



# OXFORDSHIRE GARDENS TRUST

NEWSLETTER 36 Winter 2023



*Summer Social at Pullens Lane, Headington (Will Holborow)*

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

This edition covers our events since the start of 2023. Our online lecture series began in February with a talk by Kasia Boddy on the cultural history of saffron, followed by Priscilla Frost's talk about the NGS Yellow Book garden scheme. Well-attended visits followed over the Spring and Summer to Little Peacocks, Gothic House and Stonor, and we held our summer social at Jane Owen's garden in Oxford. Details of all these visits and events are included below. A late addition to the programme was a special event at Rousham in October, to enjoy the landscape paintings of Francis Hamel, and to hear him talk about his work. We learnt more about the classical allusions in the gardens at Rousham from Alley Marie Jordan in her talk in October on classical motifs and poetry in C18th gardens. Our final lecture of the year was by Katherine Crouch on the topic of grasses in the garden. Our thanks go to Ann Lloyd and other members of the events sub-committee for all their hard work organising this varied and rewarding programme.

Plans for the 2024 programme are already well advanced, and an events calendar will be posted as usual in January. In the meantime, we hope to see you at our final event of the year, a Christmas social event and quiz at Charlbury on 14th December.

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## LECTURE BY KASIA BODDY, 23RD FEBRUARY: SAFFRON IN CAMBRIDGE, AND ELSEWHERE

Kasia Boddy is a Professor of American Literature at the University of Cambridge and a fellow of Fitzwilliam College. Her talk was about the elongated stigmas of *Crocus sativus* which, when dried, are known as saffron.

Today what we use in Britain tends to come from Iran or Spain, but for a long time it was also an important British crop, especially in southern Cambridgeshire and northern Essex - and not just around the wool-and-dyeing town of Chepyng Walden, whose change of name to Saffron Walden was an acknowledgement of

the crocus's contribution to the town's wealth. Kasia explained why, from the late 14th century, it became so desirable, the involvement of the colleges in Cambridge and Oxford, its cultivation and consumption.



Gathering Saffron ©Cambridgeshire County Archives

Will Holborow

## PLANNING CONSULTATIONS

In addition to our programme of garden visits and talks, we have been increasingly active in monitoring planning applications that affect parks and gardens in Oxfordshire, or their setting. Our comments are sent to the caseworkers at the Gardens Trust, who are a statutory consultee on applications affecting registered parks and gardens. During this year, Sally Stradling, Will Holborow, Sarah Couch and Malcom Airs have commented on applications affecting sites including Nuneham Courtenay, Magdalen College, Worcester College, Christ Church, Oxford University Parks and Albert Park in Abingdon. We have also provided background research on parks and gardens in Oxfordshire on a substantial area of Oxfordshire potentially impacted by Botley West, a proposal for a massive solar farm. This is a nationally significant infrastructure project (NSIP) which will ultimately be decided by the Secretary of State, but local councils and organisations are able to submit comments. OGT will be liaising with the Gardens Trust on this matter.



## LECTURE BY PRISCILLA FROST, 16TH MARCH: THE NGS YELLOW BOOK

Priscilla Frost, OGT member and volunteer publicity officer for the National Garden Scheme (NGS), talked about the history and operations of the famous Yellow Book. The first year of the National Garden Scheme was in 1927. The first guide to open gardens was published in 1932 by Country Life, and the annual yellow guides followed in 1949. Since then, the NGS has become the most significant charitable funder of nursing in the UK. In 1980 the NGS became independent of the Queen's Nursing Institute and began to diversify its charitable causes. Today it contributes to a range of charities, including Marie Curie, Hospice UK, Carers Trust and Parkinson's UK, as well as QNI and Macmillan. Priscilla illustrated her talk with some of her own garden photography and shared tips about local gardens which can be visited through the NGS scheme.

Will Holborow





## VISIT TO THE GOTHIC HOUSE, CHARLBURY, 13TH MAY

A very special visit to Gothic House in Charlbury in May gave us a glimpse into the life, work and garden of photographer Andrew Lawson. Andrew was interviewed by his daughter, Susie Lawson (Branch Arts), which gave us insight not found in the usual 'lecture' format. The visit was held during art week in Charlbury and kicked off with tea and cakes by Ann and Tony Lloyd, with a glimpse of Tony's art work and open studio. The group walked next door to Andrew's garden at Gothic House. The garden and studio there were filled with lovely sculptures by his talented wife, Briony Lawson.

