



Autumn/Winter 2010 Newsletter

Welcome to the Autumn edition of our Newsletter

This is the third of our Newsletters which, apart from reporting on BGT activities, also has articles on the Association of Gardens Trusts' recent AGM on the Isle of Wight by Liz Ware, our representative on the AGT.

There is also part two of Dr Carolyn Jenkins' fascinating article on the restoration of Caversham Court and early notice of events that we are planning for 2011.

BGT AGM



The Trust's second AGM was held at St. Stephen's Church Centre, Upper Basildon on Friday 30th August. The meeting was attended by 27 members and eight guests, including Tim Martin, Speaker with Christina Hill Williams chairing at the request of Lady Wroughton, BGT's President.

Christina emphasised that last year had been a successful and busy one for the Trust, which has become a Company Limited by Guarantee. Referring to Trust activities during the year, she mentioned the research volunteers group being led by Ben Viljoen, and the Trust's initial responses on Planning issues. She also thanked everyone for continuing as members, stressing that the

Trust was keen to retain and increase membership numbers (now over 80 individual and six corporate members) with various membership events and projects. Christina also mentioned a proposed awards scheme for Berkshire garden design projects, ranging, for example, from window boxes to roundabouts. Finally, Christina thanked the committee, especially the retiring treasurer and website manager, John Murphy, for their support during the year.

An AGM pack was provided to those attending the meeting and should since have been received by those members unable to be with us at the event.

Basildon Park by Tim Martin, Head Gardener

The formal AGM business was followed by refreshments and an illustrated talk from Tim Martin, Head Gardener at Basildon Park, the Grade II registered house, where Berkshire Gardens Trust held its first two meetings. Tim gave a brief history of the development of the gardens, with reference to Henry Phillips' plans from circa 1823, its Grade II* listed greenhouse and Brandon's 1850s terrace which is near Lady Iliffe's rose garden, designed by Lanning Roper, working closely with Lady Iliffe, in the 1960s.



He then took us on a lively, illustrated tour of the wider designed Basildon Park landscape.

Current plans to provide even more interest for the 70,000 visitors annually, include hopes to "re-awaken the Victorian flavour" of the gardens by adding shrubbery beds and working with existing features such as the trees with Tree Preservation Orders. Tim is also trying to add interest to areas such as the stable block area, where 'grow your own food barrels' are now a feature in the courtyard and plans to remove storage sheds and restore the view near the gardeners' yard and four and a half acres walled kitchen garden. Finally, he mentioned the increasing pressure and competition to encourage a wider visitor base, with the provision of picnic benches, traditional games and guided walks pointing out landscape and naturalistic features, as well as the traditional National Trust tea room.

Strategic Relationships

BGT continues to develop its relationships with Unitary Authorities and wrote to the new Mayors and elected representatives following the May elections. In particular, we have contributed to the draft Historic Environment Action Plan being drawn up by West Berkshire Council, where designed landscapes feature as well as buildings and

other historic features. We were also represented at this year's Association of Gardens Trust AGM and conference by Liz Ware, one of the former BGT founding committee members, who is now on the AGT Council. Her report features below as well as an account of gardens visited while there.

Association of Garden Trusts AGM & Conference

Every year, one of the County Gardens Trusts hosts the AGT's AGM and Conference. This year it was the turn of the Isle of Wight. In the opening address, the Chairman, Gilly Drummond, remarked at just how 'grown-up' the County Gardens Trusts have become. As is demonstrated by the many initiatives with which the AGT is now involved in the world of Garden Heritage, we are now a force to be reckoned with.

One initiative discussed during the short formal business meeting was the potential partnership between the AGT, Parks and Garden Database, the Garden History Society and the Garden Museum. English Heritage is

keen, particularly in the current economic climate, to find a way in which the four organisations can work together more closely. It is hoped that greater co-operation will help to avoid duplication and unnecessary expense, particularly in the areas of conservation and event organisation. A feasibility study will be starting soon.

As mentioned in the Spring Newsletter, the AGT has employed Verena McCaig in a new three year post as the Historic Landscape Project Officer for the South East. When dealing with agricultural Stewardship Projects, both English Heritage and Natural England value the information and research

that we in the Gardens Trusts are able to provide about historic designed landscapes in our counties. Part of Verena's role is thus to ensure that our research volunteers have the skills necessary to contribute fully to any project in which help is needed. Ben Viljoen and Fiona Hope continue to liaise with her and English Heritage to discuss the ways in which Berkshire Gardens Trust can be involved in this work.

