

R A B Y



Welcome

2020 has been a challenging year for everyone. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all at Raby for stepping up to the challenge under difficult circumstances.

People everywhere are facing hardship and whether you are in Co. Durham or Shropshire, are employed or have a strong association with Raby, I take great comfort and reassurance from the way everyone has persevered in such uncertain times. This festive season is certainly going to be different, but Lady Barnard and I would like to wish you and your family a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Lord Barnard

Spotlight

The First Wedding Celebration at The Refurbished High Force Hotel

In spite of the lockdown in the spring, major refurbishment work at High Force Hotel was successfully completed during the first half of the year, bringing the total number of individually designed luxury bedrooms to 11. The Hotel reopened on Saturday 4th July and has welcomed guests for relaxing Covid-secure stays throughout the summer and autumn months.

The Garden Room has also been tastefully renovated with bespoke panelling, window shutters and a hand painted frieze enhancing the original Victorian features of the room. The final stage of refurbishment work is scheduled to begin in the bar area in January 2021, which will complete the transformation of the Hotel.

High Force hosted its first wedding in the new look Garden Room in September with the happy couple, Felicity and John, enjoying a relaxed and intimate reception with close friends and family. With restrictions on wedding receptions changing days before the reception, the team worked closely with the couple and their suppliers to ensure that the day ran smoothly.

This what they had to say about their experience:

"My partner and I were married in Barnard Castle on Saturday 19th September 2020 and held our small family reception at High Force Hotel, a warm and welcoming, Covid-secure venue.

"Despite all of the uncertainties in the months leading up to our wedding we received an exceptional standard of service, and the whole team went above and beyond in every way both on the day and on each of our visits (and during the many phone calls!).

"We couldn't have asked for a friendlier team, they come across as a real family and they truly made us feel like nothing was too much trouble."



Spotlight

Conservation Agriculture

There are massive changes about to happen within the farming world, with the environment taking a much greater role within every farming community. One of the biggest concerns for those working the land and living in the countryside is pollution, specifically nitrogen and phosphate, along with the release of carbon and ammonia into the atmosphere, impacting on global warming.

As a result, governments across the world are encouraging farmers to reduce their impact on the environment.

Here at Raby, the In-hand farming business has been tasked by Lord Barnard with looking at how we can alter our working practices so that we can have a positive impact on the environment whilst also maintaining a viable, profitable business.

To ensure we achieve both aims, we are looking to positively manage the soil going forward. We are looking to do this through embracing the concept of Conservation Agriculture. The three core principles of Conservation Agriculture are:

- No/minimum soil disturbance
- Maintenance of permanent soil covers (crop residues, cover crops)
- Diverse crop rotations

No/minimum soil disturbance means there is less likelihood of nitrogen in the soil from either being leached through the soil and lost down the drains or being lost to the atmosphere. In addition, there is less chance of carbon being lost to the atmosphere too.



Credit Peter Gosling

Maintaining permanent soil covers is essential, with the aim being to have something growing in the land at all times. This has the benefit of utilising nutrients within the soil after the previous crop has been harvested, before they are leached through the soil. In addition, carbon will be pulled out of the atmosphere and stored within the cover crops, which will result in it remaining in the soil rather than causing global warming.

Diverse crop rotations are the final core principle, which will result in more spring crops being grown, which require less fertiliser and sprays to be used in growing the crop. In addition, over time as the soil health improves it is anticipated that the amount of fertiliser and pesticides used will decline, which will both save costs whilst also benefiting the environment.

Finally, by not moving the soil, the amount of machinery required to sow the crops will reduce significantly as will the fuel usage generating further financial savings and reducing the impact on the environment.

Whilst the concept appears sound, it comes with significant financial risk, so the aim is to implement this new strategy gradually over the next few years to ensure that we maintain a viable business.

