



The Work of the Volunteers in the County Gardens Trusts

There are many ways the county gardens trusts' volunteers' research and contributions can result in positive outcomes for Designated Parks and Gardens, whether it's those nationally significant enough to be on Historic England's Register of Parks and Gardens, or those which are deemed important heritage assets to their local community.

Volunteering brings people together, giving them a feeling of doing something important and making a difference. I particularly like this picture of volunteers at one of our county gardens trusts putting their protective arms around this Redwood and having fun!



There are 37 county gardens trusts all run by amazing volunteers. It is impossible to estimate how many hours of work they put in to run their trusts; stage events, visits and talks; raise funds; produce members' magazines, newsletters and other publications. They work with schools, students of horticulture and garden history, owners and gardeners of parks and gardens, local council planning and conservation officers and many other groups in our communities. They research their historic green spaces in archives, websites, and private collections; and visit and record the current condition and what features survive today in those landscapes.

This all helps to spread the news about how special our historic designed green spaces are and what we can do to help conserve them. The Gardens Trust, as a statutory consultee in the planning system, cannot respond to planning applications affecting designated parks and gardens, across the country, without the knowledge and help of the brilliant county gardens trusts' volunteers.

As you will have seen from your programme we will be hearing today from Northamptonshire, Lancashire, Suffolk and Nottinghamshire Gardens Trusts about the work they have been doing to help protect their special green spaces. I have been chatting to several other county gardens trusts and they have kindly shared what they have been doing with me and sent in photos.

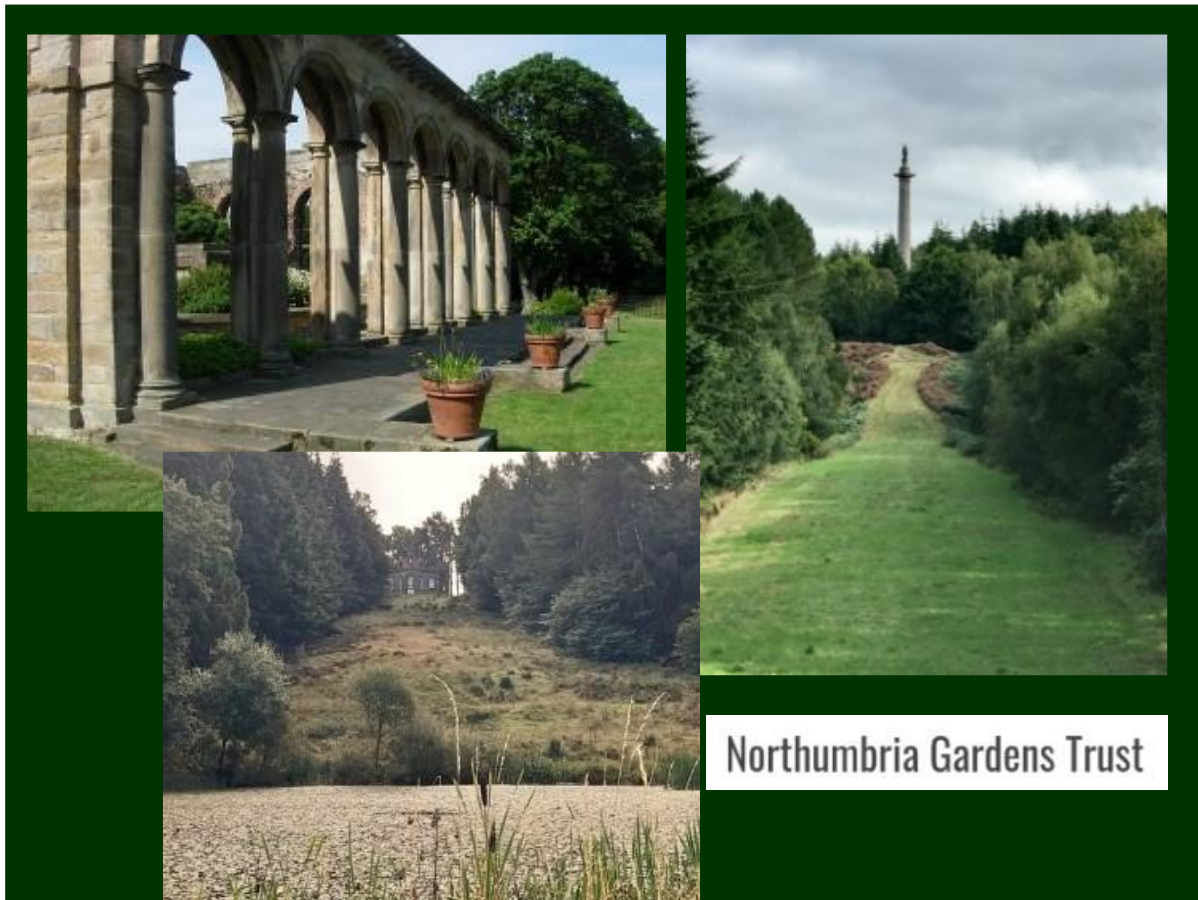


Gibside, Gateshead

I'm going to start in the north of England with Northumbria Gardens Trust, who not only cover their county but also County Durham.

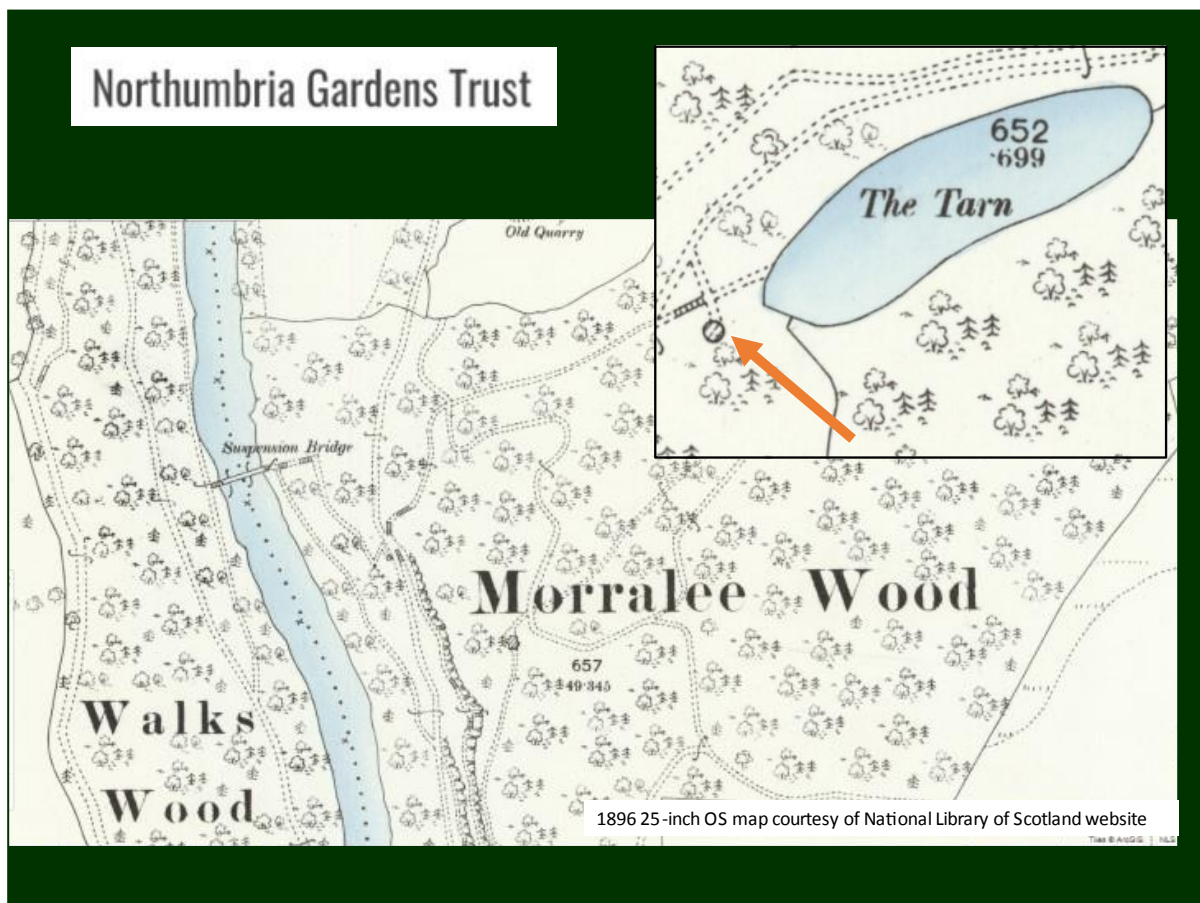
This is Grade I Gibside in Tyne and Weir and is a superb example of a Georgian landscape, fashioned with two things in mind: to provide spectacular vista views and 'wow' moments for the family and their visitors. I visited this park after the GT's Yorkshire weekend last year and can confirm that it does both these things, in spades!

