Nottinghamshire's Garden Story: Historic Landscape Research for Beginners
Preparing for your Site Visit

Tamsin McMillan, Gardens Trust Volunteer Support Officer
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Slides from the webinar

I'm Tamsin McMillan, one of the Volunteer Support Officers at the GT, and our work is part-funded by Historic England. My colleague Sally Bate is also here to help with your queries.

I hope you've had a good Christmas break. Perhaps you even managed to make a start researching a landscape near you!

This is the fourth webinar in a series of workshops aimed at new volunteers in our Notts Garden Story project, which we're delivering over the winter, with Notts Gardens Trust. We're sharing as much of the project as possible with others, so that you can find out about landscapes that are important to you, wherever you are.

Please could you keep your microphones on mute. You can keep your cameras on if you'd like to, but only if you're happy to appear in the recording!

Please post questions or comments in the chat box as you think of them

You'll be sent a copy of tonight's slides and a link to the recording, so please don't worry about taking lots of notes. If you would like to view any of the earlier recordings, you can access these via the Gardens Trust resource hub at https://thegardenstrust.org/conservation/vs-hub/campaigns-and-celebrations/nottinghamshires-garden-story/

This session is aimed at those who have started, or are about to start, researching their sites and are getting ready to visit them and record what they see. We're running a visit to Holme Pierrepont Hall, just outside Nottingham, next week, on the 16th Jan, to take the project volunteers step by step through how to record the landscape. So this session is an introduction to that. And you can still book on to that visit, by emailing me.

Tonight we'll look at:

- The reasons for making a site visit
- How to Choose a site, if you haven't done so already
- How to ask for access, especially if it's a private landscape
- The recording form we'll be using to write the final reports
- How to prepare for your visit
- And what to take on the day
- How to record features, once you're there

- And I'll tell you about travel and other expenses you can claim for, if you're taking part in the Notts project

Although you can gather huge amounts of crucial information about your chosen landscape from archival and desktop research, this only really starts to make complete sense when you visit and walk around your site. Even if you have visited many times before, you'll see it with new eyes when comparing it to the old maps, images and historic materials you've started collecting.

So, what we want to achieve from a site visit is:

- To understand the history and development of the landscape by comparing what can be seen on the ground now to what we know from the archives, maps and reports we've been looking at as we start our research.

- To record what the site looks like today and note its condition. We're not writing condition surveys for this project, but you can make a note of whether something is ruined, has been recently restored or vandalised etc.

- To think about which elements contribute most to the landscape's significance – e.g. what features really stand out and make it special?

You'll be focusing on:

- Checking the features you've noted during your desktop research – are they still there? What condition are they in?

- Picking up extra details which haven't shown up in maps, reports etc.

- Understanding the designed views and whether they survive or are becoming blocked by trees or development.

- And understanding setting – how the landscape fits into its surroundings and whether any elements of the surroundings were, or still are, important to the site.

Choosing your site

- Already well-known to you?
- Unknown but intriguing?
- Need help deciding?

HER list: email
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Of course, this assumes that you've picked your site and started doing a bit of research. Perhaps some of you have decided that you'd like to look into a local landscape that you already know well, or one that you don't know well but have always been intrigued by.

But please don't worry if you haven't decided on a site yet. David Littlewood, Nottinghamshire County Council's HER Manager, has kindly provided me with a long list of non-registered landscapes, including parkland, gardens, public parks and cemeteries, that you might like to consider researching. Please email me if you'd like me to send you this.

Please could I ask that if you have picked your Notts site, you could let me know which one? It may be that more than one person is interested in the same site…

Getting Access

- Public park, cemetery or pay-to-access
  - Private garden

- Use our standard letter

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If your site is open to the public, ie a public park, cemetery or other designed landscape which is freely accessible, you theoretically don't need to get permission to walk around, taking notes and photos of the landscape, but you may get some funny looks if you're spotted, so it's a good idea to let the owner or manager know in advance what you want to do on the day and why.

It's essential to ask for permission if the landscape is privately-owned, even if it's one that you can pay to visit.

If you can find the contact details for the person in charge, we can provide a standard letter for you to send to them, explaining what the project is trying to achieve and asking permission to visit. I'll email that to you after this session.

You may find that the site owner or manager is really interested in what you're doing and has some historic information or anecdotes you could use, so it's definitely worth making contact. It's wise to do this as early as you can, as it may take a while to get a response.

Recording Form

I'll run through the recording form we'd like Notts researchers to fill in. This makes sure that all the information needed is collected. As we'll be depositing the finished reports with the Historic Environment Record, the HER Officer has had an input into this too, so that the forms are compatible with their database. Anything with an asterisk by it is information that they need us to include.

I'm going to email the form to you all, but I'll quickly show you what it includes.