Andrew Lawson's garden has changed over the years. Andrew first moved to Gothic House in 1982 and has been building the garden since then. At the heart of the garden is a lovely crab apple tree with profuse white blooms. This tree replaced a cherry tree which died just as he was to open his garden to the Open Gardens Scheme one year. He didn't know how to cover it up, so he painted it blue. It stayed that way for a few years before it began to decay and he replaced it with the crab apple tree. Other features in Andrew's intimate garden are topiary, small water features, sculpture, seating areas, intricate paving patterns and lovely plantings. Andrew lamented that his box topiaries are now failing from box blight. This will cause him to change his garden again.

Andrew initially studied medicine at university from age 16. He fell ill one semester and was in hospital for a couple of months. Staring out of the windows of St Thomas' Hospital, he found himself more inspired by the landscape views than medicine. After completing his studies, he had a heart-to-heart talk with his father to let him know that he wanted to become a painter, instead. His father patiently encouraged him to do that. He attended the Ruskin School of Art and began taking photographs of landscapes. By 1984 he was trying to sell to publishers. He was invited to photograph a garden for a publication. He then spent the next 30 years as a garden photographer. He told us that it was an emerging field at that time and he became known for his style. He tries to pin down the character of the garden in his work, with obvious success.

His most well-known gardens are Highgrove and Birkhall for King Charles III (then Prince Charles). His favourite gardens are Sissinghurst and Great Dixter, as well as our own Oxfordshire garden at Rousham. Andrew has had a distinguished career as a garden photographer. He received the John Brookes Lifetime Achievement Award from the Society of Garden Designers in 2013 and from the Garden Media Guild in 2010, alongside many others. Those who visited left feeling inspired by the Lawson family and the many talented artists in Charlbury and in the UK.

Marybeth Harasz



*Andrew and Susie Lawson (Leslee Holderness)*



*Gothic House Garden (Pauline Edwards)*



## VISIT TO PULLEN'S GATE AND HIGH WALL ON SATURDAY 17TH JUNE

Our summer social was kindly hosted by Jane Owen and David Gye in their garden at Pullen's Gate, in Headington. About 40 members and guests enjoyed a hot afternoon, aided by cold drinks and cakes. We were given a tour of her garden by Jane; it is of particular interest for its specimen trees, eg Tulip tree, Aleppo pines, also a huge Wisteria ('a thug'). When Jane & David took ownership, they were faced with an overgrown garden full of brambles, ivy and ground elder, which they have gradually restored over the past five years. They have created a circular pond and terrace, and have trained the overgrown Yew hedge which bisects the garden into a 'cloud' hedge.



*Jane Owen leading a tour of her garden at Pullens Gate (Marybeth Harasz)*

Jane Carlton Smith adds "I was entranced by Pullens Gate, with the magical view from the terrace, of mown paths through thriving areas of meadow and rambling roses, corralled by David, using hazel branches to prevent ravishment by deer." Jane Owen described how she and David cut their way through the wilderness with chain saws, finding an overwhelmed mulberry tree, now restored to fruitfulness, and how they got inside the thick yew hedge to cut out the dead sections, which were embraced by bramble, ivy and live yew branches. They ended up with the lovely cloudy silhouette, resembling floating clouds rather than the more usual pillowy form. David commented, staring at his bleeding arms, "I thought gardening was supposed to be fun". The garden beautifully compliments the cottagey house and appears completely natural in the best possible way.

Our tour continued along Pullens Lane to High Wall, a substantial brick house dating from c.1910, designed in Tudor / Arts and Crafts style by Walter Cave for Katharine Feilden. Harold Peto laid out the garden c 1912, creating two formal areas (the rose garden and the area around the house) connected by an informal lawn.

We were privileged to be given access by the relatively new owners, Stuart and Laura, and to meet former resident Arpad - an architect with a deep knowledge of the house and garden. Photographs of the house and garden from *Country Life*, taken in 1917, were on display. The garden has a pergola, at the centre of which is a roofed octagonal gazebo; around the house is a series of terraces and steps. The grounds originally had a paddock of about two and a half acres to the west. In the 1970s the western part of this area was developed for housing and the formal rose garden and tennis court were lost to development.