Two of Northumbria GT's volunteers, Mary Conn and Margaret Wills have undertaken much research into Gibside's landscape, particularly the transcription of the estate accounts, now held in the Durham Archives.



Mary and Margaret's work was invaluable in informing the understanding of the development of the landscape under successive owners and came just at the right time to guide the National Trust's restoration project.

In more recent years The Northumbria Gardens Trust has been able to draw on this body of knowledge in responding to planning matters, as they arise, concerning the Gibside Estate.



Northumbria GT member Judith Betney studied the walks and designed landscape on both sides of the valley of the river Allen in Northumberland. Originally, these Ridley Hall walks extended as far as Raven's Crag in the C18 but were further developed considerably by Susan Davidson in the C19. This elaborate network of walks takes advantage of the picturesque qualities of this dramatic site and the wider landscape beyond. They were developed and furnished with rustic summerhouses at key viewing points. These included The Swiss Cottage; Billberry Hill Moss House; and at the spot known as The Tarn, a North American tableau was constructed, complete with a Wigwam, which I imagine is this circle here!



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Although not yet on the Register of Parks and Gardens, these picturesque walks and landscape are now looked after by the National Trust and Judith's research has added to their understanding of the development of the designed landscape, which in turn helps to inform the management of the site. This has been so important in the wake of Storm Desmond in January 2016 with many trees being toppled and the previous suspension bridge, to this one, was swept clean away.



Heading south now, to Lincolnshire Gardens Trust where a team of their researchers have worked on several designed landscapes, to assemble enough information to put them forward to Historic England for listing on the Parks and Gardens Register

The first landscape Lincolnshire GT shared with me, is the Skegness Esplanade and Tower Gardens, shown here.

The majority of the C20 design elements of this seaside landscape have survived with the Victorian Jubilee Clock Tower built in 1898, serving as the main focus point. The well-structured composition is linked by boating lakes in what were formerly sand dunes, and punctuated by bridges, sunken formal gardens, pavilions, bowling greens and mock castles. This is testimony to town engineer Rowland Jenkins' artistic vision and flair. Further historic significance is that the first Butlin's holiday camp opened in 1936 in Skegness and was the site of the first bumper cars seen in Britain.

Thanks to Lincs GT volunteer researchers, Skegness Esplanade and the Tower Gardens are now listed as Grade II on the Register of Parks and Gardens.



Photograph: Mark Robinson, HE's Missing Pieces Project. Listed Building entry: 1472526

South of Mablethorpe on the Lincolnshire coast, the Sutton-on-Sea War Memorial Gardens did not have enough to satisfy an entry on the Parks and Gardens Register, even though they were designed by Dame Sylvia Crowe after the serious 1953 East Coast floods.

The creation of superb sea-side gardens played a big part in providing jobs for the unemployed and restoring morale. Lincolnshire GT went to great lengths to highlight this historic significance but were unable to get the gardens registered. Unfortunately, some elements of Crowe's design were lost, such as the paddling pool, café and changing rooms. However, as a result of Lincolnshire GT's research, the War Memorial and surrounding garden walls were designated as Listed Structures in 2020 and therefore adding a degree of protection.



Here are two landscape parks researched and put forward by Lincolnshire GT

Top: Norton Place, West Lindsey, Grade II 2021

Norton Place is significant as an intact Brownian landscape with a surviving plan (1771) drawn up for a splendid country house for a local MP. The park is an excellent, little altered, early example of Thomas White's designs, a leading foreman who worked with Lancelot Brown. The carefully considered placement of attractive buildings especially the Grade I John Carr house and Grade II* bridge, shows the collaboration between both these distinguished designers.

Bottom: South Ormsby Hall, Grade II

This is a well-preserved gem of an early to mid-C18 landscape park with many specimen trees setting off a Grade II* James Paine country house of some distinction. Key surviving elements include the Lime Walk, serpentine lake, walled garden and stables, and planned vistas demonstrate a pleasing aesthetic Georgian quality. Both house and park are currently undergoing major restoration, the park was a 2017 entry onto the Register, again, as Grade II.

