

# Birkbeck Garden History Group Newsletter



Autumn/Winter 2017 No 47

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## Grimsthorpe Castle

*BGHG Visit 8 August*

A notice saying 'Welcome to Birkbeck Gardeners' greeted us at the entrance to the long drive up to Grimsthorpe Castle in Lincolnshire.

Grimsthorpe Castle, situated in a commanding position overlooking the fens, was granted permission to crenelate in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and the battlemented lookout tower still stands in the south-east corner of the extensive series of additions. According to the guide book 'The contrast between Vanbrugh's lofty entrance front and the venerable huddle of buildings behind encapsulates the architectural history of Grimsthorpe, the complexity of which is rivalled only by the dynastic ramifications of the family who created it'.

But we had come because of the gardens. Jim Handley, head gardener, met us at the lofty Vanbrugh front, leading us past the west lawn with its view of the lake (not designed by Brown) and the scalloped yew hedges giving splendid vignette views of the park to the herbaceous border. In August it was somewhat past its best, but the planting was themed in white and yellow with excellent Californian tree peonies.



*View from Grimsthorpe Castle*

Then to the gentler Elizabethan south front with a central courtyard surrounded by lawns and trees including a large purple beech allegedly planted by Queen Victoria, whitebeam and a weeping pear. A huge magnolia clung to the house, together with *Clematis montana* and a banksia rose. Beyond lay the topiary garden, now due for its annual cut. Many of the 80 pieces date back to at least the Edwardian era, with new shapes being developed all the time.

Past the path to the church planted with spring bulbs to the ornamental kitchen garden – reduced from seven acres in the Edwardian period – with quince and medlar trees trimmed into very satisfactory domes and a wild flower meadow which Jim told us had attracted many birds. There were splendid globe artichokes.

Finally we were shown the rose parterre at the front of the east wing which was planted in the 1920s and beginning to show its age, with the surrounding box hedges also rather unhappy. Jim was hoping to rest the garden from roses for a time, but this was obviously a difficult decision for the management/owners to make.

After lunch we set off in our bus for the Park, guided by Ray Biggs, estate manager. We drove past the Vista, with wheat waiting to be harvested, and the Jacobean stew ponds drained into the Great Water visited by Brown in the 1770s. We passed over the site of the 1147 Cistercian monastery, no trace of which remains as all the limestone was robbed to build the castle. The unimproved limestone grassland contains over a 100 species of rare wildflowers including – and we stopped the bus – the rare cluster bell flower which we saw! The park has 3000 veteran trees and is a Site of Special Scientific Interest. After the park visit, we had a brisk tour of the house, and a long drive home.... Quite a remarkable day.

**Jane Gross**

## Heale House and Wilton House

*BGHG Visit 11 September*

In between sunny spells and showers, we were shown round Heale Garden by Michael Maltby, head gardener. He was very informative, telling us of the history of the house, which was bought by Louis Greville in 1894. Harold Peto was employed to design the formal gardens and the architect Detmar Blow to work on the house. We were fortunate to be able to see the photographs of Peto's drawings for the garden, kept in the house. The Japanese garden, with its red lacquered bridge and wooden teahouse, was based on Greville's time in Tokyo at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Michael recommended visiting in the spring to see the wisteria, and the spring bulb meadow at the entrance of the house. The Tunnel Garden was a highlight, with its long pergola and fruit tree tunnels in the centre. This garden is both productive and ornamental with underplanting and perimeter borders. At this point, there was much discussion, tips and talk about planting, pruning, box blight, and the no-dig policy.

The house dates from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and has been very sympathetically restored. During the restoration, a German carriage clock was found in the roof, and a tunnel from the cellar into the garden for moving the coal for heating the house. The two large *Magnolia grandiflora* framing the doorway are splendid. To the east of the house, facing the river, is the Peto-designed terrace with stone seats and hedges.

We went on to Wilton House, also in Wiltshire, for our second visit, led by Ros Liddington, a most knowledgeable and enthusiastic guide. She showed us artefacts taken from some of the sites we would visit – a terracotta head from the boat house, and a banister from a long-gone staircase made to measure for Charles I.