Robert Sullivan

Spotlight

The resurgence of Salmon in the River Tees



The River Tees has a reputation among anglers as some of the best wild Brown Trout water in the North of England. This was proven by the success of the Northern River Masters, held on the Estate in July 2020, which saw 501 Trout caught and released over two days during the competition.

Whilst wild Brown Trout are a regular sight on the Tees, another species of fish showing a resurgence is the Atlantic Salmon. Salmon are a magnificent fish that are born in fresh water and migrate large distances out to sea, returning to the exact same stream that they were born in years later to restart the cycle.

Salmon have always been present in the River Tees but numbers had declined over recent decades, as they have throughout the world, due to commercial overfishing at sea, predation and rising sea temperatures. Other factors that have added to the decline of salmon in the Tees are industrial and agricultural pollution, The Tees Barrage and the construction of Cow Green Reservoir in the late 1960s, which reduced the availability of gravel essential for their spawning grounds. The Tees, however, is now a 'healthy' river that has been the focus of many environmental measures designed to protect and support the habitats and improve water quality.

The number of fish in rivers is generally measured by catch records or by fish counters. There is a fish counter in the Tees Barrage which provides some data but only covers part of the river and counters are notoriously temperamental meaning that some fish pass uncaptured. With regards to catch records, fishermen generally like to catch fish and so will tend not to fish a river if they don't believe they stand a chance of catching anything.

It has been said by anglers that there aren't any Salmon in The Tees, this brought rise to an idea of a Salmon Angling Weekend which was supported by the Tees Rivers Trust and organised by Fly Fishing Yorkshire. 120 anglers descended on the River for the last weekend in October 2019 actively targeting Salmon. Whilst the numbers of fish caught were low, it was exciting to prove that there are indeed Salmon in the River Tees and the anglers certainly enjoyed the hospitality of the High Force Hotel which was used as a base for the competition.



This Salmon fishing season (which runs from 1st February to 31st October) has seen reports of Salmon being caught all along the Tees with a number of fish being landed on the Raby Estate water in Upper Teesdale, the largest of which weighed 15lbs.

No one knows why a Salmon will take a fly or lure, given that they do not feed in fresh water and only return to spawn, so to catch a Salmon is an incredibly exciting experience and this is why anglers spend a lot of time and money travelling the world to try and do so. The recent activity has proved beyond doubt that Salmon are back in the River Tees and anyone wishing to fish the Raby water can do so, in season, by purchasing a day ticket or season pass through the website.

Will Witchell

Spotlight

From the potting shed



Garden gateway



Autumn is always a beautiful time of year at Raby especially around the Park and Gardens. The quietness of the initial lockdown in March seems a long time ago and it has been good to see that people feel Raby is a safe place to visit and enjoy the outdoor spaces.

The Covid pandemic has raised a number of challenges to which the Gardens, Forestry and Maintenance teams have risen exceptionally well. With the appropriate measures in place, the team have continued to work without interruption and a lot of hard work has gone into keeping the Park and Gardens in good shape.

The forestry and maintenance team have continued with the management of the Park trees, undertaking work on the mature specimens and tending of more recently planted stock. Maintenance of the boundaries has continued including the renovation of a significant stretch of the Park wall, a task which required skill and craftsmanship as well as coping with the additional difficulties around social distancing.

Despite the onset of lockdown, the work to prepare the gardens for spring provided a great start to the growing season. The gardens team did a brilliant job of keeping the beds, borders and lawns in fantastic condition, ready for when restrictions were eased in May. The warm, dry spring helped extend the flowering season, but needed what must have seemed like endless irrigation and weeding. Visitors may not have had the opportunity to see the best of the spring flowers, but over the summer it has been a pleasure for the senses to walk through the borders and central rose garden which are looking as good as they have for many years. The warm weather saw a good crop of raspberries over the summer months, with visitors enjoying the opportunity to pick fruit in the beautiful surroundings of the West Garden.

