



OXFORDSHIRE GARDENS TRUST

NEWSLETTER 28 AUTUMN 2018



Members of OGT outside the Ice-house at Waterperry. Left to right: Sally Stradling, Sarah Rutherford, Ruth Todd, Joanna Matthews, Richard Dey, Will Holborow.

Oxfordshire Gardens Trust AGM, Saturday 9 June

The AGM for Oxfordshire Gardens Trust was held at Waterperry Gardens on a beautiful June day, which was filled with good company, beautiful gardens and the rich culture and history of Waterperry. At the AGM meeting Will Holborow was re-elected as Treasurer and Marybeth Harasz elected as Secretary. Will Holborow and Joanna Matthews were elected to three-year terms as committee members. Committee members previously elected to serve three-year terms, and who continue to serve, are: David Bradley, Sarah Eaton, Vanessa Fell, Ian Gourlay, Beverley Lear, Sally Stradling and Ruth Todd.

Trustees were elected to oversee the Company Limited by Guarantee. The role of the Trustees is to ensure that the charity is discharging its charitable purposes. The existing three trustees will step down in rotation: Joanna Matthews will serve as Trustee until 2019, Will Holborow until 2020 and Sally Stradling until 2021.

Will Holborow also gave the Treasurer's report for the year. The Trust ended the year to June 2018 with a balance of £10,655. The Trust plans to put some of this money towards funding a tree conference to be held 16 and 17 of March 2019 in Oxford (see p.8). This will be a signature event and we hope to see you there.

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Joanna Matthews was honoured at the meeting for her years of dedicated service as Secretary for the Oxfordshire Gardens Trust. Joanna will remain active in the organisation, but has retired from her role as Secretary. The Trust has greatly appreciated Joanna's work over the years and looks forward to working with her in her continuing leadership roles as Trustee, Committee Member and Research Committee Member.

Lively discussion was held about increasing membership and ways to bring more community attention to the Trust. The Committee agreed to explore ideas further at the regular business meetings.

After the 'business' of the day, members went on a tour of the recently restored ice-house, the historic home and the gardens. A group lunch was also enjoyed at Waterperry's Gardens Cafe.

Marybeth Harasz & Sally Stradling



Will Holborow (left) and Sally Stradling (centre) present retiring Secretary Joanna Matthews

New Secretary: Marybeth Harasz

We are delighted to announce that Marybeth Harasz, whom some of you will know from her attendance with her husband Ian at recent events, has agreed to take on the role of Secretary. She also brings knowledge of the planning dimension, as she works as Landscape Officer for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils. A speaker on community outreach, forest restoration and park design, Marybeth was the primary author of *Building Greener Communities*, which won an American Planning Association award. For 15 years she managed the Capital Improvement Program for the Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighbourhood Services, City of San José, USA. She is also keen to take an active role in the Tree Conference sub-committee.

Thank you Pete!

Peter Edwards is stepping down from the committee, though we are pleased to say that he will continue to be a member of the OGT, so we will not lose sight of him or his wife, Pauline, completely. So we now need a replacement to take up his role as planning consultations co-ordinator.

Wanted: Planning Consultations Co-Ordinator

Would you be interested in helping the OGT co-ordinate and respond to planning consultations on behalf of the Gardens Trust? This role involves assessing the impacts of proposed development on the significance of Registered Parks & Gardens in Oxfordshire. We are looking for someone with good analytical and communication skills, together with knowledge of historic parks, gardens and landscapes. For further information or to discuss the role, please contact the Secretary.

Chairperson and Committee members needed

We are still looking for a Chairperson and committee members. Our ideal candidate for Chair is someone who has leadership and communication skills and can dedicate about two hours a week to the Trust. We also need people with skills in event planning, website or social media management skills as committee members; they need to be able to give the OGT about four hours a month. For more information, please contact OGT Secretary Marybeth Harasz, secretary@ogt.org.uk.

