

Birkbeck Garden History Group Newsletter



Summer 2024 No 67

Watts Gallery

BGHG Visit 17 April

Train, then public bus down winding lanes, brought us swiftly to Watts Gallery by the village of Compton near Guildford in Surrey, ready for a packed day. Apart from the garden and the Artists' Village, there would be three Arts and Crafts buildings to explore – Limnerslease, the house and studios; the Watts Cemetery Chapel; and the Gallery.

George and Mary Watts moved to Compton in 1891 to spend their winters there. Watts, aged 74, was at the height of his fame while Mary, only 42, would now have the opportunity to develop her brilliance as a designer and potter and also make her mark as a social reformer.

A Celtic Cross on the gentle climb through woodland to Limnerslease was the first of many symbols that we would come across as characteristic of Watts's later works and Mary's designs. Limnerslease is a custom-built, timber-framed house with studios on the first floor. George's studio is as he left it with the large oil painting, *The Court of Death*, looking broodily down from its great height and some fine portraits on easels. Mary's studio was clearly a hub of activity, used for entertaining and work, with weekly evening pottery and drawing classes for the local people. Over the years, she would set up thriving cottage industries in the Compton Pottery and the Potter's Art Guild giving training and employment for the village.

The Chapel, the plan of which is based on a Greek cross set on a circle, is Mary's acknowledged masterpiece and has earned a Grade I listing. Tiny and terracotta red, it is constructed in local red brick and ornamented with ceramic architectural detail and decoration, much made by the local community. The benches outside, the well head and some headstones are sculpted in clay. There are so many symbols that Mary wrote a key¹ and a further book² followed.

The Gallery, an elegant building completed in 1904, was designed solely to house Watts's work displayed as he instructed. Newly restored, it is filled with his paintings, some of the portraits glowing with bright jewel-like colours. Outside the Gallery is a formal sunken garden with a terracotta statue on a plinth, some clipped topiary and wisteria. Replicas of the Compton Pottery urns are planted with Queen of the Night tulips. There are mixed borders along the Artists' Village (closed at the time of our visit) and it is here that we met the head gardener, Chris Sharples. His background was as a florist, working, among other places, at Harrods and Liberty London. With two assistants and volunteers, he now maintains the site's 18 acres comprised mostly of woodland. Apart from the borders around the Gallery there is little by way of a real garden, even by the house. 'This', says Chris cheerfully, 'is because the garden is at the bottom of the food chain in terms of budget'.

By now our group were a little too leg-sore to tackle the extensive woodland walk, so we enjoyed a spirited account of the wild flora in the carefully tended grass verge, vividly described by Chris's quotes from Shakespeare and Culpeper. In the lower Sculpture Gallery we saw George's massive equestrian statue, *Physical Energy*, rearing up behind the large windows. The model is currently being re-cast in bronze and destined to be placed at the back of Limnerslease.



Watts Sculpture Gallery

Photo: Joan Pateman

The hope is that a garden in keeping will be next on the agenda of what has been a major and brilliant restoration of the site. Surprisingly, there is no information available as yet on how the garden was in George and Mary's day. However, there clearly was one as there are references to it in Mary's diary³ and also to Gertrude Jekyll, a friend and neighbour, of visits to Munstead Wood, and knowledgeable comments and queries about plants. Chris tells us that a rare double sport of *Rosa pimpinellifolia*, which is believed to have been given to Mary by Gertrude Jekyll has now, at the request of the National Trust, been reintroduced at Munstead.

Caroline Foley

¹ *The Word in the Pattern: A Key to the Symbols on the Walls at Compton* by Mary Seton Watts, published by The Society for the Arts and Crafts Movement in Surrey, 2000.

² *Watts Chapel: A Guide to the Symbols of Mary Watts's Arts and Crafts Masterpiece* by Mark Bills, published by Philip Wilson, 2015.

³ *The Diary of Mary Watts 1887–1904* by Mary S. Watts, edited by Desna Greenhow, published by Lund Humphries, 2016.

Two Gardens in Birmingham

BGHG Visit 28 May

On one rather rainy May morning we assembled at Euston Station to make our way to Birmingham. On this occasion we travelled by national rail and local public transport to reach the gardens outside the city centre – Winterbourne House, an Arts and Crafts house and garden, and Birmingham Botanical Gardens.