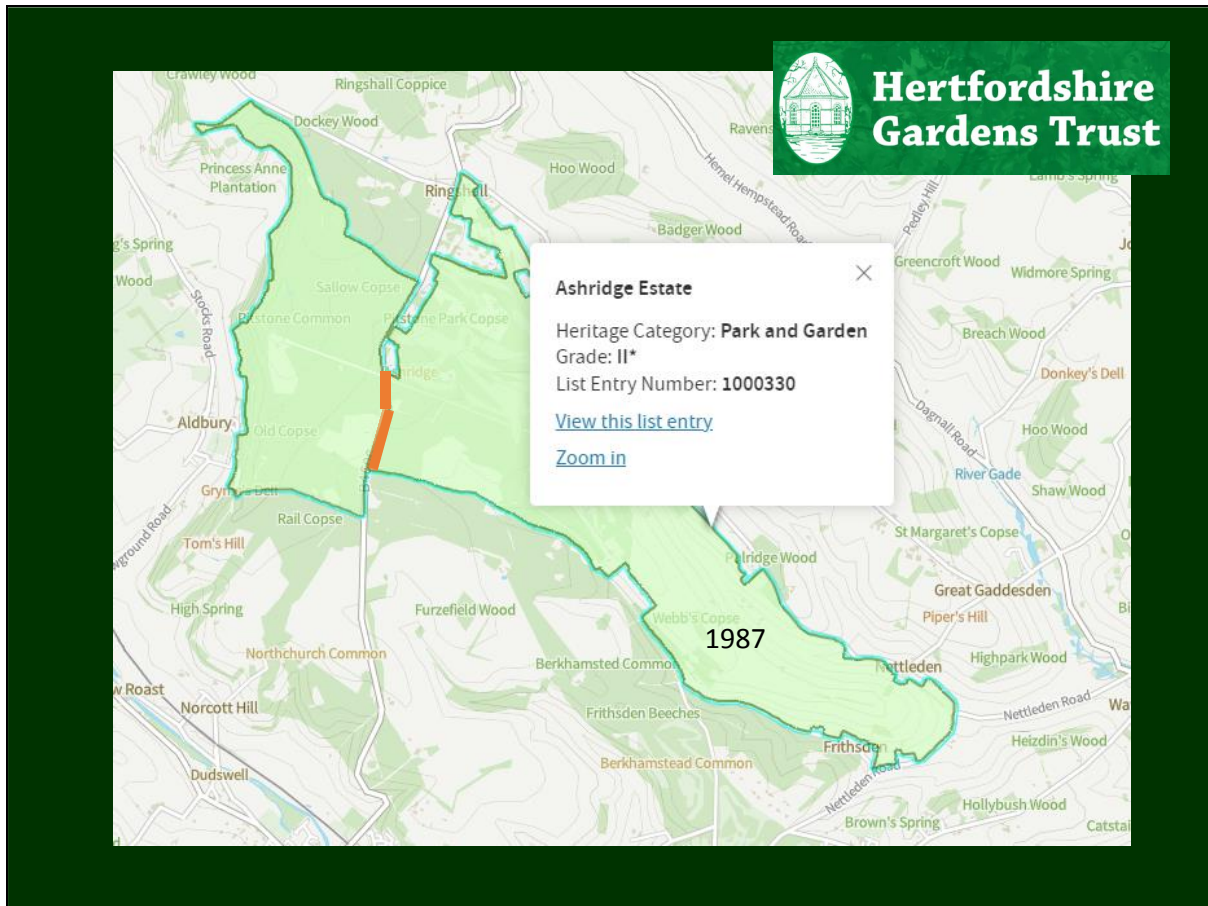


These photos are of parts of Grade II* Belvoir Castle Park and Gardens which were the subject of a Register Amendment in 2020

Belvoir has an extensive landscape park and various gardens, mostly early C19 but incorporating late C17 elements, largely laid out to a plan of 1780 by Capability Brown, and associated with a spectacular, early-C19 hilltop castle.

The Register entry was upgraded following the 2016 Brown Tercentenary year, Lincolnshire GT's research proved that the recently discovered Brown's plans were carried out following his death, with advice from his engineering experts and collaborators such as Adam Mickle. In addition, the Knipton Reservoir, designed by Jessop, was constructed in the south of the park for industrial purposes as a floodwater reservoir for the Grantham Canal *before* the two lakes on Brown's plan were created. Its setting, enhanced by planting, remains a significant Brownian landscape, designed to enhance vistas on the main approach to Belvoir Castle from Melton Mowbray and therefore, Lincolnshire's GT successfully argued that it should be included within the area of the Registered Park.

Two more landscapes (not shown here) Lincs volunteers have researched and successfully put forward for registration, include Grade II Uffington Park and Grade II Greatford Hall, both made it on to the Register in 2021.



On to Hertfordshire and Hertfordshire Gardens Trust volunteers' research and recording work into Grade II* Ashridge in Herts, and Buckinghamshire, as the park straddles the county boundary.

Ashridge is well known for its Capability Brown parkland and Humphry Repton/Jeffrey Wyatville designed gardens around the house, but this area of the parkland, west of the orange line, was not included in the original Register entry in 1987.

It has a very different character from the designed landscape and pleasure grounds nearer the house to the east.

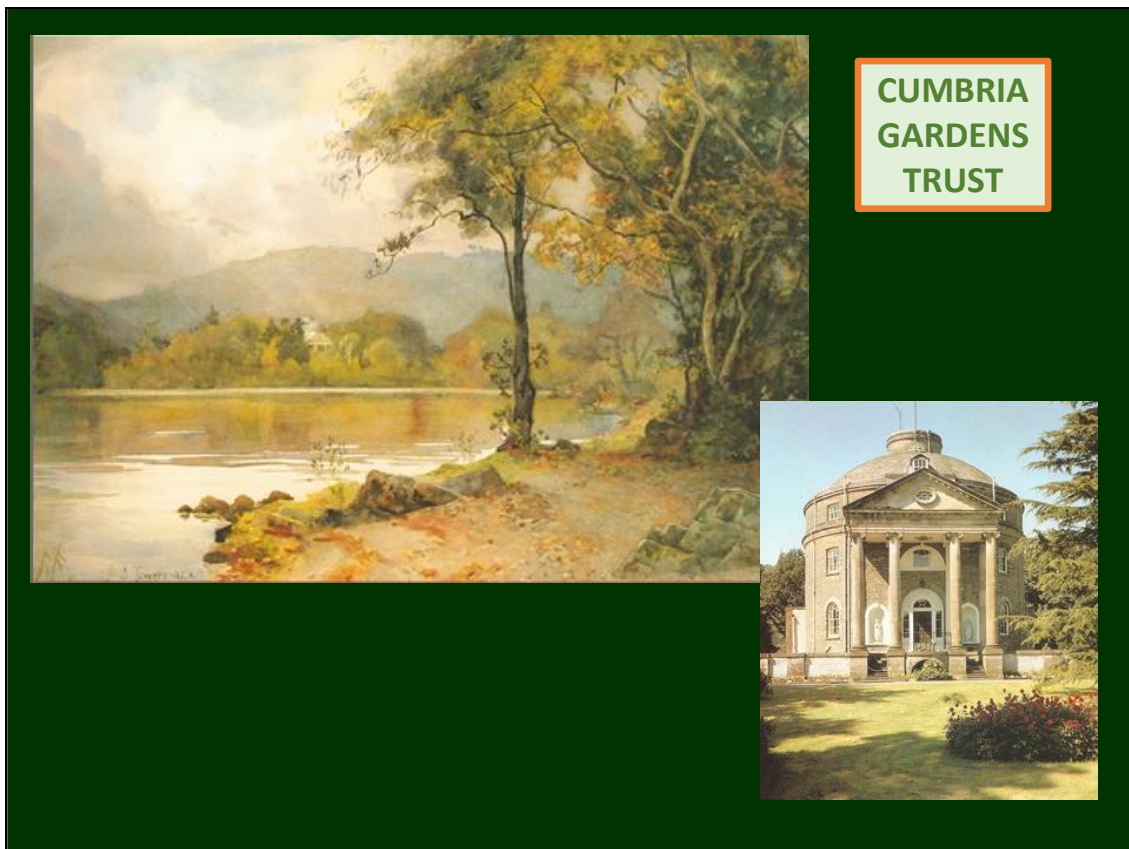


This map shows more clearly this area of parkland (outlined in red) known as the Western Park. It was laid out as an ornamental woodland park between 1803-1833 for the 7th Earl of Bridgewater and was completed by his heirs, giving a little-altered Regency-designed woodland park with picturesque built highlights and designed views.

