

# R and R in Sussex

- *Where we had got to with researching and recording our county parks and gardens:*
- In past years we've worked towards a pan-Sussex gazetteer: a basic list of sites plus more detailed reports. Have achieved latter on a significant number in West Sussex.
- **BUT:**
- Difficult to establish a realisable plan of how to achieve complete county long-term
- process was perceived as long, slow, unwieldy and insufficiently focussed to attract new volunteers

## **Practical reasons why:**

- hugely variable skills and time - from experienced and new volunteers
- limited relevant skills available to train new volunteers
- Council members running R and R - differing views on what we should be aiming for and how
- Changes in personnel/attitude/support levels of LPAs to working in partnership with CGTs; in particular attitudes of HER staff
- Changes in approach by national government – e.g. HE's guidance on local listing doc in 2013 (?); **more LPAs considering local listing - so a formal 'way-in' for a CGT**

# Finding a focus

While our West Sussex work will continue (mainly in the hands of one particular volunteer researcher) we decided to trial a new kind of project that would be:

- at the other end of the County - new territory
- Tightly-focussed on one place and on one LPA
- With a purpose: of submitting sites for a local list of heritage assets
- Focussed on finding volunteers who are already passionate about their open spaces
- Time limited -2/3 years
- Funded – to cover volunteer expenses
- Resourced with training time from experienced researchers

## Why select Hastings? It is/has:

- A specific confined urban area so no travel problems
- A local library and museum with collections and meeting space
- 2 SGT members/trustees knew the area - one knew the conservation officer (**exploit any contacts you have!**)
- A range of designed open spaces to provide experience in site survey and using different types of archive material
- Sites in public ownership so to access at any time (no issues with private owners)













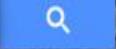
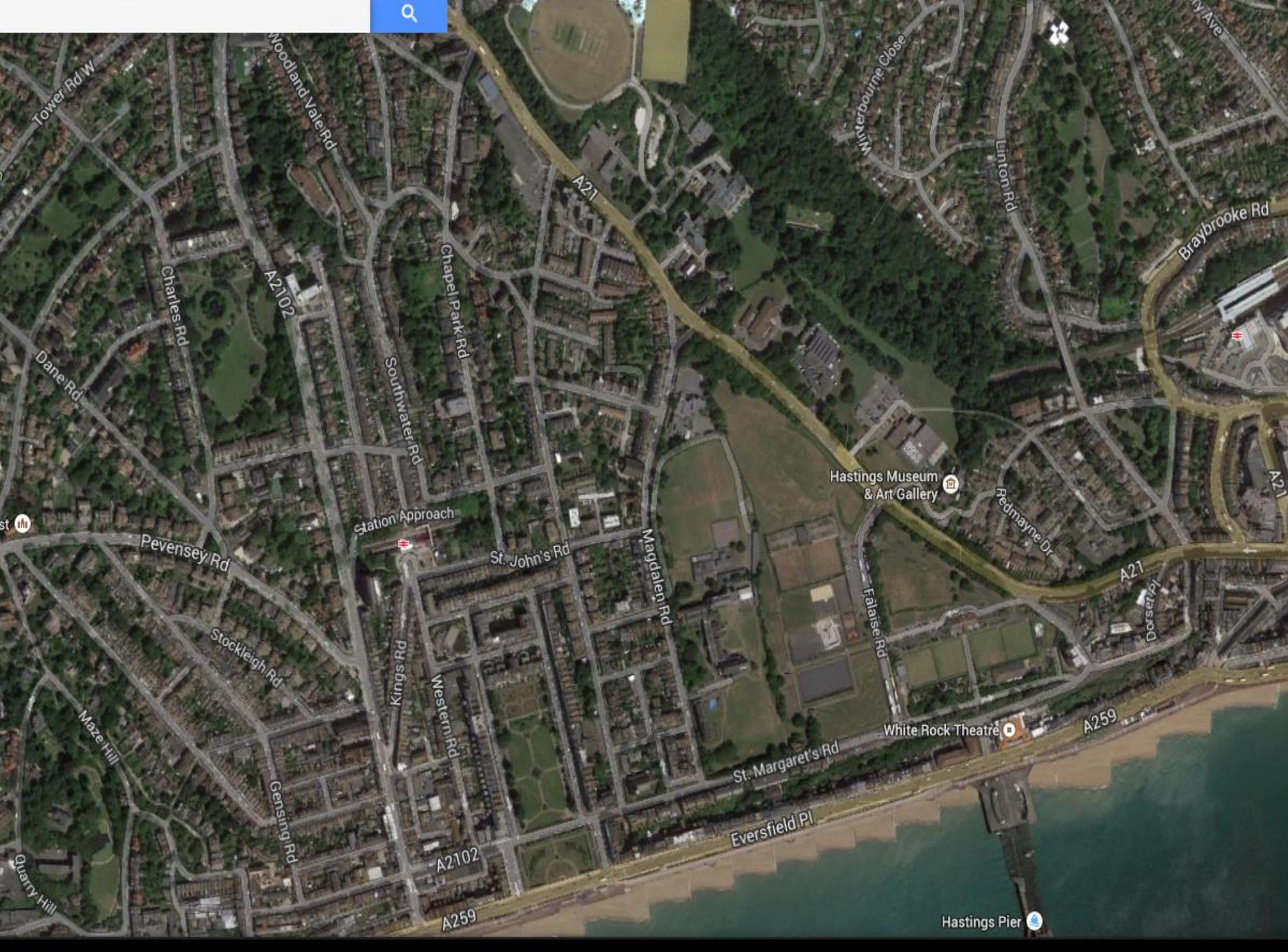


