



## Spring/Summer 2011 Newsletter

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Welcome to this edition of the Berkshire Gardens Trust Newsletter which is full of good news, ranging from news of our recent and forthcoming events, to articles about

various activities which we are involved in as well as the wider garden history world within which the Trust exists. Read on and enjoy your summer!

### *Valley Gardens, Windsor Great Park Visit, 19th May*

Members of the Trust enjoyed a real treat during our mid-May visit to these gardens. Following a picnic lunch, Graham Sanderson, Head of the Valley Gardens, led the group on a leisurely stroll up and down the paths in this varied landscape which is for many a less well-known and almost secret part of the Crown Estate compared to Virginia Water and the Savill Gardens.

Our first stop was under a handkerchief tree, *Davidia involucrata*, which was in flower displaying its large pure white bracts that had been used at the recent royal wedding. During the walk Graham explained the complex



*In Main Valley  
with the  
Plunkett Memorial  
in the background*



*Dogwood,  
*Cornus kousa**

management of the of the gardens to provide the cool dappled shade, vistas and bio-diversity. He was justifiably proud of the viewing platform on the edge of the Devil's Punchbowl that had been designed by his staff and enables wheelchair access to this iconic view. The walk ended in the recycling area where compost of superb quality is produced.

Sadly the main flowering period of the rhododendrons and azaleas had been earlier than usual but there was much else to enjoy, especially the dogwoods that were at their best.

After the walk we had refreshments at the Valley Gardens kiosk.

The Trust is very grateful to Graham Sanderson for sharing his intimate knowledge of these gardens with us and also to Mark Flanagan, Keeper of the Gardens. We



*Refreshments at the kiosk*



*Graham Sanderson with his superb compost*

would also like to thank Christina Campion, Friend of the Savill Gardens, whose 'behind the scenes' help and inspiration for this visit was much appreciated. See the next article for more about the gardens.

## *Historic Background to the Valley Gardens*

The Valley Gardens were the post-war brainchild of Sir Eric Savill, Deputy Surveyor and then Deputy Ranger of the Royal Park, with the support of Mr Thomas Hope Findlay, previously Curator of RHS Wisley, as Superintendent. His Royal Highness King George VI and Queen Elizabeth also contributed directly to the gardens during the 1950s. Lanning Roper's book *The Gardens in the Royal Park at Windsor* (Chatto & Windus, 1959), which is dedicated to the King, refers to the enthusiasm and knowledge of the royal couple, the King's particular interest in the more unusual Asiatic and North American trees and shrubs and the Queen's "infectious and spontaneous support" for all aspects of the project.

The site chosen for the Valley Gardens already contained a great assortment of mature trees with a high shade canopy, such as oaks, beech, sweet chestnuts, birches and a mix of conifers. Roper emphasises that the

aim was to ensure "harmonious blendings" with sweeps of colour as well as all-year round interest, using what was there to advantage. Sir Eric thus ensured that the paths followed the contours on the basis that "what is right from a practical point of view is almost invariably correct aesthetically". Due to the sandy soil, hundreds of tons of mulch were needed for the new woodland gardens (as had been the case for the earlier Savill Gardens), with Robert Elcock, the foreman and a core team of six men responsible for creating the vistas and rides based on the major valleys which run through the site.

Many specimen trees and shrubs came from established gardens in the Home Counties through contacts of Sir Eric Savill. For example, Roper refers to the "outstanding garden full of rare trees and shrubs to the north of Slough", owned by the late Mr. Eustace Wilding. Similarly, in *The Royal Gardens in Windsor Great Park* (Aidan Ellis,

1998), Charles Lyte mentions that the outstanding collection of rhododendrons from John Barr 'Jack' Stevenson's Titmus Court estate, made their way into the gardens following his death as his widow wanted to keep the collection intact. Lyte also comments that between them, the Valley and Savill Gardens contain plants "which represent the majority of the famous British Collectors of the past 350 years". The roll call includes the 17th century Tradescants, Sir Joseph Hooker, the 19th century Keeper of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew and 20th century collectors such as George Forrest, Reginald John Farrer, Frank Ludlow, George Sheriff and Roy Lancaster, responsible for introducing specimens rhododendrons and other Asian shrubs to England, as well as for considering ideas on conservation which we now take for granted as good policy.

Two other aspects of the gardens are worth mentioning here. Firstly, in between the plantings of rhododendrons and azaleas, the national collection of hollies, was created, with some subsequent maintenance challenges! Secondly, while there are several wonderful viewpoints in the gardens, there is only one crowned by a small building: the Plunkett Memorial, a former deputy Master of the Queen's household.

