



# OXFORDSHIRE GARDENS TRUST

NEWSLETTER 31 SPRING 2020



## RESTORATION OF THE QUEEN POOL AT BLENHEIM PALACE

The Trust has recently been notified of a major project within the park at Blenheim Palace, a World Heritage Site and Grade I Registered Park and Garden. The current planning application is for a major engineering operation to remove silt from the Queen Pool and upstream part of the Great Lake.

The 40-acre Queen Pool is part of one single water body that wraps around the Palace as far as Vanbrugh's Grand Bridge where it meets the Great Lake. The Pool and the Lake are valued for their ecological significance as well as for their significant landscape and archaeological qualities; and for the water they supply to the Palace and other buildings in the park.

The de-watering and dredging works are scheduled to take place from April until December this year (2020) with the project fully completed in Spring of 2021. A major logistical challenge is the removal of 250,000 cubic metres of silt and the deposit of this material elsewhere in the park. This will involve contractors' compounds, temporary roadways and diversion of some public routes.

OGT committee members visited the site on 1 February to assess the likely impact of a proposed new landform feature, up to a maximum 4.8m in height. This would be in the northern part of the site and to the east of the Grand Avenue, an area that has been under arable cultivation for nearly two centuries. The organic shape of this landform has been designed to subtly raise an existing plateau by continuing the existing contours around it. We were satisfied that this will blend discreetly into the landscape and that no historic parkland grass or mature trees will be lost. We also welcome the very considerable benefits of restoring the Queen Pool to a condition consistent with Lancelot Brown's original design, as well as improving the biodiversity of the park.

Will Holborow

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## Editorial

Welcome to the first Newsletter of the new decade! We have another exciting programme of visits and lectures, and I hope that you can attend any that appeal to you. Of particular note is our AGM on 6th June, to be held at Ham Court at Bampton-an inspiring historic site with a beautiful garden renovated by Emma Bridgewater and Matthew Rice. At the AGM we will be formally invited to agree to transfer our governance structure to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). A lot of work is going on behind the scenes to prepare for this transition, including the drafting of a new Constitution.

Our plans for the year ahead include re-launching the research group, with an introductory training session in Banbury on 14th March to be led by Claire de Carle of Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust, with a linked afternoon visit to see People's Park. We continue to use Kellogg College as a venue for our lecture programme, which they permit free of charge; however the availability of their meeting rooms is increasingly limited, so we are exploring a move to other venues from 2021. Our website is currently undergoing a complete re-design to make it more user-friendly. All of this activity rests on the shoulders of a small group of active committee members and volunteers. Our events are now organised by Sally Stradling, Jaqueline Mitchell, Trish

Attwooll and Pete Edwards. Sally has also been leading the re-launch of the Research Group and will need to find enthusiastic volunteers to drive this forward. The newsletter is now collated by Will Holborow with design by Sean Vassen. The website re-design is being managed by Will and Felix Lam. We need more of our members to take an active role in supporting the Committee, so please get in touch if there is anything that you would be interested to help with. In particular, we need someone willing to co-ordinate responses to planning consultations affecting historic landscapes in Oxfordshire.

The OGT is now in its 18th year, so your committee has been reflecting about our future direction. We have developed a closer relationship with The Gardens Trust over the past 12 months and have benefitted from attending the annual Gardens Trust assembly, as the report below confirms. This has encouraged us to think about how to become more effective and relevant as an organisation. There is much more we could be doing to attract new members and volunteers from different communities. We are keen to make the OGT more attractive to new members, to provide opportunities for active engagement in research and to be more effective in commenting on development proposals which have an impact on our local landscapes.



AGM at Woodstock Museum (Sean Vassen)

To remain relevant, our activities need to reflect the unprecedented pressures on our landscapes and their value to people. The importance of gardens and green infrastructure to health and well-being is increasingly recognised and this is reflected in our lecture programme for 2020. Locally we see our villages and towns expanding to make room for our growing population as we consider new ideas like 'garden villages'. Although the most precious historic parks and gardens are generally well protected, the impact of all this development on the wider landscape and the quality of new green infrastructure is surely a matter that the OGT should be concerned about. Nationally, a new strategy for England's

wildlife and ecosystem services is being rolled out - Biodiversity 2020-to improve habitat for all species. Globally we are experiencing rapid and unfamiliar changes to our weather patterns with damaging rains, flooding and fires amid an increased urgency to act quickly to reduce carbon emissions. Tree planting has even become a political election issue.