The gardens of the Palladian-style house were, like the south facade, designed by Isaac de Caus. This facade would have been twice as wide as it is, but the wing was destroyed by fire. The gardens (which were completed) would have matched the width of the house, in the French style with grottoes and water features. The present water feature marks the line of the inner parterres. In response to the Landscape Movement these were replaced with turf. What is left is a simple public garden with statuary and fountains, clumps and single specimen trees, including Cedars of Lebanon. Richard Westmacott designed the Italian garden with terrace and parterres in the 1820s. The modern fountain set in pleached limes was designed by David Vicary in 1971.

We were taken into the working gardens, not normally open to the public. Here came the wool from sheep for carpet-making and the milk to the Daye or dairy house. The Daye house, now private, was attached to the dairy, once lined with blue and white tiles. The Countess Catherine opened the wall to allow carts to carry the milk out of the estate. We were shown the Old School House, where daughters of estate staff were taught; the surprise was that the back of the house is faced with stones taken from the grotto in the de Caus gardens. They are very finely carved and pierced and look like heavy guipure lace.

We followed the river past the boat house and the tour finished off by crossing back into the gardens via the Palladian Bridge, much admired at the time of its building in 1736-7.

**Tricia Gwynn-Jones**

## Yorkshire Gardens

*BGHG Trip 19-21 September*

This was an extremely interesting and well-planned tour of Yorkshire gardens. Most of the gardens we visited were owner-designed and created during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and as such show variations on the Arts and Crafts or new Georgian style.

Our first visit on Tuesday was to Scampston Hall, situated between York and Scarborough. The landscaped park with its Palladian bridge dates back to ‘Capability’ Brown. However our main focus was the former Kitchen or Walled Garden, four acres in size and re-designed by Piet Oudolf in 1999. A walk along a maze-like allée of hedges and pleached hornbeams, planted with the owners’ personal choice of trees, shrubs and plants, brings visitors to an area comprising two waves of the ornamental grass, *Molinia caerulea* ‘Poul Petersen’ running either side of the grass lawn. The remaining ‘rooms’ are planted in Oudolf’s signature style of ornamental grasses and herbaceous plants, which continue to provide interest until the following spring.

The morning visits on Wednesday were to two gardens formerly in the ownership of Dunscombe Hall.



*Rievaulx Abbey from the Terrace*

Helmsley Walled Garden, the former five-acre kitchen garden, was rescued and restored in 1994 by Alison Ticehurst. Its long herbaceous borders, predominantly planted with ‘hot colours’, and its collection of over 50 historic Yorkshire apple cultivars provide a tranquil place for ‘supportive’ volunteers and horticultural therapy.

Rievaulx Terrace, now owned by the National Trust, was created in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century as a promenade from which to view Rievaulx Abbey. It is some distance from the Hall and, as no records survive, it has never been determined whether it was intended to be viewed as a walk or a carriage ride. A carefully contrived series of thirteen views of Rievaulx Abbey and Ryedale unfurl from the Tuscan Temple at one end

of the terrace to the Ionic Temple at the other. This was used as a banqueting house with food prepared in the basement underneath.

In the afternoon we visited Newby Hall near Ripon. The estate, set within an historic park, has been owned by successive generations of the Compton family. The original 18<sup>th</sup> century design included avenues of lime trees of which only the one leading to the river survives today. The main gardens were created during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and have associations with Lawrence Johnston and Ellen Willmott. They are famed for the long double herbaceous borders, but there are also a number of small enclosed gardens, notably a rose garden, a sunken garden, and a rock garden, probably designed by a former employee of Backhouse of York. Another enclosed garden, Sylvia’s Garden, was created in memory of the current owner’s grandmother. It was planted originally to show colour during the York race meeting in May, but has now been redesigned to provide colour and interest throughout the year.

On Thursday we went to Parceval Hall Garden, 24 acres of formal and woodland gardens in Wharfedale laid out by the architect Sir William Milner from 1927. He transformed a derelict traditional Yorkshire Dales farmhouse situated in spectacular scenery into a terraced and woodland garden. He too was associated with Lawrence Johnston. A deeply religious man, he contributed to the Shrine at Walsingham in Norfolk and bequeathed his estate in trust to them. His garden design incorporated these beliefs; the double herbaceous borders are planted in red to depict the Body of Christ. Although Milner established the Trust to ensure his garden continued, it fell into decline and has been restored over the last 25 years. The Grade II listed Hall is not open to the public but is used as a retreat house by the Diocese of West Yorkshire and The Dales.