The two massive yew hedges which form the centre piece to the garden required irrigation in early summer, to keep them healthy. At over 16 feet high and in places over 4 metres wide, the trimming task is not one for the faint hearted. Throughout September and into October, the Garden team undertook this major task with skill and diligence, follow every contour that has been formed over generations of regular tending and to bring a sharpness to the younger, low hedges in the informal gardens.

As we enter the autumn, the work goes on to keep the borders fresh and prepare the gardens for the winter. There are still some beautiful seasonal colours and Dahlias have had a particularly strong season, continuing to flower into November. The team is now looking forward to the busy festive season and the garden team will again be helping to decorate St Mary's Church in Staindrop with fresh foliage from the Park. Work continues in the Christmas tree plantation to prepare this year's crop of spruce and fir trees ready to go on sale at Raby Castle throughout December.

Geoff Turnbull

Collections Care and Conservation

Collections care is like painting the Forth Road Bridge – it never ends! Even during lockdown, preventative and remedial conservation work needed to continue on an ongoing basis.



Insect pests, temperature and humidity levels had to be monitored even when the castle was closed, and when it opened again there were some new things to think about. Historic Houses across the UK supported one-another with advice on how they were adapting to comply with the Government Guidelines and Raby was no exception. When the castle opened, the team had to consider areas that were known to be 'touch' points and the preventative measures that would be needed to keep the objects and the visitors safe.

We have also worked with a range of conservation consultants in 2020 where items had been identified as needing a little more TLC. Horologist and clock conservator, Matthew Read provided a comprehensive survey of the clocks which will allow us to prioritise work in future. This was especially useful as during



lockdown we had taken advice as to which items might be damaged by not being regularly wound were keen to make sure there had been no ill effects from 'stopping the clocks'. Other outstanding pieces of work were also commissioned. Textile conservator, Laurie Endean-Olsen began work on the damaged upholstery of a chair in the entrance hall. Covered in the skin of 'Vicar', the favourite horse of the 1st Duke of Cleveland; the fabric of the chair has been subject to the fluctuations in temperature and humidity for almost 200 years which had led to tears and cracks. Laurie began the task of cleaning and consolidating the skin to stabilize it and prevent further damage. More chairs are currently being repaired by furniture restorer Rupert McBain to make sure they can be used once more, and book and archive conservator Liz Branigan carried out an assessment on some of the Castle's paper treasures, including the well-thumbed 1780s manuscript recipe book which will see a new lease of life inspiring our future menus.



Photo credit: Matthew Read,
Horologist and Conservator

Our extraordinary collections are unique to Raby and working with specialists on preventative and remedial conservation measures ensure that these wonderful items can be enjoyed and appreciated by generations to come.

Julie Biddlecombe-Brown

Planning consent granted for proposed developments at Raby Castle, Gainford and Staindrop

Earlier this year we shared exciting details of the proposed tourism development at Raby Castle, as well as plans for residential developments in Gainford and Staindrop.

We are pleased to announce that Durham County Council has now granted planning permission for these developments, which support our long-term objective to significantly expand the visitor offer at Raby Castle, Park and Gardens, bringing jobs and economic benefits to the local area. The new developments will support the Estate's ambition to become one of the region's leading tourist attractions. We look forward to sharing further details with you in the New Year.



R A B Y
CO. DURHAM

Bridge restoration at Ashgill Head

Over recent months the estate buildings and maintenance team have completed extensive repair works to an old bridge at Ashgill Head in Harwood. The bridge was part of the old main road to Alston until it was by-passed by a new section of road in the 1930s. The team completed a sympathetic structural repair, and have preserved it for the future providing safe access to the moor and farm buildings.



Champion Rosette for Raby Nour

Raby's Longhorn herd brought home a cluster of rosettes from this year's Northern Longhorn Breed Society herd competition, with Raby Nour scooping Senior Cow, Homebred Cow and Overall Champion.