Visit to Waterperry Gardens, Saturday 9 June

After the business of the AGM had been conducted, members and guests of OGT were able to explore Waterperry House and Gardens. Today, the estate is probably best known for the Horticultural School for Women run by Beatrix Havergal and her partner, Avice Saunders, between 1932 and 1971 when they leased the facility from the University of Oxford. Indeed, Waterperry has continued to uphold this horticultural tradition, teaching many RHS gardening and horticulture courses each year. The Queen Anne façade of the house dates from 1713 and was rebuilt by Sir John Curson. In 1971 the much-reduced estate was sold to the School of Economic Science, which kept on the horticultural centre in what has today become an independent company owned by the School of Economic Science.

From a horticultural point of view, of particular note are the 20th- and 21st-century herbaceous borders, the stock beds, the Alan Bloom island

beds, and the iconic formal garden designed by the late Bernard Saunders of the SES and Mary Spiller in the 1990s. This is often people's abiding memory of Waterperry as this charming and much photographed garden is designed to look good in all seasons.

The OGT enjoyed the gardens, two talks and a visit to the newly restored ice-house with Steve Pegrum. This was followed by lunch in the tea shop and an afternoon guided tour of the house with steward Simon Buchanan. He showed us the unique modern fresco cycle which adorns almost all of the walls in the 'new' wing. The mansion at Waterperry's School of Economic Science describes itself as the Oxfordshire centre for spiritual and philosophical knowledge. Although this was only mentioned in passing it was impossible not to view the house and its spiritual frescoes through the prism of its philosophy. The fact that our tour took in the domestic quarters as well as the more formal apartments of the house meant we were also made aware of the school's down to earth objectives, wholly appropriate to the setting.

Sarah Eaton



Joanna Matthews and John Steane at Waterperry



Ruth Todd & Sarah Eaton admire the long border at Waterperry

Oxfordshire Gardens Trust Contacts

Chair: Vacant

Secretary: Marybeth Harasz secretary@ogt.org.uk

Membership secretary: Vanessa Fell membership@ogt.org.uk

Other Committee Members: David Bradley, Sarah Eaton (Events), Ian Gourlay, Will Holborow (Treasurer), Beverley Lear (Research), Sally Stradling, Ruth Todd

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www.ogt.org.uk

Report from the OGT Research Group

Our recently formed Research Group meets every other month. Until recently it has focused on bringing the research carried out under the Oxfordshire Walled Garden Project and Capability 300 to satisfactory conclusion. We have also been attending to the need to sort through material gathered by the Trust as part of these and other projects carried out over the years. Our hope is that the resulting archive will be accepted on loan at the Oxfordshire History Centre where the papers will ultimately be accessible to members and the public.

Meanwhile, we are now beginning to consider new research projects, so this is a very good time to get in touch, if you are interested in becoming involved. Currently 'on the table' are projects on Repton's Oxfordshire gardens, the history of Oxford's city parks, and research relating to Troy Maze at Somerton in the north of the county. We particularly need help at the present time with researching the six Repton gardens (Brightwell Place, Watlington; Chastleton, Chipping Norton; Great Tew; Magdalen College, Oxford; Nuneham Courtenay; and Sarsden, Chipping Norton).

Working in coordination with The Gardens Trust, which has a statutory role to comment on planning applications which impact on significant gardens, the research group also tries to provide input where background research is needed to comment on local gardens. It is through this sort of enquiry that we are spurred to continue our Gazetteer project which aims to create a database of all of Oxfordshire's important gardens and their principal features, past and present. Clearly this is a tremendously ambitious task for an organization such as ours. But if you have a passion to find out more about just one garden of any date, location or type, we would love to hear from you: perhaps we can support and inspire your endeavours with a view to adding your findings to our Gazetteer. If you would like to find out more or to join us, please contact OGT Secretary Marybeth Harasz, secretary@ogt.org.uk, or myself, Research Group Chair: bjl@learassociates.co.uk.

