Restoration in a Time of Recession

Min Wood gets to grips with ‘Working Together’ from a County Gardens Trust perspective

There is an unnerving juddering, and a squealing of brakes, as the great engines of state are brought up short by signals set to ‘Halt; Financial Hazards Ahead. Do not proceed further without adequate funding’. Nowhere are the signs of stress greater than in government and its agencies. By 2010 English Heritage was facing a 32% cut in their funding and the need to cut its staffing by 200 posts. Political analysts will no doubt argue for years to come about whether improved maternity care, homes for the homeless, or the conservation of historic gardens is the more important priority.

Before we survey the gloomth, as Horace Walpole might put it, let us look on the bright side. The past three decades have seen an unprecedented surge of interest not only in our cultural heritage but also in the natural environment. The Heritage Lottery Fund and DEFRA’s Higher Level Stewardship Scheme have channelled large sums of money, which otherwise might not have been available, into conservation and restoration projects in our parks and gardens. There has been recognition of the importance of the places now entered in EH’s Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest, and a requirement for consultation with EH and/or the Garden History Society when development may affect them.

Our universities and schools have carried out invaluable work including successful graduate courses in Garden History at Bristol, York and Birkbeck Universities and at the Architectural Association. The University of Bath is five years into a highly successful MSc course in the ‘Conservation of Historic Gardens and Cultural Landscapes’. The dissertations from students have shed new light on some of our less well-known gardens, designers and gardeners; and many have been published as books or as articles in Garden History. The conservation work by the larger institutions, in particular the National Trust and EH, has been remarkable as has that of the smaller independent charities such as those at Painshill, Hestercombe and Heligan. Local authorities have also played their part, particularly by recognising the value of public parks.

Private efforts have produced the Historic Gardens Foundation and the New Arcadian Journal. Above all there has been, for some people, an enormous expansion in personal wealth, a fuel for creativity in all fields, but particularly in the case of architecture, garden design and what John Claudius Loudon called ‘landscape husbandry’, where achievement generally demands rather more than just the smell of an oily rag. Of course, we have also seen the flourishing of the County Gardens Trusts and their Association.

In an apparent paradox, during financial recession money continues to flow into the HLF. That is not surprising. The prospect of great wealth being thrust upon someone for less than the price of a pint of beer is irresistible. Despite the demonstrations outside St Paul’s Cathedral, rewards from business and enterprise continue to be substantial.

On the policy front Planning Policy Statement 5 ‘Planning for the Historic Environment’ ushers in a welcome shift away from sites being protected because of the mere fact of their designation toward the recognition of the value of an heritage asset based on the most up-to-date information available; the onus being on the developer to research and reveal that information. The adoption of the European Landscape Convention of 2000 means that the potential value of all landscapes can be recognised when development is regulated and not just those which have been distinguished with some special status like an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or a National Park. If you are now warmed by that summary of great achievements prepare yourself for a cold look forward.

Not since the 1947 Planning Act has planning policy been in such disarray. If the Government has a clear rationale for the proposals put forward in the draft National Planning Policy Framework they have made a very good job of concealing it from the general public. Of course there should be a presumption in favour of development; none of us want to live in an ossified society where there are insufficient homes and little industrial or commercial progress. We ought also to want to see new made landscapes of a high quality in the countryside where appropriate and improved urban design. However, development should not be permitted where it would cause harm to interests of acknowledged importance unless there is an overriding public need for it to go ahead. That simple proposition became well established in the 1980s but now seems to have been forgotten in a rush for reform.

There will always be, in our planning system, something that is either called, or looks like, a Development Plan. This, together with any other material considerations relevant to a proposed development, from local need to the existing heritage value of the site, must be weighed and evaluated with care. In balancing competing interests what matters is whether a person or
In this lies a challenge. The task of researching the significance of our heritage asset is time-consuming and expensive. Those framing earlier Planning Acts had it in mind that public authorities would carry out the necessary survey work to make sure that everything was properly taken into account; after all, the decisions to be made were not intended to be for the benefit of a particular party but for the benefit of the community as a whole. Similarly, those considering heritage protection started from the position that EH, or its predecessors, would advise government on the heritage value of sites under contemplation for development.