In conclusion, we are lucky to have these gardens available to us free of charge. As some members will be aware, a few years ago, Christine Weightman, an original BGT committee member and others, worked hard to fight the threat of charges. A good example of the importance of local knowledge and enthusiasm for such spaces can work to the benefit of all!

*Fiona Hope*

## *The Plants in Your Garden BGT Spring Lecture by Michael Keith-Lucas*



*Drinks before the lecture*

A fascinating lecture was enjoyed by Trust members and friends at the Purley Barn given by Dr Michael Keith-Lucas describing a potted history of when, how and from where some of our most common garden plants have arrived. From time immemorial, wherever the wonder-lust of global exploration has taken man, whether it has been for war, territory or religious reasons, seeds and bulbs of every shape and size have found their way back to these shores, secreted in pockets or smuggled in larger quantities. The timescale Dr Keith-Lucas covered stretched from the beginnings of recognised

civilisations in the Middle East and the Roman Empire to the plant hunters of the last two centuries and the consequent hybridising of these now familiar plants. The importance of flowers as things of beauty and their unusualness increased the progression of plant breeding. Anything which was a "little bit different" which caught the eye, was attractive and fragrant and which no one else had, was especially captivating and desirable.

He described the various stages or phases that plants had been 'discovered'. These phases, he hastened to add, were a convenient

aide memoir as “a lot of plants do not seem to have read the literature, and turn up in the wrong phases!”

To set the scene, Dr Keith-Lucas explained that even in pre-history, the evidence that the movement of plants has been endemic with the movement of people, and an intrinsic part of their lives, has surfaced in his more recent work concerning burial evidence of archaeological bog people. The scrutiny of pollen from flowers left as grave-goods, indicates not only what was being grown in the vicinity of the burial but what was being brought from further afield.

The first stage known as the **European Phase (Prehistory to 1560)**, included the spread of the Romans who remarked disdainfully of the ancient Britons’ practice of flavouring their porridge with ground elder. Just to “rub our noses in it” they proceeded to introduce pears, cherries, peaches, vines, vegetables, and herbs including rosemary, parsley and fennel.

The collecting and growing of more and varied plants was coupled with the ability to keep things alive. Typical Roman courtyards with influences from central Persia and Greece, used cisterns and aqueducts needed to supply an increasing variety of plants. This knowledge was adopted by many civilisations and eventually filtered down into the monasteries who kept the knowledge of vegetable growing and espaliered fruit as an esoteric science. The use of flora for their medicinal properties was well acknowledged, but specific flowers from abroad, including irises, peonies and poppies began to appear in illuminated manuscripts, not only to convey allegorical symbolism but as appreciated things of beauty in their own right.

Religious pilgrims travelling across the continent could not resist the temptation and were often guilty of secreting seeds into their pockets. Even the fall of Jerusalem in 1080 brought the introduction of the ‘holy-hock’ and by 1100 the delphinium to the gardens of Europe.

By 1100-1400, Europe was trading with Arabia for spices, calling in at major cities like Venice on the way home. By 1453 the fall of Constantinople cut off the spice route so ships

had to find alternative routes. This led to explorers, like Vasco de Gama bringing plants like bay, cistus and lavender from countries bordering the Mediterranean to the notice of mainland European garden owners.

By 1550, (in the **Near Eastern Phase, 1560-1620**), exploration to the near east and Turkey led to tulips and carnations being brought back by Dutch courtiers. Some of these tulip bulbs were stolen by Dutch gardeners and as their popularity and then their price increased fortunes were made and lost.

By 1570 the American continent opened up more possibilities with potatoes, sunflowers, maize, yuccas and datura being brought back via Spain. The Incas even traded with pineapples and started the craze for these plants in all the horticultural power-houses of England. To be able to grow them in this climate, needed heat, sheltered space and money. Not only was the pineapple a form of gold for the Incas, but it required just as much gold in this country in order to grow them. Rich and powerful became synonymous with pineapple growing.

By 1570 the central and north American continent had opened even more doors and by 1620-1700 families like the Tradescants became embroiled in plant mania from this part of the world.

**The East Coast North American Phase (1620-1686)**, introduced plant collectors to tulip trees, maples, and swamp cypresses, followed by lupins, red oak and hickory from Canada.

In the 1600s, Britain’s voracious appetite for trading and protection of the sea routes from other countries, had a knock-on effect, necessitating royal forests to be felled to build navy ships. To urge the planting of new oak forests for future sustainability, people like John Evelyn with his publication of *Sylva* in 1664 urged the county landowner to plant more trees.