Winterbourne was the home of John and Margaret Nettlefold. John, part of a successful engineering family involved in the firm GKN (Guest, Keen & Nettlefold), married into the influential Chamberlain family. The garden is the creation of Margaret and was intended to complement the house designed by local architect Joseph Lancaster Ball in 1903. Margaret followed the style of Gertrude Jekyll and to this day there remains the feel of her style of planting.

We were met by the head gardener Dan Cartwright who guided us round from the terrace outside the rear of the house to the walled (former kitchen) garden alongside. The walled garden has a central pond fed from the roofs of nearby outbuildings and a crinkle-crinkle wall on one side. Over the years the growing of produce has given way to flowers.

In time the house passed to new owner John Macdonald Nicholson, a keen gardener who added a scree garden, Japanese features and alpine touches. I loved the Japanese bridge and tea house. He also constructed a pergola (now restored) and glasshouses (mostly replaced) and stocked the garden with whatever new plants could be sourced from abroad. An attractive woodland walk follows the stream past rhododendrons to the magnolia border.

It is thanks to Nicholson that, in 1944, the house and gardens passed to the adjoining University of Birmingham's Department of Botany which ran it as teaching resource and a place for recreation. That led to some further interesting additions to the gardens, such as a north-facing glasshouse for plants gathered in the field by the Birmingham-based British Antarctic Survey (the idea being that the north-facing aspect would keep the interior cooler).

In the last 20 years the gardens have been transformed by a restoration that merited Grade II listing and visitor numbers are now 80,000 a year.

After lunch we headed to Birmingham Botanical Gardens. The gardens were established in 1829 and have remained in independent ownership and on the same site since. We were taken through the grounds by Emily Hazell, the Director of Horticulture. Emily, trained at Kew, was appointed in 2023 and it was exciting to hear her describe her plans for restoring and developing the gardens as we went around.

The design was by John Claudius Loudon and the layout remains very close to his original. The



Bandstand, Botanical Gardens

Photo: Joan Pateman

glasshouses date from the 1850s with later additions but in 1990 were altered by a rebuild. Heights were reduced, a new entrance added and sundry offices attached to accommodate increased conference and event facilities. The current arrangement all feels decidedly 'odd' and I do hope they raise the funds to put things right in the planned restoration. The fanned lawns remain and lead down to a lovely restored Victorian bandstand and the 1850 Coade stone fountain. Later additions were the 1895 alpine garden by Backhouse of York (funded by the Nettlefold family and now listed) and pinetum. I was pleased to see a really good modern Japanese garden to the side of the glasshouse offices. Like many a public garden, they are moving away from annual bedding displays in favour of grasses. The caged birds and animals have gone and their former enclosures will no doubt follow. Open space would then return and with it a closeness to Loudon's ideal.

Both Winterbourne and the Botanical Gardens are well worth a visit and our thanks to both Helena Poldevaart and Sandra Pullen for arranging our trip.

M G Jones

Adwell and Waterperry Gardens

BGHG Visit 19 July

On a hot sunny day we visited two rather different gardens in Oxfordshire. Adwell is peaceful and serene in a beautiful secluded setting. Waterperry by contrast seemed at first sight to be bustling and full of buildings and people, although it was quieter further into the gardens.

At Adwell, our tour with Head Gardener Colin Roberts started at the colourful herbaceous border facing the house. Next was the small parish church of St Mary, tucked into the grounds beside the walled garden, which was packed with flowers in large box-edged beds. The second part of the walled garden beyond the tennis court was a simple grassed space with a large pond and fountain in the middle and a huge wisteria along the back wall. Through the arch, over a hump-backed bridge and we were on the riverside walk. Cleverly designed to progress from a more managed landscape to an increasingly natural one, this took us past some of the eight lakes on the estate. Spots of colour through the woodland were provided by yellow-painted benches and bridges; in the spring the area along the stream would be filled with daffodils. Turning back towards the house we had views across the parkland with its large specimen trees. It was altogether a lovely place.



