



## ***Chairman's Introduction***

The Berkshire Gardens Trust has had a 'bumper year' of events so far, with more to come. In this respect I would like to take the opportunity to pay particular tribute to Ben Viljoen, whose sterling work in respect of Capability Brown's Tercentenary Year has contributed significantly – and successfully – to BGT's 2016 calendar.

It is also most important to record great thanks to Kaye Warner, who has been BGT's most able and reliable Membership Secretary since early in 2012. Kaye has done much more than keeping track of membership and sending out information to members, for example welcoming people to events and, more recently, helping with the Newsletter. We are sad to see her go but really appreciate the difference she has made to BGT.

As you will also see, there is a lot of work still to be done in other areas and I really hope that we will be able to attract more support and people to help us take these forward. Please approach myself or others on the committee if you have

any ideas or useful contacts which we can call upon in the months ahead!

*Charles Elly*



Tea time at Eton College during the visit to the gardens – see pages 4 and 5

## ***BGT's 2015 Spring Visit to Rousham, May 2016***

Our visit to Rousham's house and garden on 25<sup>th</sup> May followed Michael Symes' autumn lecture about the "pictorial circuit garden" of Rousham. During an internal tour of the house there were plenty of portraits of the ancestors of the Dormer-Cotterell family and their estate as it evolved. As well as some interesting furniture and ornaments, it was certainly lovely to be able to look out and see the gardens which were new to most of our party, including some guests from Oxfordshire.

The gardens themselves are Grade I registered, with most of the estate buildings or structures Grade II\* listed by Historic England. Led by Ben Viljoen and mindful of our role as spectators, we followed the route round the garden written by the head gardener, John MacClary, who carried out the detailed planning and planting following William Kent's design. MacClary describes the picturesque features encountered on a circuit of

the gardens in his 1750 letter to encourage the 18<sup>th</sup> century owners to return and enjoy the work they had commissioned to 'update' their estate.

We set off along a narrow path beside the *ha-ha*, which separates the gardens from the rich pastures, towards the stone Palladian gateway with its wooden door and the 2-storey castellated stone lodge (both Grade II\* listed).

Pausing to admire and contemplate as appropriate at certain points with Ben Viljoen quoting from the letter, Ben also provided further insights into the development of the 18<sup>th</sup> century gardens commissioned by General James Dormer. For example, in addition to the 'Augustan', journey suggested by the various classically inspired sculptures we passed, Ben commented about how they also reflected the lifestyle of the general, through their links to the general's army career and personal friendships.

Leaving the 'Temple of Echo', a rustic Doric Temple, we turned southwards along the Watery Walk, a serpentine rill and cold bathing or plunge pool and adjacent grotto, both within their dense shrubbery setting. Returning to Kent's version of 'the countryside', with views across the Cherwell, we turned east to the surprise, lusciously green setting of Venus Vale with its cascades.



We then continued along to the *Praeneste*, an arcaded loggia on the upper terrace with Roman inspired allegories set in niches, which it had not been possible to see from below. With the bright light and late spring vegetation, it was hard to pick out the Gothicised mill house and the castellated sham castle gateway, originally clear on the northern skyline beyond the river and the water meadows. Nonetheless, despite the slight intrusions noted in the Historic England

registration document for this estate, the views out across towards them remains very peaceful and rural as Kent intended.

Finally, we made our way along the river bank before viewing the final feature of William Kent's work which we approached up a steep slope. Whether or not it was intended as a symbolic representation of death or architectural artifice, the stone Pyramid House gazebo certainly makes an impact. Nearby a small door leads through a wall into the kitchen garden with its still extant 17<sup>th</sup> century dovecote and modern planting.



With many thanks to Ben Viljoen, whose knowledge and enjoyment of the messages conveyed by the sculptures, views and features helped us appreciate some of the less obvious influences behind this relatively small garden which certainly 'packs a punch beyond its weight'.

## ***BGT's 2016 'Capability Brown Festival' Celebrations***

### **'Brown in Berkshire' – Lecture**

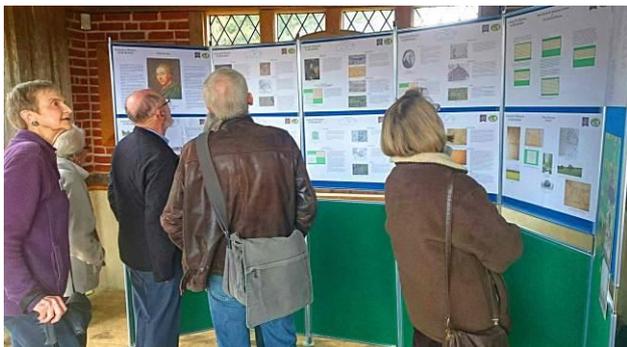
This late March event got Berkshire Gardens Trust's celebrations for the Lancelot 'Capability' Brown Tercentenary year off to a good start. As usual, the event started in the Purley Barn with light refreshments and a glass of wine.

