

Birkbeck Garden History Group Newsletter



Summer 2017 No 46

Stonor Park and The Manor House

BGHG Visit 26 April

We arrived at Stonor Park, Oxfordshire, after negotiating some delightful country lanes and swept into the park past the late 18th century Richard Gillow lodges and up the new drive laid in 1760. The Stonor family has lived here for 850 years and Lady Ailsa, clutching a lengthy plant list for aficionados, joined our guide, Karen Townsend, to show us around. The oldest building in the park is the 13th century Chapel, constructed in knapped flint and now joined to the house, itself all mellow Tudor brick with Georgian windows. In front of the Chapel is a recreated circle formed of prehistoric Sarsen stones. These eroded remnants of rock, which once covered the chalk hillside, reference the ritual circle originally standing on the site of the Chapel.

A short incline led us to a door behind the house and into what felt like a secret garden, the first of three. This was the Italianate (Pleasure) Garden, featuring two rectangular lily ponds on the site of greenhouses and, in the middle of the lawn, a modern armillary sphere. A series of steps led the eye and foot intriguingly uphill to ... a wrought iron gate and a field. The garden historian in me wondered what might once have lain behind the gate at the end of those enticing steps, but no-one knew. In this garden, the steep slope was cut into terraces with a broad border running along the top terrace and beyond into the Old Kitchen Garden next door. The Kitchen Garden was planted with summer shrubs grouped in six beds and led into the arboretum, a spring fantasy of fresh leaves and wild primroses.

Stonor Park was once heavily wooded but is now rolling parkland and sits wonderfully in this Chilterns valley. The family is Catholic and the estate has been through hard financial times as a result, but gained a new lease of life when the current Lord Camoys took over in the late 1970s.

After lunch, and with the weather still dry, we drove a few miles to The Manor House, Bledlow in Buckinghamshire. The 17th century house has been owned (but not always inhabited by) the Carrington family since the 18th century and in 1945 the current Lord Carrington moved in. At 98 he remains in residence and it's thanks to him, Lady Carrington and their garden designer Robert Adams that we have the gardens we see today. Two full-time gardeners maintain



Stonor Park

delightfully varied garden rooms (more like garden mansions actually). There was a large kitchen garden, with green houses, and an orchard. Next the snail garden, so called due to Lady C's hearty dislike of snails, had been translated into a huge snail sculpture in her memory. Behind the house a lawn and fishpond, led to what for me were the twin highlights.

Firstly there was the Lyde Garden which is a wild-ish garden created from three watercress beds in a dip between the church and its graveyard. Open to the public at all times, the only sound to be heard is the twittering of the birds and the wind in the trees; even the hailstones (that sun was never going to last) fell to earth mixed with petals in a cascade of loveliness. Hurrying on as time was now short, into the arboretum and sculpture garden. This is outdoor sculpture as it should be displayed and how bold to support modern sculptors. No need to love them all, but fascinating.

Helena Poldervaart

Bowood House and Corsham Court, Wiltshire

BGHG Visit 16 May

Bowood Park, famed for its 'Capability' Brown landscape, was purchased by the 1st Earl of Shelburne in 1754 and remains in the same family (now Lansdowne) today. The house was originally the orangery (by Robert Adam) of the Big House, demolished in 1955. The current main house has undergone many changes over the years. Our tour, led by Mandy Gibson, began on the terrace outside. The terrace was on two levels, the higher a simple parterre of box hedging and alliums, the lower guarded by two strange looking lions. Beyond was a ha-ha and then the wonderful stretch of Brown rolling landscape and lake.

Behind the house were the private gardens of the family, all surrounded by enormously tall old brick walls, the bricks probably made in the garden. The four-acre walled garden was divided into quadrants: a swimming pool with modern gazebo, a cutting garden for flowers for the house, a vegetable garden and ornamental areas. The large productive part of the garden included three greenhouses, two with vines. The vegetables and flowers were grown both for the house and the hotel on the estate.

Outside the private gardens we walked across a pasture, through trees to the head of the Brown lake. Here Michael Symes showed us the hermit's cave, lined with ammonite fossils, the amazingly naturalistic cascade and a large amount of rockwork. Known as the rococo valley, it was all designed by the Hon. Charles Hamilton (1704-1786) of Painshill and made a very impressive display. See also Michael Symes' article, 'Charles Hamilton at Bowood', in the *Garden History Journal*, Winter 2006.