Riverside Walk, Adwell

Photo: Joan Pateman

We went on to Waterperry Gardens where Horticultural Manager Rob Jacobs gave us an extensive tour and talk about Waterperry's history. The most significant period was from 1932 to 1971 when Miss Beatrix Havergal ran her School of Horticulture for women here and developed the gardens. Rob also had a fund of stories about horticultural history. At the magnificent 200-foot-long herbaceous border he described Miss H's philosophy for designing a border to look good over three seasons using only herbaceous perennials and how her principles are still followed today. When we got to the array of island beds, Rob told us about the nurseryman Alan Bloom's then-innovative idea in the 1960s to plant in island beds rather than in a border along a wall and why island beds were easier to maintain. We saw the 'family' apple tree where 52 varieties of apple are grafted as branches on a single tree. There was much more, such as the quiet Formal Garden with its shady wisteria tunnel, the Mary Rose garden, the Contemporary border planted almost entirely with grasses and the Walled Garden with its national collection of saxifrage.

The gardens are laid out as a series of areas, some enclosed as 'rooms'. There was a great deal to discover and take in and we did not see it all. Waterperry certainly merits a return visit.

Joan Pateman

Restoring Lodge Park, Gloucestershire

Lodge Park, part of the Sherborne Park Estate, lies in east Gloucestershire near Aldsworth. The main building was built in 1634 as a banqueting house and grandstand from which to watch deer coursing but it is the surrounding parkland which is of special interest. It was known that the owner at the time, Sir John Dutton (1684–1743), commissioned the landscape designer Charles Bridgeman (c.1690–1738) to design a highly innovative new park but not much was known about the design. The estate came under the management of the National Trust in 1987 and they embarked on a detailed investigation and restoration of the landscape which is still going on today.

The National Trust started with a site survey of the trees and research into the estate accounts but a breakthrough came with the discovery in 1998 by David Jacques of an early working plan for the new parkland in the Bridgeman Collection at the Bodleian Library. This plan includes both a contemporary site survey and Bridgeman's proposal for a new layout but more research was needed to determine how much of the proposed development had been implemented. The Trust studied aerial photographs, undertook LiDAR scans of the park and commissioned some archaeological investigation to look for the buildings shown on the plan. They also studied a painting of the park in 1747 by George Lambert which gives an idea of the immense scale of Bridgeman's parkland.



Lodge Park, 1747 painting by George Lambert

Photo via Wikimedia Commons

This new research, together with the earlier investigations, indicated that most of Bridgeman's design had been put in place although his buildings and grand serpentine canal were never built. What is most interesting is that the park was neglected and left virtually unchanged in the intervening years, thus retaining the outlines of an almost pure Bridgeman landscape. The Trust launched an ambitious long-term project to restore the park to that shown on the Bridgeman plan. This involved not only planting literally thousands of new trees and shrubs

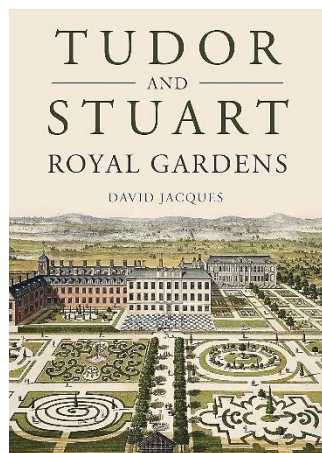
but also removing some trees now seen to be out of place. The curved tree-lined walks along the valley and the woodland blocks on the sides of the Great Avenue have now been restored. The Trust plans to continue to reinstate Bridgeman's design in the western section of the park and to open up the terrace walk.

A description of the project at Lodge Park since 1987 is published in the National Trust's Spring/Summer 2024 Cultural Heritage Magazine, pp 46–55, which can be read on the web by visiting [chm-spring-summer-2024.pdf](https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/cultural-heritage-magazine/2024-spring-summer-2024.pdf) (nt.global.ssl.fastly.net).

Joan Pateman

Book Review

Tudor and Stuart Royal Gardens by David Jacques, Windgather Press,
April 2024



This exhaustive and extraordinarily detailed overview of royal gardens, covering 200 years from the reign of Henry VII until that of the last Stuart monarch, Queen Anne, is much needed and is a welcome addition by David Jacques to his already renowned contribution to the study of garden history. The book is packed with information but so clearly arranged and analysed that it is a joy to read. Jacques has been able to fill in the gaps in our knowledge of Tudor and Stuart gardens thanks to his long career and connections with Historic Royal Palaces which have enabled him to access and share sources of research hitherto unavailable.

