



OXFORDSHIRE GARDENS TRUST

NEWSLETTER 34 Winter 2021



All Saints Church, Nuneham Courtenay (Sean Vassen)

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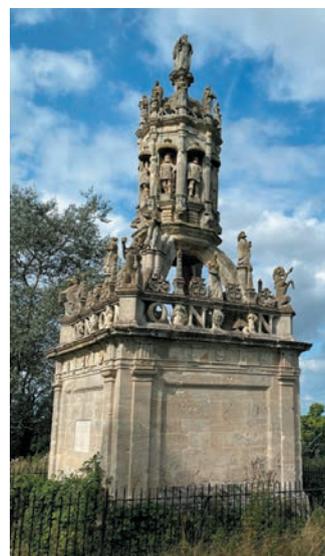
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Editor's introduction

First of all, apologies for the long gap between newsletters. This edition covers our events and activities since January. Our online lecture series began in January with Stephen Wass of Polyolbion Archaeology who shared his doctoral research into the 17th century water gardens at Hanwell, Enstone and elsewhere. Following the easing of Covid-related restrictions, we were able to re-start our programme of garden visits and in-person events with a visit to Ham Court in July. Our summer events programme continued with a tour of East Oxford gardens

in July, a summer social at Rousham in August and a guided visit to the Wittenham Clumps in September. Our Autumn lecture series began with Advolly Richmond's online talk on *Flora Domestica* - the history of house plants - and continued with Clare Sargent's lecture on the Capability Brown landscape at Radley College. The final two lectures were given by Susannah Charlton and Jaqueline Mitchell, the former on twentieth-century gardens and landscapes and the latter on the literature of garden birds.

In addition to these events, some OGT members took part as volunteer guides at Nuneham Courtenay, as part of Oxford Open Doors weekend in September. The landscape at Nuneham is Registered at Grade I and contains several important historic buildings, including the Carfax Conduit (listed Grade I) - an early

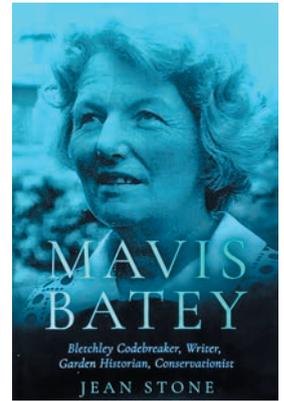


Carfax Conduit (Sean Vassen)

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17th century structure relocated to Nuneham in 1789 as an eye catcher. Elsewhere in the grounds is the Church of All Saints (Grade II*) - built in 1764 to resemble a classical temple. Mavis Batey (1921 - 2013) - best known for her role at Bletchley Park during the Second World War - lived on the estate for a time in the 1960s before moving to Oxford. The Nuneham landscape fired her interest in garden history and she pioneered this as a subject for serious academic study. She became Secretary of the Garden History Society in the 1970s and was its President from 1985 - 2000. In 2002 Mavis was one of the founder members of the Oxfordshire Garden Trust.

This year is the centenary of her birth. A biography of her was published last year (*Mavis Batey: Bletchley Codebreaker, Writer, Garden Historian, Conservationist*, by Jean Stone). This reveals much about her role as a pioneer of garden history, campaigner for landscape protection and champion of Oxfordshire's landscapes.



Visit to Ham Court, Bampton on 10th July 2021

This was our first garden visit since the recent lockdowns and what a treat it was to see this garden that has been recreated around historic buildings. All that survives today of the early-14th century Bampton Castle is the gatehouse and a short section of the adjoining curtain wall, which are listed Grade II*. Since 2011, the property has belonged to Matthew Rice, author and illustrator. Matthew warmly welcomed us with a lively talk about the history of the buildings and grounds, his alterations and improvements during the last 10 years, and how he created the garden.