*Parceval Hall Red Borders*

Our last visit was to York Gate, a one-acre garden on the outskirts of Leeds created by the Spencer family from the 1950s, and now owned by Perennial, formerly The Gardeners' Royal Benevolent Society. Although the garden was laid out as a series of discrete rooms by Frederick Spencer, it was his son Robin who created the many vistas punctuated by his collection of antique garden ornaments. After Robin's death, his mother Sybil continued to enhance his vision.

Among the treats of all these gardens were the knowledgeable gardeners and volunteers who took us round. Not only did they give us advice on how to look after plants, they all had considerable and fascinating information about the gardens' history, their records and their plants.

**Anne Kaile and Jean Cornell**

## Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park

*BGHG visit 10 October*

Starting at Timber Lodge in the northern part of the park, our Blue Badge guide, Karen Eastland, led a very interesting tour of the London Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. Karen made especial reference to the pre- and post-2012 landscaping of the site. The area had firstly been cleared and levelled then 80% of the soil/earth was reused after being cleared of toxic waste (mainly lead and arsenical compounds). Only 20% of new sand-based earth was brought in. The planting and landscaping reflect the policy of encouraging wildlife, accessibility, sustainability and low maintenance. Rainwater is harvested via swales (ditch-like depressions with drains) and used domestic water is filtered naturally and recycled. There has been a huge amount of development of the site since the Games.

Man-made mounds and slopes giving views over the park are mainly planted as wild flower meadows. This autumn, unkempt seed heads dominated in these areas. A visit in spring would be interesting to view the flowering of the one million bulbs donated by East Anglian commercial growers. Slightly more formal areas, like those around the London Pleasure Gardens, are planted with swathes of ornamental grasses and shrubs.

There are in fact four designated garden areas in the park: Mandeville Place, the Great British Garden, the London 2012 Gardens and the London Pleasure Gardens. Mandeville Place is a small urban orchard in honour of the paralympians. The post-2012 Great British Garden is designed as three interlocking circles planted in appropriate colours in reference to the gold, silver and bronze medals.

The site still feels rather exposed as, apart from a few mature trees remaining along the River Lea, the 4,300 trees planted since the Games have yet to reach their full potential. It was pleasing to learn that native tree species have been chosen, including black poplar, silver birch, English oak, holm oak, willow and ash.

We finished our tour with a welcome burst of colour on the terraces of the London 2012 Gardens alongside the Waterworks River with plants from four main areas of the world in four divisions. What a change from 2010 when I last viewed a barren, muddy site from the raised Greenway path.



*View across Waterworks River to the Aquatic Centre*

**Patricia Reynolds**

## Stephens House, Finchley

In September I took a tour of Stephens House, a Grade II listed building, and its gardens in Finchley, North London. Formerly known as Avenue House, it was the home of Henry 'Inky' Stephens (1841-1918), son of Dr Henry Stephens who invented the indelible writing fluid that became known as 'Stephens' blue-black ink' His son, having inherited the business, bought Avenue House in 1874 and commissioned its expansion and the laying out of the gardens by Robert Marnock in the Gardenesque style.

'Inky' Stephens was a Victorian polymath; successful businessman and chemist, he was MP for the area (1887-1900) and a man eager to embrace new technology and innovative building materials. The house was ahead of its time with electricity provided by its own generator, central heating, and a water tower providing the house and the 23-acre estate with their own supply.

Employing fourteen gardeners, Avenue House had extensive landscaped gardens, an experimental model farm with livestock and abattoir, as well as heated glass houses and many rare trees, some of which still survive. There have, inevitably, been changes since Marnock's original design, but the characteristic wide sweeping lawn remains plus a wide variety of trees, including a massive pre-1820 weeping beech close to the house, *Davidia involucrata* (handkerchief tree), redwoods, including *Sequoia sempervirens*, a large Blue Atlas cedar, and a number of species of pine, of which 'Inky' was a collector. There was originally a sunken Japanese garden, which is now the pond, in addition to the bog garden and cascade, all of which were fed from a 45-foot well and an elaborate system of underground pipes. The rockery garden has been restored. The site of the model farm, known as the Bothy Gardens, now contains herbaceous borders and a small box parterre, all surrounded by a high concrete wall – one of the materials in which 'Inky' was interested. Our walk round the garden took us through the wooded area, with some of the trees just turning to autumn colours, and up Monkey Hill, a man-made hill of clay constructed so that encroaching local developments could not be seen from the house.