After lunch we continued on to Corsham Court, an Elizabethan house which has been in the Methuen family since the middle of the 18th century. By this time it was raining heavily so the present owner, James Methuen-Campbell, welcomed us in the enormous stone porch and explained the special features in the garden. There were 'Capability' Brown landscapes to the east and the flower garden nearest to the house was laid out by Lady Jane Methuen in the early 19th century. He told us about the bathhouse constructed by Brown in the Gothic style and later altered by Nash, the planting of many specimen trees, and the remarkable yew hedges clipped in the cloud style.

We walked around the garden in the rain and the dampness seemed to make the wild flowers in the long grass greener and fresher. We saw the enormous Oriental plane, an immense ginkgo and a paulownia in flower. Altogether a magical garden.



Diana Wright

Sezincote and Upton Wold, Gloucestershire

BGHG Visit 6 June

Statues of Indian Brahmin bulls, originally in Coade stone, line the bridge welcoming the visitor to the front of Sezincote, an 18th century house in the Cotswolds. Built for a wealthy merchant on his return from India, it was visited in 1807 by the Prince of Wales and may have influenced his choice of architectural style for the Brighton Pavilion. Minarets, doorways, peacock-tail windows all feature here in Moghul styles of Rajasthan. Repton, may have designed the garden below the Orangery, and although there is no 'Red Book' for Sezincote, he certainly visited, and some of his sketches are extant. This garden, with canals and Irish yews, is today an Indian-style Paradise Garden, which was inspired by Lady Kleinwort's visit to India in the 1960s. She and her husband restored the gardens following war-time neglect with advice from Graham Stuart Thomas. On the hillside to the north of the house, is a small temple to Surya, the sun god. Here a spring feeds a series of descending pools each with Indian architectural elements, including a pool with a snake coiled round a dead tree to form a fountain. Richly planted with moisture-loving plants, the stream enters the river Evenlode from the Island Pool. Noble trees frame the views including a magnificent specimen of *Carpinus pendula* (weeping hornbeam).

The resident red-legged partridge greeted us at Upton Wold, as did the owners Ian and Caroline Bond. From 1973 they have created the garden at Upton Wold surrounding a 17th century house with sweeping views across the valley from the terrace at the rear. Tall yew hedges framing the lawn conceal an herbaceous border to the left, with a rill, and to the right a woodland garden, with trilliums and fine magnolias. This leads to two formal potagers, one planted in white, the other in red and black. They are separated by a pleached lime *allée* recalling the nearby garden at Hidcote, which Caroline greatly admires. Imposing wrought iron gates lead into a daisy meadow, with slipper orchids and on to 'Juglans'. Ian's life-long passion has been walnut trees and he holds the National Collection. Leaving the walnut glade, one enters a field where Hal Moggridge has created a Labyrinth, providing a link to a nearby medieval village.

Nearer the house is a canal garden with weeping mulberry trees, a swimming pool and vegetable gardens. This modern interpretation of the traditional is a real delight.

Elizabeth Griffiths

Barbican and Nomura Bank Gardens

BGHG Visit 29 June

Good fortune, and dry warm weather, followed us throughout the day of our visit to London city landscapes. We began our visit at the Barbican with our superb guide, Francis Pugh, himself a resident of the Barbican.

The Barbican Estate is a listed Grade 2 residential estate with about 4,000 residents in over 2,000 apartments of varying styles and sizes designed by Chamberlain, Powell and Bon in 1956 and completed with the

opening of the Barbican Arts Centre in 1982. The landscape itself is listed Grade 2 *. The area was originally commercial and almost entirely flattened by incendiary bombs in December 1940. The architecture of the estate is in the style known as Brutalist (Pevsner called it 'wild and wilful') and reflects the original use of the land. The planting is therefore important to mitigate city life and bring a feeling of tranquillity and peace for residents and visitors alike. Water is a central component - long straight canals, now softened by water lilies and rushes, and the sound of fountains and a cascade distances the noise of the busy city. The encouragement of wild life has also become an important element and a northern area of the estate is a wild life garden maintained by the residents.