Ham Court, Bampton (Sally Stradling)

The original Norman manor house belonged to Aymer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke, who decided to fortify his property and so obtained a licence from the king to crenelate the walls in 1315. After Aymer's death in 1324, the property passed to the Talbot family and eventually became farmland. From the 17th century it was known as Ham Court. In 1865, the property was sold to Jesus College, Oxford.

During the intervening centuries, there were periods of temporary abandonment and building alterations, and more latterly the addition of the south wing to the gatehouse in c. 1870. During this period, the site became a quarry for local villagers as the property fell into disrepair. There are parts of the original crenelated wall to be found throughout the village of Bampton today. Finally, Matthew bought the property from Jesus College in 2011.

Matthew's initial tasks were to remove some of the dilapidated farm buildings and to excavate until he found the original silt line for the medieval moat. He restored the moat, which now only survives on the south side of the property (for which he had to obtain approval from six bodies). Work then started on upgrading the buildings - the main gatehouse with Victorian extension, and the Grade II listed barns that were to become Matthew's current home and studio. Meanwhile, the ground was improved in soil quality, drainage and irrigation.

When Matthew first began, the landscape was depleted. There were no birds as there were no shrubs for them to sit in. There was no topsoil. In the courtyards and gardens the soil was found to be only 4 inches thick above a deep hoggin aggregate layer. Considerable excavation and replacement with fertile soil was required, particularly in the kitchen garden which was revived as far as possible according to a 1719 map.

Our garden tour began on the recently constructed and very steep mount for a view of the landscape, which was recently planted with 12,000 trees across the 32 acres of land. Then, after passing alongside the moat via a croquet lawn, we observed what survives of the original external walls of the gatehouse and the crenelated wall. Further on, we passed through a tunnel of young hornbeams before entering meadows with mown paths.



Ham Court, Kitchen Garden (Marybeth Harasz)

Back in the main garden, we visited the extensive greenhouse and the adjacent kitchen garden which is abundantly planted with herbs, vegetable and flowers. Alongside but still within the original kitchen garden area, there is another croquet lawn bordered with herbaceous beds and bright flowers. Other garden areas include borders and gravel gardens in front of the gatehouse and alongside the barns. These beds were planted with brightly coloured salvias, delphiniums, toadflax, monarda, mulleins, and many other annuals and perennials.

On our return to the main forecourt we were served with a delicious lunch in the open-fronted shelter barn. Beautiful botanical prints by Kitty Rice were on display there, blending art with nature. You can read more about Ham Court in the January 2020 issue of *Gardens Illustrated*.

Marybeth Harasz and Vanessa Fell



Ham Court, The Moat (Sally Stradling)

RESEARCH ON PUBLIC PARKS AND RECREATION GROUNDS

Following the successful case study at Manor Road Memorial Park Wantage, one solution to relieving lockdown was to research the parks and recreation grounds in our local areas, since these were already partly familiar to us and could be recorded easily by individuals. Surprisingly, our choices turned out to have distinct geological characteristics. In west Oxford, where the floodplain dominates, the silty clay alluvium created land that became principally agricultural. In east Oxford, the clay, sand and limestone was quarried over many centuries for building materials.

On the west side of Oxford, the low-lying ground frequently floods. Botley Road, the turnpiked road running west out of Oxford, was key to satisfying the housing need from the 19th century onwards with development on both sides of the road. The first public park to be created in this area was Botley Park on land to the north of Botley Road that was bought by the city in 1922. This well-used park with a community centre and play and sports facilities also gives access to Tumbling Bay Bathing Place, opened in 1853.

On the opposite side of Botley Road, slightly further west and hidden by side-streets, is Oatlands Road Recreation Ground on land bought by the city in 1927. Adjacent, and connected by a bridge, is King George's Playing Field which was donated to the city by St John's College in 1935 to mark the Silver Jubilee of King George V. Both of these grounds lie adjacent to the historic Willow Walk pathway and to the ancient flower-rich Hinksey Meadows.