Linton Gardens  
Photograph c 1990





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**It was: A step in the dark as we didn't have any  
volunteers in Hastings! So we:**

- Approved a budget of £500 to kick-start the project
- Met with the East Sussex County Archaeology/HER team to ask for practical support in providing maps and archival information stored on the HER.
- Met with the Librarian and Museum curator to check out resources
- Contacted HBC departments for material (*you would be surprised what turned up!*)

- Took a stand at the Rother and Hastings Family History Fair's *Hastings Day* a October 2012 and set up a rolling slide show on site survey and recording with lots of pics of local parks and gardens in the area – took about a dozen expressions of interest
- Wrote copy for local newspapers and Sussex archaeological Society newsletter (see article ***Planning to look after the county's greatest gardens***)

HERITAGE

# Planning to look after county's greatest gardens

BY RYAN HARRIS  
ryan.harris@press.co.uk

**SUSSEX boasts some splendid, nationally-famous gardens, parks and estates.**

The most important and historic like Petworth, Sheffield Park, Herstmonceux and Bayham Abbey are recognised by being included on English Heritage's National Heritage List.

This gives them at least some protection as planning authorities have to take their listing into consideration when making decisions about any new development within them.

However, there are many lesser heritage features including gardens and parks which are not so well known but are still greatly valued and loved locally and which contribute hugely to the character of Sussex's special landscapes – and to our enjoyment of living here.

A new Government initiative is encouraging local planning authorities to prepare lists of these heritage features so, like their nationally-famous 'relations', their value can be recognised too and taken into consideration when development is proposed.

The Sussex Gardens Trust has taken on the task of identifying as many of the locally important parks and gardens throughout the county, ranging from small town squares and open spaces to little-known private gardens with some history behind them.

Lewes residents will know of Southover Grange Gardens while the people of Hastings might be surprised to find a wonderful walled garden surviving from an otherwise 'lost



Grange Gardens.

'estate on Bohemia Road.

Obviously not every green space can be protected so English Heritage has published a 'Good Practice Guide for Local Heritage Listing'. It sets out criteria to help identify the most interesting and historic gardens and explains how local communities and organisations such as the Sussex Gardens Trust can work in partnership with local planning authorities to give formal recognition to them in local plans.