Despite these concerns, have a great New Year of garden exploration!

Marybeth Harasz, Honorary Secretary

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## Gardens Trust Assembly, 19 November 2019

The annual assembly meetings organised by the Gardens Trust are an excellent opportunity for the OGT to catch up with the latest developments in our sector. This year's event held at Burlington House was well attended by representatives of 20 county gardens trusts and 20 other organisations. OGT was represented by Ruth Todd, Will Holborow and Max Askew.

After an introduction by Jim Bartos, Chair of the Gardens Trust, Linden Groves gave feedback on the successful Sharing Repton research project, HLF-funded. Their next project for 2020-22 is entitled Unforgettable Gardens for which they also hope to get a National Lottery grant. This is a deliberately broad title which can cover a multitude of activities including the training of new volunteers.

Jenifer White, Historic England's National Landscape Advisor, heads a team of four landscape architects. She highlighted that in the last ten years 102 parks and gardens have been registered, with three new ones in 2019 and further registrations of C20th sites currently subject to consultation. She mentioned that Historic England have published a research report on Capability Brown's drawings.

Elaine Willett, Historic Environment Principal Advisor, explained Natural England's role in conserving and enhancing landscapes including nature. Following budget cuts there are barely three full-time historic environment advisers. She mentioned the Landscapes Review report published by DEFRA and led by Julian Glover. Parkland Plans are held by Natural England but are not available online. They are potentially a useful source of information for researchers.

There were two case studies from county gardens trusts. Essex CGT have paid for consultants to train a small group of volunteers to create inventories, collections of reports on sites in Essex, with short reports and statements of significance. The aim of this research is to add reports to Parks & Gardens UK as well as the county HER (Historic Environment Record). The second study from Bedfordshire was about their Head Gardeners Network highlighting the value of Head Gardeners meeting up and sharing their experience.

Shaun Kiddell from the now renamed National Lottery Heritage Fund showed some of the achievements of past lottery funding for public parks. However the current situation is 'grim' due to council budget cuts, loss of skills in park management, lack of leadership and sale of council-owned assets. Currently, NLHF funding for public parks and green spaces is through the open programme. The main criterion of funding is that 'a wider range of people will be involved in heritage'.

Sarah Poppy from Historic England talked about OASIS. This is a digital archive of archaeological 'grey' literature reports available online through the Archaeology Data Service. OASIS is due for a major redevelopment in 2020 when its scope will be broadened to include all aspects of the historic environment including parks and gardens.

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Philip White from Parks and Gardens UK, now part of Hestercombe, reported that their new website went live in March and that there are now 10,000 records on it. He is encouraging CGTs to use the P&GUK website for their research, rather than relying on their own databases, which typically lack the functionality of P&GUK. Hestercombe is also acting as a repository for Conservation Management Plans (CMPs) for historic parks and gardens, and has already acquired around 800 of them.

Questions from the audience revealed understandable confusion about the archiving of research by CGTs. There are several options about where to log their research reports - P&GUK, the county-based HERs and OASIS. We are still some way from arriving at a consistent approach to gathering data and making it easily accessible. The same applies to the archiving of CMPs and parkland plans - an issue that has become urgent following the wholesale destruction of CMPs funded and held by the HLF.

Report by Ruth Todd and Will Holborow

**Parks & Gardens** Places & People News & Events Get Involved Projects Knowledge Conservation

**Rycote** (also known as Rycote House) 7575  
Thame, England, Oxfordshire, South Oxfordshire

**Brief Description**  
The gardens have been restored to reflect the landscape park design of Lancelot Brown towards the end of the 18th century. Views from the house to the lake have been opened up and the lake having been dredged has been returned to its former glory. The house having been restored and extended in the early 20th and

**Key Information**  
Survival: Part: ground/below ground level remains  
Hectares: 223.00

Rycote Park: Example of an entry on the Parks & Gardens UK website

## Research and Recording Group- calling new volunteers!

Over recent years the group has focussed on research contributing to national initiatives such as CB 300 - recording landscapes designed by Capability Brown, a pilot project for a Gazetteer of Oxfordshire Parks and Gardens and archiving our work on the walled kitchen gardens of Oxfordshire, our HLF funded volunteer project.