Oatlands Road Recreation Ground (Vanessa Fell)

Further away and to the north, across Port Meadow, lies Aristotle Lane Recreation Ground in Jericho. This small recreation ground, with playground and sports goals, was created on land purchased by the city from St John's College in 1938. It lies next to the canal with

its Grade II listed road bridge at the north-east corner. In 1965, Lucy's Eagle Ironworks created their sports and social club on adjacent land but this disappeared when Lucy's sold all their Jericho land and workshops to Berkeley Homes for development from 1996.



Aristotle Lane Recreation Ground (Vanessa Fell)

Research on the east side of Oxford revealed that the Headington quarries stretched from the crossroads of the present Windmill Road and Old London Road, Headington to Downside Road in Risinghurst. Visible remnants of the quarries exist at Rock Edge (SSI), Magdalen Quarry (SSI) and Quarry Hollow Park. The remaining quarries were infilled for housing expansion, particularly in the 1930s. The land also bears the scars of the numerous clay pits visible in the inundated ponds, from the C.S. Lewis Reserve to Monks Wood and Downside Dip (a small play park, although until 20 years ago a claypit pond).



Olive Jacks Memorial Field (Felix Lam)

Olive Jacks Memorial Field, donated to the Parish in 1951 by Dr L.P. Jacks and Risinghurst Recreation Ground, acquired by the Parish in 1959, serve both Risinghurst and Sandhills communities. The playground is spacious but with a variety of modern equipment and Risinghurst Recreation Ground boasts cricket and football pitches, as well as a wildflower meadow and a spinney. Sports fixtures regularly take place and the community also mounts firework displays and fêtes.



Risinghurst Recreation Ground (Felix Lam)

Exploration of both eastside and westside parks were more interesting and revealed far more unexpected history, geology, urban design and sociology than was ever imagined. A very satisfying few months despite the restrictions of lockdown.

The full reports and summaries of these researches are available on the OGT website under: www.ogt.org.uk/oxfordshire-gardens/city-of-oxford

Vanessa Fell & Felix Lam

PAUL NASH & WITTENHAM CLUMPS

On the 4th September twenty members arrived at St Agatha's Church, Brightwell cum Sotwell for the delightful Talk and Tour to Paul Nash's Wittenham Clumps. To start the morning Christopher Baines delivered a lively and engaging summary of Nash's life and his enduring love of the Clumps. The artist's relatively short-lived life was both joyous and painful. By the time we set off on the walk we had a full in-depth understanding of Nash.

Christopher's enthusiasm sustained us for the complete tour of Castle Hill - interspersing his narrative with photos of Nash's pictures held up against the present woods and skyline. At every corner he was never at a loss to add the odd nugget of information, or anecdote. Our enjoyment of the morning meant we all bought a copy of his book 'Pyramids in England', which were conveniently stowed in the boot of his car. The morning was rounded off with a very sociable picnic on Castle Hill.

Christopher Baines' website can be accessed via this link

[Link to Paul Nash and the Wittenham Clumps](#)

Felix Lam



Wittenham Clumps (Felix Lam)



Christopher Baines at Wittenham Clumps (Felix Lam)

VISIT TO EAST OXFORD GARDENS

Pete Edwards led a fascinating tour of East Oxford gardens on 31 July. The tour began at Bartlemas Chapel, a medieval leper hospital (listed Grade I) which was rebuilt by Oriel College in 1649 after the Civil War. The Chapel now stands in a tranquil enclave with two other buildings (both listed Grade II*) which formed part of the hospital. We were given an introductory talk by Christopher Franks of Bartlemas Chapel Trust and then enjoyed seeing his garden at Bartlemas Farmhouse. We were then divided into two groups to see four more gardens, all on the north-west side of Divinity Road. They reflected the varied tastes and interest of their owners - Clare & Stephen at No.115, Tom & Peter at No.111 and Danny at No.151. The tour concluded with an excellent tea with home-made cakes provided by our hosts Pauline and Pete Edwards at No.113. Our thanks go to them, all the owners and to Trish Attwooll who really initiated the whole thing.