Even in the full flush of the wildest and most spendthrift years of public expenditure those aspirations were wholly unrealistic. There was simply not the money to provide enough qualified officer time for proper research or for the effective evaluation of all the proposals which would affect listed buildings and other heritage assets. There had to be some trimming. First, after an initial burst of enthusiasm, the inspection of sites and additions to, or revisions, to the Register slowly decelerated. It became apparent that EH, and its predecessor, would not have the resources to comment on all the relevant planning applications. It was decided that they would only formally respond in the case of the relatively small number of Grade I Parks and Gardens, formal consultation on the others would be undertaken by the GHS to whom, as a sweetener, a grant in aid would be given to help them employ conservation officers. Thus was ushered in an era in which tasks which ought to be in the province of government came to be undertaken by a voluntary body which at the beginning of this century came very close to collapse. Even this fragile arrangement is now under pressure from the cuts. In addition, the knowledge base on which we all depend for the proper assessment of heritage assets is bound to be severely affected by the closure of all the Master’s degree courses at universities save for that in Conservation at Bath [thought this has now slightly improved].

If you think that this article is getting to the point at which something challenging is likely to be raised you are absolutely right. If EH cannot afford to put up an effective response to planning applications, and other threats, affecting parks and gardens and if the GHS now finds itself swamped by applications to which it does not have sufficient resources to respond then who is going to fill the gap?

It is this question which lies at the heart of an initiative called Working Together in which the GHS, the Association of Gardens Trusts, the Parks and Gardens Database and the Garden Museum are examining, with the support of a £20,000 grant from EH, how they might co-operate to deliver their different objectives effectively in a highly constrained financial circumstances. These discussions have yet to reach a conclusion and it is too early to anticipate what the response of government will be to any proposals they may make. We are however all very fortunate that those leading these discussions represent some of the most able and most flexibly minded players in the fields of garden history and landscape restoration. I shall spare their blushes but you have only to look on the webpages of the organisations concerned to see how lucky we are.

Although the Gardens Trusts are by no means all equal in expertise, experience and funding there is no doubt that the more powerful can play a very useful part. Collectively, through the generosity of their members both in time and money, they may be better placed to carry out detailed surveys of heritage assets and to respond to the majority of development proposals than either EH or the GHS. Where a Trust is weak it can draw strength from stronger neighbours. I suspect that the reaction of most Gardens Trust members to these new realities will be that we should do all we can to help protect and improve our historic parks and gardens and if necessary take action ourselves to make sure that work is done. However, if we are to depend on local volunteers to carry out the sort of work which is really the proper task of government then is it not right for those local volunteers to expect government to support them? If this kind of action represents localism, or the ‘Big Society’, then we must see to it that it does not actually result in the marginalisation of local communities and a bitter shambles.

EH appear to understand the challenge. In their Corporate Plan for 2011–15 their aims include, under the heading ‘Caring’, supporting owners, local authorities and voluntary organisations to look after England’s heritage. Words are a fine thing but EH themselves will not be able to deliver this aim unless they have the firm and unwavering support of the Coalition Government.

EH should have the necessary resources to act swiftly to amend or add to the Register of Parks and Gardens when local research has identified a previously unrecognised heritage assets.

Public bodies should take urgent steps to make sure that the research which has been done for the purpose of planning applications, applications for Higher Level Stewardship schemes and HLF grants are properly catalogued and available for public inspection, ideally in digital form. EH, at the aptly named Engine House in Swindon, should continue to be sufficiently funded to allow inspection of the photographic and other resources held there. It is unfair to expect volunteers to work on researching sites which have already been the subject of close attention by experts.

The government should be asked to give much clearer policy guidance about the importance of the historic environment in relation to other policy objectives. The search for alternative sources of renewable energy is undoubtedly of national importance. However existing guidance in relation to the impact of such installations on the historic fabric or protected landscapes is wholly inadequate. No one would wish to question the central thrust of ‘The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature’ the Coalition Government’s White Paper published in June 2011, yet nowhere in it is there any guidance about the weight which should be given to the significance of heritage assets when colonised by wildlife; as they inevitably are if they decay. The insensitive management of, for example, Durlston Country Park, Dorset, when dealing with the distinctive landscape created by George Burt is a glaring example of the failure to give heritage assets within the park an appropriate priority.

It is important for government to give clear guidance to local authorities that the delegation of the role of consultee from EH to the GHS in the case of Grade II & II* sites does not imply that those are of slight importance; as members of planning committees may infer in the absence of a proper explanation to them of their importance.