Quote from HGT researcher Kate Harwood:

The provision of designed views, especially the patte d'oie and those from Albury and Duncombe Terraces, ornamental planting and picturesque cottages is very much of its time and was described in *Sylva Florifera: (The Shrubbery Historically and Botanically Treated: with Observations on the Formation of Ornamental Plantations, and Picturesque Scenery)* by Henry Philipps in 1823. The Herts GT researchers not only looked at all the documental evidence for this area, but they carefully recorded this landscape with its many planned views within, and extending out of, the park – shown here by the blue arrows.

Herts GT argued that the Ashridge pleasure grounds, C18 park and Regency park were the three elements in the 7th Earl's vision for his parkland and must be considered together as a whole. Western Park is now included in the Grade II* Registered landscape of Ashridge.



Heading north to Cumbria Gardens Trust and their research into Grade II* Belle Isle, Windermere

The Gardens Trust was consulted over the removal of a temporary wharf structure on Belle Isle on the shores of Windermere. The research by a Cumbria GT volunteer not only identified the house in its grounds as being the first cylindrical mansion built in England but also the first building in the Lake District to be designed and sited for Picturesque reasons. In creating a Jardin d'Anglais it was thought that Thomas White was influenced by William Gilpin's expressed views that the island had picturesque potential, when Gilpin visited the island a few years earlier.

It is also likely that, before any of the landscape design and improvement works, the western shore of Belle Isle would have originally supported deep stands of Phragmites reeds. The recommendation of these being reinstated would protect the newly restored beach in the same location, and thus protect this island garden from erosion and increase biodiversity along its shores.



Travelling south to Hereford and Worcester GT and their work at Grade I Croome Court

Lancelot 'Capability' Brown's first professional commission, at Croome Court in Worcestershire, was designed to be visually contained by dramatic plantings of Cedars and Limes on the sky lines of the surrounding hills. Being high on the exposed ridges the original trees have slowly succumbed to storm and wind damage as well as old age. Hereford & Worcestershire GT volunteers decided to replant the Pirton Ridge where the majority of the mature trees have been lost. Those still standing are broken and vulnerable but still make a strong statement in the surrounding landscape. The National Trust is now the caretaker for Croome Park and kindly supplied the stakes and tree guards for the Cedar and Lime saplings that a group of stalwart volunteers planted on a cold and windswept day. They are pleased to report that all the trees have survived the hot summers of 2021 and 2022 and are now beginning to make a positive difference to this important designed landscape.



Quote from H&WGT volunteer Jane Patton: The replanting of Croome's Pirton Ridge was one of the most satisfying projects that we have undertaken. After a few years the trees are beginning to make an impact on the landscape.

Here are the plucky H&WGT volunteers on their planting day and one of their Cedars, 3 years after it was planted. As you can see it is doing well and will be a future, beautiful tree on the Croome skyline.



Southeast to Hampshire Gardens Trust and the planning response work they have submitted for the Grade I Bramshill Park landscape. Bramshill Park, Hart BC, Hampshire, is a series of early C17 to C18 formal walled gardens, terraces and avenues set in a park which includes extensive early-C17th water gardens around a Grade I Jacobean mansion. These in turn stand in the middle of a Medieval deer park. Subsequent changes to the landscape happened in the late C17, mid- and late-C18, mid-C19 and between the 1930s to 40s.

Between 1954 - 2014 Bramshill was owned by the Home Office when it housed the National Police Training Academy. During that time accommodation blocks and lecture halls were built in the park but otherwise the historic garden features survived, although severely neglected. In 2014 the Home Office sold the site to a developer. Hampshire GT were concerned that the likely direction of development under the new owner would threaten the historic value of the landscape. They succeeded in their application to HE to upgrade the landscape to Grade 1. Hampshire GT went on to respond vigorously to all the subsequent planning applications for Bramshill which included a substantial new build in the park: all the applications were rejected by Hart BC.

Hampshire GT volunteer Sally Miller says 'Earlier this year a new planning application was withdrawn and we have learned subsequently, through a contact, that the developer has sold the entire site; with a non-disclosure agreement to protect the name of the new owner. Sally goes on to say 'Obviously, we will continue to monitor Bramshill and respond to future proposed development.'



Worthing Park, Basingstoke & Deane BC

Worthing House (privately owned and currently in use as commercial offices) is one of several polite C18 country mansions in parkland situated along the highway from Basingstoke to Andover. As a group they add significantly to the historic importance of Basingstoke at that period. Worthing Park is locally listed on the Hampshire Register of Historic Parks & Gardens. The park, although small, retains the most important features of an C18 estate: open parkland with mature trees scattered throughout; it has a ha-ha; encircling paths; terraced gardens; tree belts; two walled gardens; a stable block, and farm buildings. The village of Worthing has historically been outside the defined Basingstoke Settlement Area until recently. It is a Conservation Area – due to its rural character and C18 houses surrounded by fields and Worthing Park is an important element within the Conservation Area.

There is a current application to build a housing estate on about a third of the parkland. Hampshire GT have objected to the application on the grounds that the harm it will cause has not been justified and they are not convinced that there are sufficient public benefits to outweigh the harm to the setting of Worthing House and its Park. Basingstoke and Deane BC's Local Plan Policy (SS3.10 para h) states that it will 'conserve and enhance the architectural and historic significance of the Worthing Conservation Area with its listed buildings including Worthing House, respecting their setting, and ensuring sufficient mitigation is put in place when required.' This is yet to be seen.



St Giles Hill, Winchester (which is again locally listed)

