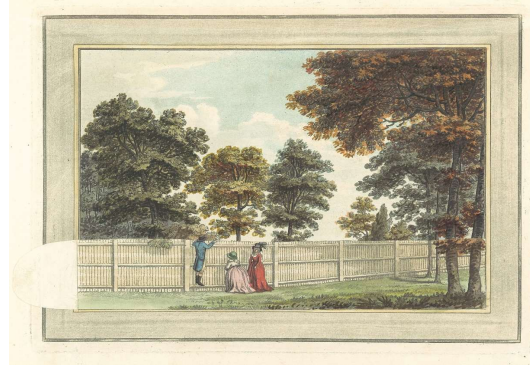


A Welcome for All



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This presentation is intended to help us move away from an assumption that our events will appeal to likeminded people rather like ourselves and instead start to look at ways in which we could and should attract not simply a bigger number of people, but rather a wider range of people. It's about providing a Welcome for All.

This presentation takes an hour, and we clearly aren't going to learn how to change the world in an hour, but what we can do is just start our own cogs whirring as to how we can make perhaps just small adjustments to the events that we organise so that they are more inclusive, more welcoming. I don't think any of us set out not to be inclusive, but it's amazing how small things that may not have occurred to us can make a big difference either for better or for worse.

We're not particularly going to look at 'outreach' type activities that are targeted at specific groups, ie taking a minibus of refugee teens to explore an 18th century park, but rather at open events to which we hope a broader range of people will come, ie how do you make your garden visit or other activity appealing to a 21st century public that is broader than your own membership.

This presentation is definitely not about lecturing you on what needs to be done, rather it's intended as an opportunity to share ideas and experiences.

"For the honour of the Country, let the Parks and Pleasure-grounds of England be ever open, to cheer the hearts and delight the eyes of all, who have taste to enjoy the beauties of Nature."

Humphry Repton, *Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (1816).



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Let's just take a moment to enjoy these words from Humphry Repton, and perhaps take some inspiration from them. Admittedly, I believe Repton was really talking about not having fences or walls that you couldn't see through as a passer-by, but it's too good an opportunity not to appropriate it!

Why do we want to welcome more diverse people?

- To ensure the heritage sector is relevant in modern society
- To learn from outside our usual circles
- To give our work a more secure footing on broader foundations
- Because it's fun and interesting to be amongst people with different stories to tell
- To avoid a weird monoculture bubble in an increasingly diverse society
- Because it's greedy to keep historic parks and gardens all to ourselves!



[Pic is of Repton garden at Ashridge]

Why do we want to welcome more diverse people?

First of all, shall we think about who these 'more diverse people' might be? It's a slightly ridiculous statement, of course, because it actually over-emphasises the differences between people and implies that some people are more different than others, whereas of course we are all part of an overall diversity! But you know what I mean, so let's take as our starting point that most people engaging with historic parks and gardens in the UK appear to be white, middle class, and over 60, but we want to increase the number of people who vary from that demographic in some way.

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Just to be clear, this is not about worthy charitable works which help people whom we perceive to be less fortunate than ourselves, but rather about simply widening our

social circles, and enjoying wider horizons as a result.

What might prevent people from feeling welcome?

- False assumptions
- Confidence and Know-How
- How the stories are told
- ... And if no one tells them that they are welcome... or smiles!



- False assumptions – might potential guests feel they need to be more educated or affluent to enjoy or be welcome on a stately home visit. Do we sometimes slip into an assumption that people who aren't educated or affluent might struggle to gain pleasure from the beauty of a Palladian temple unless there is a gimmick attached? For example, my son would like me to take him to a football match, but I have no experience of it. I fear that the whole stadium will be incredibly sporty and clued-up, and will know that I am an ignoramus, and direct a chant at me, despite the reality that all the football fans I know are lovely considerate people.

Perhaps new audiences might assume a historic garden event to be boring, expensive or elitist. (Do we need to consider whether actually it sometimes might be?!)

- Confidence and Know-How – Going into a new scenario is challenging, with all kinds of questions around what will happen and whether you will be welcome? Will you make a faux-pas? Spend too much money? What will happen? Taking the football match example, I am brave enough to go but actually have no idea how to do it. When are the matches on? How do I know? Where and I do I buy tickets? Can I buy tickets for any match? Do I just turn up? At what time? What if I need the toilet during the match, do people just get up and go? Will I need to spend lots of extra money when I'm there?