There were many elements of past architectural and garden design apparent throughout the estate especially in the remains of the medieval City walls, the church of St Giles Cripplegate and allusions to London's private squares. The Italianate can be spotted in the formal canals, long vistas, changes in level and use of huge columns, while the English Landscape Movement is apparent in the unexpected framed views and in the recent changes in Beech Gardens – serpentine raised beds planted by Nigel Dunnett for year round colour and maintained by the residents. These new beds replaced the previous traditionally planted formal rectangles and on our visit were planted in a delightfully informal vibrant prairie style.

The afternoon visit was to the Japanese Investment Bank Nomura that was only completed in 2010. It is created from three linked buildings forming multiple roofs; the highest has a green sedum roof and beehives. The roof on the sixth floor has the largest garden (the size of eight tennis courts) but it is the stunning unobstructed views that immediately grab your attention - downstream to the Shard and Tower Bridge and upstream past Tate Modern and on to One Blackfriars. The layout of the space is formal – long narrow rills, clipped box hedges, raised rectangular flowerbeds and lawns. But perhaps it is the unexpected inclusion of a very productive kitchen garden that attracted much of the attention of our group. This is almost the size of a standard allotment and is planned and cultivated with an array of vegetables by three very keen switchboard operators in their lunch hours. Wild life is again important in these gardens and a beautiful wild flower bed attracts pollinators.

These were two very different sites and made a very enjoyable and interesting day, with at times an element of surprise.

Jan Clark

Otley and Helmingham Halls

BGHG Visit 12 July

Our first destination was Otley Hall near Ipswich. Otley is unusual; a mix of traditional lawns and borders next to both medieval-like and wild gardens. Our guide, Head Gardener Simon Nickson, started the tour with the older-looking parts.

The remains of an ancient orchard now has a large grass labyrinth on one side. The H-shaped canal leads to an untamed herber, planted with old medicinal and strewing herbs. The wild meadow edge round the canal has grown two feet tall, and is full of wild flowers. We passed the mount, and went round a corner to the vine tunnel, with lovely underplanting on each side. Both the mount and tunnel were features added by Sybil Landsberg as part of the 1998 reconstruction of a medieval garden. We threaded between high hedges to the sunny knot garden and then out into the formal part with croquet lawn, summer houses and floral borders - quite a difference. Beyond the lovely medieval house, the moat walk took us through trees and shrubs past the large, much-pollarded maple, reckoned to be 400 years old. There was an enchanted, tangled feel to the whole place somehow, as though we had wandered into a landscape in a fairy tale.

Helmingham Hall was quite a contrast. Set in parkland the large house, surrounded by its moat, dominated the landscape. Even the gardens were of stately proportions. The two-acre walled garden was also



Spiral of wild flowers at Helmingham Hall

surrounded by its own moat. It was approached through a box-edged parterre surrounded on three sides by roses. Entering the walled garden, you were faced with a 120-metre path with herbaceous borders on both sides. The garden was divided into eight sections, separated by grassy paths, and arching ironwork tunnels planted with roses, sweet peas and even hanging gourds. There was so much variety and imagination at every turn. While there was a vegetable and an herb garden, there was also a whimsical box topiary section. One deep border against the wall was separated by yew buttresses with different colour-themed beds planted in between. Another section simply contained a meadow of wild flowers, not in a border but planted in the grass as a large spiral you could walk through. Outside the wall on one end was the late summer border. Shaded by the trees of the woodland, it was planted with pink, silver and white flowers which caught the light. And there was still more to see: apple walk, spring border, wild garden, and more. To the east of the house across the moat was an intricate knot garden, filled with plants introduced into Britain before 1850, and yet more roses beyond.

A mere description cannot do justice to this splendid place; it was a delight to have seen it. In fact in their different ways, both Helmingham and Otley were quite special and made a memorable day.