Will Holborow



Garden at Bartlemas Farmhouse (Felix Lam)

CAPABILITY BROWN AT RADLEY: REDISCOVERING A LOST LANDSCAPE

In this talk we were treated to a feast of research by Clare Sargent, Archivist at Radley College. Radley Hall stands on a commanding site with superb views to Nuneham Courtenay, Shotover Park and the Vale of White Horse. Like a Capability Brown landscape, the talk unfolded gradually, revealing snippets about the history, ownership and landscape development until the whole was revealed and the evidence for the landscape was carefully examined on various maps including OS maps and Roque's map of 1761, paintings and sketches by William Turner, plans and photographs.

The site was owned by Abingdon Abbey until the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 1530s and the ownership of the site transferred from the Crown to the Stonhouses in 1562 and then the Bowyers. It was in continuous occupation by only four families/institutions until the College leased the site in 1847 and then finally bought it. A grange existed here with a farmed medieval landscape showing up on Lidar as ridge and furrow on the site of the present playing fields. Later a deer park and timber-framed house appeared in the landscape - the house lying at right angles to the 18th century house constructed by Sir John Stonhouse from 1722.

It's not known exactly what involvement Lancelot Brown had at Radley. What is known is that he was paid £672 by Sir William over four years for remodelling the landscape at Radley between 1770 and 1773. In 1761, two formal avenues had existed, one going north from the house, replaced by Brownian clumps, the other from Lodge Hill on the west planted with an avenue of sweet chestnuts, mostly replaced with Brownian clumps and more recently replanted with an oak avenue. This was the main access to the house across parkland with a sweeping curve and a slow reveal as the house appeared across the deer park and lake. Brown probably did not design the lake, but possibly the island and sculpting of the land. It is curious that there is no surviving bridge, and it seems unlikely there was just a watersplash across the causeway, however no trace remains. Other extant features include a boundary wall and ditch, which could be mistaken for a haha except it is too far distant from the house, a fragment of a haha near to the house, a shrubbery, walled kitchen garden and west lodges. What was fascinating too were the close family connections Clare had unearthed between members of the Stonhouse family and commissions executed by Brown including at Kirtlington (Sir James Dashwood, cousin), Stratfield Saye (niece of Sir William Stonhouse), Nuneham (Harcourt cousins), Ditchley, Blenheim and Rycote.

Sally Stradling



'FLORA DOMESTICA: A SOCIAL HISTORY OF INDOOR PLANTS'

Advolly Richmond may be known to members as a contributor to Gardeners World on BBC2. She gave a fascinating talk which covered the history of house plants from the Roman period right through to the present day. She mentioned the rise and fall of different fashions including the ancient practice of Bonsai plants grown in shallow bowls, the medieval use of nosegays, Dutch tulip mania, and the practice of growing citrus plants in decorative pots which was at its most popular in the 17th and 18th centuries. In the 19th century the Wardian case enabled the import of exotic species from distant parts and led to a wave of competitive plant collecting amongst the wealthy classes. The *Aspidistra* arrived in the UK from China in the 1820s. Terrariums led to 'Fern mania' - the craze for collecting which started in the 1850s. During the nineteenth and early 20th century the Kentia Palm became highly fashionable and an emblem of Palm Court orchestras.



The Aspidistra or 'cast-iron' plant

After the First World War the fashion for indoor plants waned as interest in arranging cut flowers increased under the influence of Constance Spry. However, interest in house plants started to revive with the 1951 Festival of Britain. Popular plants of the post-war period included 'Swiss Cheese' plants, African Violets and Spider plants. Dr D.G. Hessayon's books on house plants were immensely popular in the 1980s. In the current century, we have experienced a revival of orchid delirium, now that these plants are so much more affordable, and interest in unusual indoor plants - so-called 'Unicorns' - has never been so great as during the recent lockdown.