Ben's lecture itself was fascinating and it is hard to do it justice or match its quality in a write-up! Ben started off with some biographical information about the man who 'struck lucky' and rose from relatively humble beginnings to work for some of the greatest landowners and, through his ability to identify the 'capability' inherent in any landscape designed many of England's key 18<sup>th</sup> century estates, including Highclere on the Berkshire/Hampshire borders. For example, we heard how Brown transformed "the stranded whale" of Vanbrugh's overbearing bridge at Blenheim Palace into an elegant adornment across the lake and conversed with Lord Cobham "... free from vanity and conceit" about his plans for the now famous 'Grecian valley' at Stowe.

Within Berkshire, there are 6 (mostly Grade II registered) landscapes linked to Brown. Ben briefly covered Ditton Park (now Manor) near Datchet with its moat and views to Windsor and Basildon Park where Brown's work seems to be confined to the walled kitchen garden. He also mentioned that there is less evidence or visibility of his work at Woodside near Windsor (now the home of Elton John), while an extract from the accounts confirms Brown's contribution to Maiden Erleigh near Reading.

Thereafter the lecture's focus was on Benham Valence and Sandleford, near Newbury, West Berkshire and of course Caversham Park. There were various references to some fascinating women. At Benham Valence, Mrs. Craven's theatrical lifestyle influenced the inclusion of 2 pillars from Hamstead Marshall at the entrance to her husband's memorial. At Sandleford, Mrs. Montagu, with her links to the 'Blue Stockings', hosted literary soirees and wrote innumerable letters about ideas for the estate, while Mrs. Lybbe Powys of Hardwick House wrote about her visits to and developments at Caversham Park.

## 'Brown in Berkshire' – Mini-Exhibitions



In early April, Ben's portable exhibition illustrating Lancelot 'Capability' Brown and his work in Berkshire, then made its debut at the Caversham Court Gazebo, where it was well visited. For those who missed it, the exhibition will return to Caversham Court in September and also travel to Newbury in the west of the county later on: see BGT Events elsewhere in the Newsletter.

### Caversham Park Tours

Caversham Park enjoys a commanding position on the hills to the north of central Reading and Caversham, especially when seen from the train approaching or leaving the town. However, its internal delights, with the downstairs Victorian decorated rooms and the many-layered garden that culminated in the changes which Capability Brown made here, were a surprise to most attendees, including previous employees and local residents.

Guided tours for 75 people on each occasion took place in April and June and a 3<sup>rd</sup> event is scheduled for September. These events have been a couple of years or so in the making, so huge "Thank You's" are therefore due to Ben Viljoen and everyone else who have made them a reality.

As the visits marked the first time in many years that the general public have had access to Caversham Park, BGT was kept very busy with a great demand for the tickets and administration on the day in liaising with BBC Security; and mindful of those working on the site. Those behind the scenes at the BBC, include Eddie Fallon and his successor Clark Hunter, Facilities Managers and Stuart Vernon, Head Gardener, whose team had the additional challenge of a heavy storm just prior to BGT's first visit: luckily, bright sunshine returned for us!

The BGT tour leaders and Jill Wallace with her colleague Paul from the BBC leading internal tours, as well as the team providing refreshments, also worked very hard to cope with seventy-five interested, thirsty and peckish visitors during and after the tours.



The afternoon started with an introductory talk by Ben Viljoen on the history of the estate. The tours of the garden then went past the old coaching porch and chapel and out onto William Winde's impressive 1200 foot long axial terrace, where the house's Doric columns are reminders of the previous building. From here extensive views look south beyond stepped lawns, previously formal parterre gardens, over Reading's northern outskirts and the Thames.

We made our way past some impressive woodland towards a Grade II listed stone temple, which Historic England cite as a 19<sup>th</sup> century replacement for the one marked on earlier maps. Others, including the Pevsner guide for Berkshire, maintain it is the one which Thomas Jefferson (later US President), saw on his visit in 1786.



There was then plenty of opportunity to appreciate the persistence of the grounds team in clearing undergrowth as we descended down into woods around the oval-shaped lake to the south-west of the house and into the woods. Emerging on the far side of the lake after walking along the brick wall which separates the estate from its former kitchen garden, now a mobile home site, we were able to appreciate the terrace and house above us from the edge of the *ha-ha*, below which fields lead down to the Reading Crematorium and Queen Anne's School.

A 20<sup>th</sup> century *Millennium Garden* utilises the natural spring rising in this area to drain water away from the lawns to the south-east below the terrace. More woodland beyond leads to glimpses of the original Capability Brown pastoral

landscape beyond, now encroached upon by housing. It is however still possible to follow a footpath north from Caversham which was previously an approach drive up from an 18<sup>th</sup> century gatehouse to the east of the estate.