For anyone interested to know more about this garden, see *The Great Edwardian Gardens of Harold Peto* by Robin Whalley (Aurum Press, 2007). The site is included in Historic England's Register of Historic Parks and Gardens at Grade II. The Register entry provides a detailed description of the garden and its historical development, see [here](#)

Thanks for this memorable visit go to the owners of both gardens and to the OGT members who helped on the day - Trish Attwooll, Jane Carlton Smith, Sally Stradling and Sean Vassen.

Will Holborow

## VISIT TO STONOR PARK, 14TH JULY

Hidden in the Chiltern Hills, north of Henley-on-Thames, are the splendid Grade II\* registered park and gardens of Stonor Park. Unfortunately, when OGT visited on July 14th, the weather was against us, but nevertheless, we had a wonderful guided visit to the historic formal gardens.

On arrival, we were served with refreshments in the oldest part of the main house, the remodelled 13th century hall on the south-east side of the house, close to the medieval chapel. Here our guide described the background and history of the Stonor family and land. The extensive parkland has now shrunk to only 230 acres although still includes a herd of 130 fallow deer from the medieval park that originally lay on the opposite side of the road to the present entrance.

The Stonor name, both applicable to park and family, comes from the 'sarsen' stones seen scattered throughout the landscape. Sarsen stones are the result of the crushing of the sandstone layer of the chalk escarpment some 4,000 years ago. The stones were considered mystical; a henge was created and later the 12th century chapel was built nearby with one sarsen used as a foundation stone.

The first historical mention of the garden dates to 1150 - 'the great garden and the great orchard'. On the steep slope to the rear of the house is the large 17th century walled garden of which the east half is now a pleasure garden overlooked by the house. This has a large central lawn, shrubberies with paths to both sides, and a terraced garden with central steps leading up to the north wall. Previously the terraces contained a large 19th century greenhouse, but this was removed after the First World War and replaced with two rectangular decorative ponds. In 1978 Lady Camoys replanted the terrace with old fashioned roses and lavenders. Lady Aisla, her daughter-in-law and a trained gardener, has designed a white border on the western side of the lawn. The west half of the walled garden was formerly a productive kitchen garden, but this has been redesigned by Lady Camoys as an Italianate garden, now laid to lawn with ornamental beds, Irish yews, box pyramids and old fashioned roses. Some of the old fruit trees remain, including a weeping plum. At the top of the garden is a 'hot border' with vibrant crocosmia and red hot pokers.

To the west of the main walled garden is a large triangular area of land which in the 18th century had a series of walks with seats, temples and a pagoda. In the late 19th century it was laid out as a productive garden, including an orchard that fell into disuse following the Second World War. We passed a 19th century brick-built peach house that is now derelict. Many of the trees in the gardens and parkland were decimated by the storms of 1987 and 1990. This area of land is currently being developed: the hazel walk has been replanted and some orchard trees replaced and under-planted with camassias, alliums and scilla by Lady Ailsa and her gardener. The discovery of old invoices has shown that 200 laburnums had been purchased for a laburnum walk and there are currently plans for it to be reinstated.



*Stonor Park (Sally Stradling)*



The final part of the visit was to Lady Camoys private garden at The Wool House. Lady Camoys started work in the garden in November 2015 when it was a stable yard and had to be cleared completely of concrete and then filled with top soil and manure. The garden comprises beds arranged symmetrically; at the north end there is a circular sitting area and summerhouse that looks upon a second circle planted with the crab apple 'Everest'. The four garden borders are cornered by clipped yew and are brimming with lavenders and roses. The wall opposite the house, west facing, has yew pillars to create contrast between the climbing roses and clematis. The house doors are adorned with colourful seasonal pots, and one has a miniature ginko. A small bird bath and four ornamental stone/concrete eggs are at the far end of the garden. Lady Camoys has plans to create a larger water feature to enhance her delightful and stunningly designed private garden.

Vanessa Fell and Felix Lam



Stonor Park (Vanessa Fell)

## FRANCIS HAMEL AT ROUSHAM, 6TH OCTOBER

On a perfect, still, autumn day, fifty-two members and friends of OGT and neighbouring garden trusts gathered at Rousham, looking forward to hearing the artist Francis Hamel talk about his work.