Another exciting new venture for the AGT is The Opening All the Gates Project. Together with the National Trust, the Historic Houses Association and the Royal Horticultural Society, the AGT hopes to carry on the work of

the remarkable Gateway Gardens Trust. The Trust, which was forced to close last year due to lack of funding, introduced hard-to-reach community groups to make historic gardens accessible and appealing to new audiences by working with owners and managers of historic houses. A series of roadshows taking place throughout the country will discuss the work of the Gateway Gardens Trust and encourage the setting up of regionally run garden access projects using their knowledge and expertise. Towards the end of 2010, Liz Ware will be attending the show at Saltram, a National Trust property near Plymouth, to find out more about the project.

Isle of Wight Gardens

The theme of this year's conference was 'We do like to be beside the seaside.' We did indeed stay by the sea, at Shanklin on the east coast of the island; an excellent starting point for our visits to a fascinating selection of gardens and landscapes. The gardens were well chosen to suit the mix of Trust members. There was just as much to interest the committed plantsman as the dedicated garden historian. Every visit had something to recommend it, but for me there were particular and unexpected highlights:

Shanklin Chine was the site of the first evening reception. The Chine is a deep valley



Entrance to Northcourt

that cuts through the cliffs and drops via spectacular waterfalls to the beach. It became popular with tourists in the early 19th century when its craggy forms attracted the attentions of the romantic poets and those interested in the picturesque. This privately owned landscape is still much visited today. Despite the rain and strong winds that accompanied us, it was easy to understand its attraction.

Ventnor Botanic Garden is certainly worth a visit. Sited on the famous Undercliff where the warm coastal microclimate allows an enormous range of tender plants to be grown, this council-run garden was created on the site of a former chest hospital and was first planted by Harold Hillier in the 1970s. There is plenty to interest and inspire, from the imaginative use of recycled materials to the themed areas of planting.

Osborne House on the north coast could only have been enjoyed by a group of British gardeners as we braced ourselves against the wind and driving rain while we admired the planting (by English Heritage) in Victoria and Albert's formal gardens. Of particular interest was Swiss Cottage, a small building in the grounds, equipped with a child-size working kitchen where Prince Albert encouraged his nine children to cook the produce they grew on their own small plots of land.

Northcourt, a listed Jacobean Manor House, is home to the Chairman of the Isle of Wight Gardens Trust, John Harrison and his wife

Christine. The present house was built in 1615 by John Leigh, the Deputy Governor of the Island. At the turn of the 18th century it was lived in by Elizabeth Bull, a noted landscape gardener who used her talents to bring it to its picturesque peak. During the 19th century it was visited by the poet Swinburne who found inspiration there. Northcourt is still inspirational today. A combination of both acid and alkaline soils allows John to grow a wonderful variety of plants. The fact that he is

able to combine them in a way that is very pleasing to the eye, in a setting that is brimming with history made this much loved family garden a joy to visit. I stayed there for a couple of nights after the conference. The Harrisons run an excellent B&B – a perfect base if you are planning to explore the island.

Next year it will be the turn of Oxfordshire Gardens Trust to run the conference. No doubt another treat is in store!

Gazetteer Research Project



Dr Peter Durrant, Berkshire county archivist and member of BGT showing members of the research group material held at BRO of relevance to the parks and gardens of Berkshire.

Following the inaugural meeting at the Museum of English Rural Life (MERL), in March and an informal get together in the summer, the Research Group attended an event hosted by the Berkshire Record Office (BRO), in their state-of-the-art premises in Coley Avenue, Reading, in early November.

Ben Viljoen led discussion between the group's members about the progress being made and issues encountered in carrying out the research, with reference to the Recording Forms he has designed with input from Bettina Kirkham and Fiona Hope.

Dr Peter Durrant then introduced the group to the resources on offer at the site, including the original estate archives, maps and other related documents which are stored there.

Verena McCaig, the Historic Landscape Project Officer for the South East, has offered to talk to the group in the near future about the way in which this research will be valuable input to various projects with which the Association of Gardens Trusts and others are progressing, as well as important contributions to planning debates.

BGT Garden Projects

As mentioned by Christina Hill Williams in her report to the second AGM in July, the Berkshire Gardens Trust is currently exploring two particular garden design projects: the Hungerford Tragedy Memorial Garden, West Berkshire and Watlington House, Reading. Timing on both projects is hard to predict. However, the committee hopes to be able to involve members of the

Trust and others as appropriate as they progress.