Raby Petra came 4th in the Junior Cow category, Raby Suzi was 5th in Senior Heifer and Raby Nour featured again, with Raby Petula, as winners in the Dam and calved Daughter section.

It was a proud occasion for the Raby herd, which came 3rd in the large herd category.

Raby Nour has had a bull calf this year and this will stay in the herd in the hope that it may become a breeding bull and continue the award-winning tradition that began when the Longhorn herd was first established at Raby in the 1970s.

A warm welcome and fond farewell

We are delighted to have welcomed some new faces to the team at Raby in recent months.

Lesley Renteurs joined Raby as Estate Administrator in August and is based at the Estate Office in Staindrop. Working closely with Lesley are Martin Potts, who joins Raby as HR consultant, and Nicola Jennings who is working with the team as Health and Safety consultant.

Other recent appointments include Beverley Heslop who joined our finance team this summer; Tom Parry who joined Raby in September in the new role of Estate Chef; and Chris Bond, who joined the catering team as Head Chef at High Force earlier this year.

We bid a fond farewell to colleagues who have left Raby over the course of the year: Graeme Mailen, Katrina Appleyard, Clare Robson, Billy Jones, Shaun Andrews and Donna Morgan. We thank them for their contribution during their time with us, and wish them all the very best for the future.

An interview with...

Annual Pass Holders Peter and Elaine Gunton – What Raby means to us

Raby has gained a huge number of new Annual Pass holders this year, many of whom have taken the trouble to tell our team how much they have appreciated being able to access the outdoor spaces and enjoy nature at a time when everyone's lives have been so restricted.



Peter and Elaine Gunton from Bishop Auckland became Annual Pass holders for the first time earlier this year, just before the first lockdown. In a year of restriction and uncertainty, Raby has become the perfect retreat for them, and they have visited most days, watching the seasons change. They spoke to us about what spending time at Raby means to them.

Your Annual Pass has been well used this year – what's the best thing about it?

We're outdoors people and we love the wildlife, the trees, the gardens, the whole place. Being able to come here with our dog, every day if we want to, has meant such a lot to us, especially this year. We use it at High Force too, which is another fabulous place. We've visited so regularly that we worked out it had paid for itself in the first week - we just wish we had done it years ago!

Having watched the seasons change in the Park and Gardens, has any particular time of year stood out?

Every day is different, and there's always something new to see, whether it's the light on the castle, the colour of the leaves, the flowers in the gardens or the wildlife, it's never the same two days running.

Do you have a favourite spot?

There's a bench over the hill by the top pond where we like to sit and relax. It's so peaceful there and it really clears your mind. We like chatting to people as they pass or just simply enjoying the view. We love the gardens too, they're incredible. They keep on giving, day after day and we enjoy chatting to the gardeners, who do a fantastic job. In the gardens there's a sheltered place to sit, looking down towards the fountain, where we can enjoy the view even on a wet day.

Peter, your beautiful photos have been shared with hundreds of people through our social media channels. Do you have a favourite wildlife subject?