As Britain’s navy moved its way around the world, the next continent to prosper was South Africa. In 1686, (**Cape Phase, 1686-1772**), ships stopped at the Cape to trade and take on vital provisions. It was here that plants were found to be dramatically different and

were used to great effect in breeding and creating new colours into the gardening palette in Europe and this country.

Many plants in South Africa were predominantly red, a colour in the spectrum particularly attractive to the indigenous bird pollinators. Few native British plants have the red in their spectrum as they are pollinated by insects which “see” blue and pale colours. By crossing red and bright coloured plants with our own modest shades, a new vibrancy and variety could be achieved.

By the 1700s, pelargonium cross species were developed and our scientific capability to grow and look after plants from different continents improved. Glasshouses, pine-houses, and later Wardian cases to care for plants in transit, enabled more species especially those which suffered heat stress in the tropics to survive long journeys, especially red-hot-pokers.

The **Australian Phase (1772-1820)**, included the other southern hemisphere countries of Argentina and Chile where the fuchsias and monkey puzzle trees were collected in the late 1700s.

By the time of the **West Coast North American Phase (1820-1860)**, the Douglas Fir and Wellingtonia giants were brought back to provide the statuesque specimens that are familiar in many country parks and pinetums today.

Drama was brought to these shores by the

**Japanese and Chinese Phase (1860-1900)**, with hybrid tea roses, rhododendrons, magnolias and camellias introduced by Robert Fortune being avidly collected. This love for blousy colour was tempered by the use of evergreens which originated from Japan. During the 1860-1900 Japanese Phase, the trade was predominantly with the south island where the plants including cherry laurels were evergreen. These cherry laurels brought ground cover fashion to the fore in garden design throughout Victorian England.

To round off the lecture, Dr Michael Keith-Lucas discussed the exploits of the **Golden Age of Plant Hunters (1900-1930)**, like George Forrest who increased the diversity of rhododendrons, Himalayan poppies and primulas to enable hybridisation with our existing garden species, (**Phase of hybridization, 1930 to present**), to form the backbone of many of our great parkland gardens. He also asked a question of whether there was a place for genetically modified flowers in our gardens, or whether seeds slipped into pockets over centuries had been our own form of haphazard modification, which up to now has worked perfectly well.

*Gaila Adair*

*Dr Michael Keith-Lucas is a strong supporter of the Trust from its early days and has recently retired from the University of Reading. He is also a member of the Reading Naturalists.*

## *New BGT Website Launched*

The committee is delighted to announce that this is now available, following a three month project led by Ben Viljoen with support from Fiona Hope and the rest of the committee. The design work by Ben Dobson, of *Materially Thinking*, has resulted in a lively design with more opportunities for members and others to interact with the Trust.

The address of the site is [www.berks-gardens-trust.org.uk](http://www.berks-gardens-trust.org.uk) or just google Berkshire Gardens Trust.

Please visit the site and let us know what you think using the appropriate comment and contact options. **And remember, ideas for and contributions to both the Website and Newsletter are always welcome!**

## *Berkshire Gardens Trust Awards*

The Trust has received positive interest in this new initiative from several parts of the Royal County. The entries are being inspected and it

is hoped that the awards will be presented at the Trust's AGM on Friday 29th July.

## *Watlington House & Hungerford Tragedy Garden*

### *Watlington House*

Gaila Adair is researching the history of this site and preparing a design for the garden.

The William & Mary period of the early 17th century is a key basis for the garden design concepts being explored by the Watlington House Trust. Current lines of enquiry include progressing references to an interesting 'double wall' and 'christian cross' designs which are visible in period maps of the site. It is also important to start considering 'story lines' which will help to explain the garden and house to visitors, including links to those who may have influenced their development at different times, such as Elias Ashmole, founder of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, who knew the plant-collecting Tradescant family of Lambeth. Other matters being considered are, for example, perhaps inviting BGT members to sponsor certain

plants or aspects of the garden design and the need for the garden's planting and maintenance to be suitable for its urban setting.

BGT Members will have the chance to see the site for themselves and an accompanying display about the house and garden during the evening of Friday 29th July at the Trust's AGM. An invitation to the AGM is enclosed with this Newsletter.

### *Hungerford Tragedy Memorial Garden*

The Trust continues to progress this project with the support of Hungerford Town Council. The intention is for the site to be cleared and prepared this autumn with the help of the Community Payback Scheme and Thames Valley Probation Service. This will then lead the way to planting of the garden, based on the design by Bettina Kirkham.