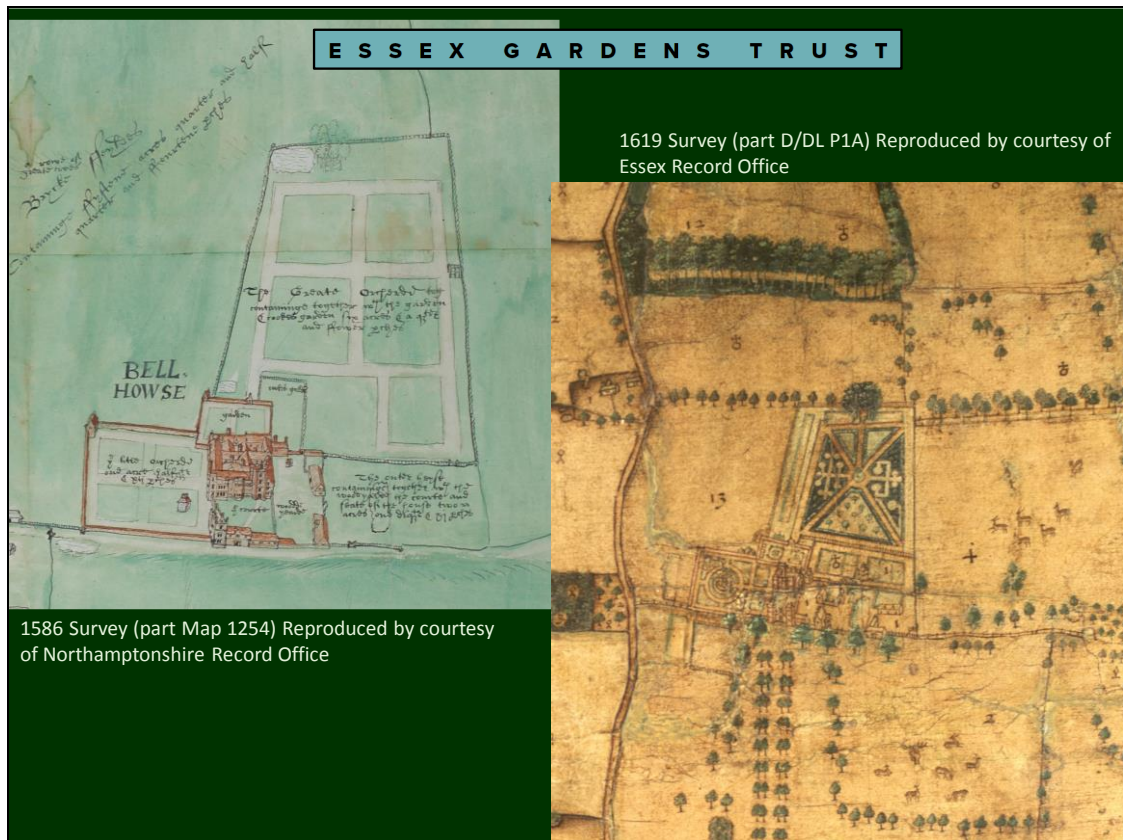
The designed historic space known as St Giles Hill, has long afforded fine views of the Cathedral, the High Street and extensive views across the city of Winchester. It is owned by the City Council whose restricted budget now means nothing more than essential works can be done. Self-seeded trees and scrub have overtaken the slopes, and the historic views outwards are obscured.

Recently, a group of concerned residents, living on or near the hill, have set up a Friends Group with the aim of working with the City Council to improve and restore the landscape. In the 1860s parts of the hill were laid out as a recreation ground. In the 1890s an additional piece of land was donated by Lord Northington, local landowner, and H E Milner was commissioned to lay out the new ground as a more formal park, for which the plans survive. The site is now completely overgrown. Hampshire GT research volunteers are working with the Friends group to record this history and advise them on the possible recovery and restoration of the original Milner design.

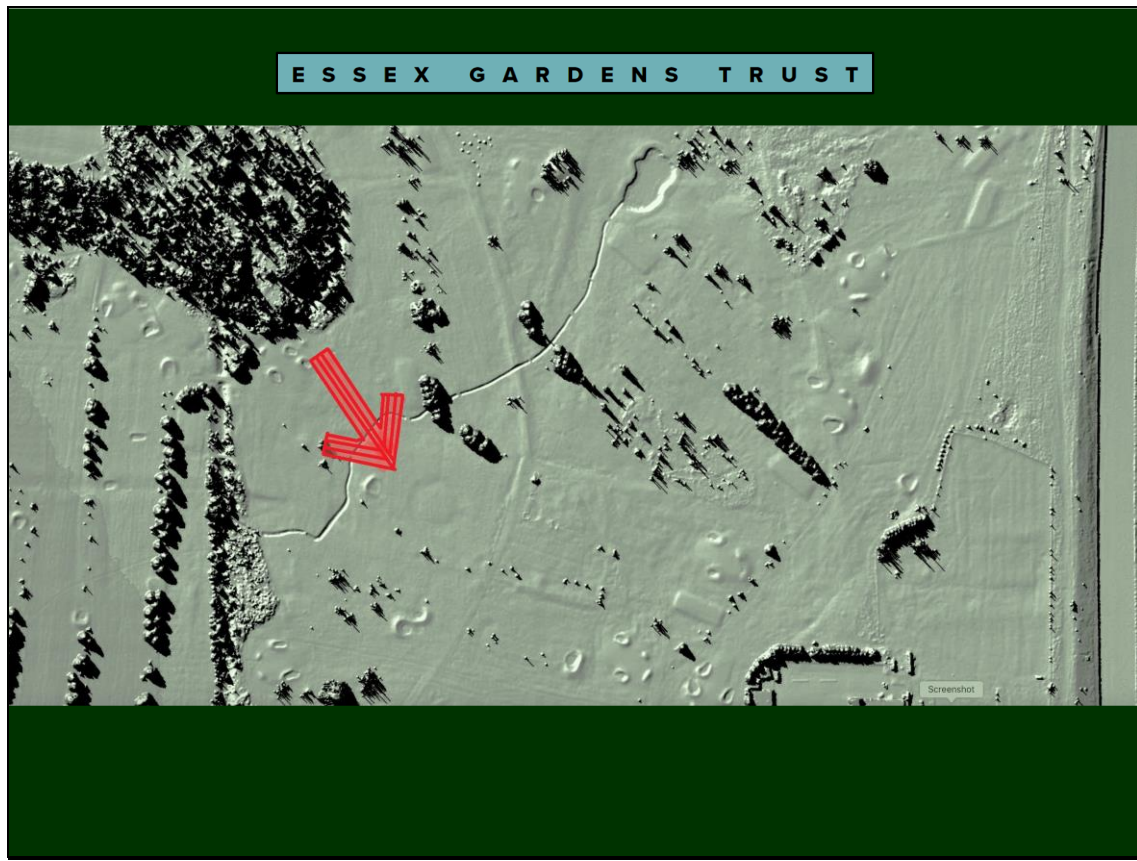


We are now heading round London to Essex Gardens Trust and their work on Grade II Belhus Park. You can see in this painting the early gardens lay to the west and north of the mansion (now lost). The landscape was later worked on by Capability Brown to produce an extensive C18 landscape park.

Sadly, as many of you will know, in the late C20 Brown's parkland was rudely dissected by the M25 and had a golf course built on part of it!



In 2020, research was undertaken by Essex volunteers for the 'Fifty Fabulous Features' report, supported by the Essex Gardens Trust and the Land of the Fanns project. Documentary sources were found, such as these plans of 1586 and 1619, that supported aerial photography and.....



....this LIDAR survey.

The LIDAR imagery indicated that remains of the Tudor and Jacobean gardens at Belhus Park and were interestingly preserved despite the Brownian changes and being now under the local authority golf course. The circular pool can be seen here, with paths radiating off it, and was narrowly spared by the digging of fairway bunkers close by.