The Sussex Gardens Trust needs help with this campaign and is looking for new volunteers to help it identify gardens and to research and describe them. Anyone who is familiar

with the techniques of family, house or local area research - which is equally applicable to gardens and parks - will know how fascinating and rewarding this activity can be.

To help kick-start our campaign the Trust is running a free training day at Kidbrooke Park, Forest Row, on November 1 for anyone who would like to 'come into the garden' and learn a new skill – or hone some you have already.

For more information or a chat about what we do please contact Jennie Starr, Chairman, 01323 46131, jennie@chatleydene.com or look at the Sussex Gardens Trust website, [www.SussexGardensTrust.org.uk](http://www.SussexGardensTrust.org.uk)

- Emailed HBC's conservation officer and a senior planner in local plans with a detailed project proposal:
- "CAN WE HELP YOU WITH YOUR LOCAL LIST OF PARKS AND GARDENS AS HERITAGE ASSETS?"
- This summarized what we could offer and, importantly, **highlighted our skills and experience and our willingness to take the lead.** We received a supportive reply from HBC. **It turned out that HBC had just started thinking about a local listing project - so ask around your LPAs – a door may be ajar!**

- Held a workshop (November 2012) in East Sussex for all SGT members on a general introduction to site survey and recording; specifically to identify any who would like to work in the Hastings area. **We used much of the HLP early training material;**
- Invited HBC planning and conservation staff to our workshop as a good CPD opportunity - they didn't attend!); suggested a follow up workshop in Hastings. HBC responded with offer to host inaugural workshop in the town hall.

## **First Hastings-based workshop: we invited:**

- The 7 contacts we made at Family History day
- The 3 HER staff at East Sussex County Council
- The Hastings librarian and the Museum curator
- Experienced volunteers from Kent CGT
- HLP staff member
- 4 SGT Council members – Chairman and R and R group
- A local author/researcher on local history

## We advertised the workshop:

- In the Hastings on-line Times (Hastings & St. Leonards on-line community newspaper) and got front page billing!



- To The Old Hastings Preservation Society
- To The Hastings Museum local history group
- To various Park Friends groups

## The full day programme comprised presentations by:

- HER staff on the role of the HER
- Librarian and Museum curator on their collections
- Kent GT volunteers for experience of a similar project
- HBC Planning and conservation staff on the role/importance of local heritage assets in local planning system
- SGT on concept of local listing, selection criteria, significance, introduction to writing up research and survey
- **Round up and open discussion on next steps:**
- **Main Q's:** Is there enough interest for a project? If so: how do people like to work - in pairs/ groups/as individuals?  
How shall we keep in touch/co-ordinate volunteers within Hastings: How should we select sites? Criteria to be used ?  
Are there sites that are priorities in Hastings?

11 potential new volunteers attended including 3 from the Museum's local history group, 1 from the OHPS and several who had heard about it from contacts in HBC or from friends.

We recorded a list of all attendees with a note on experience, knowledge. **Need now to capture their attention and tempt them to get stuck in – no guarantee that any of them would stay.**

HBC presented us with its own agenda for sites we should look at – it included 3 of their major potential development sites...!

So, what next?

## Cunning plan:

- Sessions to be **regular** and be **hands-on/activity-based**
- Volunteers have to do something new at each.
- We plan each session together (new vols and experienced SGT 'trainers') at the previous one so volunteers feel they have 'control' and are not pressurised

## **1<sup>st</sup> post-launch session March; Library hosted us: 12 turned up!**

- Volunteers worked to enlarge ‘the list’ using local knowledge and enthusiasm for particular sites;
- Volunteers introduced to criteria for assessing potential of a site for local listing;
- Hands-on element: noisy ‘discussion’ on sites/values; list whittled down to manageable number.
- Next session planned – **Wellington Square: how to do a simple site survey**; Invitation and some ‘homework’ (look at maps and postcards in library) sent out 2 weeks in advance.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> session: April:**

Wellington Square; 10 turned up;

1 ½ hrs. on site looking at/making notes on orientation, topography, views in/out, details of its layout and planting.

