



# OXFORDSHIRE GARDENS TRUST

## NEWSLETTER 32 SUMMER 2020

### EDITORIAL: THE PANDEMIC EDITION

This newsletter arrives after an unprecedented period of national ‘lockdown’, which began at the end of March and continued until late June when restrictions began to be relaxed. We hope all our members have managed to stay well during this period and have found ways of adapting to these extraordinary times. We have all had to adjust to the ‘new norm’ of staying home and using the internet to work and keep in touch with friends, family and work colleagues. However this does lack the same sense of community that we enjoy from face-to-face contact and we are looking forward to a time when we can meet in person again.

Many people have commented on how this interruption to their normal routine has offered an opportunity to appreciate the natural world to a greater degree. Our parks and gardens and their value to people’s wellbeing have never been more important than during the COVID 19 pandemic. We are fortunate that the lockdown has coincided with an exceptional period of good weather, including the hottest and sunniest May on record in England.

Despite the lockdown, the OGT committee has been busy with various activities during recent months. We have completed work on our new website, responded to several significant planning applications and relaunched our research group. We are using video conferences to hold business meetings and are looking at ways of holding a ‘virtual’ AGM this Autumn. The core committee is now effectively reduced to a ‘gang of four’, however we are supported by a wider group of corresponding members who contribute to the Trust’s activities in various ways - for example by helping to plan events, contribute to research or assess planning applications. As ever, we are always welcoming of any members who can participate in the Trust’s activities.

Will Holborow

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Gardens open at Rousham (Will Holborow)

## LECTURE: JINNY BLOM, NATURE AND NURTURE

We were privileged in February to hear a fascinating talk by Jinny Blom, distinguished garden designer and a recent resident of Oxford. Her subject was ‘Nature and Nurture: Gardening for pleasure and health’. This was an inspiring and well-attended lecture.

Jinny established her garden design practice in London in 2000, and has created an extraordinarily wide portfolio of work in the UK, Europe, USA, Africa and the Middle East. Her winning designs have been featured in the Laurent Perrier gardens at Chelsea, and she is currently Artist in Residence at the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital. She is author of *The Thoughtful Gardener; An Intelligent Approach to Garden Design*, published in 2017.

Jinny described some of her intriguing projects, starting with the creation of a garden on the coast in Maine, USA, overlooking the North Atlantic ocean. This particular project suffered from a dearth of soil, a 4-foot layer of permafrost, and an interior designer who had decided to change the course of a river. A local disused quarry provided a source of huge boulders used for landscaping and to re-establish the river to its original course, whilst 750 spruce trees were planted, along with species such as aquilegia to provide elements of the English garden loved by the client.

Jinny went on to talk about a garden she created at Ibstone in the Chilterns, near the border of Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. She starts all her projects by undertaking thorough historic research for up to a year before work begins. At the outset this hilltop site around a group of historic farm buildings was utterly neglected and barren. In less than two years it was transformed into an elegant series of gardens set in quiet parkland. The hilltop location gave the chance to make a lot of drama in a relatively contained space, with tremendous views over unspoilt English countryside from a grass-covered bastion.

Jinny concluded with a fascinating and ambitious project at Laikipia in the Rift Valley, Kenya, on a site accessible only by a small private plane from Nairobi. The project involved building a dam to conserve water as it rains only twice a year and re-contouring the landscape to change the course of the river. Equatorial plants were chosen for the 15 acre landscape, with a central courtyard to link parts of a newly designed lodge.

Further information about her projects can be found on her website: [Jinny Blom](#)

Therese Crawley



*Lodge at Laikipia, Kenya (© Jinny Blom)*



Banbury Town War Memorial (Sally Stradling)

## THE ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF PEOPLE'S PARK, BANBURY

### Saturday 14 March: Talk and walking tour with Jane Kilsby

The People's Park Banbury celebrated its 100th Birthday in 2019. Jane Kilsby, our knowledgeable tour leader, explained that 1919 was the year in which the park finally came into the ownership of Banbury Council. It was formally opened in July, as a celebration of peace at the end of the Great War, by Lord Neithrop on whose former land the park was created.

However the creation of the park had not been straight forward. First discussed in the 1880s, the Council had no means to purchase a site until a local benefactor George Vincent Ball (1814-1894), a supporter of the idea of a "People's Park", promised a legacy in his will for that purpose. This was eventually fulfilled, but the sum of £3,200 did not reach the Council until after 1917. In the interim a private syndicate purchased the estate of Lord Neithrop in 1910 intending to sell it on to Banbury Council when they had the resources. It all finally came to fruition in 1919.

