



Chairman's Introduction

After somewhat unusual winter weather recently, we start to think about the Spring and Summer. There is a great deal planned, and I hope you will find our Programme interesting and enjoyable.

First, we celebrate the tercentenary of 'Capability' Brown in 2016. Ben Viljoen has been leading a small group to plan our celebration. Come to hear his Lecture on the 17th March at Purley Barn to learn more about the work Brown did in our County, backed by Ben's meticulous research and illustrated by images he has taken or found. One of the landscapes which retains much of Brown's designed landscape is Caversham Park. Many of you will know this is a property occupied by the BBC and is rarely open to the public. This year the BBC have agreed to allow Berkshire Gardens Trust to have access, to enable us all to see the glory of Brown's work. The first day we are able to visit is the 17th April, but if there is demand we can also visit again on the 12th June and the 18th September, all Sunday afternoons. Tea will be included in the ticket price and additionally we will have a conducted tour of the House by one of the BBC staff. Flyers for booking these events have been sent out, so do contact our Membership Secretary, Kaye Warner, if yours is not to hand. Tickets for Caversham Park visits must be pre-booked, with an initial priority period for members. In addition to this, there will be an exhibition of Brown in Berkshire at Caversham Court on 3rd April.

Those of you who enjoyed our Autumn 2015 Lecture on Rousham, will be looking forward to BGT's visit on the 25th May. We will also have a conducted tour of the House, which was in part designed by Kent and also still contains evidence of the Civil War in the older part. The House tours are led by members and friends of the family who have been in continuous occupation since the 17th century. Ben Viljoen will lead us around the historic garden and there will be plenty of time to look at the more modern gardens. The flyer and booking details will be

circulated around the middle of March. There is no catering at Rousham, but some of you may be interested in meeting for lunch nearby at *The Holt Hotel* beforehand.

On the 21st July, BGT has been able to arrange a visit to the private gardens of Eton College. We will see the Provost's Garden, with the King of Siam's garden newly restored, the Headmaster's and Fellows' gardens and Luxmoor garden, which enjoys an island-setting in a backwater of the Thames. Tea is also included in the ticket price here. We will have tea in one of the gardens if fine, otherwise in a cafeteria. Tickets are limited for this rare privilege and members will have priority, after which we will welcome guests. The gardeners will be on hand in 'their' garden and will join us for tea to answer any questions.

Our AGM is on Tuesday the 11th October when the speaker at the Lecture after the AGM business and refreshments will be Timothy Walker, former Director of the Oxford Botanic Garden and Harcourt Arboretum, who will be talking about the Arboretum. We will be arranging a visit there in Spring 2017.

Our research group is about to start on the next part of the Gazetteer and our comments are still being submitted on planning applications. We would be pleased to welcome other members or non-members to join in this work, and ask you all to keep your eyes and ears open and let us know of any concern about the historic parks and gardens of Berkshire.

You will shortly be receiving a request to renew your membership. Please do so as we need your support for our work and to help preserve our wonderful designed landscapes for our children and grandchildren.

With every good wish from your Committee for 2016.
Charles Ely

BGT's 2015 AGM and Bi-Annual Chairman's Awards

It was good to welcome our President, Lady Wroughton and Sir Philip, as well as members and visitors to our AGM at Purley Barn. This year our official guests included The Lord Lieutenant and Mrs Puxley of Welford Park, West Berkshire and the High Sheriff of Berkshire. Representatives from Bray Parish Council, Leckhampstead Parish Council, Sulham & Tidmarsh Parish Council, Wokingham Borough Council and Woodley Town Council also came to join us and receive their Chairman's biennial Award certificates in recognition of achievements in Berkshire's local public gardening, planting and landscaping projects.

In addition to the formal business, tribute was paid to Ben Viljoen by Christina Hill Williams and Charles Elly, for his tremendous contribution generally and especially his research, IT and design work. Gaila Adair (member of BGT and Watlington House Trustee) was also applauded for her sterling work in redesigning the Watlington House gardens with support from BGT members.

The AGM minutes are available on our website www.berks-gardens-trust.org.uk.

The Lord Lieutenant then presented certificates, signed by Lady Wroughton, for the biennial Chairman's Award for innovative designs improving a range of county localities as follows:

Bray Enhancement Committee: Outstanding



For the themed displays for the central Conservation area, including planters for traffic calming, with an overall unity of colour and scent to the whole village.

Leckhampstead former Pond area: Commended



For an area which was formerly a pond, long since dried up and allowed to become an overgrown eyesore in the middle of the village and is now a pleasant area with seating for enjoyment by local residents.