Despite the scarcity of actual remains of the gardens mentioned, the reader is able to readily imagine the extent and complexity of their planning by royal patrons and then to appreciate how they were added to and changed according to fashion and royal intentions, ranging from the desire to impress for diplomatic or political purposes, to the provision of spaces for feasting, processions and pageants as well as hunting and hospitality. The many illustrations, some familiar, are helpfully integrated beside the text to which they refer, and many include clear diagrams, drawn by the author himself, so that the reader can easily envisage a lost garden. There are also countless invaluable quotations, from Jacques' research, which give immediacy to the reader's experience, such as that of Bishop Fisher who thought it fitting to include a description of Henry VII's garden at Sheen in his funeral oration for the king in 1509.

The book is arranged chronologically. Various inaccuracies have been corrected as to when and where 'knots', 'labyrinths', 'galleries' or 'banqueting houses' were really first introduced and precisely how they came about, such as through the impact of French royal examples inspired by the invasion of Naples by Charles VIII and the introduction of Italian influences into the gardens of the Loire.

The differences between the monarchs and their ideas are well explained. Elizabeth I, for example, had a conservative approach and was reluctant to spend, preferring to rebuild or simply consolidate with her own heraldic devices or the addition of gates, bridges or arbours to enhance her walks through St. James's Park. A small but valuable detail is the importance of growing rosemary for spreading upon mud floors and the way in which this was replaced by the growing and distilling of musk roses to create 'sweet water'.

The development and choice of garden ornaments from highly complex sundials, such as that by the astronomer Nicholas Kratzer for Henry VIII, to the gradual introduction of figure sculpture, is another interesting theme. The brief reigns of Edward VI, Mary I and the Interregnum are not ignored. What happened during the Interregnum is most fascinating and there is a clear explanation of what was destroyed and what escaped destruction and why.

The continuing influences of 17th-century France and the gardens of Louis XIV and the Dutch impact upon British royal gardens under William and Mary are described. Even the later royal gardens acting as an enhancement of royal power receive further outstanding and detailed analysis in this most readable but scholarly book.

Clare Ford-Wille

News

Marble Hill House and Pope's Grotto – Advance Notice

We have been able to arrange a repeat of last year's successful Study Visit to Marble Hill House and Garden, and Pope's Grotto in Twickenham on **Wednesday 23 October** this year. Both Michael Symes and Chris Sumner will join us as before and the schedule for the day will be similar to last year. We will meet at Marble Hill Coach House café at 10.30 for a brief introductory talk by Michael Symes and then split into two groups for alternating tours of the house and garden. After lunch at Marble Hill café, we will take a public bus to Radnor House School to have a tour of Pope's Grotto. There should be an opportunity to see the adjacent Radnor Gardens and views over the Thames as well.

Members who were on the waiting list for last year's visit will be given an opportunity for advance booking after which the usual flyer and booking form will be sent to all members in early September with more details of the travel arrangements and timetable.

RHS Lindley Library *Discovery Morning*

The RHS Lindley Library is putting on an interesting session aimed at exploring gardening through time as revealed by the collections held in the Library. The session will start in the 17th century and delve into an array of rare books, archives and artworks to bring to light people, plants and places that shaped gardening over 400 years. The *Discovery Morning* will be held in the RHS headquarters, Vincent Square, London SW1P 2PE on Monday 4 November from 10 am to 1.30 pm and is open to all. But book soon – the first running of this event sold out very quickly. Booking is via the web link Eventbrite *New* RHS Lindley Library Discovery Morning Tickets, Mon, Nov 4, 2024 at 10:00 AM | Eventbrite

Good News from Benton End

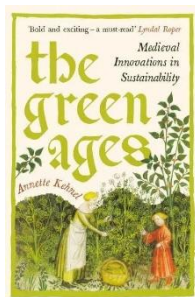
We have all been following the story of Benton End in Hadleigh, Suffolk, the home of artist and gardener Cedric Morris (1889–1982) and his partner, and artist, Arthur Lett-Haine (1994–1978). Benton End was also the home of the East Anglian School of Painting and Drawing, run by Morris and Lett-Haine. In 2021 Benton End was majority gifted to the Garden Museum who developed a visionary project to revive the house as a centre for artistic and horticultural study and to restore the garden. The Museum planned to apply for National Heritage Lottery funding and they have just announced that their Expression of Interest, the first stage of the application, was approved by the Fund in June, a major step forward.