Indoor session: short description composed – done verbally, as a group, with leader writing up on flip chart.

\*\* Volunteers often lack confidence to write something – hence starting with verbal description.

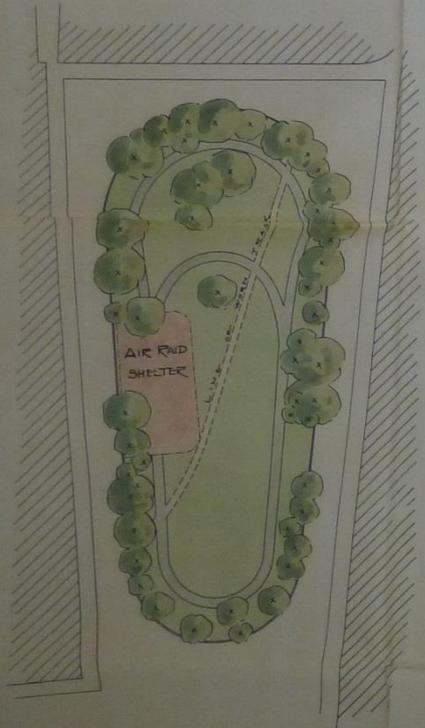
Tea and **CAKES**

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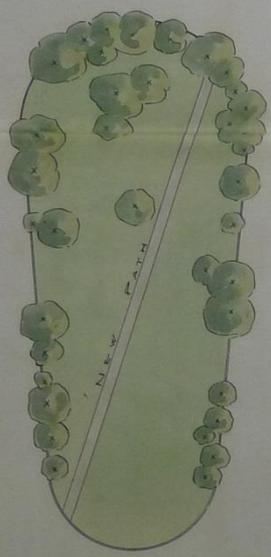


# WELLINGTON SQUARE GARDENS

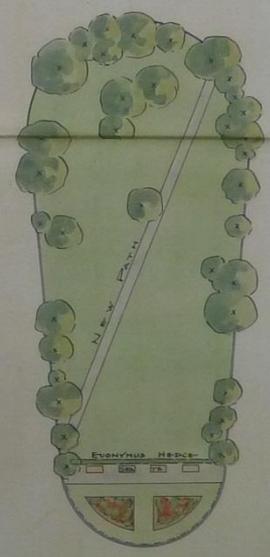
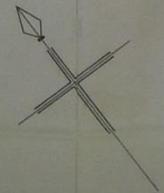
## PROPOSED LAYOUT



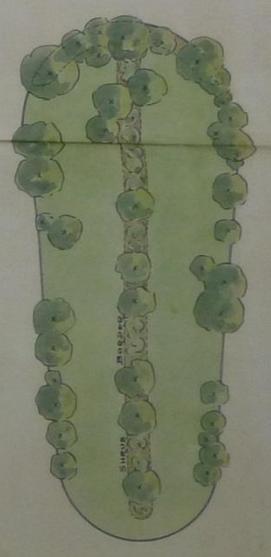
EXISTING DESIGN



SCHEMES 1 & 2



SCHEME 3



SCHEME 4

SCALE: 30 FEET TO 1 INCH

ROSS YOUNG, N.D.M., DIST. PA.  
SUPERINTENDENT OF PARKS & GARDENS,  
HASTINGS. OCTOBER 1949

Proposed layouts for Square 1947  
Hastings Parks and Recreation dept.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> session: June:**

Volunteers beginning to 'take ownership' of sites and to start and explore sources alone.