Tidmarsh Wild Flower Meadow: Highly Commended



For a wild flower area with over 30 types of wild flowers attracting a variety of insects and a bench accessible via a mown path. The meadow's backdrop is mostly hedge, mixed trees and railings with an attractive lych-gate.

Wokingham, Pavilions Border Community Garden: Outstanding



For imaginative planting with insect friendly plants and bee boxes alongside a public footpath leading to the railway and housing.

Woodley Town Centre Project: Highly Commended



For its planters and hanging baskets, in a co-ordinated colour scheme create a pleasant atmosphere in the traffic free Town Centre zone with bench seats in smaller more friendly, litter free areas and making the whole area more welcoming.

On page 7 are photographs showing examples of the innovative displays at Bray and Wokingham.

Peter Thorn reviews BGT's 2015 Autumn Lecture – Rousham: The Birth of the Pictorial Circuit Garden



Temple of Echo in the Gardens at Rousham

A visit to Rousham House and gardens may be likened to a pilgrimage that diverts the senses so that one becomes absorbed into a meld of classical design and an Arcadian ideal of the gentle, green, English countryside. It is also a pilgrimage in the sense that Rousham is the first and only 'virtually as created' remaining example of the work of a man whom some judge as the father of the British landscape garden, William Kent. Our AGM evening was certainly enhanced through a fascinating virtual tour of Rousham's gardens by Michael Symes who gave us an enticing introduction for BGT's planned late Spring 2016 visit.



Rousham House was built in 1635 by Sir Robert Dormer and remains in family ownership to this day. In 1738, General James Dormer-Cotterell commissioned William Kent to carry out alterations to both house and gardens, following earlier work by Charles Bridgeman to lay out an extensive landscape around the house, with a garden of meandering walks and pools leading to the Cherwell. Kent designed new wings with stables for the house and internal features many of which remain today especially the entrance hallway and his South Front seen from the gardens. However it is the gardens that are key to the uniqueness of Rousham; it is a pioneer landscape garden, a precursor for the development of the great 'constructed' landscapes

that became 'classic' representations of a grand country English style over the next one hundred years.

William Kent, the son of a joiner from Bridlington, trained as a sign and coach painter. Encouraged to further study art and design by his enlightened employer, he must have exhibited great talent at an early age as subsequently a group of Yorkshire businessmen paid for Kent's 'grand tour' to Italy. This good fortune proved to be a formative experience. During this period Kent developed an interest and expertise in architectural design through which medium he first gained attention and commissions, his appeal partly due to subsequent patrons' nostalgia for their grand tours as reflected in Kent's early interior work.

After his grand tour and introduction to Lord Burlington, Kent championed a 'new' style influenced by his Italian experience and inspired by Inigo Jones and the Venetian, Palladio. In the Georgian era the 'new' Palladian style was utilised to reinforce the power and image of the State; for example the Treasury building and Horse Guards in Whitehall are fine examples of Kent's architectural legacy. He was fortunate that this was a period of major investment in country estates that again reflected status and power: Holkham Hall in Norfolk is perhaps his grandest statement in this regard. These themes are also reflected in features incorporated within Kent's garden designs as we shall see at Rousham.

Kent began developing gardens in the 1730s' and his good connections enabled him to contribute to gardens for Queen Caroline at Richmond. It is said that he lacked horticultural knowledge and practical skill. If so he more than made up for this with a depth of feeling and empathy for the countryside developing a naturalistic approach to his work. His influence upon up and coming designers such as Capability Brown, a sometime pupil, was considerable, though from his clients' perspective Kent could be something of a nightmare as not being a timekeeper he was often disorganised. However without doubt he designed buildings which command our attention and admiration today whilst also creating a 'doorway' that future generations of garden and landscape designers developed into the 'English' style.

Upon entering the gardens at Rousham there are two levels and choices about which way to go. Each level contains surprises for the visitor; this is a pictorial circuit for us to follow as Kent's aim was to set scenes or tableaux which surprise and excite a visitor whilst expressing the wealth and

influence of the owner. Michael Symes was very precise in his guidance for us to follow the higher path first, which he interpreted as tableaux conveying a message of power or battle to reflect the professional employment and status of the family. We are also on a classical, 'Augustan', journey with sculptures: *Minerva*, the goddess of wisdom, a horse confronted by a lion to express power with dominance and a 'dying gladiator', set within a series of garden rooms linked by paths and an upper terrace, underneath which is a hidden gem to be viewed later.

The second, lower element of the pathway leads us into the 'countryside', as contrived by William Kent. The classical theme continues past the 'Temple of Echo' and down towards the Cherwell. Here the tenor changes and we see across the river a 'Gothicised' mill house with the eye drawn to a Gothic castellated folly on the hill behind (it is said that Kent took the Gothic out of churches and put it into a domestic setting).