Meanwhile work has started on the revival of the garden, which is an independent project. James Horner was appointed as Head Gardener in early 2023 and Benton End hope to be able to open the garden to the public regularly in 2026. They are rebuilding the collection of bearded irises bred by Cedric Morris, with the help of Sarah Cook, retired Head Gardener at Sissinghurst, who has made it her retirement project since 2004 to locate as many varieties worldwide as she can. From 2023, the house and garden have been opening by special arrangement for some community events and for some special interest groups to view the work in progress in the house and garden.

To keep in touch with the latest news, Benton End produce an occasional newsletter to which you can subscribe and the Garden Museum feature articles in their news pages. The latest Garden Museum news article, with many photographs of the garden, is an account of the recent restoration work on the garden by the horticultural trainee Jonathan Zerr; follow the link Jonathan Zerr: My time at Benton End - Garden Museum

New Book

***The Green Ages: Medieval Innovations in Sustainability* by Annette Kehnel, Profile Books, August 2024**



Fishing quotas on Lake Constance, common lands in the UK, the medieval answer to second-hand clothing shops in the middle of Frankfurt, these are all just some of the sustainability initiatives from the Middle Ages that Annette Kehnel illuminates in her astounding new book, *The Green Ages*, translated by Gesche Ipsen. From the mythical-sounding City of Ladies and their garden economy to early microcredit banks and rent-a-cow schemes, Kehnel uncovers a world at odds with what we might think of as the typical medieval existence. Pre-modern history is full of inspiring examples and concepts that open up new horizons. This book, imaginative and vividly written, is a fascinating look at the medieval precedents for modern sustainable living.

The Gardens Trust Lecture Series Online

The Gardens Trust are running three lecture series online weekly beginning in August. The first is a rerun of the series they did in Spring 2024 on *A History of Gardens 1* using the recordings of those lectures starting with *Elizabethan Gardens* on Friday 9 August. Subsequent talks will discuss the magnificent gardens of ancient Egypt, Persia, Greece and Rome; the splendours of Islamic gardens and Italian Renaissance gardens; and finally the quiet beauty of the medieval garden.

The second is *A History of Garden 2*, a five-part series from Tuesday 10 September on 17th-century gardens including talks on botanical art of the period, gardens of the mid 17th century, and baroque gardens both in France and England. The third series of five lectures is on *Gardens and the Written Word* starting on Wednesday 2 October with *Plants and Gardens in Shakespeare* and ending with *Marcel Proust and Gardens of la Belle Époque*. For full details and listings of other GT events, see <https://thegardenstrust.org/gt-events/>

NIHGT 30th Annual Conference

The Northern Ireland Heritage Gardens Trust are holding their annual conference from Thursday 3 October to Saturday 5 October in Woodenbridge, Vale of Avoca, County Wicklow, Ireland on the theme of *The Role of Water in Historic Garden Design and Management*. There will be eight papers over the three days on a range of topics and periods from classical times to the 21st century. Two site visits to Mount Usher Gardens and to Kiltruddery in Bray are included. Further details and booking instructions can be found at NIHGT 30th Annual Conference | Northern Ireland Heritage Gardens Trust

Events

BGHG Programme 2024

14 August	Waddesdon Manor and Eythrope Gardens, Buckinghamshire
18 September	Swiss Garden, Bedfordshire and St Paul's Walden Bury, Herts
23 October	Marble Hill Study Visit, repeat of last year's visit
November	Winter Lecture

RHS Wisley Exhibition

To 25 August 10.00 am–4.30 pm *William Robinson – The Wild Gardener*. Old Laboratory, Wisley Lane, Woking, Surrey GU23 6QB, Tel: 01483 224234, <https://www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/wisley/viewevent?EFID=3734&ESRC=CMS>, Email: wisley@rhs.org.uk