Hungerford Tragedy Memorial Garden

This project was brought to BGT's attention by Elizabeth Cardwell, the previous Town Mayor of Hungerford and now a member of the Amenities/Grounds committee. Members of the committee have attended meetings in Hungerford to discuss how best to revitalise

this important heritage site for the people of Newbury, visitors to the historic town and particularly those with personal links to the site.

Bettina Kirkham is leading on behalf of the Berkshire Gardens Trust with design ideas for the site and the Town Council is involving local residents and individuals associated

with the tragedy in its plans. The new garden is being designed in a sympathetic manner and in a way which is a worthy memorial to the tragedy in 1987. As part of the project it is hoped that local people and a team of Young Offenders will be able to help with preparing the ground and doing the planting.

Watlington House

The Watlington House Trust which is responsible for managing the garden of this 17th century William & Mary house in this central Reading Conservation Area has written formally to Christina Hill Williams inviting Berkshire Gardens Trust to become involved in this project. There was a lot of interest in the House when it was open to the public during the Open House weekend in September. Given the nature of the site and the fact that funding will have to be raised, this is likely to be a long term project, potentially involving others in a partnership approach.

There are very few gardens of this era in Britain; two examples which spring to mind are Hampton Court's Privy Garden and canal and Westbury Court's delightful gardens



Watlington House and proposed site for Dutch Garden

near the Severn estuary. However, they are both essentially rural in nature, even if the former is now part of London's conurbation. It is thus a potentially very exciting prospect for the Trust.

An Insight into Caversham Court...restoration

Part 2 of this article, kindly provided by Dr Carolyn Jenkins, Parks Development Manager for Reading Borough Council, looks at the design principles and restoration of the gardens.

Design principles Planning the restoration of the gardens was complex. The layers of history, from the 11th to the 21st centuries, needed to be exposed, restored and interpreted. The vision was to bind together the layers of history to create a public garden with a timeless sense of peace.

Relics of the early history of the site are largely erased, and are realistically only exposed to users through education and interpretation.

The built structures originate from the 17th and 19th centuries, and include the gazebo with its elevated causeway, a 10m high crinkle-crankle retaining wall, other terrace walls, and the perimeter garden walls. All are listed, and their restoration was a clear priority. The

garden layout is strongly influenced by the terraces, believed to date from the late 17th century: documentary evidence of the original design does not exist, so this view is based on the archaeologist's report. During the 19th century the house was extensively remodelled and the overall garden plan adapted to incorporate fashionable new features like glasshouses, exotic trees and herbaceous borders, but the original garden structure was essentially retained.

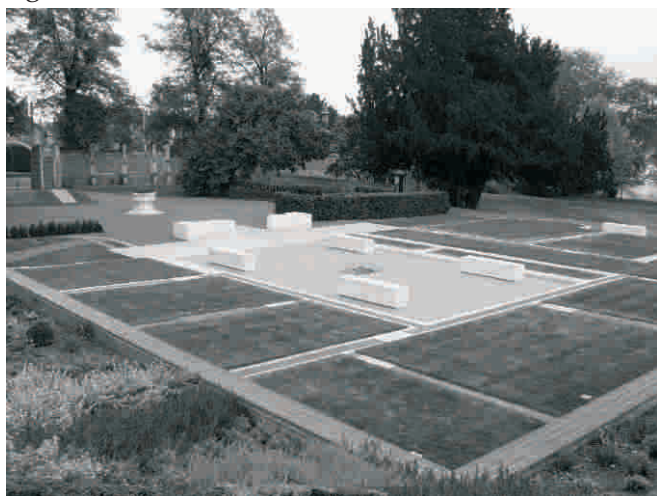
The coexistence of 17th and 19th century remains, and the evidence from 19th and early 20th century photographs, diary descriptions and sales particulars, provided enough historical material to support restoration. The renovation of Caversham Court made use of the historic organisation of the site, with the

early layer of gazebo, yews and terraces to the west and the later layer of garden features to the east and south. These overlap in a



Archaeologists at work before restoration

reconstruction of the house plan to the north east, showing the footprints of both earlier and later houses, and in the replanting of the borders below the main path. The restoration of Caversham Court therefore incorporates a balance of 17th, 19th and 21st century design – the last not in any overtly modern sense but to bind the historical remnants and allusions together.