A pathway then returns to the house past cascades and ponds, where once again Augustan images surprise and impress upon us powerful family values: Apollo resplendent on the Long Walk merges into the 'Vale of Venus', with representations of their esteemed attributes in stone. Then follows the *Praeneste*, an arcaded loggia above which sits the terrace walked earlier,

complete with Roman inspired allegories set in niches. So on to one of the few details originally created by Bridgeman, a ramped amphitheatre left as a clearing by Kent but embellished by statues of Bacchus, Ceres and Mercury representing fecundity and agriculture, pleasure and plenty, with Mercury to convey the message. Our circuit is then completed with the final tableau, a pyramid at the tip of a rise; symbolic representation or architectural artifice?

William Kent's landscape confirms his status as a genius whose flair and innovation defied the pretensions of formal and accepted fashion. His empathy with nature enabled him to create works which, inspired by ideal landscapes of pastoral literature and painting, provide places for reflection and solitude and for pleasure, pageantry and ostentation. Rousham among many other great houses, always encouraged the 'right sort' of paying visitor and Kent's skill was to position structures as focal points for views or for contemplation, with surprises around the corner and the visitor as an actor perambulating his stage design. We warmly thank Michael for his erudite and fascinating introduction. He certainly wetted our appetite to both see Rousham for ourselves and to more fully appreciate the genius and to learn more of this great man.

The Gardens Trust and the story so far

The first South-East County Gardens Trust (CGT) Forum and National Forum since the Newcastle launch of The Gardens Trust (TGT) was launched in Newcastle last July, featured a number of presentations of interest and relevance to BGT as we develop our research and planning activities.

In particular:

- The ***LeaptheHaHa*** email and ***Resource Forum*** on the UK Parks & Gardens website were mentioned as useful sources of help.
- ***Historic England's (HE) Parks & Gardens Heritage at Risk Register*** includes sites in Berkshire, for example Aldermaston.
- ***The Capability Brown Festival*** is seen as a platform for CGTs reaching out to new audiences.
- ***TGT and CGTs*** need to create a national presence and reach out to like-minded

bodies in the heritage and cultural world, as well as less obvious, other users of historic designed landscapes, for example walkers and fishermen.

- ***Working with Local Authorities and Heritage Environment Officers*** should be seen as a critical CGT activity.
- ***CGT Research Records*** need to contain a summary of historical sites in each county available in a form which is useful both for general enquiries and also as a resource for Planning, HER and Conservation officers (site *Statements of Significance* are a particular interest).
- ***Digitising Research Records*** need to be 'future proofed' so they can be read in future. County Record Office should have suitable (hard/electronic) copies of all relevant papers for historic sites.

Members' News

Have you got your copy of *Heritage in West Berkshire*, the booklet published 2015 by BGT's first and continuing Corporate Member? This will be a useful reference for BGT and contains details of other local and County-based organisations with whom we hope to develop links.

You can also download a full colour version of the Heritage in West Berkshire Report at: <http://info.westberks.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=40478>.

The report is also available to purchase for £3.00 from Shaw House or West Berkshire Museum.

Lancelot Brown Festival



Portrait of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, c.1770-75, Cosway, Richard (1742-1821) / Private Collection / Bridgeman Images

The tercentenary of the birth of Lancelot Brown, the father of English landscape gardening has arrived. To celebrate the achievements of this great man there will be county and national level events collectively called the *Lancelot Brown Festival*.

The Berkshire Gardens Trust will start this celebratory year with Ben Viljoen giving the Spring lecture on Thursday 17th March in the Purley on Thames manorial barn. The title of Ben's talk will be *Brown in Berkshire* and he will be telling us about the properties that Brown worked on, the people he worked for, which includes some fascinating women, the discoveries that he has made while researching these properties and their current state. As usual, the event will start with light refreshments and a glass of wine.

On Sunday the 17th April the Trust, by kind permission of the BBC, will be hosting a ticketed event at Caversham Park. Caversham Park, which with its many-layered historic garden that culminated in the changes Brown made, will be a really exciting event. This is the first time in many years that the general public will have access to Caversham Park, so there will be a great demand for the tickets – book early as the number of people we can cope with at this event

is limited to seventy-five. The afternoon will start with an introductory talk by Ben Viljoen on the history of the garden. This will be followed by conducted tours of the garden and the important rooms in the house, followed by light refreshments. If demand is sufficient, this event will be repeated on Sunday 12th June and Sunday 18th September.

On Sunday the 3rd of April, the Friends of Caversham Court will be in the Caversham Court gardens from 2.30 to 5pm to answer questions and to offer informal tours. They will also be directing visitors to the gazebo where, by kind permission of the head gardener, we will be mounting a small exhibition on Lancelot Brown and Caversham Court.