We are now at a turning point with a need for a new project, new volunteers and someone to lead the group. This person will ideally have a background in garden history, landscape architecture and an interest in landscape design. We plan to have a training event in March 2020, to be led by Claire de Carle of the highly successful Bucks Garden Trust, Research and Recording Group, who will explain how their group operates and offer guidance to OGT.

OGT members are invited to join the event to learn new skills including how to undertake field work and research to support a key area of OGT's work. We hope to recruit more volunteers and to find someone who can lead and manage the research group. If you are interested or know anyone who might be interested in these roles please come along to the Banbury training morning on Saturday March 14th 2020. The event will be posted on our website with booking via Eventcube and will also be in our annual event card.

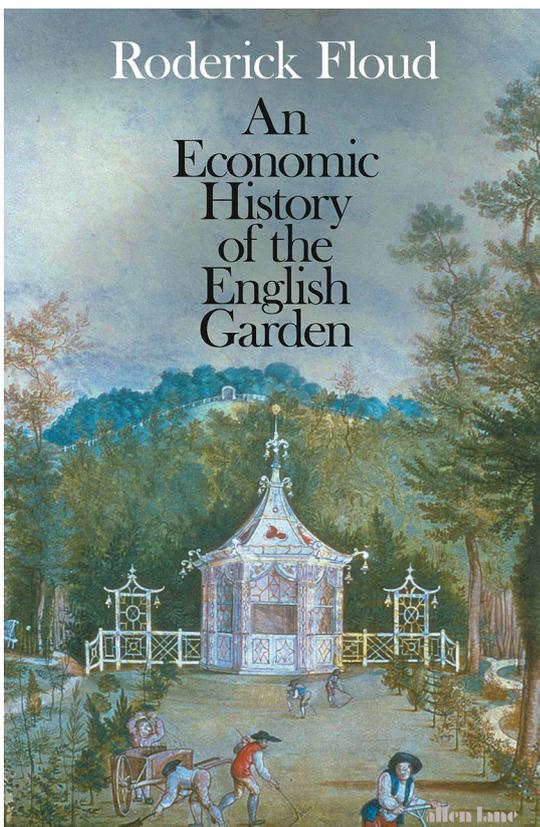
Sally Stradling

## Purchasing Paradise: The money that financed the great gardens

At our 15 November lecture Sir Roderick Floud explained the method he developed for translating values from the great garden era into today's figures. He used average earning values to develop a conversion rate for each era. For example, in 1700 the average working man made £12 and 8 shillings per year. In 2015 the same worker would be earning £25,609. This method is a bit different than the method others have used in the past, allowing us to better understand the real value of gardens over time. For example, Sir Lancelot 'Capability' Brown was paid £21,238 between 1764 and 1774 for his work at Blenheim which equates to around £34 million at today's values. Expenditure on building the lake was £27,000, an amount equivalent to tens of millions today. It took six years to prepare the lake bed and dam and two more years to fill the lake with water. All under the watchful eye of a well-paid Capability Brown.

The value of gardens today is still significant. The Royal Horticultural Society is spending £35 million on its new garden at Salford. And that amount makes up only a small part of the £12 billion spent annually on nurseries, garden centres and landscape contractors in the UK. Gardening today is a larger industry than aerospace.

Marybeth Harasz



*Crockmore garden (Felix Lam)*

## Crockmore House visit 7 September

Hidden away on the top of a hill and quite difficult to find, Crockmore House, built in 1988, has a 3-acre garden with a beautiful view across an undulating landscape. Keith Lockley the head gardener welcomed all 39 of us, including a party from CPRE.

The owner Julia Kirkham was so impressed with Bradley-Hole Schoenaich's designs when she met him at Chelsea Flower Show in 1994, that she chose him to re-interpret the garden at Crockmore. His signature style of clean lines, gently swaying plants and beautiful large pots is evident in the garden. The overarching purpose of the design is that it should integrate into the landscape and the mounds of grasses on the perimeter of the garden certainly echo the tree line of the woods lying beyond.