The top terrace and house footprint

Landscaping works Once archaeologists – and contractors – began to scrape away gently at the site, significantly more was revealed. For example, the entire foundations of the older and later houses, including old Tudor beer cellars and Regency wine cellars, the outdoor privy, and the vinery, with its pond intact, were exposed. Some unexpected features needed a response, and designs and priorities changed so that visitors can now ‘enter’ the old vinery and the old vaults alongside it, as well as gazing from the

restored gazebo, and walking paths trodden by residents for hundreds of years. The footprints of the old houses can be followed: brickwork traces out the older house and limestone the newer mansion. The impressive stone battlemented entrance has been rebuilt and is a faithful replica of the original gateway, of which several photographs survive.



Rebuilding the battlemented gates

On the other hand, the cellars have been thoroughly documented and then filled in, following advice on best practice in preserving ancient structures. The house footprint has been built up on the old foundations with a lime mortar, which is soft, and can readily be swept away entirely to re-expose the original structures without damaging them in any way. Brass symbols in the ‘floor’ of each ‘room’ give children endless pleasure as they search them out and then work out the function of the room.

Great care has been taken to preserve the sense of place of a private garden: there are few park benches – instead seating has been incorporated into the features – and public information is displayed mainly in indoor spaces or built into paving. The re-creation of a riverside garden of beauty was as important as the repairs to the historical framework; the project is almost unique amongst Lottery-funded restorations in that a significant part of the budget was set aside for planting. There is a lavender bank behind the House Footprint Lawn, and borders beneath the Long Walk. The vinery is bedded out with houseplants, and new trees have been planted.

Post-restoration The works were so extensive that it was necessary to close the

gardens for nearly a year. When they re-opened on the afternoon of 7 August 2009, over 4,000 people attended the opening event.



A view into the secret garden

Since then, the park has been used by thousands of visitors, families, young people and elderly folk.

A tea kiosk has been opened, run by local charities four afternoons every week from spring to autumn. Volunteers sell tea, coffee and home-made cake. All proceeds are retained by the charities. This proved so popular following the opening that the charities extended their opening hours in 2010.

Visitors come repeatedly, primarily for the

Caversham Court Gardens is open to the public every day from 8.00 am until dusk. From April to October the tea kiosk, selling home-made cakes, is open on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday and bank holiday Monday afternoons from 1.00 pm until at least 5.00 pm (6.00 pm in July and August), and all proceeds go to charity. The Friends of Caversham Court Gardens offer guided tours of the gardens on the first Sunday of every month from 2.30 pm during the summer; there is no need to book. This year the gardens won a Green Flag and were awarded Green Heritage Site status. They were also 'best park' in the Thames and Chilterns region of the Britain in Bloom competition.

Planning Matters

The Trust is continuing in its efforts to strengthen its links with the local authority planning departments and their historic, landscape and archaeology staff. We are not at the moment being consulted directly on any planning applications for development within

beauty of the place, although there are hidden things to discover – like the fact that each wrought iron gate has a motif with a significant meaning – that reward exploration. A full set of leaflets provides information on ecology and sustainability, history, horticulture and architecture, and there are two leaflets for children.



The lovely mixed border

There is no doubt that a major refurbishment of a public park flames community enthusiasm and civic pride. The Friends of Caversham Court has over 300 members, and Friends often act as volunteer guides over weekends. There has been huge public interest in the restoration project, and it is hoped that the park – and its new tea garden – will become a valuable resource for local visitors of all ages as well as a tourist destination.

© Dr Carolyn Jenkins, Parks Development Manager, Reading Borough Council

Berkshire's parks and gardens, some of which may be considered by English Heritage or the Garden History Society, depending on the site's importance. However both organisations are severely stretched, so with the help of our members we need to try and

start responding where we can about development proposals which will harm our precious parks or gardens.

We are thinking of organising a small team of BGT members from all around Berkshire who could together look at planning applications. One approach might be to have a small seminar for those of you who are interested to look at the sort of applications coming up, and discuss how we can best

Influence the planning process, involving for example English Heritage, the Garden History Society, Local Authorities and to give the benefit of their experience and some guidance on how to go forward.

Bettina Kirkham is leading on this and will be in touch in due course to ask if you would be interested. In the meantime please contact her on 0118 972 3589.

Berkshire Gardens Trust Events in 2011

Spring Lecture on The Origin of Garden Plants, Saturday evening, 9th April, 2011 in the Purley Barn

Dr Michael Keith-Lucas, an early member of the Berkshire Gardens Trust who recently retired from the University of Reading and is a recorder for the Reading Naturalists, will introduce us to the varied origins of many of

the plants we take for granted in our gardens. Further information will be sent to members nearer the time.

Spring Visit, 2011

We are planning a trip to East Berkshire during May - more details in the Spring Newsletter.

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