Beverley Lear

Parks & Gardens UK

The Parks & Gardens UK website (www.parksandgardens.org) is a good place to look for greater depth of information about National Trust gardens and similar landscaped properties. This online resource was started in

1993 by Peter Goodchild at York University as the result of 20 years of campaigning by the Garden History Society under whose auspices Oxfordshire's Mavis Batey produced an inaugural listing of 300 sites throughout England and Wales. The future of the database has now been secured under the direction of Philip White and the Hestercombe Gardens Trust. As well as being easy to search for information, plans and illustrations relating to specific gardens or designers, the website also provides useful guidance for beginners wishing to carry out historic garden research.



Sarsgrove, dower house to Sarsden House, near Chipping Norton. A design of 1825 by G S Repton, son of Humphry Repton

Blogs on Gardens

David Marsh's useful and entertaining blog can be found at <https://thegardenstrustblog.wordpress.com>. A garden historian, lecturer and writer, Dr Marsh is also involved in setting up a national programme for garden history education. The blog has been running since 2013, originally under the auspices of Parks & Gardens UK, but recently transferred to The Gardens Trust, and covers a wide range of topics from mechanical elephants to roof gardens. Christiana Payne's blog takes as its focus 'Trees in 19th-century British art'. It discusses questions such as how the interest in trees developed, and how ideas about trees and landscape in art changed over the 18th and 19th centuries: <https://www.christianapayne.com/blog>.

Among other well reputed gardening blogs are 'The Anxious Gardener' (<https://theanxiousgardener.com>), by David Marsden, an often humorous blog on such things as the trials of clipping yew, tools and tussocks, moths, mice and all sorts of gardening lore; he also writes 'The Walking Gardener': <https://thewalkinggardener.com>. And meanwhile, as a taste of what we might see at the Green and Gorgeous Cutting Garden when we visit next year, here is its blog: <https://www.greenandgorgeousflowers.co.uk/blog>

A. Pugh-Thomas & Jaqueline Mitchell

Beverley Lear: Mazes, ancient traditions and modern meanings, 9 February

Mazes and labyrinths (the latter having only a single route whereas mazes involve choices and dead ends) have a long history, back to ancient Crete at least. They frequently had turf walls or, from the Renaissance on, hedges separating the parts, as in the Italian Villa Pisani, which made it much harder to discover the route through.

Having explained the historical context of mazes, Beverley Lear continued with an enthralling account of creating the Peace Maze at Castlewelan in Northern Ireland, following the Good Friday Agreement. She explained how the problems of planning, funding and creating the high degree of community engagement were solved. 4,000

schoolchildren from both sides of the conflict submitted designs to be used for the resulting hedge maze. Local people planted over 6,000 yew trees to border the 2.18 mile route between the periphery and a central mound, which has a 'Peace Bell' which may be rung on reaching the central point. The route through requires people to pass through both sides of the maze, and the hedge height is low enough for users to be able to see and help each other.

About 120,000 people, predominantly schoolchildren, now visit annually what was until 2007 the world's largest hedge maze (now exceeded by the Pineapple Maze in Hawaii). Much closer at hand, and on a local scale, is a turf maze at Troy farm (the name Troy is often associated with mazes) near Somerton, in Oxfordshire, which is seeking interest from the OGT and which we hope to visit in 2019.

David Bradley



Troy Farm maze (Sally Stradling)

Timothy Walker: The Harcourt Arboretum 1712-2014: One of Oxfordshire's Brightest Botanical Jewels, 9 March

Timothy Walker worked at Harcourt Arboretum from 1986 to 2014, beginning as general foreman and leaving as Director of the Botanic Garden and Arboretum. He began a thoroughly entertaining talk by introducing us to Harcourt's history. George Harcourt (2nd Earl Harcourt) began redesigning the gardens and park in 1772, first with the help of William Mason and later of Capability Brown.

