

**** Spetchley Park Gardens Press Release ****

For Immediate Release

26th August 2008

**Heritage Open Day – Ellen Willmott and
Spetchley Park Gardens**

Spetchley Park Gardens will be open free of charge under the Heritage Open Day scheme on Saturday 13th September. This will be an opportunity to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the birth of celebrated Victorian Gardener Ellen Willmott, who had such an influence on Spetchley Park Gardens.

Ellen Willmott's sister, Rose, married into the Berkeley Family who owned Spetchley Park. It was natural therefore that Miss Willmott would have come to know the Gardens, and as a passionate gardener (as the Berkeleys were then and now) she helped to redesign parts of the 30 acre Gardens which can still be enjoyed today.

Born in 1858 to a wealthy family Ellen Willmott owned three gardens, in England, France and Italy, and employed one hundred and four gardeners. She mixed with royalty and her name was associated with the greatest gardeners of her time, Gertrude Jekyll, William Robinson and E. A. Bowles. In 1894 she joined the Royal Horticultural Society and in 1897 she was one of the first sixty recipients (and one of only two women) to receive the Victoria Medal of Honour. She also received the grande médaille Geoffroi St Hilaire from the Société d'Acclimatation de France and in 1924 received the Dean Hole medal from the National Rose Society. An acknowledged and admired expert in her field Ellen Willmott died in 1934 aged 76, alone and nearly bankrupt.

The Gardens will be open from 11am – 6pm. The next event after this will be the Armoured Picnic, a multi period living history event on October 4/5th.

A new Season Ticket for the Gardens has been launched lasting 12 months from date of issue rather than being year specific and at £25 is excellent value for the regular visitor to the 30 acre Gardens, situated just outside Worcester on the A44.

Note for Editors:

The history of Spetchley covers the burning down of the original Tudor house on the eve of the Battle of Worcester in 1651 to prevent Cromwell from using it as his headquarters.

The two Victorian horticulturists Ellen Willmott (of Warley Place in Essex) and Rose Berkeley redesigned the gardens shaping them very much as they are seen today. Sir Edward Elgar used to stay and compose in Gardener's Cottage within the Gardens, taking inspiration from Spetchley's pines to write the *Dream of Gerontius*.

Spetchley was earmarked for Churchill and the Cabinet should the Blitz have proved too effective and later in WW2 the American 8th Air Force used Spetchley as a rest and recuperation base during when one of the Cedar Trees was reduced in height by a low flying American pilot flew his 'plane into it – happily both pilot and 'plane survived and the tree can still be seen today.

The 2nd Armoured Picnic, a multi period re-enactment event will take place on October 4/5th and the 4th Illuminated Trail will run between December 12th to 21st, when the gardens are lit with lights and special effects for Christmas.

For more information, pictures and opportunities to film at Spetchley or interview the Berkeley Family please contact

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