Even after the grand opening however, little was done immediately. There was public access and the Town War Memorial was unveiled there in 1922. It was the appointment of a new Borough Engineer, Sidney Hilton, in 1925 that gave fresh impetus to the original vision. Over 15 years he implemented a complete municipalisation of the park to provide new public amenities including tennis courts, bowling green, children's playground and paddling pool, park shelter, public toilets and drinking fountain. The centre-piece, opened in 1932, was a stylish bandstand which so enhanced the park that the local press declared it "the brightest spot throughout the whole history of Banbury".

This momentum continued in the early 1950s when a new Superintendent of Horticulture with a staff of 17 propagated 30,000 plants annually in the park nursery. Until the 1970s they were used to mount spectacular floral displays in ornamental beds whilst existing amenities continued to be well maintained and enjoyed by the public. But in the 1980s the bandstand, following several years of vandalism, was demolished and the paddling pool was filled in for safety reasons.

Our guided tour showed that despite the losses noted above, the park still offers plenty to enjoy. It continues to provide a green lung in a busy town and plays a significant role in the life of its citizens in line with the wishes of its founding fathers. As a bonus we finished the afternoon with a brief visit to the nearby parish churchyard which had been re-designed as a public garden by Banbury born Sylvia Crowe in the 1950s.

You can read Jane Kilsby's two articles online here:  
[Municipal Dreams: The People's Park, Banbury, Part I](#)  
[Municipal Dreams: The People's Park, Banbury, Part II](#)

Peter Edwards

## PLANNING CONSULTATIONS

Over the past 6 months OGT has been consulted by The Garden Trust (TGT), a statutory consultee, on a number of applications affecting registered parks and gardens in the county.

**Ascott Park P20/S1395/LB:** This was a renewal of an application for alterations to Ascott Park Cottage. We considered that the proposed new windows and rooflights would be a discordant and intrusive element in views from within the registered park and garden. This site near Stadhampton includes well-preserved earthwork traces and historic garden buildings relating to 16th- and 17th-century parkland. OGT offered suggestions on how mitigation might be achieved by reducing the number and location of the rooflights.

**Fairmile Hospital, South Oxfordshire P20/S1420/HH /P20/S1422/LB:** The proposals were for a single-storey extension and internal alterations to No 3 Reading Road, Cholsey. This Victorian cottage is located within the curtilage of the former Fairmile Hospital, a late 19th century asylum which closed in 2003. The site is included in the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. OGT considered that the height and length of the extension would disrupt the symmetry of the cottage and

offered suggestions for design improvements. These have been accepted and we have now withdrawn our objection.

**Heyford Park. Ref: 18/00825/HYBRID.** The proposals were for amendments to a former planning permission for re-development of part of the site at Upper Heyford, the former US airbase. Amended proposals included the re-location of sports development and the introduction of a 30 metre high observation tower with zip-wire. OGT submitted a holding objection pending details and clarification of the impacts on views and the setting of the Grade I listed Rousham landscape and its subsidiary features and setting. The Rousham landscape is of national and international significance and is regarded as the most complete surviving example of an early 18th century landscape designed by William Kent. A key aspect of Kent's design was using the countryside beyond the site to provide extensive picturesque views including north and north-east across the water meadows and Heyford Bridge to nearby villages, focal points such as the church towers at Steeple Aston, Lower & Upper Heyford and to eyecatchers or tree clumps which he created.

Sally Stradling



Rousham: View across the Cherwell valley towards Upper Heyford (Will Holborow)



*View from Nuneham towards Oxford, J Boydell after J Farington 1793 © British Museum*

## NUNEHAM ESTATE - PROPOSAL FOR GRAVEL EXTRACTION

Earlier this year we were notified of Oxfordshire County Council's consultation on its preferred sites for mineral extraction across the county, under its Minerals and Waste Plan. One of these sites ('SG-42') is an area next to the River Thames south of Sandford-on-Thames and immediately adjacent to the Nuneham Estate. The importance of the Park at Nuneham is recognised by its inclusion in Historic England's Register of Parks and Gardens at Grade I. A Parkland Management Plan was produced by landscape consultants Askew Nelson in 2019. This gives a very detailed and useful account of the landscape's development and significance, and recommendations for its future management. It confirms that the designed landscape at Nuneham is one of the most influential landscapes in British garden history.

The Thames is Nuneham's *raison d'être*; the villa was designed to overlook the river and take in the picturesque views up and down the Thames valley landscape. Mineral extraction would fundamentally alter the setting and the celebrated views north to Oxford (from in front of the house as well as from the Grade II\*

listed Church of All Saints). This view has been celebrated in paintings, poetry and literature as a primary example of the 'Picturesque' in England.