By the time you read this article the arrangements for the future protection of heritage assets may have become clearer. I have little doubt that Gardens Trusts will have an important part to play. There is perhaps one characteristic they should try to retain in any future arrangements. Whilst the GHS, by reason of it being a Statutory Consultee, is inevitably cast in the role of adversary when opposing development, the Trusts have, generally, confined themselves to seeking to inform and persuade. In this way they have maintained the support of a broadly based membership, including many landlords of heritage assets. I have every reason to be grateful for this positive approach and the help given to me by Hampshire Gardens Trust when searching for a safe and sustainable future for Charles Bridgeman’s incomparable Spring Wood within Hackwood Park. If Gardens Trusts are to be drawn more directly into the planning system let us hope they are able to retain that most valuable quality.
GHS Essay Prize 2012 (and 2011 update)

The winner of the 2012 GHS Essay Prize is Johanna Lausen-Higgins’ *All the Gold a Miser Desires: A New reading for the Iconography of the Grotto of the Animals at Villa Castello*. This was a very exciting piece of scholarship; combining Renaissance heraldry, iconography and horticultural traditions with an exemplary study of the site, the author proposes a convincing and utterly innovative reading of this complex garden grotto. Ms Lausen-Higgins is a recent graduate of Bristol University’s Garden History MA programme and she is now lecturing at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh.

Also commended was Sally O’Halloran’s *The Gardener’s account of extraordinary work: the role of Gervase Whitehead at Knowle, Sevenoaks in Kent, (1718–39)*, a focussed and well written essay which made excellent use of some wonderful primary source material.

Despite the dearth of garden history courses, this year’s competition was remarkably well subscribed, with contributions from departments of history, horticulture, art history, archaeology and landscape design. Subjects ranged from Renaissance grottoes through Gothic novels to Edwardian picnics, encompassing the work of seventeenth century patrons, eighteenth-century gardeners, nineteenth-century architects and twentieth-century designers. There were some very good entries and it was a tough decision but the judges were unanimous in their choice of the winner. Our thanks to NFU Mutual for their ongoing support of the Essay Prize.

It was great to finally meet last year’s winner, Karin Seeber, whose essay has now been published in the current edition of *Garden History*. *Ye making of ye Mount*: *Oxford New College’s Mount Garden* particularly impressed the judges with the way the author went back to original sources, re-examined and reinterpreted them, and discovered new pieces of information along the way. The essay challenges accepted theories, presents a new interpretation of the Mount and in so doing makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of mounts in general and the New College Mount in particular. Members of the Education and Publication committee together with Society Chairman, Dominic Cole and Administrator, Louise Cooper; treated Karin to a celebratory lunch in Cowcross Street after presenting her with her winner’s certificate.

Katie Campbell, Chair of Judges

GHS Events 2012–13

For more details of our events please see GHS news 89 or: www.gardenhistorysociety.org/events

**Fragments of History**

**Study Day at the Caldwell Estate**

Mure Hall and the Caldwell Estate, Scotland 10.30am, Saturday 9 June

Cost: £16, to include a buffet lunch.

For further details please contact Sue Hewer: 01575 560 259 or: suehewer1@btopenworld.com. To book a place, please send a cheque for £16 (made payable to The Garden History Society) to Sue Hewer, Clintlaw Farmhouse, Lintrathen, Kirnemuir, Angus DD8 5JF.

**Finding the post in the Settings of Scottish Country Estates**

**Study Day at Inverarity Hall, Angus and neighbouring Estates, Scotland**

10.30am, Saturday 23 June

£16 to include a light lunch at Inverarity Hall, Inverarity, Angus DD8 2JP and neighbouring estates. For further details please contact Sue Hewer as above.

**Visit to the Hannah Peschar Sculpture Garden and The Deepdene, Surrey**

with the London Parks and Gardens Trust 11am, Wednesday 4 July

The Hannah Peschar Sculpture Garden, near Ockley, south of Dorking, originated as ten acres of an estate laid out between 1915 and 1920, bought by Hannah Peschar in the 1980s and redesigned by Anthony Paul. It has been described as ‘among the most established and renowned of the [English] sculpture gardens, its beautifully arranged grounds matched by a high standard of sculpture’.

The first house and garden at The Deepdene were created in the middle of the 17th century by the Honourable Charles Howard, and exciting new research by Sarah Couch has located remnants of his garden. The estate was eventually bought by Thomas Hope, collector and connoisseur of neoclassical style, in 1806. He altered, improved and extended both house and garden, which became among the most celebrated and influential in Britain.

The house was pulled down in 1969, however, and after years of neglect the grounds have been described as ‘one of southern England’s great lost landscapes’.

Under the title ‘Hope Springs Eternal’ a campaign has been launched to restore The Deepdene’s garden and park. Sarah Couch, who has produced a historic landscape survey and management plans for the site, will show us what remains in the light of the planned restoration.

Cost: £35. For further details and a Booking Form please contact Robert Peel: rma.peel@btopenworld.com or: 0207 121 8938 or use the on-line Booking Form.
AGM, GHS 2nd Annual Graduate Symposium & Supper at the Garden Museum, London
2pm, Friday 13 July
See the enclosed Annual Report and Booking Form for all details.