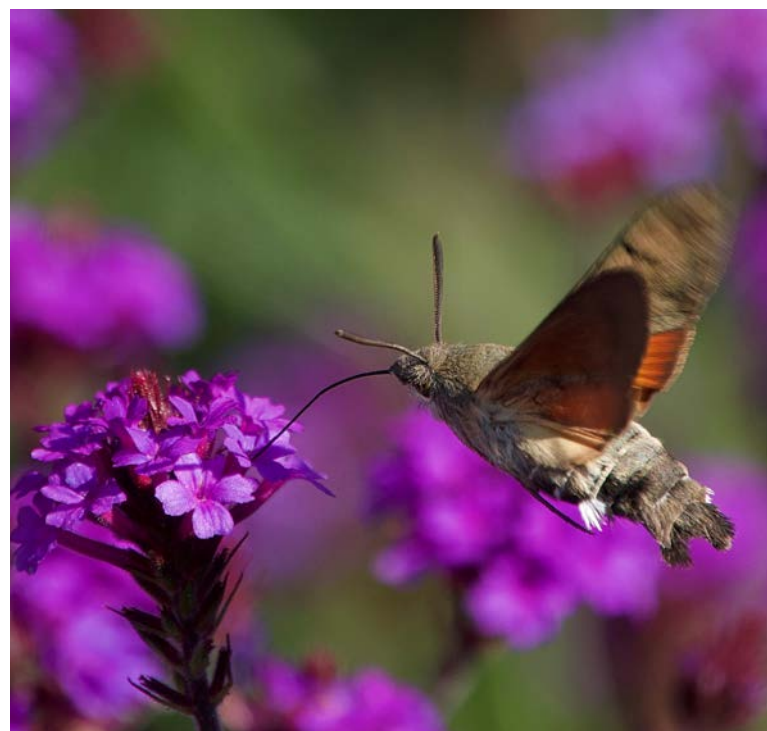
The deer are a real favourite of mine. Sometimes I might catch the fallow deer playing or a red stag posing for the camera. I've really enjoyed photographing the swans and cygnets this year too. We've been watching the babies since they were little things on the lake and it's been fascinating seeing them grow.

Why has Raby been so important during lockdown?

It's been a lifeline and most importantly it has always felt safe. Even on days when the car park seems busy, the Park and Gardens feel quiet and there is plenty of space for everyone. The staff have been fantastic in that respect, making sure there is plenty of hand sanitiser available and all the necessary measures are in place.

Is there anything that has really stood out during your visits?

The people who work at Raby are incredible. They always have time for you and everyone is so pleasant and helpful. There's such a lovely atmosphere both at Raby Castle and High Force and the staff can't do enough for you. It really does make such a difference.





R A B Y

SHROPSHIRE



Update

Environmental Focus in Shropshire

We hope the rest of the Raby community is well and send our best from Shropshire. We have been able to remain working ensuring property refurbishment projects, farm operations and building workstreams continue in a safe manner. This has ensured our employees and contractors have been able to continue working over the COVID period. Thanks to all our customers, families who live in our homes, and contractors for working with us in a positive way.

One focus has been on improving the energy performance of our homes which is a key focus over the next couple of years. We have installed loft insulation in our homes and to date covered a total area equivalent to 3.5 tennis courts! The initial stage of the programme has seen improvements of our 10 worst properties from low up to mid grades. This means the properties and occupiers are now saving costs on fuel and a total of amount of 50 tonnes of carbon has been saved from being emitted to the environment.

Finally, a renewed ecology focus on the Home Farm is taking place. We have set aside an area of 205 football pitches which is now dedicated to improving the environment. Initiatives include wildflower margins, temporary 2-year grass pastures to fix nitrogen and improve soil health, 7 km of gapping up and laying hedgerows. In addition to this, winter cover crops are being sown to improve soil health, reduce erosion and create green manures. This reduces our reliance on artificial fertilisers. We are in year 1 of an initial 5-year programme and to assess if the measures will work, we have soil surveyed the Home Farm to assess soil condition using latest GPS and laboratory techniques. We are also completing night-time bird surveys which are proving successful with lots of Fieldfare, Skylarks being seen each time and small coveys of Grey Partridges have been spotted twice. These are key indicator species to the health of the environment and the farm. This scheme continues alongside productive agriculture producing crops for the food chain.

Tom Birtles

Raby Events

A Year Like No Other

Despite the huge challenges we have faced this year, adapting to ever-changing government guidance and restrictions, our marketing and events team has worked incredibly hard to keep Raby at the heart of the local community.



During lockdown we shared behind the scenes glimpses of the Castle, Park and Gardens on social media and ran two hugely successful competitions, a children's art competition and a short story competition for all ages.