## *The Wider Garden History Context*

As mentioned before, Berkshire Gardens Trust is the most recent member of the Association of Gardens Trusts (AGT). As such, we feature in the Association's first Yearbook, published in March 2011. Every BGT member is entitled to a copy, which will be available at BGT events (or via the Secretary with an S.A.E). The committee will also be using the publication for promoting the Trust to various organisations in the context of developing relationships and partnerships with Berkshire's Unitary Authorities and those organisations with

which we share common goals about our heritage landscapes. It is very important that we do this bearing in mind current economic priorities which could threaten such important features of our County. This imperative is reinforced by articles elsewhere about the risks to Berkshire's Designed Landscapes and the listing of local heritage assets, which all underlie the importance of research and local knowledge.

More information about the Wider Garden History context is available via Fiona's Blog on the new BGT website: [www.berks-gardens-trust.org.uk](http://www.berks-gardens-trust.org.uk).

## *Herschel Park, Slough*

The Berkshire Gardens Trust is very pleased to congratulate Slough Borough Council on the successful restoration of this important part of Slough's town and park history.

Thanks to the £2.7million grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, support from the Friends of Herschel Park and more than 500 days of volunteering activities, Slough Borough Council has restored Herschel Park to its former Victorian glory. New perimeter fencing and grand stonework, metal and wooden gateways now protect the park and grace the main entrances to the Upton Park estate. Victorian-style lamps light the park and the bridge over the lakes has been restored. The lakes have been lined and refilled, new paths constructed and hundreds of new trees and shrubs have been planted. Some of the older trees – including a 150-year-old Lucombe Oak – are now lit from below showing off their grace.

Members from BGT joined local people on Sunday 22 May 2011 to celebrate the official reopening of the park by Queen Victoria, played by Sylvia Strange, as she planted a new tree. Many of those who through their hard work and support made this possible were there, including the current Mayor, Sukhjit



*"Queen Victoria" & Sukhjit Dhaliwal, the Mayor of Slough, planting a tree*

Dhaliwal, Michelle Davies Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South East, and representatives from Slough Borough Council, English Heritage, and English Landscapes and the ever energetic local community.

Congratulations go to Bruce Hicks, project manager, Elias Kupfermann, and Tony Down, management officer, who researched and steered the project.

*Bettina Kirkham*

## *Local Listing of Heritage Assets*

Berkshire Gardens Trust has responded to an English Heritage consultation about a Good Practice Guide for Identifying and Managing Significant Local Heritage Assets. Its aim is to establish a common approach across England which will enable greater importance to be allocated to locally significant heritage assets and ensure that they are better protected and managed in accordance with appropriate planning legislation, which will have to take such assets into account.

The initiative is part of the move to encourage local people to get involved in partnership with the local authority and work together to protect and enhance what is

important about where we live and work. The new proposals set out suggested criteria for assets to be included on the list, with potential for theming and otherwise grouping them. Most importantly and relevantly for BGT, the proposals widen the scope of listing to include designed parks and gardens and other open spaces as well as buildings and which, while they are significant and well loved by many in the area, may not be otherwise protected.

A copy of the BGT response is available on our new website and more information about the consultation is available via English Heritage at [www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk).

# *Historic Fields of Vision: The Risks to Berkshire's Designed Landscapes*

The fragility of historic designed landscapes is something we can all recognise – from the ephemeral nature of a planting scheme, to the exposure to the elements of hewn stone ornament. Overlay these natural forces with those human conditions such as the lack of understanding of significance, poor stewardship, economic motivation and inappropriate use and it is clear that our significant designed landscapes can easily be under siege. Between about 1918 and 1995, nearly 50% of the 400,000 hectares of surviving historic parkland covering the southeast of England was lost, whether to agriculture, development or through ignorance of this delicate asset.

In 2010, the umbrella body of the County Gardens Trust (CGT), the Association of Gardens Trusts (AGT), embarked on a project to work closely with English Heritage (EH) and Natural England (NE) to look at how the CGTs in the southeast could help to halt this parkland decline, drawing on the local knowledge and considerable experience of CGT volunteers. The Historic Landscape Project Southeast runs to 2013 and brings together the common agenda of these organisations in the conservation of the historic environment, looking to make sure that the contribution of skills and the knowledge of CGT volunteers are recognised and developed.

A key aspect of the project is further highlighting those landscapes which are currently or imminently imperilled. In 2009, EH added historic designed landscapes to its annual publication, the *Heritage at Risk Register*. This 'At Risk Register' acknowledges those nationally important landscapes on the *EH Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest* (commonly known as Registered Landscapes), which are under considerable threat. While these threats may be from poor management, development or neglect, ultimately we risk losing the original design integrity, and often this loss is permanent, for example, housing devel-

opment intruding on vistas.