Session held at Museum to look at ref sources; Local history group members able to help us navigate collections

**4<sup>th</sup> session:** August - held at Museum; group stabilizing at 5/6 volunteers and starting to 'bond'; individuals gave feedback on what they had found; **advice and critique given on individual basis** by SGT project leaders

## Next 3 years

- On-going sessions – group and individual - held bi-monthly
- locations and content of sessions planned in advance; SGT trainers available for emailed advice; reports went through several iterations/edts
- report writing skills developed by group and individual sessions with help from SGT trainers
- Site - based sessions for a volunteer to present his/her site to the group, with copies of ref material
- Group visits to East Sussex Record Office, Museum collections etc. continued

# Outcomes

## In 2015 HBC launched its local list initiative and called for site submissions

- Hastings Group submitted 4 sites for first Panel in Sept.2016: White Rock, Holy Child Convent, Wellington Square and the Bohemia Estate land.
- **Wellington Square** and the older, more historic **half of White Rock** were accepted and have now been endorsed through public consultation. The Convent was adequately protected through listing status;
- More information was asked for on **the Bohemia land**. This site and **Linton Gardens** were recommended for inclusion in December 2016 and are out to public consultation.
- We will submit all our other sites in due course

*Extract from HBC's web page on local heritage assets list :*

“The panel has recommended three assets to take through the Council approval process and as such consultation will run from **Friday 6 January to Friday 3 February 2016**”.

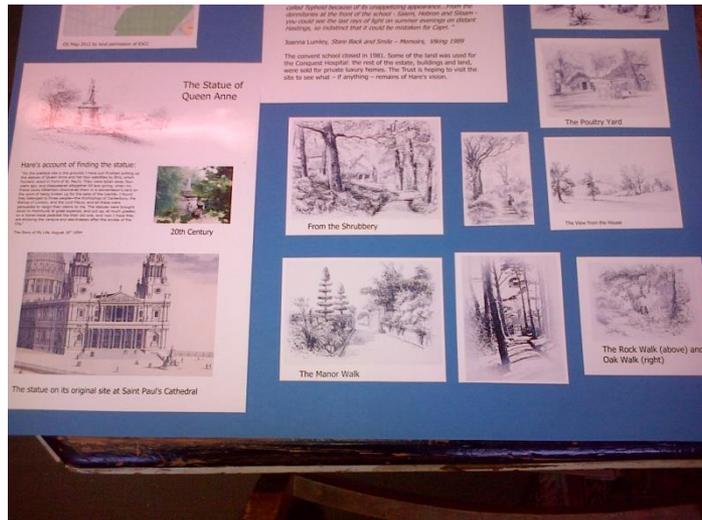
The assets currently being consulted are the following:

[Bohemia Estate](#)

[Linton Gardens](#)

[Wellington Square](#)

# The Old Hastings Preservation Society invited the volunteer group to produce a small exhibition of its researches for spring 2016.



# WHITE ROCK DEVELOPMENT PLAN

## SGT group Invited to take part in series of Stakeholder Workshops - November 2015 /16

“ In order to gather ideas [Hastings Borough Council] hosted a full day consultation workshop at the end of November 2015 and again in November 2016. The workshop, run by the Council's appointed consultants Bilfinger GVA, was attended by a number of key stakeholders and partners with an interest in the Town Centre and White Rock area”. **New exciting experience for volunteers!**



# what we learned/what next?

- Small is beautiful
- Choose a discrete project with a clear aim/outcome
- Local listing is a good one; though not top(!) it is on LPAs agendas and has Historic England support
- Use all/any of your personal/CGT contacts in LPAs if you want to do a local listing project
- Be prepared to invest time in mentoring and support e.g. practising visual site surveys, writing descriptions, reading maps etc.

# Next project: Building on Hastings' success we are:

- Rolling out a 'Seaside Parks and Gardens' research and recording project across Sussex's coastal towns.
- We will use the same techniques for finding, mentoring and training new volunteers
- We will use the success in Hastings to make our pitch to LPAs
- We will aim for a publication!