## ***Berkshire Gardens Trust Needs Your Help!***

In addition to organising visits and lectures, the committee continues to explore the options for taking forward research and planning activities, especially with the support of West Berkshire Council and the West Berkshire Heritage Forum. However, although 1 or 2 members have recently expressed interest, we still need to find a way of developing these areas which are a core reason for the Trust's existence and one of the key areas which distinguishes us from Horticultural and other Heritage Groups.

BGT has been keen to use the Capability Brown events as part of its outreach to new audiences. Nonetheless, while information was distributed via various channels and attendances at Caversham Park visits and associated events has been consistently high, this has sadly not yet led to a huge increase in membership.

Kaye Warner writes, I thank the Chairman for his very kind comments and have enjoyed my time as the Membership Secretary but, unfortunately, other commitments mean I cannot continue. Being the Membership Secretary has been an interesting job and I have been able to meet and get to know other members of the BGT at

occasions, such as lectures. As you know, the Membership Register is computerised and some basic knowledge of using a computer and how an Excel spread-sheet works has been necessary (although I had little previous experience of this when I started but our Treasurer gave me an excellent introduction). Each year there is the renewal of subscriptions – and you will all have received emails or letters from me about that!. Apart from this, I send out the flyers for events, etc, and compile the list of attendees. So, for much of the year, my job has not been too onerous and I have enjoyed my time as the Membership Secretary.

The Berkshire Gardens Trust can only continue to prosper if its members are prepared to help it do so. Your assistance would be much appreciated, particularly with some or all of the functions of the Membership Secretary. But in addition to that role, we need Committee Members, to help with the general running of the Trust. In short, we really need more 'people on the ground' to make some progress in these sorts of core activities. Please let us have any ideas or suggestions you may have, or – better still – come and join us!

## ***Summer Tour of Eton College Gardens, July 2016***

Some 30 members and guests of Berkshire Gardens Trust visited these Grade II Historic England registered gardens on a hot, sunny day with the summer herbaceous borders and specimen trees shown to advantage.

The first garden to be visited was the *King of Siam's Garden*, a small garden which had been created with funds donated by the King of Siam in 1929 to replace old stables blocking the view of the college and its brickwork from the College Field. With donations by Thai 'Old Etonians', it was restored in 2014, by James Alexander-Sinclair (RHS member, Chelsea judge and Old Etonian) who also redesigned the *Provost's Garden* and *Fellows' Garden*. There was sadly no sign of any eastern promise amidst the summer colour and grasses moving in the welcome breeze, rather an atmosphere akin to being at a shrine; perhaps this was appropriate enough given that the large

statue of *Perseus* with the Gorgon's head in the centre was probably intended to represent a symbol of the struggle between Good and Evil, as it was given in memory of a young relative killed in the Great War 1914-1918.

A large pair of decorative gates led into the large, square *Provost's Garden*, where a large magnolia took pride of place in the lawn around which were profusely flowering herbaceous borders. Aside from the perimeter planting, which Alexander-Sinclair positioned to draw you in as you descend onto the lawn. Once there, the eye is drawn to 3 modern sculptures: Sir Henry Moore's *The King and Queen*, who are sitting on the edge of the lawn, while around the perimeter Auguste Rodin's *St John the Baptist Preaching* and Jacob Epstein's *The Visitation*, peacefully surveying the tranquil scene before them.



Members studying Sir Henry Moore's  
*The King and Queen*

It is often said that "necessity is the mother of invention". Certainly the *Fellows' Garden* boasts a wonderful view out, which has been created by a raised but low shrubbery border behind which the 'borrowed landscape' of the River Thames and its pastures looked peaceful rather than being the source of occasional floods onto the lawn. Along the back of an 18th-century cloister building Alexander-Sinclair created small compartments using hedges; when we visited they contained delicately scented creamy yellow hydrangeas. Towards the south-east corner stands a Lebanon cedar with an outstanding London Plane just beyond the garden.

Passing through the *Headmaster's Garden*, with evidence of children's play equipment to one side, we arrived at 1 of 2 simple bridges onto the island with *Luxmoore's Garden*. This was the most interesting part of the gardens for many of us, with a maze of paths, different gardens, including a wonderfully rich bed planted with zinnias for the first time this year and places for contemplation.



It is situated on an island and surrounded by a network of branching streams with access only permitted to older students for quiet study and relaxation in the summer months and totally out of bounds to the younger ones. From an expansive garden seat within a church porch-like or summer garden house frame, set slightly back against a wall and above the more central lawn area with geometric beds and a 'sundial sculpture', there was a marvellous view back to Eton College and chapel, with its Tudor brickwork and gothic stone pinnacles emerging from a wonderful panorama of leafy trees.