The arboretum itself did not take shape until the 1830s when Bishop Harcourt acquired more land close to the Henley Road and W.S. Gilpin was commissioned to lay out a Pinetum with a serpentine carriage drive linking it to the house. In 1861 his son, Revd William Vernon Harcourt succeeded to the estate. He added hundreds of new trees imported from the USA and Europe to create an arboretum. Ironically, it was his son, Sir William Harcourt, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, who in 1894 introduced death duties – a policy which led, in 1947, to the sale of the Nuneham Estate to the University of Oxford. By 1963 the university's land agent wanted to

sell off the woodland including the arboretum. Instead, the then 30-acre arboretum became part of Oxford Botanic Garden. Its acid soils complemented the alkalinity of the Botanic Garden and offered space for much larger trees and bamboos to be grown.

Over time the university was persuaded to add more land to Harcourt Arboretum until it reached its current 130 acres. The Serpentine Ride was restored but with a greater variety of under-planting complementing the original rhododendrons and an Acer Glade was added along the eastern boundary. On land to the west an area of native woodland was taken in that now includes a bluebell wood, a lime wood (with the tallest lime trees in the country) and a coppice area. In the late 1990s land was taken to the north where a line of oaks and a wheelchair path were added. In 2006 the arboretum acquired a further 50 acres at Palmers Leys: 20 acres have been planted with 13,000 native tree species, and 30 acres, 'Pylon Meadow', are being transformed into a species-rich meadow.

In recent years the educational purpose of the arboretum has expanded. As well as being a research resource for the university's students, Harcourt now provides opportunities for teachers, schoolchildren and community groups.

Peter Edwards

Michael Brown: Death in the Garden, 20 April

Author and historian Michael Brown's lively talk gave us a real taste of 'Poisonous Plants and their use through History'. Once, the 'evil spirit' in plants was seen as the work of devils. Nowadays we see their poisonous compounds as part of plants' armoury against attack, but then they were considered to have 'magical' effects, as aphrodisiacs or hallucinogens and sometimes as fatal poisons.

Michael began his talk with the Mandrake, used as a knock-out drug. Among plants with purgative properties are English native White Bryony; Deadly Nightshade, *Atropa belladonna*; and from South Africa, Morning Glory, *Ipomea violacea*. 'Killer' plants with a high poison content include Monkshood or Wolfbane (*Aconitum napellus*) and Henbane *Hyoscamus niger* which was said to be cultivated by witches to enable them to fly. This was the poison used by Dr Crippen. Hemlock was used to kill Socrates, while the red fruits of Yew, *Taxus baccata*, contain a seed that birds



The Mandrake plant (Michael Brown)

can eat as the poison passes quickly through their gut, but humans cannot. Recently the anti-carcinogen taxol has been found in the tree's leaves.

Other plants with pharmaceutical uses are Birthwort, *Aristolochia rotunda*, found in the ruins of the old nunnery at Godstow, and Autumn Crocus, whose corms contain a poison used to treat gout. Better known is foxglove, *Digitalis purpurea*, which is used to help control many heart problems. Addictive properties are found in the Opium poppy, Hemp, *Cannabis sativa*, known to the ancients as hashish, and the Tobacco plant, *Nicotiana rustica*, the smoke of which was used as an insecticide in Victorian glasshouses. Other plants endanger though their poisonous sap: Rue, *Ruta graveolens*; Giant Hogweed, *Heracleum mantegazzianum*; the Castor oil plant; and the spurge family.

For those who want to know more, see Michael's book, *Death in the Garden: Poisonous Plants and Their Use throughout History* (Pen and Sword, 2018)

Joanna Matthews

Visit to the former Morrell Estate, Oxford, Saturday 28 April

A dozen members and friends enjoyed a leisurely walk around the former Morrell Estate, led by local resident and OGT member Peter Edwards. This was a 3-km landscape history walk covering the grounds of Oxford Brookes University, Cheney School, Headington Hill Hall and Park, and South Park.