Keith took us to the grid beds which had no plant staking, just the careful planting of species which on the whole support each other. The seed heads are left over winter both for the birds and their beauty and then chopped down hard in February/March leaving light and air for the under planted bulbs to come through. The garden also has an extensive area of grass into which is mown a large circle.

Over delicious home made cakes and tea visitors agreed and disagreed about the garden - to some not enough variety but to others a peaceful and tranquil place that you could really enjoy.

Bradley-Hole Schoenaich has redesigned the garden of St Peter's College Oxford and I for one am looking forward to going to see it.

Felix Lam



Dame Ottoline Leyser

## Do plants really think?

Dame Ottoline Leyser gave a fascinating lecture on 18 October that revealed the science behind plant growth and pruning techniques in the garden. She was able to explain science in a way that was easy and enjoyable to absorb.

Professor Leyser is the Director of the Sainsbury Laboratory at the University of Cambridge and

her group studies the role of plant hormones in plant development. They study shoot branching in plants as a model for hormone activity. She used the technique and timing of pruning plants in the garden as an example for how plant shoots can remain dormant or activate to produce a branch. The decision to activate or not is complex, but one factor is the network of interacting hormonal signals that generate a rich source of information that is systematically transmitted from one part of the plant to another. The result is that one part of the plant is telling another part of the plant to create a new branch. So while there may not be a central “brain” in the plant, there are many areas of the plant transmitting signals to other areas of a plant - giving orders.

This talk was very well received by those who attended, as Professor Leyser was an engaging speaker. Her pioneering scientific work, notably on the role of auxin, has been recognised by numerous awards and medals. She was appointed a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire (DBE) in the 2017 New Year Honours list for services to plant science, science in society and equality and diversity in science.

Marybeth Harasz

## Mary Spiller 1924-2019: An Appreciation

Mary, who died at the end of October at the age of 95 was a talented horticulturalist, inspirational teacher, expert plantswoman and garden designer. Born in Cowley, Mary trained at Waterperry’s Horticultural School for Women run by Beatrix Havergal in 1943. She became a respected horticultural teacher and lecturer around Oxfordshire and returned to Waterperry on the teaching staff in 1963. After the horticultural school closed in 1971 she continued to work and teach at Waterperry, helping to develop and expand the gardens there. Her talent for communicating and teaching was spotted by the BBC and Mary became the first female presenter on *Gardeners’ World* in 1982.

Mary continued working at Waterperry for 50 years, retiring from her teaching role at the age of 89. Her achievements were recognised by the Royal Horticultural Society in 2008 when she was made an Associate of Honour. She continued gardening in her retirement in Cowley. Mary never married: she is survived by her sister and loving extended family.

Ruth Todd



## OGT SPRING LECTURES

All lectures, unless otherwise stated, are at Kellogg College, 60-62 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 6PN. Doors open 6.30pm, for lecture at 7pm.

Friday 21 February. Jinny Blom: Nature and nurture: gardening for pleasure and health - and our surrounding environment

Jinny has created over 250 gardens and landscapes, many of which have won awards - including two Chelsea show gardens for Laurent-Perrier which gained a Gold. Artist in Residence for Chelsea & Westminster Hospital, she is author of *The Thoughtful Gardener: An intelligent approach to garden design* (2017).

Saturday 14 March, 11-1pm. Introduction to recording parks and gardens

Talk at friends Meeting House, Horsefair, Banbury, OX16 OAH.

Clare de Carle of Bucks Garden Trust explains the work of the highly successful Bucks volunteer research and recording group. Of interest to those who might consider joining OGT's new volunteer research and recording initiatives.

£5 members £10 guests; gather at 10.45. Maximum 20.

Saturday 14 March, 2-4pm. The origin and evolution of Peoples' Park, Banbury

Talk at Friends Meeting House, Horsefair, Banbury, OX16 OAH, followed by walking tour of the park.

Jane Kilsby, local historian shares her recent research into this well-loved 19th century public park.

£10 members and £15 guests; gather at 1.45. Maximum 20

Friday 15 May. Linda Farrar: Gardens and Gardeners of the Ancient World

Linda Farrar is a freelance researcher, lecturer and author of *Ancient Roman Gardens*.