There are key views from the park looking north towards the southern edge of Oxford with its spires and domes in the distance. The only 20th century intrusions are electricity pylons and the white outline of the John Radcliffe Hospital on the horizon. The proposed quarry would be highly visible in these views, changing a rural landscape to an industrial one, and would therefore constitute a high level of harm to the setting of the Registered Park and Garden.

OGT submitted a strong objection to this proposal, helped by Iain Geddes who is a member of the Trust and a local resident. Similar objections were made by Historic England and other heritage and amenity bodies. The County Council is now considering the results of the consultation and we keep our fingers crossed that site 'SG-42' will be withdrawn.

Will Holborow

## OGT RESEARCH AND RECORDING GROUP - NEW INITIATIVES

Following on from the Introduction to Recording Parks and Gardens day in March, with Claire de Carle, OGT Research Group decided that public parks (recreational in both urban and rural settings) in Oxfordshire would be an interesting and rewarding research initiative. They are often little known and unrecorded, under threat from lack of funding and have features which are gradually being eroded through neglect and demolition. They may also be threatened by large national projects like the Oxfordshire Cambridge Expressway and housing targets.

A few members who attended the March day have already selected parks and started researching - despite lockdown. For example, Felix Lam and Vanessa Fell have chosen to investigate Manor Road Memorial Park, Wantage. Would you like to be involved and research your local park or one further afield? Are you interested in architecture, archaeology, art history, landscape design, local and social history? OGT has enough funds to deliver further training, support and some expenses involved in this research project. Ultimately we would hope to have a body of case studies to put on the website, that would be of interest to other researchers, landscape designers, planners and gardeners.

We are a sociable group enjoying regular meetings and group visits. Please do get in touch and join us in researching some of these unique and interesting places.

Contact Felix Lam - [felix.lam45@gmail.com](mailto:felix.lam45@gmail.com)

Felix Lam

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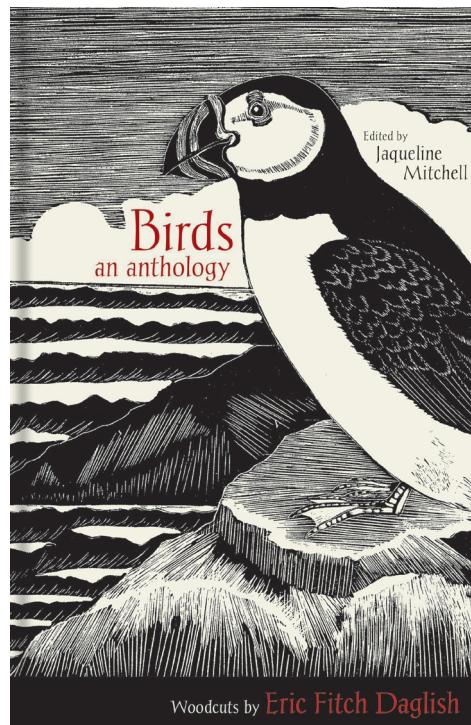
## NEW BOOK: BIRDS: AN ANTHOLOGY

Just as we have been finding new enjoyment in the birds in our gardens, Jacqueline Mitchell, whom many will know as our Newsletter Editor for some years, has published *Birds: An Anthology* (Bodleian Library, 5 June 2020). Already garnering excellent reviews ('Book of the Week' in Country Life), the book brings together prose and poetry from over a thousand years in celebration of birds. It is illustrated with the charming and beautiful woodcuts of Eric Fitch Daglish, whose work is little known, but was rediscovered by Jacqueline in the depths of the Bodleian Library. Themed chapters cover the seasons, bird behaviour, flights, habitats, migration and song. Determined that the contents should not be Anglo-centric, they include writers from across the world: from Pliny & Ovid in Roman times to the Rwandan filmmaker, poet & politician Edouard Bamporiki today. Jonathan Franzen goes birdwatching, Joseph Lane Hancock describes the migration of night hawks over Chicago, Australian poet John Le Gay Brereton writes about 'The Silver Gull'. She includes old favourites too: Edward Thomas, Richard Jefferies, Charles Darwin, T.H. White on Wart meeting Merlyn's owl, J.A.



Bandstand in Manor Road Memorial Park, Wantage (Vanessa Fell)

Baker on the peregrine, extracts from Dorothy Wordsworth's journals, Kathleen Jamie and Barbara Kingsolver.



## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Like all organisations, we have had to reconsider our plans for holding an AGM this year. The Committee has decided to hold a ‘virtual’ AGM on either 9th or 16th October using Zoom. Papers will be circulated at least three weeks in advance, including the draft of a new Constitution. We will encourage all members to ask questions in advance and to return a ballot paper. Resolutions will be tabled regarding election of officers, rotation of trustees, acceptance of accounts and the adoption of a new Constitution for a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). If members wish to raise any other matters or have queries about attendance, then please contact the Secretary.

## OGT WEBSITE

We have recently completed a comprehensive re-design of our website: [www.ogt.org.uk](http://www.ogt.org.uk). This was undertaken for us by Dom Knight of Oxfordshire Web Services, based in Wootton-by-Woodstock, and coordinated by Will Holborow and Felix Lam. The old website was notoriously difficult to edit and had become very dated since the previous re-design in 2013. The new website has many new images of Oxfordshire gardens, a link to our Twitter feed and new research material on the Capability Brown sites in the county. Previous newsletters can be downloaded from the membership page. The branding remains the same but the layout and underlying functionality is much improved so it can now be read on a phone or tablet. Please have a look and let us know what you think!



## 2020 EVENTS PROGRAMME

The first three of this year’s events went through as programmed and are recorded in this newsletter. However, following the ‘lockdown’ announced on 29th March, we had to cancel the remainder of our programme of lectures and visits for 2020 and refund all booking fees. We are currently researching whether the Autumn/Winter lectures can take place online through a platform such as Crowdcast, which is used successfully by other organisations. Booking could be made available through EventCube as before. The lockdown has given us time to start planning 2021 events. All our 2020-21 lectures will be online until it is safe to meet in person again.

## NEW LECTURE VENUE?

We are considering moving our main lecture venue from Kellogg College. This has been a wonderful meeting place and lecture venue over the past years and we are enormously grateful to Kellogg for their support. However, as the College has grown, we are finding the lecture space more difficult to book. That is why we are looking for a new venue in the Woodstock area for lectures to be held in the post-pandemic era. We are interested in hearing from you as to how Woodstock will work as a location for lecture events. Please send email with your views to:

[secretary@ogt.org.uk](mailto:secretary@ogt.org.uk)

## ONLINE EVENTS

The events listed below may be of interest to our members. For further information, please click on the title of each event. For a more comprehensive listing of external events, go to: [www.thegardenstrust.org/events](http://www.thegardenstrust.org/events) or [click here](#).

### A Brief Introduction to Garden History

Gardens Trust online course that puts the story of the English garden into a wider context. 8 x 90 mins (max) sessions, once a week, Thursdays, starting 6th August at 11.00am. £40.

### Tales from the Fruit Bowl

Gardens Trust series of online lectures from by Michael Holland. Illustrated talks on some of our best-loved fruits - including aspects of their historical and geographical roots, folklore, symbolism, botany, nutrition, chemistry and more. 4-week online course, with 4 x 90 mins (max) sessions, once a week on Tuesday mornings, starting on 4th August, £16 for all 4, or £5 each.

### The Evolution & Origins of Plants

Gardens Trust 12-week online course with a slant towards the questions ‘where did the plants in my garden come from and ‘why do they look this way?’’, presented by Dr Mark Spencer, formerly at the Natural History Museum, and now the Hon. Botany Curator at the Linnean Society of London. 90-mins (max) sessions, Wednesday afternoons, 2pm - 3.30pm, starting on 9th September. £60

### Great Dixter lecture: Integrating Annuals and Biennials into your Borders

Online lecture by Fergus Garrett, Wednesday 29th July, 7.30pm and Saturday 1st August, 9am, £15. Past lectures also available, inc. The Magic of Dixter, Layered Planting, Biodiversity.

## AUTUMN / WINTER EVENTS

### Chelsea Physic Garden: Tree Identification Seminar: Fruits & Seeds

Friday 9th October, 10am-4pm, 66 Royal Hospital Road, London, SW3 4HS

### Chelsea Physic Garden: Get To Know Our Glasshouses

Tuesday 27th October, 2020 at 11:30am, £35, Chelsea Physic Garden, 66 Royal Hospital Road, London, SW3 4HS

### Garden Museum: Oudolf vs Robinson: exploring styles in naturalistic planting

Tuesday 17th November, 7:00 pm - 8:00 pm, Venue: The Garden Museum, London. £25; £20 Friends.

## Oxfordshire Gardens Trust Contacts

Secretary: Marybeth Harasz, 6 Heritage Lane, Ascott-under-Wychwood OX7 6AD;  
[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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