There is a plethora of information about Capability Brown and various events nationwide are being promoted by **the Capability Brown Festival, CB300**, including a chance to view a 20 minute 1964 documentary film which features important Brown landscapes, such as *Wootton, Buckinghamshire*, which featured in Alan Titchmarsh's recent television series (**see www.capabilitybrown.org/**).

Forthcoming BGT Events

BGT's Spring Lecture, Thursday, 17th March 2016 – *Brown in Berkshire*

BGT's exploration of Capability Brown will start with our Spring Lecture by Ben Viljoen on Thursday 17th March 2016. Ben has already hinted that while the history of landscape design in the 18th century tends to be dominated by men, one aspect he will be talking about is some of the intriguing ways in which his relationships with women informed Brown's work.

This event is at the Purley Barn in Purley on Thames. Refreshments will also be available. Invitations have been issued to members, so please put this date in your diary and bring a friend!.

Caversham Park Visits

As mentioned elsewhere in this Newsletter, the first visit is on Sunday 17th April. A short introductory talk, a guided tour of the designed landscape and house and then refreshments are included in the £7.50 cost. Please note that the walk in the grounds will include some slopes and woodland paths. Detailed information on parking and other practical matters will be given with booking confirmation.

Caversham Park exhibition at Caversham Court - Sunday 3rd April, 2.30-5.00pm

Please see page 5 above for details of this event.

Rousham Garden Visit – Wednesday 25th May 2016

We will be having a guided tour of the house, which is only open to groups, as well as a tour of the gardens. Invitations and further information will be issued in due course.

Eton College Private Gardens – Thursday 21st July 2016

We are very privileged to be able to visit these gardens for a private afternoon tour. Invitations and further information will be issued in due course.

BGT's AGM and Autumn Lecture – Tuesday 11th October 2016

Following the formal AGM and refreshments, our speaker will be Timothy Walker, former Director of the Oxford Botanic Garden and Harcourt Arboretum.

The following Events may also be of interest to members

Painting Paradise: The Art of the Garden – The Royal Academy of Arts, 30th January – 20th April 2016

This exhibition examines the role gardens played in the evolution of art from the early 1860s through to the 1920s. It is therefore a real opportunity to trace the emergence of the modern garden in its many forms and glories during a period of great social change and innovation in the arts with more than 120 works by internationally acclaimed artists. Following the impressive displays of the *Painting Paradise: The Art of the Garden* at the Queen's Gallery last year, this is certain to be another 'unmissable' exhibition.

SM300: Sanderson Miller and the Amateur Designers, Saturday 12th March

The Birkbeck Garden History Group is organising a Study Day in London, with a variety of speakers, to look at another important 18th century garden designer, Sanderson Miller, for whom 2016 marks the tercentenary of his birth, as well as other 18th century Amateur Designers, including William Shenstone, The Duchess of Portland & Mrs Delany and Coplestone Warre Bampfylde.

There is an Eventbrite booking option [18/1] at <https://BGHG-SM300.eventbrite.co.uk> or you can email queries to: diana.renard@virgin.net

The Institute of Historical Research is currently hosting a series of seminars looking at the heritage and historical importance of plants (*More detail available via <http://events.history.ac.uk>*).

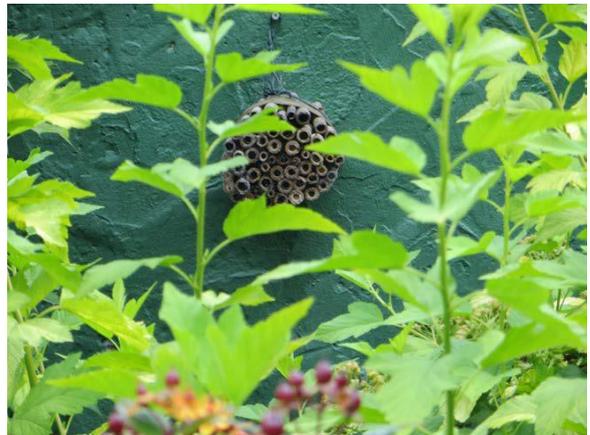
Garden History Education Courses are currently available:

- The University of Oxford's School of Continuing Education's is currently providing an on-line course (information via www.conted.ox.ac.uk/courses/online).
- The V&A course is *Unearthed: a history of gardens from mediaeval to modern*, scheduled for Thursdays from 21st April June to 30th June 2016 (information via www.vam.ac.uk).

Bray Enhancement Committee



Wokingham, Pavilions Border Community Garden



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