As restrictions eased, we were finally able to open our outdoor spaces to local visitors and we made the most of the glorious summer weather to extend our opening on some evenings for special "Summer Lates" evening openings, the first of which was held to mark the Summer Solstice.

To subscribe to the Raby Newsletter visit www.raby.co.uk

People of all ages, including young families meeting relatives for the first time since March, and others who had not left their homes for many months, enjoyed social distanced walks in the expansive grounds of the Castle.

Soft music inspired by the natural surroundings, summer scented incense and glowing storm candles in the Walled Gardens created a sense of calm and the feedback from visitors was incredibly positive.

One visitor wrote afterwards:

“It was so good to be among people after the past 3 months of lockdown and it was noticeable that others were feeling the same. It was particularly pleasing to see families with young children picnicking and enjoying the freedom that the parkland offered.”

Summer Lates set the theme for a season of outdoor events, including exclusive yoga and mindfulness sessions in the Walled Gardens and a new outdoor Towers and Terrace tour, telling the story of Raby Castle's dramatic medieval architecture and nine magnificent towers.

We also brought open air cinema to Raby for the first time with hundreds of families enjoying socially distanced screenings of big screen favourites such as Bohemian Rhapsody, The Greatest Showman and Beauty and the Beast in the beautiful surroundings of the Walled Gardens. The garden team's precision mowing skills came into play for the cinema event, with the team transforming the west lawn into rows of beautifully mown socially distanced pitches.



Our summer events calendar also saw the return of our popular Harvest market weekend, and a new collaboration with Auto Italia Magazine with the Castle playing host to a magnificent selection of Italian cars.

Families enjoyed the Scaries and Fairies trail in the Walled Gardens during the October half term week, featuring some spectacular willow sculptures including unicorns, giant spiders and a dragon, with visitors enjoying three extra spooky after dark evening sessions.



We are so pleased to have been able to open our outdoor spaces to visitors and find lots of new ways to help them enjoy them.

None of us quite knows what the next few months will bring and although some of our planned Christmas events have had to be withdrawn due to the ongoing uncertainty and government restrictions, Christmas is by no means cancelled and we will certainly be bringing Christmas sparkle to Raby in December.

We are also planning to open the Park and Gardens on New Year's Day again with a charity donation in lieu of the usual admission fee to support The Cancer Research Institute.

Raby Events

A look forward to Christmas at Raby

Raby is known for providing visitors with a special place to visit at Christmas and we hope this will be the case this year too. Keep an eye on our social media channels for further updates about our Christmas activities.

Raby Christmas Trees and Produce



There's nothing quite like the smell of a real Christmas tree to make you feel festive, and this year we will be selling freshly cut Christmas trees, grown on the Estate, as well as wreaths and foliage to decorate your home for Christmas. Weekend visitors are being asked to book a time slot to come and choose their tree so that we can manage numbers safely. There is no need to book midweek.

Our Stables Christmas Shop is well stocked with a beautiful range of decorations and gifts and is open daily from 10am.

Enchanted Festive Forest



Families can explore a new trail through the Walled Gardens which will be transformed into an Enchanted Festive Forest full of magical scenes to discover.

Visit www.raby.co.uk



Further details can be found
across our Social Media pages.

Father Christmas at Raby Castle



Father Christmas didn't want to miss his annual visit to Raby Castle so he will be joining us again this year, although he has given up his favourite seat by the fire and will be meeting families in his Present Store instead. The experience will be socially distanced but will be just as magical as ever, and each child will receive a special gift to put under the Christmas tree.

Join us on New Year's Day



The Deer Park at Raby Castle will be open on New Year's Day. Join us for a stroll in the Park, enjoy a warming drink and snacks from the refreshment kiosk.

Enquiries

Raby Estates, Office Square, Staindrop,
Darlington, County Durham, DL2 3NF

Raby County Durham Tel: 01833 660888

Raby Shropshire Tel: 01952 740223

Email: reception@raby.co.uk