Slide 22



As a result of the volunteers' findings, in March 2021, Historic England conducted a survey of part of the site using Ground Penetrating Radar and a drone. The subsequent report confirmed the survival of both 'significant elements of the original garden design beneath the golf course fairways' and 'the paths and walls related to the water garden, together with anomalies associated with the original manor house, gardens and a possible gate house'.

The findings of this report were summarised in the 2021 Inventory of Designed Landscapes of Thurrock, produced by the same group of Essex volunteer researchers. Following the success of the survey, and to aid the removal of Belhus from their At-Risk Register, Historic England commissioned a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) that should help to protect Belhus more in the future.



Heading into our Capital and in 2023 London Parks & Gardens has continued to champion the historic landscapes of London. This Trust has an extensive inventory of over 2,500 historic green spaces, available to search for and read on their website. This inventory includes public parks, squares, churchyards, cemeteries and any other green space of historic interest. The information, whether it is for a park or garden on the Register, or a smaller more modest landscape, is a key resource for the London PG planning group who respond to planning applications.

Here, you can see their volunteer research group, who took part in a study day to discuss the future management of Grade II* Kenwood – which is a Repton designed landscape in the north of the city.



You will have undoubtedly been aware of London P&G's sustained campaign, which eventually took them to the High Court, to protect Grade II Victoria Tower Gardens in Westminster from the building of the Holocaust Memorial, believing this structure is the right idea but this is the wrong place for it.

London PG has worked tirelessly over the last few years with the Save Victoria Gardens Group and the Thorney Island Society. They continue to monitor the situation and are waiting to see if the Prime Minister carries out his intention to repeal the Victorian Act which enabled the campaigners to successfully win their High Court challenge last year.



Photographs: S. Bate

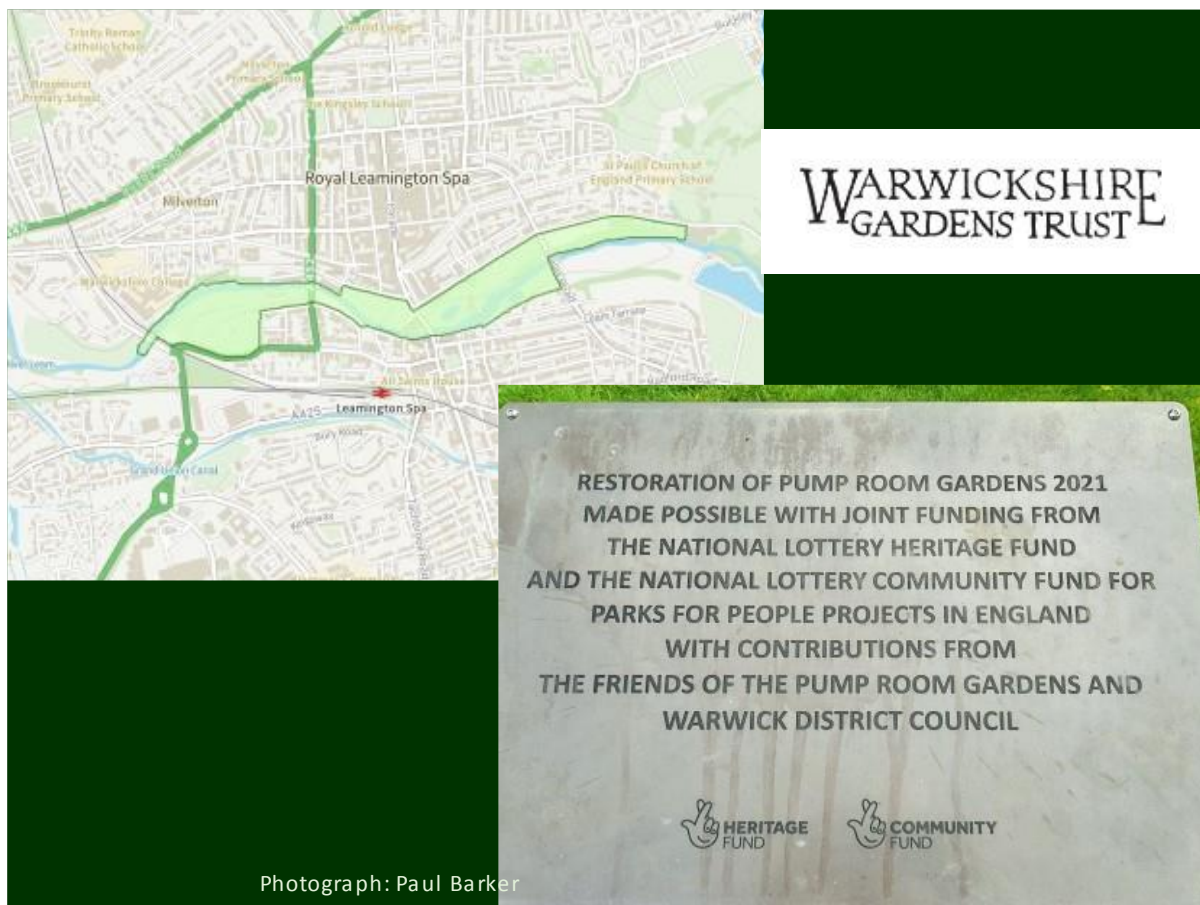
This year, in June, LPG was thrilled to see the return of its annual London Open Gardens weekend, not only is it their major fundraiser but it succeeds in highlighting the gardened spaces of London and the many people who look after them. It was a very hot weekend, but it was a super event, that I can heartily recommend.



Heading out of London and up to the East, where 20 Norfolk Gardens Trust volunteers spent around 20 years researching historic designed landscapes and gardens in their county. Those in Norwich and the 19 market towns formed the NGT Town Garden Survey reports (shown left), which were placed in council planning and conservation offices, as well as the Norfolk Heritage Centre and Record Office. As these reports date from the 1990s, over the lockdown periods many of the reports were transcribed into a digital format - and this work is still ongoing - so that they can be shared more widely.

The Norfolk GT gazetteer of 320 Gardens and Designed Landscapes has not only sold 2,500 copies but has become an invaluable resource to the Norfolk GT conservation volunteers when they are responding to planning applications affecting Parks and Gardens. NGT is now at the start of their next 10-year plan and one of the top priorities is to get the research group back up and running, and to share the information from the book digitally - as well as updating it - to the Norfolk HER, the Parks and Gardens database and HE's Missing Pieces Project (formerly known as Enriching the List). They will also be looking at those landscapes that might be suitable for an entry on the Register.

It is the same situation for all the county gardens trusts, the more they can share their research, the more appreciated it becomes by a wider section of the public and therefore the more historic green spaces are valued, leading to a greater desire to protect them.



Travelling west now to Warwickshire Gardens Trust.

The Spa Gardens, Leamington Spa (known locally as the Pump Room Gardens) is a kilometre-long chain of riverside walks, gardens and parks, created at various dates between 1814 and 1903. They run through the centre of Leamington Spa following the route of the river Leam. These Grade II Spa Gardens were restored in 2020/21 with funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Warwick District Council and the Friends of the Pump Room Gardens, an active group of volunteers led by Paul Barker.