The Morrell family began milling and brewing in Oxfordshire in the 18th century. Land was later purchased on the east side of Oxford for the first Headington Hill Hall although it is the second hall, built 1855–58, that survives today. At the same time, the garden was redesigned by William Baxter, once curator of the University Botanic Garden. At the upper end was a Pinetum, of which some trees survive, including a Wellingtonia, a monkey-puzzle and cedars. The land drops away sharply westwards, and Baxter formed this into terraces near the house and surrounding garden. Below this was the drive and parkland – now Headington Hill Park. A large kitchen garden was also created to the south of Headington Road, on the site that is now Oxford Brookes University. Here were numerous glasshouses, a vinery, exotic plantings and a large pond in the orchard adjacent to Gypsy Lane. In 1949, the kitchen garden was sold to Oxford City Council (OCC) for the development of Oxford College of Technology, formed by merging the art and technical colleges that spread across Oxford, with John Henry Brookes as the first principal. Ultimately, in 1992, this became Oxford Brookes University. Meanwhile, the hall, which had been requisitioned as a military hospital, was sold to OCC and finally leased to Oxford Brookes in 1992. This 3-hour walk included considerably more history than is possible to relate here – though fortunately, Peter has decided to share the history further with us in a talk in April 2019 – but the grounds are accessible to the public and are well worth visiting. The walk ended conveniently near Peter's house where Pauline, his wife, had prepared tea and cake for us. Many thanks to them for a most enjoyable day.

Vanessa Fell



Headington Hill Hall garden

Do we have your correct e-mail address?

If your email has changed recently, please let us know! That way you will receive all the circulars on forthcoming events and be kept up-to-date with news and other matters. Contact Vanessa Fell at:

membership@ogt.org.uk.

Visit to Oare House Garden, Friday 11 May

Oare House in Wiltshire is situated on a shallow ridge below the chalk escarpment south of Marlborough. Until 1330 it was part of Savernake Forest, but in 1740 a London wine merchant, Henry Deacon, purchased the tract of land known as The Rudge and built a 3-storey house there. By the late 18th century, under new owners, there were lime avenues on both sides of the house, a formal walled garden, summerhouse and a large plantation. In the 19th century much of the park was sold and under a succession of owners the property fell into disrepair. It was revived in the 1920s under the ownership of Sir Geoffrey Fry, who commissioned Clough Williams-Ellis to design two new wings for the house and advise on the layout of the formal gardens – among features he designed were a loggia framed by a pleached lime avenue, a swimming pool and a kitchen garden. Sir Henry and Lady Keswick, owners since 1975 and both passionate gardeners, have restored and developed both the formal garden and the surrounding parkland.

Our tour was in two parts, first around the formal gardens and then to the wider parkland and arboretum. Graham Schofield, head gardener, led us around the house gardens, which are laid out as a series of rooms, bounded by walls and hedging as designed by Williams-Ellis in the mid-1920s. Beyond are the more recent Magnolia Gardens, the Kitchen Garden and the Great Lawn with its magnificent borders and clairvoyee railings screening the pool.

From the terrace the vista across the Great Lawn and Swimming Pool leads along the lime avenue towards an I.M Pei-designed glazed pavilion, commissioned in 2000 to terminate the west lime avenue. As we walked along the avenue, cut through the North Copse in the 1920s, Michael and Beverley Lear took over as our guides. They act as tree consultants to Oare Park and have been responsible for advising on both recent planting across the park and development of the arboretum. Begun in the 1930s, the arboretum has been extended since 1975 (to 9 acres) and is still under active development. Since 2008 there

has been more emphasis on obtaining wild source material for cultivation in co-operation with Kew and botanical institutes in China, and this has enabled the introduction of new plants.