Our visit ended at the coach-house and stables, now a small visitor centre providing information about the Stephens company in its heyday. Our excellent guide was Melanie Wynyard, who has an absolutely encyclopaedic knowledge of the property and the Stephens family and gave us a fascinating tour.

**Kay Dixon**

## Oude Hortus

The Oude Hortus (Museum Garden Oude Hortus) is part of the University Museum and Botanical Garden in the Museum Quarter of Utrecht, Netherland. It is a beautiful little gem of a garden that I much enjoyed visiting recently. This garden started as the Hortus Medicus, attached to the University of Utrecht, in 1723. It was the Botanical Garden until 1987, when it was re-sited elsewhere in Utrecht. I have yet to visit the new garden, but this garden is wonderful for those interested in trees; it has one of the oldest *Ginkgo biloba* trees outside Japan and China. As it was autumn when I came, this tree was shedding its golden leaves giving a sense of magic to my visit. There is also a *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*, a *Sequoiadendron giganteum* and a tiny 'medicinal' garden. There are still a few of the old greenhouses in existence, one of which is accessible to visitors. The Museum is a science museum and both it and the garden are worth a visit, although they are both due to close for some eighteen months for renovations from early March 2018.

For more information see [www.universiteitsmuseum.nl](http://www.universiteitsmuseum.nl) and the Utrecht Botanic Gardens: [www.uu.nl/botanischetuinen](http://www.uu.nl/botanischetuinen), both with English versions

**Trijntje Ytsma**

## News

### BGHG Study Day

Our Study Day this year will be on the theme of *The Paradise Garden* concentrating on Christian and Islamic traditions. Starting with the literary and cultural traditions of Paradise, we will go on to look at Italian Renaissance and Islamic gardens and then consider the way the Garden of Eden has been represented in art. Speakers include Michael Symes, Christine Lalumia, Katie Campbell and Clare Ford-Wille. The Study Day will be held on Saturday 17 March 2018 at the School of Pharmacy in Brunswick Square, Bloomsbury. Make a note of the date in your diary now; booking information will be sent out in early February.

### Celebrating Humphry Repton

Next year marks the bicentenary of Repton's death in March 1818. Humphry Repton (1752-1818) was deemed to be the last great landscape designer of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. His bicentenary is being marked by a number of conferences, lectures, exhibitions and publications throughout the country. Included are two Study Days and a day-long workshop. Both Hertfordshire Garden Trust and the London Parks and Gardens Trust are planning publications about Repton's work in their areas.

Most of the events, which start in January, are listed in <http://thegardenstrust.org/news/celebrating-humphry-repton-2018/repton-200-events/>

## Events

### BGHG Programme 2018

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|---------------------|--|
| <b>21 February</b>  | AGM and Lecture by Doreen Wilson   |
| <b>22 February</b>  | Cambridge Botanic Garden and Anglesey Abbey  |
| <b>17 March</b>     | Study Day – <i>The Paradise Garden</i>   |
| <b>19 April</b>     | Painshill  |
| <b>May</b>          | Canterbury Cathedral Precinct Gardens  |
| <b>June</b>         | Highdown Gardens and Arundel Castle Gardens, West Sussex                               |
| <b>29 June</b>      | Barbican, London (repeat)  |
| <b>July</b>         | Hemel Hempstead Water Gardens, Hertfordshire and Luton Hoo Walled Garden, Bedfordshire |
| <b>16 August</b>    | Hestercombe Gardens, Somerset  |
| <b>14 September</b> | Bridge End Garden and Audley End, Essex  |
| <b>October</b>      | to be confirmed  |
| <b>November</b>     | Annual Lecture   |

### RHS Lindley Library London Events

**20 November – 2 March** *Exhibition – Collecting in the Clouds: Early 20<sup>th</sup> century plant discoveries.*

**Wednesday 17 January 11 am and 2 pm** *Tour: The Art of Reginald Farrer.*

**Tuesday 13 February 6 pm** *Talk about George Forrest, collector.* Booking for tour and talk is essential. 80 Vincent Square, London SW1P 2PE, Tel: 020 7821 3050, [www.rhs.org.uk/libraries](http://www.rhs.org.uk/libraries), Email: [library.london@rhs.org.uk](mailto:library.london@rhs.org.uk)

### Garden Museum Exhibition

**30 November – 25 March** *John Brookes: The man who made the modern garden.* Lambeth Palace Road, London, SE1 7LB, Tel: 020 7401 8865, Email: [events@gardenmuseum.org.uk](mailto:events@gardenmuseum.org.uk), [www.gardenmuseum.org.uk](http://www.gardenmuseum.org.uk)