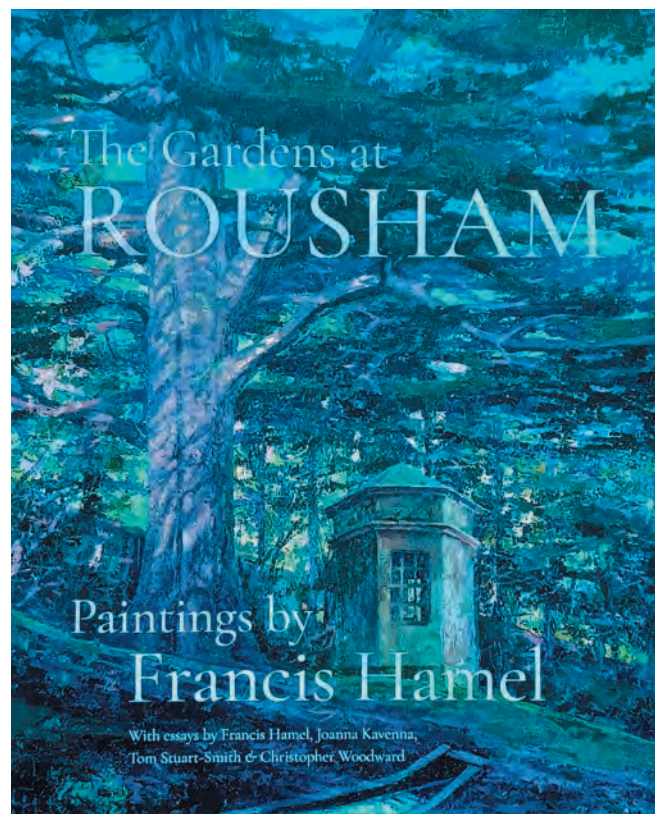
His London agent, the John Martin Gallery in Albemarle Street, had arranged this exhibition, prior to its move to their London gallery. The work was displayed in the drawing room and in his studio.

Members had time to view his paintings and then have their picnic lunch in the warm sunshine, sitting on the benches outside the marquee, before gathering inside to listen to Francis talk about his life and work.

Francis explained that he had lived in a cottage at Rousham for most of his adult life and was fortunate to have the most wonderful garden as continuous inspiration.

Francis answered numerous questions from a very appreciative audience who were then free to revisit the exhibition if they wished and spend the rest of the afternoon exploring Rousham.

Ann Lloyd



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## LECTURE BY ALLEY MARIE JORDAN, 19TH OCTOBER

Dr Alley Marie Jordan gave an interesting lecture in October on the topic of classical motifs and garden poetry in 18th century Oxfordshire Gardens. She highlighted examples from the gardens at Rousham and Blenheim Palace. Listeners learned about classic art and philosophy themes which allow a better understanding of gardens with classical underpinnings.

Poetry and philosophy concepts from the great minds of Epicurus and Plato to Horace, Virgil, Vitruvius and Allan Ramsey of the Augustan Age in the 18th century were covered. Epicurus started a philosophical school on the outskirts of Athens around the 3rd century BC called 'The Garden School'. He accepted anyone, including women and slaves, to study in his school. His contemporary, Plato, only accepted men and emphasized reasoning rather than pleasure.

Dr Jordan explained the idea of otium, a Roman concept which describes a contemplative way of life in the countryside. Otium came to mean leisure time, and classical gardens exemplify this concept. They are a place for relaxing, reading, and creating a setting in which '...a story could take place.' One might imagine Diana riding past in the hunt or that Pan could be spying nearby. Time can stand still in the garden, where the weight of the modern world dissipates. In the Augustan era, Alexander Pope presented the idea of 'Genius Loci', the genius of the place. This concept has become a central theme in the modern education of landscape architects and garden designers all over the world.

Those who sought enlightenment could be found in contemplation in the grotto. The grotto was seen as an entrance to the underworld. These were sacred spaces, full of stillness and quietude. One might consider themes of life, death and the soul. Waters in the grotto were considered healing waters because they flowed to the underworld.

The classics were basic to 18th century education, allowing gardens to be interpreted by visitors. In our more modern era, a study of the classics is a good way to better understand some of the amazing gardens built in the Augustan age and beyond.

Dr Jordan was interviewed by Horticulture Magazine in July of this year, where her work as a garden historian was highlighted. Stay tuned for the publication of her first book called *Classical Taste in the Architectural World of Thomas Jefferson* later this year.