Joan Pateman

Gardens in Seend

It was worth being in the Wiltshire village of Seend (between Trowbridge and Devizes) in June for Open Gardens Weekend. Strung along the high street, ten gardens ranging from cottage gardens to walled gardens were on display, some having fine views over the Wiltshire countryside. There was even tea and cake in the pavilion on the village playing field. The highlight had to be the garden of the Manor House – a large walled garden divided into four quadrants representing places which have been important in the owners' lives: England, Africa, Italy and China. The England quadrant included a *cottage orné* and had a rose garden: gazebo, obelisk, arches and arbours were all festooned with 20 varieties of rose which were complemented by six varieties of peony. Africa was represented by a sphinx pond surrounded by *Trachycarpus fortunei* palms leading to a sub-Saharan area planted with Spanish reed (*Arundo donax*) and bananas (*Musa basjoo*) around a mud hut. The formal Italian garden included a loggia within which was a barrel fountain modelled on the one at the Villa Cisterna. However the real gem was the Chinese garden centred on a pavilion of 'Past Joys and Present Happiness' designed by a master craftsman in Hangzhou. This was surrounded by 'cracked ice' paving edged by stone hitching posts topped by Foo dogs. The planting included bamboo, acers, peonies and dwarf prunus set with large natural rocks typical of a Chinese scholar-gentleman's garden. Stunning!

Elaine Bimpson

In Memory

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Diana Renard, BGHG Membership Secretary. Diana died on 17 June 2017, after a courageous battle against cancer.

Diana was a longstanding member of the BGHG and had a great interest, and knowledge, in garden history. She took the Birkbeck Certificate in Garden History course, starting in 1999. Diana joined the BGHG committee in 2014, soon becoming our Membership Secretary. She was always willing to take on new challenges; it was on her initiative that we launched our two day trip to Wales in 2016. Diana organised several trips for the group and managed the March Study Days for two years. We have lost a loyal colleague and a great friend and she will be sorely missed.

News

BGHG Fifteenth Anniversary

Our fifteenth anniversary was celebrated on 11 July with the unveiling of a plaque outside Birkbeck College, followed by a reception held in Senate House, University of London. The plaque is under the *Davidia involucrata* tree we planted in March and commemorates the teaching of garden history from 1995 – 2011 at Birkbeck. The tree and its plaque are planted in the border on the east side of Torrington Square, near the Senate House end.

Michael Symes, BGHG Honorary President, gave a speech at the unveiling, recalling the founding of the group in 2002 and its subsequent growth. At the reception afterwards, a slide show, prepared by Barbara Deason, was shown of pictures of the group on various outings, and in variable weather. Everyone enjoyed the evening and the opportunity to meet with old friends.

Plea from the Treasurer

Do please pay for activities by BACS, not cheque.

Picture the scenario. You're in the queue at the bank; the queue is steadily moving forward. Suddenly you realise it hasn't moved for some time. What's the problem? You look closer. Aha! It's that woman from the garden history group. What IS she doing? The queue behind you is growing longer by the minute. It seems she is paying in a rather large number of cheques, around 70 or 80 cheques in fact, and the cashier has to feed each cheque through a machine by hand. No wonder it's taking so long.....

While we understand that some members do not do their banking online, if you do use internet banking it would be greatly appreciated if you would make payments by BACS whenever possible as it saves a lot of time for everyone concerned.

Westonbirt Estate Award

The BGHG visited Westonbirt Gardens in July 2016. At that time there were signs that the gardens, particularly the stonework, were in need of repair and restoration. The exciting news is that the Westonbirt Estate was awarded National Lottery funding in June 2017 to support the refurbishment and restoration of these important historical gardens. According to the Holfords of Westonbirt Trust's press release, the restoration project 'will see the conservation and repair of the Italian Garden East Pavilion and Garden Wall, the refurbishment and return to use of the surviving 19th century greenhouses, the restoration of the lake, the renewal of the water supply system to enable the historic fountains to operate once again and the construction of additional pathways to enable better access around the site.' At this stage the Heritage Lottery Fund have endorsed Westonbirt's outline proposals and have already earmarked considerable additional funds, to be awarded following approval of the detailed plans.