Will Holborow

COMMITTEE REPORT

The good news is that membership of the OGT has increased over the past 12 months and we now have about 100 paid-up members.

However the Committee now has only four active members following the departure of Marybeth Harasz who stood down as Secretary at the AGM. There is an urgent need for a Secretary to replace her so please consider working with us, even for a temporary time. We also need help with publicising our activities, producing the newsletter, undertaking research and expanding our membership.

Despite this, we have continued to offer a varied and exciting programme of talks and tours throughout the year. Plans for the 2022 programme are already well advanced, and details will be circulated as usual in January. Thank you to Sally Stradling, Jaqueline Mitchell, Trish Attwooll, Felix Lam and Pete Edwards for planning such wonderful events and to Will Holborow and Sean Vassen for help with the online webinar interface of Zoom.

We hosted our second virtual AGM on Friday 24th September. In summary, all those proposed for election were elected. Our trustees and directors (now one and the same) were confirmed as Max Askew, Felix Lam and Will Holborow.

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

We continue to be consulted by the Gardens Trust about planning applications for developments which affect registered sites in the county. We have commented on applications for sites including Blenheim, Christ Church and Nuneham Courtenay. Thanks go to everyone who has supported this important work. Sally Stradling, Will Holborow, Pete Edwards, Malcolm Airs, Sarah Couch and Iain Geddes have all contributed to these responses.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Did you know that the OGT has an Instagram ([oxfordshire_gardens_trust](https://www.instagram.com/oxfordshire_gardens_trust)) account as well as Twitter (@OXGardensTrust)? We held a social media training day in August with Thom Airs at Rousham, which has encouraged us to make more use of social media, especially Instagram. Catch up with what's happening at OGT, and join in the conversation with other garden trusts and organisations.

OGT EVENTS 2022

All lectures this winter are online. Zoom links will be sent just before each lecture takes place; please enter the zoom 'room' by 5.45pm, for the lecture to begin at 6pm. Register for each talk on EventCube: <https://ogtevents.eventcube.io>, £4 members [inc other GT], £5 non-members.

Thursday 24 February, 6pm: Collingwood 'Cherry' Ingram and the Japanese Cherry Tree

Naoko Abe, author of 'Cherry' Ingram, *The Englishman Who Saved Japan's Blossoms*, discusses the life and achievements of the British plantsman Collingwood Ingram, who not only introduced many cherry tree varieties to the UK and beyond but saved them at a time when they were forgotten and disappearing in Japan.

Thursday 17 March, 6pm: Classical motifs and garden poetry in 18th century Oxfordshire gardens

Alley Marie Jordan speaks about classical illusions in Oxfordshire gardens including Rousham and Blenheim, the subject of her PhD in Classics from the University of Edinburgh.

Thursday 21 April, 6pm: From Planting Plans to Power Stations: The Landscape Institute Archive

Annabel Downs, chair of the Friends of Landscape Archive at Reading (FOLAR), describes the evolution of the Landscape Institute archive from its first constitution (c.1930) to 25 years on, when the library and archive relocated to The Museum of English Rural Life at the University of Reading.

Saturday 30 April: Visit to Little Peacocks, Filkins, West Oxfordshire, GL7 3JQ

Hal Moggridge, OBE, will introduce Brenda Colvin's small (half an acre) garden, the Colvin & Moggridge practice and its history. Once Brenda Colvin's own garden, it has been kept close to her original design as an historic example from the 1960s-70s, and there is an extensive spring bulb collection. Coffee/tea; wheelchair accessible, except for toilets (unless up 3 steps and then 2 metres on foot is possible). Maximum 20, member priority. £5 members; guests £8.

Saturday 21 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.



Oxfordshire Gardens Trust

Committee: Vanessa Fell (Membership), Will Holborow (Treasurer), Sally Stradling (Events), Stephen Wass
Membership applications to: Vanessa Fell, c/o 30 West Street, Chipping Norton, Oxon, OX7 5ER
membership@ogt.org.uk

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