In Berkshire, there are six Grade II and Grade II\* landscapes considered to be at 'High Risk' and on the Register. Additionally, there are Listed Buildings and Scheduled Monuments at risk in the county, many of which contribute integrally to historic landscape design. Through the Historic Landscape Project, EH and NE are encouraging CGTs to participate in conserving landscapes in need of our attention in very practical ways; not just those sites on the Register but those of local significance too. For example, CGT volunteers could:

- Flag up sites which are potentially At Risk, so that perhaps concerns can be addressed before the situation deteriorates

- Contribute to conservation management plans and stewardship agreements to ensure these are addressing the issues causing a site to be vulnerable

- Work on specific conservation projects such as research and recording of particular features, vistas or planting plans

- Encourage owners to apply for their land to enter into environmental stewardship schemes, as these can often fund management plans and restoration works

- Develop further understanding of and involvement in the planning system and be alert to development threats

- Research and record sites to identify those with local significance that should be recognised in local planning guidance (see the article on Local Listing elsewhere).

Over the next two years, there will be a series of training courses run regionally, tailored to equipping CGT members to be active in designed landscape conservation, as well as making available specific support and advice. Courses will include guidance on how to respond to a planning application affecting

a historic landscape, researching and recording sites to support their protection, and the structure and use of conservation management plans in deciding how best to conserve a site.

If you're not already active within BGT, this is a great opportunity to take up the cause of these threatened landscapes, gain new skills and meet others across the region. EH want to work closely with members who have the local knowledge and NE have opened up the chance for volunteers to help maximise the benefits of their stewardship and biodiversity protection schemes to preserve historic parkland features: after all, without the ornamental parkland trees and planting there

are fewer habitats. We all enjoy visiting these seductively fascinating places; further understanding them and contributing to their protection will ensure others can do so after us.

You can read more about the Historic Landscape Project at: [www.Gardenstrusts.org.uk/12-proj-historiclandscape.html](http://www.Gardenstrusts.org.uk/12-proj-historiclandscape.html) OR you can search and browse the Heritage At Risk Register at: [www.english-heritage.org.uk/caring/heritage-at-risk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/caring/heritage-at-risk) OR contact the Berkshire Gardens Trust (see below) OR Verena McCaig, Historic Landscape Project Officer, on 017904 609553 and [verena.mccaig@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:verena.mccaig@naturalengland.org.uk).

## *Gazetteer Project*

Progress on this project has been limited because of commitments over Easter and early summer. However several of our researchers have now completed site information sheets for properties and early in the autumn an informal meeting will be held to discuss this work.

Ben Viljoen and Fiona Hope had a very

useful meeting with Verena McCaig the Historic Landscape Project Officer about how best to structure and present the information gathered within the site information sheets. Useful work has been done along similar lines by the Kent Gardens Trust using English Heritage expertise which we will also tap into.

## *Forthcoming Events*

***Our 3rd AGM on Friday 29th July, 2011, at Watlington House, Reading, 6.30 for 7pm***

All members are invited to attend this event, free of charge, when there will be an opportunity to visit parts of this Grade II listed building and to look at the site being considered for gardens as mentioned elsewhere in this Newsletter, as well as a display about them. Following the formal AGM business, there will be a talk about the house, by Clive Williams Hon Secretary and Treasurer and the garden by Gaila Adair, BGT committee member and Watlington House Trustee.

An invitation is enclosed. Drinks and light refreshments will also be available.

***South Hill Park, September***

It is hoped to arrange a joint visit to this

Grade II registered park in September with members of the South-East Region of the Landscape Institute. Remnants of the former 18th century park and 19th century terraced gardens now form a public park and garden linked to one of the largest arts centres in the south East. The site has received Heritage Lottery Funding to restore the parkland and the terraces of the original house and the visit should enable us to gain an appreciation of the challenges and practical issues associated with such projects. Details and invitations to follow nearer the time.

**Autumn/Winter Lecture 2011**

Various ideas are being pursued. Do let us know if you have more and Watch This Space and the Website for more details in due course!

## *New Committee Members*

We are very pleased to welcome three more new committee members to help take the Trust forward into its 4th year:

*Gaila Adair*, a Garden Designer based in West Berkshire, who is already involved with the Trust's Research Group and represents us on the Watlington House Board of Trustees.

*Susan Balchin*, an organiser for the Air Ambulance Berkshire's Open Gardens events and a new member of the Trust.

*Peter Thornton*, currently Principal of Berkshire's Agricultural College and also new to the Trust.

## *Who is Who & Contact Information*

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