Events

BGHG Programme 2017

- 11 September** Heale Gardens and Wilton House, Wiltshire
19-21 September Yorkshire Gardens trip
10 October Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, London and Lea Valley
22 November Annual Lecture – Cherrill Sands on Painshill

The BGHG programme for 2018 will be listed in the next newsletter

The Garden Historians Courses

21 September – 23 November 1.30 – 3.30 pm
Introduction to Italian Renaissance Gardens
21 September – 23 November 10.30 am – 12.30 pm
Italian Renaissance Gardens Burgh House, New End Square, London NW3 9LT, Email: info@thegardenhistorians.co.uk, www.thegardenhistorians.co.uk

Garden History Grapevine Courses

Thursday 12 October 10.00 am – 4.30 pm
Introduction to Garden History in Ten Objects.
Audley End House, Saffron Walden CB11 4JF, https://audleyend.eventbrite.co.uk
Tuesdays 9 January – 20 March 2018 10.30 am – 1.00 pm *Repton in Context.* Institute of Historical Research, Senate House (North Block), Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU, www.eventbrite.co.uk

Cambridge Botanic Garden Lectures

Friday 13 October 10.00 am – 1.00 pm Twigs Way
Shakespeare and Gardens. 1 Brookside, Cambridge CB2 1JE, Tel: 01223 331875, www.botanic.cam.ac.uk

Institute of Historical Research Seminars

Thursday 5 October Speaker and lecture to be confirmed. See website.
Thursday 19 October Clare de Carle *Maud Grieve, early 20th century herbalist.*
Thursday 2 November Terry Gough *Queen Mary's Exotics.* Three more lectures in the term are listed on the web page. All lectures take place from 6.00 pm in the Wolfson Room North Block Senate House, University of London, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU. Email: ihrgardenhistory@gmail.com, http://www.history.ac.uk/events/seminar/history-gardens-landscapes

South London Botanical Institute Lectures

Saturday 21 October Letta Jones *Jane Loudon.*
Saturday 11 November Letta Jones *Vita Sackville-West.* 323 Norwood Road, London SE24 9AQ, Tel: 020 8674 5787, Email: info@slbi.org.uk, www.slbi.org.uk

Oxford University Department for Continuing Education Courses

Tuesdays 3 October – 5 December Caroline Dalton
Introduction to Garden History: from Nineveh to Munstead Wood.

Wednesdays 18 April – 20 June 2018 David Boswell
Garden History and Design in Italy and the Cote d'Azur. Ewert Place, Oxford OX2 7DD, Tel: 01865 280892, Email: ppweekly@conted.ox.ac.uk, www.conted.ox.ac.uk.

London Parks & Gardens Trust Winter Lectures

Monday 9 October Linden Groves *Playgrounds and Beyond: How Children have Played their Way through the History of London's Parks and Gardens.*
Monday 13 November Sara Tenneson, Ed Ikin and Stephen Smith *Knighton Wood, Epping Forest: Questions of Conservation.*
Monday 11 December Margaret Willes *Parsley and Parmesan: the Gardening Experiences of John Evelyn and Samuel Pepys.* Three more lectures in 2018 are listed on the web site. All lectures are from 6.30 – 8.00 pm in the Gallery, 77 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EL, www.londongardenstrust.org, Email: office@londongardenstrust.org.

Oxfordshire Gardens Trust Lectures

Thursday 26 October Rob Jacobs *Beatrix Havergal and Waterperry, their story and legacy.*
Thursday 16 November Val Bott *Discovering West London Nursery Gardeners 1650-1850.* Both lectures start at 7.00 pm. Kellogg College, 62 Banbury Road, Oxford. Email: eatonsarah@hotmail.com, www.ogt.org.uk

Chelsea Physic Garden Supper Talk

Thursday 2 November 6.00 – 8.15 pm Jekka McVicar *Grandma's Herbal Remedies, Fact and Fiction.* 66 Royal Hospital Road, London SW3 4HS, www.chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk

City Lit

Thursday 9 November 10.30 am – 4.30 pm Letta Jones *City of London gardens: their history and botany.*
10 January – 14 March 2018 10.15 am – 12.15 pm
18th century garden history: Arcadia and the 18th century garden. Further information Tel: 020 7492 2652, Email: humanities@citylit.ac.uk, Enrolment Tel: 020 7831 7831, www.citylit.ac.uk.

Cambridge University I. of Continuing Education

29 June – 1 July 2018 Caroline Holmes *The 200th anniversary of landscape designer Humphry Repton.* Madingley Hall, Madingley, Cambridge CB23 8AQ, Enquiries Tel: 01223 746237, www.ice.cam.ac.uk, Email: ice.admissions@ice.cam.ac.uk.

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