Painshill

To 8 September 10.00 am–4.00 pm *The William Gilpin Trail*. Gilpin's sketches in situ in the landscape. Cobham, Surrey KT11 1JE, Tel: 01932 868113, <https://www.painshill.co.uk/events/the-william-gilpin-trail/>

Linnean Society Lecture Online

Tuesday 10 September 2.00–3.00 pm *The "Curious" Life of Elizabeth Blackwell*, Will Beharrell. Tel: 0207 434 4479, Email: info@linnean.org, Web: The Linnean Society - VeryConnect

Georgian Group Lectures

All lectures Tuesdays 6.30–7.30 pm

10 September Online *Eleanor Coade's London*, Caroline Stanford. <https://georgiangroup.org.uk/event-directory/online-lecture-eleanor-coades-london/>

29 October In-person *The Greening Family*, Val Bott. <https://georgiangroup.org.uk/event-directory/the-greening-family/>

12 November Online *The early topography and buildings of London Zoo*, Oliver Flory. <https://georgiangroup.org.uk/event-directory/online-lecture-the-early-topography-and-buildings-of-london-zoo/>. 6 Fitzroy Square, London W1T 5DX, Email: office@georgiangroup.org.uk, Tel: 0207 529 8920

Garden Historians Course In-person and Online

Thursdays 3 October–5 December 1.00–2.30 pm *A History of English Gardens from the Tudors to the Stuarts*. Burgh House, New End Square, London NW3 1LT, Repeated as an Online course 6.00–7.30 pm. <https://www.thegardenhistorians.co.uk/online-courses>.

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Assistant Editor: Sheila Poole

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Cambridge University Botanic Garden Course Fridays 20 September–22 November 10.00 am–

1.00 pm In-person *Painters in their places: exploring the interplay between gardens and art*, three lectures with Twigs Way. 1 Brookside, Cambridge CB2 1JE.

Wednesday 16 October 10.00 am–1.00 pm

Online *Lancelot Brown: Reassessing the 'Capabilities'*, Laura Mayer.

Email: enquiries@botanic.cam.ac.uk, Tel: 01223 336265, Web: Courses Archive - Cambridge University Botanic Garden

Institute of Historical Research Seminars

Autumn Term 2024 In-person or Online

Thursday 26 September 6.00 pm In-Person

Gardens in the Nineteenth-century Historical Novel, Brent Elliott. Wolfson Room (NB01), Senate House, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU.

Theme for the year: *An Open Book: Gardens in Literature and Letters*. Full programme on <https://www.history.ac.uk/seminar/history-gardens-and-designed-landscapes> later in August. Enquiries: gardenhistory.ihr@gmail.com.

Cardiff University Course Online

Wednesdays 2 October–4 December 10.00 am–12.00 pm *The Artist Gardener: Bohemian*

Communities, Gardens and Culture, Stephen Parker. Email: learn@cardiff.ac.uk, Tel: 029 2087 0000, <https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/part-time-courses-for-adults/courses/>

London Parks & Gardens Winter Lecture Series In-person and Online

Mondays from 14 October 6.00 pm

<https://londongardenstrust.org/winter-lecture-series/>, Email: office@londongardenstrust.org

Gardens Trust Lectures

Friday 25 October 7.00 pm In-person *The Making of Charlton House Gardens 1607–1925*, Stella Butler. 77 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EL.

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/onsite-london-talk-the-making-of-charlton-house-gardens-1607-1925-tickets-922958643147>,

Email: enquiries@thegardenstrust.org

The three series of online lectures are outlined in the News section on the previous page.

Garden Museum Exhibition

23 October–2 March 2025 *Lost Gardens of London*. 5 Lambeth Palace Road, London SE1 7LB, <https://gardenmuseum.org.uk/exhibitions/lost-gardens-of-london/>, Tel: 0207 401 8865.

Oxford Gardens Trust Lecture Online

Thursday 21 November 6.00–7.30 pm *Threats to Historic Landscapes*, Margie Hoffnung.

<https://ogtevents.eventcube.io/events/56037/threats-to-historic-landscapes>. Email: events@ogt.org.uk