South-West Scotland Landscape Perspectives
Cally Palace Hotel, Gatehouse of Fleet
Friday 14 & Saturday 15 September
Cost: £15 to include lunch on Friday 14 September; For further details, please contact Theo Stanning: 01556 630244 or: t.stanning@virgin.net. To book a place, please send a cheque for £15 (made payable to The Garden History Society) to Theo at Seabank, The Merse, Rockcliffe, Dalbeattie, Kirkcudbrightshire, DG5 4QH.

In a most Agreeable Valley
The development of the landscape at Bretton Hall, 1720–2012
Study day at Yorkshire Sculpture Park/ Bretton Hall in association with the AGT, Yorks GT & YSP
9.45am to 4.30pm, Friday 21 September
It is probably fair to say that the Bretton Hall site is a unique landscape in the UK: a mansion and designed landscape dating principally to the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with a sculpture park overlaid onto the grounds in the later decades of the twentieth century. This Study Day will encounter the landscape at a significant moment of change, renewal, and acclaim; the mansion awaiting a new role, the lakeside landscape recently restored and opened up to the public, and the now world-renowned YSP (voted Yorkshire’s Most Magnificent Attraction in 2011), currently enjoying accolades for the first major UK exhibition of sculpture by Joan Miró, presented in collaboration with the artist’s foundations and family.
The Study Day will give you the opportunity to learn more about the history of the Bretton Hall gardens and park, and about their restoration, conservation, and management. Greater public access brings new challenges, as well as additional opportunities for the display of contemporary sculpture and new possibilities for artists’ projects.
Our speakers are: Karen Lynch, ‘Happily situated, in an elegant style’: two generations of landscape development at Bretton c.1760–1830; Dr Jan Woudstra, Robert Marnock at Bretton Hall (c.1827–34); Dr Helen Pheby (curator; YSP), ‘Layered Land: the designed landscape of Bretton as a backdrop for sculpture, and as a continuous source of inspiration for the appreciation and creation of art.
There will be a chance to see some of the outdoor sculpture on the afternoon walks, but to fully enjoy both the extensive landscape at Bretton and the sculpture collection as a whole (including the indoor galleries), we recommend you stay longer. Spend another day at YSP (entry is free) to take advantage of the Miró exhibition: the setting of key works in the landscape fulfils the artist’s desire that ‘sculpture must stand in the open air, in the middle of nature’. And why not explore further this part of Yorkshire: it has many sites to impress the garden historian (Wentworth Castle, Wentworth Woodhouse, Brodsworth Hall, Cannon Hall, Sheffield Botanical Gardens…); and the beauties of the rolling countryside and historic villages around might even surprise you!
Cost: £50. Download the online Booking Form, or contact the AGT Co-ordinator: 020 7251 2610 or: co-ordinator@agt.org.uk

Professor Charles McKean on Country House Policies 1550–1709
At The Glasite Meeting House, Edinburgh
6.30pm, Monday 5 November
£5, pay at the door

Study Tour to the Landscapes of California
Sunday 14 to Thursday 25 April 2013
We have been overwhelmed by the response for places on this Study Tour and regret that it is already FULLY BOOKED. If you would like to go on the waiting list please contact Liz Goodfellow for more information: LIZGZ@aol.com or Robert Peel: 0207 121 8938. Or see our website for the full (planned) itinerary, and to download a Booking Form and conditions. The projected cost is £1,950, not including flights.

Trouble at ‘Fountains’

‘The Wonder of the North’ is how one 18th-century visitor described the Studley Royal estate and as you might imagine the title has stayed with us, though at times it does seem very difficult to live up to that rather grandiose label. Equally, there were visitors looking at the garden with a more ‘technical’ eye and it would seem that their observations were equally prophetic.
The Aislabies’ exploitation of the locality was to be marvelled at and one can now only dream about the freedom that they had at their disposal to create gardens on such scale. BUT, and there always has to be one, hindsight is a wonderful thing as you all know, and we are now having to wrestle with inherent faults in the system be they over planting, lack of any planned maintenance and design flaws.
Water management is a constant headache. Utilising and modifying a river; especially one that is prone to spate, exposes the site to the excesses of the natural flow. At one moment you are short of fresh water; and the next you are a metre under water; and as a consequence the whole of the lower garden is gradually being washed away [see also our Annual Report].
What is the answer, and there has to be one. Currently we are seeing massive engineering works taking place around Venice to reduce the effects of tidal flooding; surely Studley, our equally impressive World Heritage site, deserves the same attention…

Michael Ridsdale
Head of Landscape at Studley, NT
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