The Head Gardener and his gardeners later joined us for a delicious tea on the *Fellows' Garden* lawn, where Charles Elly thanked all those involved for their help, especially Richard Griffith-Jones, who organised this visit to his old college and gardens.

With thanks to Rosemary Simon for her thoughts and reference to extracts from Andrew Gailey's *A Brief History of the Garden, The Spirit of Luxmoore* by Angus Graham-Campbell and Mary Keen's article 'Inside Eton's Secret Gardens' in The Telegraph of 9 June 2014, circulated by BGT to those on the visit and Historic England's registered entry for the gardens.

## ***The Wider Garden History and Heritage World***

In the midst of all the political and economic uncertainties, it is good to see cultural matters still featuring nationally and internationally. We also benefit from regular information and advice from The Gardens Trust as our 'umbrella body',

much of which relates directly or indirectly to the sort of issues with which the Trust is involved, from planning matters and research to membership recruitment.

## ***Gardens Trust Awayday at Westonbirt Arboretum***

The Garden Trust's conservation and planning officers, supported by *Historic England (English Heritage)* are planning an informal day out on **Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> October** designed to help broaden the volunteer base which is so crucial to all County Gardens Trust activities. The initiatives being promoted and explored include building links with the CPRE, how we might share

volunteers, ways of presenting conservation work as an appealing activity and adjusting the training which is already provided so that it is more accessible by and suitable for 'a currently less engaged audience'.

The day offers delegates a rare chance to visit these Gloucestershire Grade I gardens as well as opportunities to explore how site problems affect

research, conservation and planning issues. It will also be interesting to informally meet and compare experiences with other CGTs.

**Please let Fiona Hope know if you are interested in coming and getting involved!**

## ***Central Government Heritage Initiatives***

**An investigation into public parks invites responses by Friday 30<sup>th</sup> September – visit the Select Committee for the Communities and Local Government’s simple questionnaire via:**  
***<http://www.parliament.uk/business>***

The Secretary of State for The Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the Right Hon. John Whittingdale, MP, has issued a formal response to a recent vote in favour of leaving the European Union, emphasising that the sector

represents an important source of income and opportunities. A number of related bodies, such as the *National Trust*, *Visit Britain* and *The Heritage Alliance*, have also issued similar statements.

Tracey Crouch MP, the Minister for Heritage, is also inviting the heritage sector to let her know what impact ‘*Brexit*’ will have on the wider historical environment and heritage tourism, focusing on what should be protected and what could be reformed given this period of change.

## ***The Heritage Alliance***

As a member of The Gardens Trust, BGT receives regular briefings from *The Heritage Alliance* on a wide range of heritage subjects as well as the political and economic environment within which we operate.

Lizzie Pugh, formerly an adviser at the DCMS is the new Chief Executive. Lloyd Grossman, Chairman of the Alliance has welcomed her rare combination of skills and experience as “... a passionate enthusiast for heritage of all kinds”.

## ***Forthcoming BGT Events***

### **BGT’s AGM and Autumn Lecture, Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> October 2016**

Following the formal AGM and light refreshments, our speaker will be Timothy Walker, former Director of the Oxford Botanic Garden and Harcourt Arboretum. Timothy, who is also a lecturer within the academic world, is a lively speaker and his lecture should be fun as well as informative. There is no charge to attend the AGM, although the Lecture will be a paying event. Invitations for both will be issued shortly.

### **Capability Brown 300 - Autumn Mini-Exhibitions and Talks**

Following his Spring Lecture at Purley Barn and the April mini-exhibition at Caversham Court, Ben Viljoen has arranged some further events on Brown in Berkshire as listed below:

- *Saturday 10th September and Sunday 11th September*, Heritage Open Day at Caversham Court Gazebo, Exhibition 2-5 pm.
- *Wednesday 28th September*, Cookham & Cookham Dean Horticultural Society, Talk at 7.30 pm.

Guests are welcome at £5 per head, with payment on the door. However, to avoid

disappointment, it would be helpful if anyone intending to come notifies Charles Elly, Horticultural Society Secretary (01628 482637), as there is a limit on numbers the Hall can accommodate.

- *Monday 14<sup>th</sup> November to Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> December* in the Carnegie Lounge, Newbury Library, Exhibition from 9am to 5pm.
- *Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> December*, Carnegie Lounge, Newbury Library, Talk at 6pm. The talk is free but as space will be limited, please apply to Newbury Library (01635 519900 or [library@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:library@westberks.gov.uk)).

In addition, at the time of going to press, BGT’s third and final guided afternoon tour at Caversham Park is on Sunday 18th September.

These events all offer a further opportunity to buy the booklet which Ben has produced about Caversham Park, at a very modest price of £3.50. It is packed full of information about those involved in the development of the estate, as well as including some excellent historical illustrations and photographs.

## ***Who's Who and Contact Information***

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