People's Park, Banbury (Claire de Carle)

## OGT VISITS

Saturday 9 May, Visit to the private park and gardens surrounding Faringdon House SN7 8AE

10.45 assemble, 11-1pm. Led by Sarah Couch, Historic Landscape Consultant. We shall see evidence of the early origins of the site, overlain with landscape features from the 18th to 20th centuries including those from the time of Lord Berners and 'Mad-Boy' Robert Herber-Percy. No photography allowed.

Priority booking to OGT members. £10 members; £15 non-members. Maximum 25.

Saturday 6 June. AGM & Visit to Ham Court, Bampton, Oxfordshire, OX18 2HG

10am-2pm AGM in barn 10-11am, followed by tea/coffee, talk and tour of the site with Matthew Rice, author and artist. Ham Court was once the gate house of a major 14th-century castle. Emma Bridgewater and Matthew Rice have energetically transformed the site, re-instating the moat, making a productive kitchen garden, woodland walk and encouraging wildlife. No charge for attending AGM.

Maximum 30 persons for garden tour. £15 members, £20 guests, lunch with wine included; plant sales before departure. Plenty of on-site parking.

Saturday 18 July. Guided tour and croquet at Chastleton House & Garden (NT), near Moreton-in-Marsh, GL56 0SU

10.30 am to 2pm Guided tour of the garden which has Jacobean origins and explanation of works in progress, followed by croquet. Bring your own refreshments/picnic lunch. These lawns are where the rules of the game of croquet were codified! Normal admission costs to house if wished in afternoon. Maximum 20; £10 for OGT members who are also NT members. £20 for OGT members who are not NT members. Non-OGT members who are NT members £15. Non-OGT and non-NT members £25.

## EXTERNAL EVENTS

The events listed below may be of interest to our members. For a more comprehensive listing of external events, see [www.thegardenstrust.org/events](http://www.thegardenstrust.org/events)

29th - 31st May 2020. Women and Gardens: Study Weekend at Rewley House, Oxford. Annual weekend conference held in association with The Department of Continuing Education, University of Oxford, including visit to Wrest Park.  
<http://thegardenstrust.org/event/women-and-gardens-study-weekend-at-rewley-house-oxford/>

Saturday 13 June. Oxfordshire Past 2020, Banbury Museum  
Join visitors to OxPast 2020, an enjoyable annual event for anyone interested in history, buildings and archaeology, with stalls and exhibits open throughout the day. Tickets must be booked in advance.  
<http://www.oxfordshirepast.org/>

Friday 4th September to Sunday 6th September. The Gardens Trust Annual Conference and AGM  
To be held at Richmond and Wensleydale, North Yorkshire.  
<http://thegardenstrust.org/event/7404/>

## Transition to CIO

Currently the Trust is registered as both a Charity and as a Company Limited by Guarantee. As reported at the last AGM, the Trust can simplify its governance and administration by becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). To make this transition, we need to agree and adopt a new Constitution to replace the current Memorandum Articles of Association that were adopted when the Trust was formed in 2002. A resolution to formally agree the new Constitution will be proposed at the AGM in June. A draft copy of the new Constitution will be circulated in advance so that members have an opportunity to ask questions and understand the implications of the change before voting on it. In practice, members are unlikely to be aware of the transition as the provisions of the new Constitution are very similar to the current Articles.

Will Holborow

## Oxfordshire Gardens Trust Contacts

Secretary: Marybeth Harasz, 3 The Square, Milton under Wychwood, OX7 6JN; [secretary@ogt.org.uk](mailto:secretary@ogt.org.uk)  
Other Committee Members: David Bradley, Vanessa Fell, Will Holborow (Treasurer), Joanna Matthews, Sally Stradling (Events).

Membership applications to: Vanessa Fell, c/o 30 West Street, Chipping Norton, Oxon, OX7 5ER.  
[membership@ogt.org.uk](mailto:membership@ogt.org.uk)

Patrons: Charles and Angela Cottrell-Dormer, Lord and Lady Saye and Sele, Lady Camoys,  
Professor Liam Dolan

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NEWSLETTER 32: Please send copy to [secretary@ogt.org.uk](mailto:secretary@ogt.org.uk). Deadline: 7 June 2020