Paul is now the Chair of Warwickshire Gardens Trust who have been petitioning Warwick District Council about two proposed projects that have the potential to adversely affect these gardens.



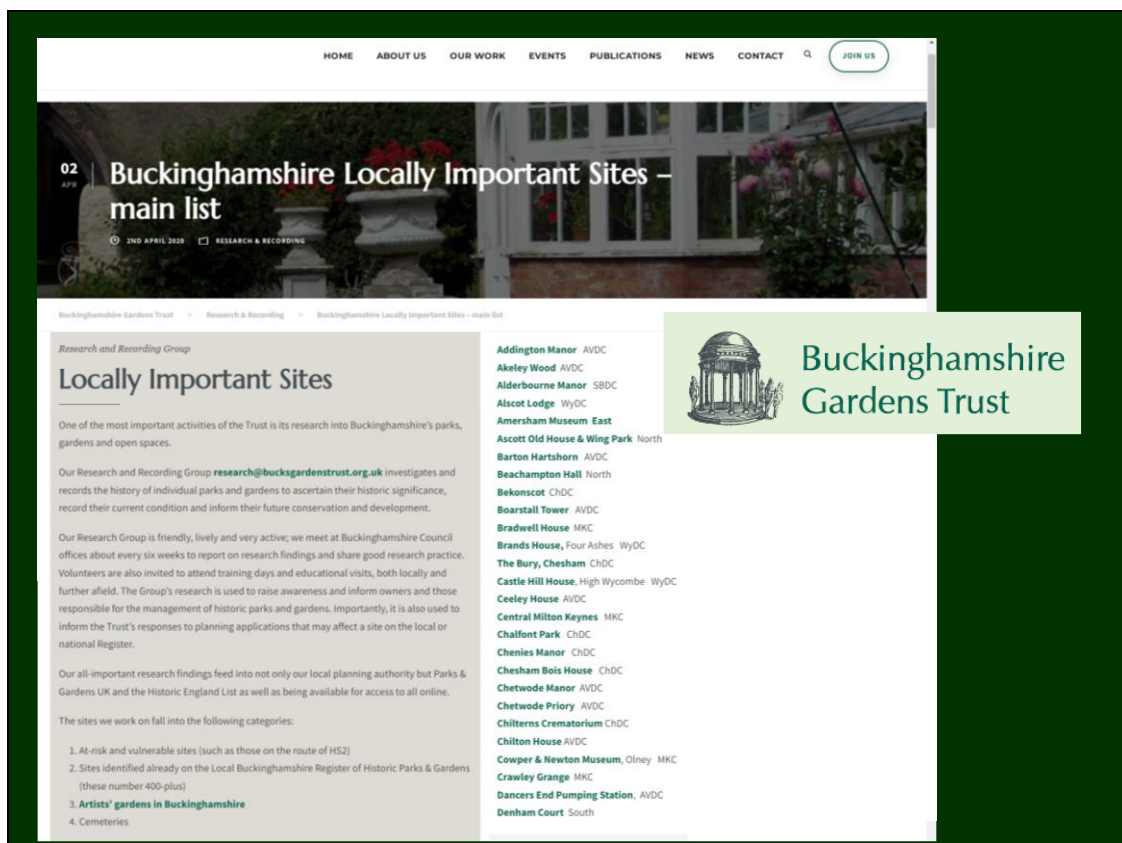
Severn Trent Water are proposing for dig a very large hole in the middle of the gardens, on the right of this picture, for a storm overflow tank. The twist here is that they appear not to need formal planning approval as the work is covered by their statutory powers. Warks GT have written to the Council in the hope they will be engaging with Severn Trent Water before the work is due to begin in September. There is a statement to say they will reinstate the Pump Room Gardens to match the existing quality but previous work which promised this, was not carried out well. Warks GT is asking for assurance that while the project may be necessary for ecological/flood risk reasons, a conservation management plan is drawn up to make sure that the tank is installed well below the ground level and that no heritage asset such as the bandstand and tree planting is adversely affected.

A second recent planning application for these gardens asks for the installation of CCTV cameras on a 6-metre column with a bulky base, right in the line of these elegant lampposts – sited where the blue star is shown. Warks GT asks that other designs and location be considered to make this less intrusive and more in keeping with existing styles, particularly as the application doesn't even mention that this is a Registered Park or the negative affect such a structure would have on it.



The state of these gardens is a reflection of the neglect by the Council and the use of the grounds for inappropriate festivals which require access for HGV's and equipment.

These are typical examples where parks, even those listed on the Register, are seen as empty green spaces, fair game for development, and a county gardens trust can really make a difference with their local knowledge and research.



Further east, we come to volunteer achievements in Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust

Bucks Gardens Trust have contributed to the 'Local Heritage List pilot project' in Buckinghamshire. The body of research, on locally important gardens, that they have researched over the last 10 years, has been uploaded in the Parks and Gardens category. Bucks GT passed their 100th research report milestone last year, and all their reports are available to view on their website.

We will be hearing more on this when Claire de Carle, the chair of BGT will speak about how their volunteers' research is being added to Local Lists in, here, at the GT Historic Landscape Assembly on 12th October.

The GT and Sheffield Botanic Gardens joint project on Robert Marnock has led to new Bucks GT research on three Marnock sites in South Buckinghamshire, one that has not been previously researched and two registered sites where Marnock's work has not been previously recognised. Hopefully, Jill Sinclair will mention these Marnock sites, in a few minutes.



Bucks GT have also taken part in the GT community champions scheme and attended three garden open days during the summer. This enabled them to engage with members of the public by gently introducing them to Garden History and raising awareness of historic gardens in their patch.



Bucks Gardens Trust has recently launched a new initiative 'The Mission Statement project' and as part of this they are seeking funding for their new 'Professional Gardener's Network' which is proving to be very popular and in the long term will see closer relations being built between over 20 historic gardens across their county.



Aerial photo courtesy of Google Maps

Heading west now and since 2020, volunteers from Somerset Gardens Trust have been working with The Friends of Mendip Hospital Cemetery.

History:

In 1873 almost 3 acres of land were purchased by the Somerset and Bath Pauper Lunatic Asylum (known as Mendip Hospital from 1948). The land was laid out as a burial ground for nearly 3000 patients and staff until it was closed in 1963. The cemetery was neglected for many years and in the year 2000 it was put up for sale for a potential housing development. The charity called Friends of Mendip Hospital Cemetery, was formed in an attempt to save it. This proved successful and two years later the Friends were granted a long lease on the property.

Somerset GT Volunteers have researched the site as well as helped to clear and maintain the grounds - unfunded and supported solely by donations.



Photos: Peter Jaggard.

Somerset GT aims to continue to support the Friends of this cemetery to ensure the long-term direction of the conservation of the site. To achieve this, they funded a Conservation Management Plan from a professional garden historian / landscape architect.