Peter and Pauline Edwards



The west vista towards the Pei Pavilion and the Downs



A view across the kitchen garden towards the house

Reminder GDPR and OGT Privacy Policy

Our Privacy Policy is available on the OGT website on the membership page: <https://ogt.org.uk/membership>. Copies of the Privacy Policy and Consent Form were circulated with the AGM papers in May, together with a s.a.e. If you have not yet done so, please complete and return the Consent Form, either by post or by scanning and emailing, to the Membership Secretary.

Gardens Illustrated

An OGT Member who has a set of *Gardens Illustrated* that covers 77 per cent of the first 260 issues from its start to now, and is downsizing, will be happy to part with them in return for a donation to OGT. If interested, please contact david.bradley@LSHTM.ac.uk (or phone 07796 694488). Delivery possible in Oxford area.

LECTURES

All lectures are at Kellogg College, 62 Banbury Road, Oxford. Doors open 6.30pm, for lecture at 7pm. Pay at the door: members £5/guests £8, including a glass of wine or juice.

Friday 7 September, Oxford University's work with heritage

Dr Oliver Cox, of The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities (TORCH) speaks about Oxford University's work with heritage – Heritage and Innovation in Oxfordshire, examples of recent projects with the National Trust, and future plans.

Friday 26 October, Repton's Legacy: The Red Books

Jane Bradney, independent garden historian and lecturer, talks about the pervading influence of the Red Books, including Oxfordshire connections.

Friday 16 November, Forests Parks and Woodland in early medieval England and Normandy

Landscape historian and archaeologist Trevor Rowley, Emeritus Fellow of Kellogg College, and author of the classic *Villages in the Landscape* and *The Landscape of the Welsh Marches* uncovers the history of English landscapes and their associations with Normandy.

Friday 7 December, Parsley and Parmesan: the Gardening Experiences of John Evelyn and Samuel Pepys
Historian, writer and former Publisher at The National Trust, Margaret Willes talks about these two great diarists of Restoration England and their intense curiosity in what Evelyn called 'hortulan affairs', subject of her recent book *The Curious World of Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn*.

Saturday 16 & Sunday 17 March 2019, OGT Conference, St John's College, Oxford: Trees & Townscape - Past, Present & Future

Weekend conference comprising a day of presentations on the 16th looking at the value of trees from a variety of perspectives, and, on the 17th, a choice of guided walks in Oxford looking at trees in urban settings. For further information, or to register your interest, contact secretary@ogt.org.uk. Booking opens autumn 2018.

OTHER EVENTS

5 November Discovering the Real Repton

A joint event between the Garden Museum and The Gardens Trust, Garden Museum, London
County Gardens Trusts' researchers from across the country will present talks on their research findings, chaired by Professor Stephen Daniels and Professor Tom Williamson. £68 for GT members.

COURSES

Sat 22 September Garden History in 10 Objects, UCL School of Pharmacy
29 - 39 Brunswick Square, London, WC1N 1AX

Organised in conjunction with the Birkbeck Garden History Group and The Gardens Trust, with talks by Letta Jones, David Marsh & Susan Jellis, £37.27.

Tuesdays 18 September - 4 December Plants in Garden History - Part 1
Institute of Historical Research, London

Course on early plant hunters and collectors and the way their introductions changed our gardens and domestic interiors, £265 [+ booking fee], normally 10.30-1.00 but with 2 all day visits, one to the Oxford Herbarium and the other visit behind the scenes in the amazing conservation glasshouses at Kew.

26 September - 7 December English Landscape Gardens: 1650 to the Present Day
University of Oxford Department of Continuing Education online course, led by Jill Sinclair.
Contact: 01865 280974 onlinecourses@conted.ox.ac.uk www.conted.ox.ac.uk

Friday 31 May - Sunday 2 June 2019 The Picturesque Garden in England
Oxford University Department of Continuing Education course looking at how the Picturesque relates to wider perceptions of the landscape, creation of Picturesque gardens, and how they are managed today.