### Institute of Historical Research Seminars

**Thursday 11 January 6.00 pm** Keith Alcorn *The London Nursery Trade in the Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century.* See website for the rest of the series. Wolfson Room, North Block Senate House, University of London, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU, Email: [ihrghistory@gmail.com](mailto:ihrghistory@gmail.com), <http://www.history.ac.uk/events/seminar/history-gardens-landscapes>

### The Garden Historians Courses and Tours

**Thursdays from 11 January** *Gardens of the Italian Dynasties and Gardens of the Veneto.* Burgh House, New End Square, London NW3 1LT, **April** *Two Guided Tours in Italy.* Email: [info@thegardenhistorians.co.uk](mailto:info@thegardenhistorians.co.uk), [www.thegardenhistorians.co.uk](http://www.thegardenhistorians.co.uk)

### Oxford Botanic Garden Winter Lectures

**Thursday 25 January 8.00** Dame Helen Ghosh *Fascinating documents of the past: National Trust Gardens.* Mathematical Institute, Andrew Wiles Building, Woodstock Road, Oxford OX2 6GG, Tel: 01865 286690, [www.botanic-garden.oxford.ac.uk](http://www.botanic-garden.oxford.ac.uk), Email: [valerie.parslow@obg.ox.ac.uk](mailto:valerie.parslow@obg.ox.ac.uk)

### The Gardens Trust Winter Lectures

**Wednesday 24 January** Pete Smith *The Gardens of Wollaton Hall Nottingham.*

**Wednesday 31 January** Stephen Daniels *Revealing Repton: Approaches to the Art of Landscape.*

**Wednesday 14 February** Shirley Evans *The Life and Work of William Andrews Nesfield.*

**Wednesday 28 February** Susan Campbell *Queen Victoria's Kitchen Garden at Windsor.* All lectures are from 6.30 to 7.30 pm in The Gallery, 77 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EL, Tel: 020 7608 2409, Email: [enquiries@thegardenstrust.org](mailto:enquiries@thegardenstrust.org), [www.thegardenstrust.org](http://www.thegardenstrust.org)

### Fulham Palace Talk

**Monday 26 February 2.00 – 3.15 pm** Sally Miller *Postcards from the Park – Bishop's Park.* Jessie Mylne Education Centre, Bishop's Avenue, London SW6 6EA, Tel: 020 7610 7162, Email: [functions@fulhampalace.org](mailto:functions@fulhampalace.org), [www.fulhampalace.org](http://www.fulhampalace.org)

### Cambridge Botanic Garden Lectures

**Friday 16 March 10.00 am – 1.00 pm** Twigs Way *Humphry Repton: Landscaping with Taste & Palette.*

**Friday 20 April 10.00 am – 1.00 pm** Twigs Way *Jane Austen: Writing the Regency Landscape,* 1 Brookside, Cambridge CB2 1JE, Tel: 01223 331875, Email: [education@botanic.cam.ac.uk](mailto:education@botanic.cam.ac.uk), [www.botanic.cam.ac.uk](http://www.botanic.cam.ac.uk)

### Chelsea Physic Garden Day

**Wednesday 23 May 9.30 am** Letta Jones and Michael Holland *The History of Chelsea Physic Garden in Ten Objects.* 66 Royal Hospital Road, London SW3 4HS, Tel: 020 7352 5646, Email: [enquiries@chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk), [www.chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk](http://www.chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk)

### The Gardens Trust with Oxford University Department for Continuing Education

**1 – 3 June** *Wonders and Marvels: Water, Intellect and Science in 17<sup>th</sup> century British Gardens.* Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JA, Tel: 01865 270380, [www.conted.ox.ac.uk](http://www.conted.ox.ac.uk), Email: [ppdayweek@conted.ox.ac.uk](mailto:ppdayweek@conted.ox.ac.uk)

### Gardens of Ireland Study Tour 2019

**May 2019** Letta Jones. Contact ACE Cultural Tours to receive details in mid 2018. Tel: 01223 841055, Email: [gill@aceculturaltours.co.uk](mailto:gill@aceculturaltours.co.uk)

*Editor: Joan Pateman, 77 Huntingdon Road, London N2 9DX. Email: [joan.pateman@zen.co.uk](mailto:joan.pateman@zen.co.uk)*