- How the stories are told – it's really easy to assume a certain base level of knowledge when producing interpretation, writing a talk, etc, and you can't necessarily take everything back to absolute basics. But are you accidentally assuming a shared starting point, which then creates a web of confusion and a sense of the event being targeted at 'someone else'? The most obvious example I would give is to refer to 'the Georgians', rather than the 18th century. Everyone can work out when the 18th century was, even if they have a hazy idea of when it was and what it meant, but 'the Georgians' really demands that you have a certain level of historic knowledge, probably acquired from a certain type of education acquired at a certain period in time.
- And of course, actually, a large part of it can be simply being friendly in the usual human ways! Don't assume people know that you're welcoming them ... Show them with a smile!

Basically, no one wants to find themselves the poppy who accidentally grew in a field of bluebells.

What practical things might cause difficulties?

- Publicity
- Timings
- Cost
- Activities
- Children
- Transport
- Physical accessibility
- Mental accessibility
- Activities
- Catering
- ... Don't forget what messages you give out



But of course there are also lots of practical things that might make it difficult for people to come. Let's have a think about some of the things we might need to address in order for more diverse people to not just be able to come, but actually feel properly welcome.

- Publicity – like it or loath it, many people these days receive most of their information via social media. Huge swathes of the population don't read newsletters or newspapers, even if they are sent electronically, but are hooked on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. The good news is that these can be free! Even if you can't throw yourself fully into social media – either because of resources, skills or stubbornness – do get on just enough to be able to promote your events. Honestly, do people feel welcome at events where no one made much of an effort to tell them about it?
- Timings – maybe a tour by candlelight would appeal to young couples? Or best to avoid afternoons if you want young families? Or avoid weekdays if you want to attract working people? Or bear in mind Ramadan and the need to pray if we want to be accessible to Muslim guests?
- Cost - £7 for a ticket might be extremely reasonable, but does it push out of the

range for a student? Or does it then mean £35 for a family of 5? £15 for a ticket might be incredibly good value, especially if it includes a free cup of tea and slice of cake (!), but on the otherhand it is also a family weekend food budget or three hours of childcare. I'm not saying we need to make everything super-cheap so as not to exclude everyone, but maybe consider having some events that are subsidised by others? Do you want to think about reduced rates, and who might qualify? Is it appropriate to have a concessionary price for the retired but not young workers in today's economy, and if you are trying to reach out to younger people?

- Children – not every event needs to include children, but do be aware that you lose a huge number of potential visitors by not facilitating people coming with their children. This doesn't have to be complicated, although it can be. For example, we do like our walks and talks model, but could you adjust the balance so that there is an activity for children at the back of the hall whilst the talk is going on, so that families can join? Or would a talk whilst walking (and bouncing without the guide frowning) be more appealing to families?
- Transport – so many currently typical garden visitors live in rural areas with a car that it's easy to forget that a large portion of the population don't have cars, either for financial or ethical reasons. Or many simply aren't confident driving into unknown areas of countryside, or at evening to get to lectures. Do have a think about making sure that at least some of your events are accessible by public transport, and perhaps think about providing a minibus if need be. Or should we be trying harder to facilitate car sharing? The Capability Brown Festival produced a fantastic sustainable travel guide, which is available still at <http://thegardenstrust.org/conservation/hlp-hub/campaigns-and-celebrations/celebrating-humphry-repton-1752-1818/>
- Physical accessibility – Obviously what springs first to mind is wheelchair use, and it's not rocket science to work out a route or alternative route that wheelchair users (or baby buggies, incidentally) might be able to take so they can still see the garden. If it will really be too tricky to tour the garden in a wheelchair, then is there at least a nice spot where they might at least socialise and admire the view? We shouldn't feel that this is a problem unique to us – let's not forget that bath chairs were a frequent presence in gardens in the past, and that Humphry Repton himself spent the last years of his life in one.
- But of course it doesn't need to involve a wheelchair before you take it seriously. There are many walking folk who find access difficult and need level surfaces and plenty of well-placed seats. And don't forget those who have hearing difficulties (definitely one to take into account when you are organising talks or guided tours ... Do you invest in a voice amplifier? Do you avoid stopping for a talk in an echoey grotto? Do you face the view and not the audience when you are pointing something out to them?), or visual impairment (can they read your leaflet which

has small print in order to fit maximum info onto 1 A4 side?, can they navigate their way around the site? Do you remember to explain the visuals in a lecture? Do you make sure that your tour isn't entirely reliant on the participant admiring the view?)