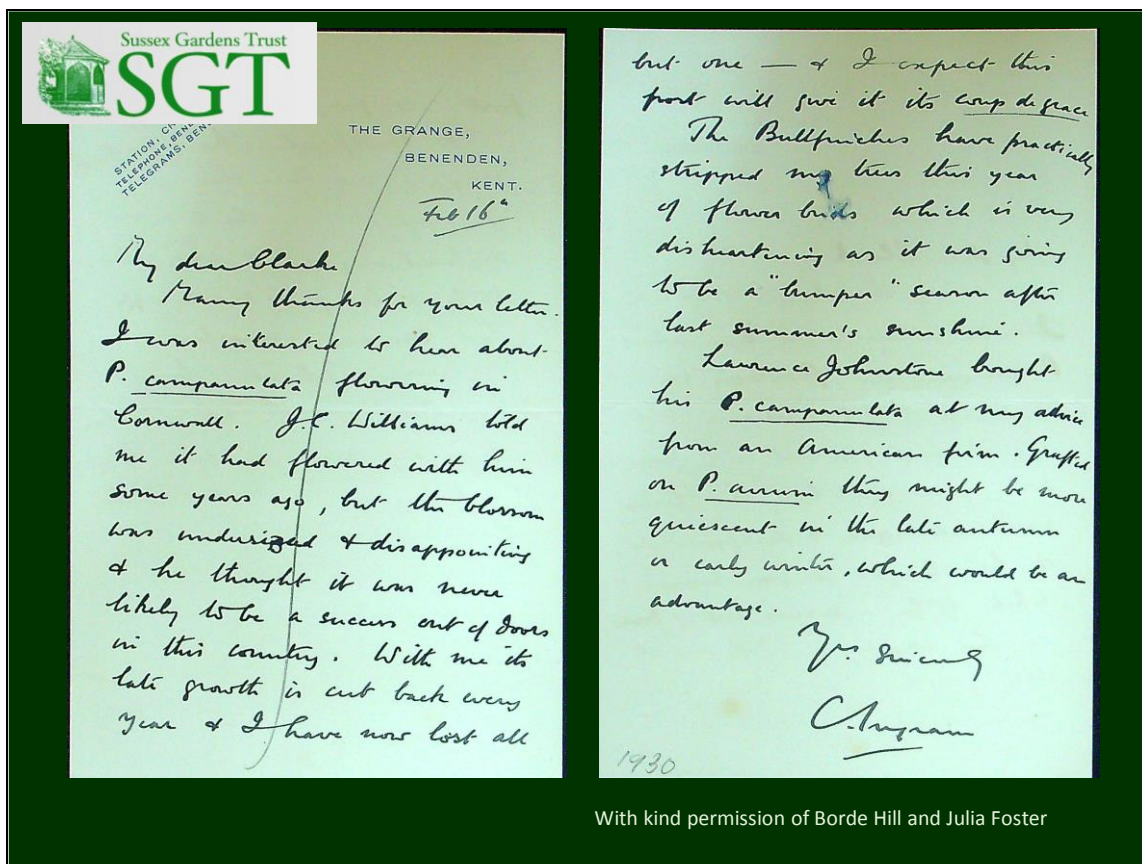
Going forward, the plan is to lodge the report with Historic England and look to see the work needed to achieve listed status on the Register of Parks and Gardens. Another option they are considering is uploading the information onto the Somerset Heritage Environment Register.



I am going to end my round up county gardens trusts' volunteers' work, with Sussex Gardens Trust. And I'm sure many of you will recognise the garden in this picture as being part of the 2,300-acre estate at Borde Hill, outside Haywards Heath in West Sussex.

At the end of 2019, Sussex GT was approached by Borde Hill Park & Gardens and asked for advice on first collating, and then cataloguing, a diverse archive of family papers dating back to the late C19th. Borde Hill is listed as Grade II* on the Register of Parks and Gardens, and Historic England describes it as *'A late C19 to mid C20 plantsman's and collector's garden, laid out by Colonel Stephenson Clarke, set within early C20 park with mid C19 origins.*

Colonel Stephenson Clarke (1862-1948) was highly respected in horticultural circles, sponsoring many plant hunting expeditions, and after serving on several RHS committees he received the RHS Victoria Medal of Honour (VMH) in 1936 and the RHS Veitch Memorial Medal in 1944. So, as you can imagine, there was a lot of correspondence and other documents in the collection.



This is an example of one of the horticultural treasures that exist in the Borde Hill archive. It's a letter from Collingwood 'Cherry' Ingram to Colonel Stephenson Clarke and is a discussion of the characteristics of *Prunus campanulata*. Sussex GT volunteer Maggie Hill has this sent me this letter, as an example, because:

- Letters, such as this, between friends are often undated, possibly due to the frequency of the correspondence, and therefore needing research to find the year they were written.
- It shows the convention of underlining the plant names.
- It gives international sources of plants by enthusiasts.
- D. It gives evidence of the friendships between the horticulturalists of the time. Here, J.C. Williams of Caerhays and Lawrence Johnstone of Hidcote are both mentioned in this one letter.
- E. It provides historical information to the current gardeners at Borde Hill and informs their new planting schemes.
- F. And.... because this author has relatively easy-to-read handwriting!

Maggie Hill volunteered to help bring some order to the papers, lying loose on shelving in a small office. In summary, it was, at that time, a simple, if mammoth, filing project. Some initial organisational structure was identified and implemented, before the first lockdown struck in March 2020, and Maggie was unable to return (to what is a family home) until May 2021.



With kind permission of Borde Hill and Julia Foster

During the lockdown the owners decided that some professional archival help, in the guise of Julia Foster, was needed to catalogue and conserve this important collection; but Maggie has continued to work alongside Julia as a volunteer.

They have consulted with West Sussex Records Office and have created and applied a reference numbering system, so that the cleaned documents in their approved storage files and boxes can be easily retrieved when responding to enquiries from students, other archives or to form exhibitions such as this one shown here, to mark 130 years of Planting Excellence at Borde Hill, held June 2023.

Julia and Maggie have prioritised the most important material and scanned it to a digital database. The archive includes letters from other major estate owners and their head gardeners, plant hunters, nurseries, and garden staff working at Borde Hill; documents from the RHS, RBG Kew, RBG Edinburgh, overseas botanical gardens and numerous plant societies. Also, some of the more fragile articles have been transcribed.

Already the exchange of knowledge with other gardens and organisations has become much easier as well as increasing everyone's knowledge about this Grade II* garden. On the left is Maggie's working list, where amongst other notes she is working out all the names of the Head Gardeners.

Maggie tells me 'It has been a huge, delightful, learning opportunity for me to understand all the work which goes into developing and maintaining an archive, its present and future value, and how it works in practice. . . I have a new mentor in Julia Foster, gaining an understanding of what is involved behind the scenes. She and I happily pull each other down fascinating 'rabbit holes' as something new comes to light, before one of us pulls us back up again to get on with the 'day job'!

This is a great example of how volunteering can be very rewarding and fun!

To end...

I would like to say a big thank you from all of us, to all the CGTs who took the time to tell me what they have been working on to research and conserve their counties' designated parks and gardens. And, a huge thank you to the many volunteers at the County Gardens Trusts for all the work they do to research, record, campaign, and protect the special historic green spaces in their respective counties.