Marybeth Harasz



Statue of Pan in Venus Vale (Marybeth Harasz)



Statue of Pan in Venus Vale, ©Historic England



## RESEARCH NEWS: QUAKER BURIAL GROUNDS AND GARDENS

This year we began recording the gardens of Friends (Quaker) Meeting Houses in Oxfordshire. There are eleven attended Meeting Houses in the county; seven of these have original buildings dating back to the 17th century and six of those are listed. Initially, burial grounds preceded the construction of a meeting house and nine of the eleven have gardens, some of which once served also as burial grounds, although their roles are now more significant as places for meetings, contemplation and remembrance. So far, we have recorded two gardens, both detailed on the OGT website, and others are in progress.

In Burford, West Oxfordshire, the meeting house is in the centre of the town. At the rear of the house is the small rectangular garden, which comprises mainly lawn with borders on the north, east and west sides. The only remnant of the original burial ground is one surviving headstone, which is set against the north wall. The garden was completely re-designed in 2009 to celebrate the tercentenary of Quaker associations with the building. A plaque on the east wall lists Quaker plant-hunters, naturalists and nurserymen who played a part in establishing different species in UK gardens.

The Meeting House in Henley-on-Thames, South Oxfordshire, lies in the north part of town. Behind the house is a long narrow garden that runs to the west, with the original burial ground occupying the most westerly third of the area. In 1994 it was agreed that the overgrown burial ground should be renovated and the tombstones were repositioned against the walls and a meadow and orchard were created. The rear garden is an informal meandering space full of spring flowers, trees and shrubs. In spring the garden is abundant with crocus, daffodils and cowslips, whilst in summer, mown paths lead visitors through the extensive displays of cow parsley in the burial ground.

The research into the Quaker Meeting House gardens has brought to light the caring transition made from burial ground to garden. Although some gardens certainly became overgrown, much attention to the transformation and embodiment of Quaker principles and beliefs is apparent.

Vanessa Fell and Felix Lam



*Burford Meeting House entrance (Vanessa Fell)*



*Grave stones At Henley Meeting House Burial Ground (Vanessa Fell)*

## MEMBERSHIP

We now have over 100 members and numbers have been rising steadily since the introduction of online membership applications via our website - this makes it easy to become a member without having to fill out any paper forms, and to renew membership without having to write a cheque. At our AGM in October, we considered how to attract more of our members to volunteer to help with our activities. We will be hosting a lunch in January for anyone who is either a volunteer already or interested to know more about what's involved. Details will be circulated by email.



## GRASSES IN THE GARDEN: A NEW TREND OR AN OLD ONE? 16TH NOVEMBER

Katherine Crouch is an award-winning garden designer who has exhibited at Chelsea, BBC Gardeners World and Malvern, and is the author of *Designing Gardens with Plant Shapes*. She gave an entertaining talk about the use of grasses in the garden. The popularity of grasses can be attributed to their low maintenance as well as their sustainability and diversity of shape and colour. A further advantage is their tolerance of the drier and hotter periods that are becoming more common as a result of climate change.

Until the 1990s, ornamental grasses were rarely seen as a desirable feature by garden designers. Pampas grasses are still a rather derided feature of suburban front gardens. The fashion for using grasses and perennials in public planting began in the 1980s through the influence of Piet Oudolf in Holland and his German predecessor Karl Foerster.

Katherine recommended the Knoll Gardens near Wimborne, a nursery specialising in grasses with a beautiful garden. Other examples can be seen in the Oudolf Field at the Hauser & Wirth Gallery at Bruton and in the Tom Stuart-Smith borders at Wisley. Examples of urban planting which make extensive use of grasses include the Sheffield Grey to Green project and the High Line in New York.

Deciduous grasses need to be cut down around Easter, meaning that there is only a short period of the year when they are not contributing to the visual attractiveness of the garden, compared to herbaceous borders which are both more labour-intensive, expensive and have a longer 'dead' period during winter. Katherine shared many insights into how she uses the height, colour and shape of plants to create visual interest all year round in the garden.

Will Holborow



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### Oxfordshire Gardens Trust

Committee: Jane Carlton-Smith (Secretary), Vanessa Fell (Membership), Will Holborow (Treasurer), Ann Lloyd (Events), Sally Stradling

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