And actually, let's not forget toilets! The NHS estimates that between 3 million and 6 million people in the UK may suffer from some form of urinary incontinence, and of course bowels are also a huge issue, so don't consider toilet access as an afterthought!

- Mental accessibility – Don't forget that not all disabilities are visible. Is your interpretation accessible and appealing to, say, an adult with special needs who has the interests of an adult but the understanding of a child? Is your determination not to have screens in a garden really that important when you remember that many autistic people (and teenagers!) find life easier to handle when they have a screen to hand? Is your bundle of jolly balloons by the entrance actually terrifying to that autistic child?
- Activities – can we have a look at what kind of things have captured the younger zeitgeist at the moment and maybe incorporate into our events? So perhaps cocktails after the garden tour? Or a Pop_up Mexican café next to the dahlia border (dahlias are Mexican)? But what about activities that actually put people off? Many Africans or Caribbean cultures have a fear of dogs, so is a jolly Dog Show really so jolly? Does a tombola mean anything to anyone without a very English background? Is a quiz with free Pimms too off-putting for a Muslim who doesn't gamble or drink? And speaking of which, ...
- ...Catering – just be mindful. Many many religions don't allow alcohol so wine after a lecture is a little exclusive, heaps of folk are gluten-intolerant so a refreshment offer based on sarnies and cake is not very helpful, Muslims generally don't eat pork. Is a hog roast welcoming to cultures who can't eat pork? Obviously there's an argument that no one has to eat the hog roast, but is that really a welcoming message? Speaking of messages ...

A lot of this is actual practical things that we ought to consider and be prepared for. But a lot of it is to do with messages, and whether we are sending out positive and welcoming messages. If you have a bacon sarnie stand and a vegan curry stall at your open day, there may well be something for everyone ... Is the bacon sarnie stand the only one you publicise? Does your publicity picture show an array of people from different backgrounds, or does it show a homogenous group of elderly white ladies? Does your helpful abbreviation to 'BOGOF' actually mean anything to someone who doesn't know that it stands for 'buy one get one free'?

The Three Points to Remember

- Audience development is about mutual benefit, not about being charitable
- Don't overthink it, just be mindful
- Remember our unique offer of historic parks and gardens



There's so much to think about, and it's easy to be daunted and then do nothing for fear of failing or causing offence. Here are three easy things to focus on.

Audience development is not just about social obligation: Reaching new audiences is not about doing charitable things for people who need it. We are not better than 'you' – 'We' have a lot to gain also.

Don't overthink it, just be mindful: Is a hogroast really sensible in a Muslim area? Is charging £2 for a cake helpful if you want a mixed soci-economic group? But don't overthink it and scare yourself – people are just people.

Remember our unique offer: It's easy to get carried away by all the lovely things we would like to happen... can we please stay focused and keep our engagement linked and relevant to historic gardens?!

Pic: Repton's Warley Woods in the Black Country. Sledding is a perfect way to enjoy a historic garden!

Resources:

- <http://thegardenstrust.org/conservation/hlp-hub/campaigns-and-celebrations/celebrating-humphry-repton-1752-1818/>
- <https://www.hlf.org.uk/audience-development>

Interesting organisations:

- <https://gatewaygardenstrust.org/>
- <http://www.accessiblegardens.org.uk>
- <http://www.ben-network.org.uk/index.asp>



Resources:

<http://thegardenstrust.org/conservation/hlp-hub/campaigns-and-celebrations/celebrating-humphry-repton-1752-1818/>. Growing number of useful items (will especially grow during our HLF Sharing project), especially guidance harvested from the Capability Brown Festival, eg Sustainable Travel Toolkit.

A few interesting organisations to be aware of:

<https://gatewaygardenstrust.org/>
<http://www.accessiblegardens.org.uk>
<http://www.ben-network.org.uk/index.asp>

www.thegardenstrust.org

www.humphryrepton.org

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