Our finished reports are going to be deposited as PDFs with the Nottinghamshire HER. If any of you aren't familiar with HERs, they are an important starting point for anyone interested in the archaeology, built heritage, and history of an area. They provide information on a wide variety of buildings and sites, from finds of prehistoric flint tools to medieval castles, battlefields, Second World War pillboxes and historic parks and gardens.

They're a primary source of information for researchers, planners and land managers. David Littlewood is very keen to get the new Notts landscape reports onto the HER as it currently lacks information about non-Listed gardens and parks.
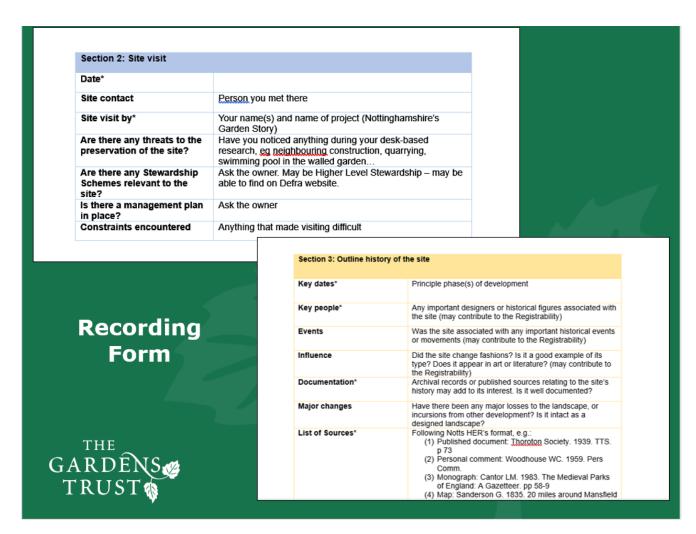
Your reports will go into their grey literature library – a collection of unpublished reports which the public can request to view. A record on the HER map will be created for each site – like these existing purple areas on the HER map here.

The Site summary and description that you'll include in your report are really important, as these will be the main info available on the HER, when people are searching the database. The summary will pop up on the HER map when you hover over a site. And the Description, when you click open the record. You can see that they'll be on page 1 of our reports, but you'll write them right at the end, bringing together everything you know about the landscape.

Do have a look at the HER. It's really fascinating and I'm sure you'll discover lots of local heritage that you weren't aware of. It also has copies of useful historic county maps, like Sanderson's 1835 map.

https://her.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/search

David has kindly offered to have a Zoom chat with anyone who'd like to learn more about the HER, so do let me know if that interests you and we can arrange a session.

Section 2: Site visit

Date*	
Site contact	Person you met there
Site visit by*	Your name(s) and name of project (Nottinghamshire's Garden Story)
Are there any threats to the preservation of the site?	Have you noticed anything during your desk-based research, eg neighbouring construction, quarrying, swimming pool in the walled garden…
Are there any Stewardship Schemes relevant to the site?	Ask the owner. May be Higher Level Stewardship – may be able to find on Defra website.
Is there a management plan in place?	Ask the owner
Constraints encountered	Anything that made visiting difficult

Section 3: Outline history of the site

Key dates*	Principle phase(s) of development
Key people*	Any important designers or historical figures associated with the site (may contribute to the Registrability)
Events	Was the site associated with any important historical events or movements (may contribute to the Registrability)
Influence	Did the site change fashions? Is it a good example of its type? Does it appear in art or literature? (may contribute to the Registrability)
Documentation*	Archival records or published sources relating to the site's history may add to its interest. Is it well documented?
Major changes	Have there been any major losses to the landscape, or incursions from other development? Is it intact as a designed landscape?
List of Sources*	Following Notts HER's format, e.g.: (1) Published document: Thoroton Society. 1939. TTS. p 73 (2) Personal comment: Woodhouse WC. 1959. Pers Comm. (3) Monograph: Cantor LM. 1983. The Medieval Parks of England: A Gazetteer. pp 58-9 (4) Map: Sanderson G. 1835. 20 miles around Mansfield

Recording Form

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The next sections of the form will give some information about your site visit and then a summary of the site's history, which you'll write from any maps, images and reports you've managed to find.   Don't worry, we really don't expect you to write huge amounts or go into great depth! I'll send you an example, based on Holme Pierrepont, to show you the sort of detail we're looking for.

Recording Form

Section 4: Description of the site	
Ordnance Survey 8 figure grid reference* – site centre	E.g. "AB 1234 5678" Use Grid Reference Finder for this figure and the postcode: https://gridreferencefinder.com/ (Right click in the middle of your site or on a particular feature to find the 8-figure grid reference)
Type of Location / aspect / topography	Incl. location in relation to settlements, roads, rivers etc. Area of site in hectares and how the parts relate to each other. What forms the boundaries? What sort of land is adjacent?
Entrance points and pathways*	Where? Main dates, features and changes. What was the view as people approached
Main component areas	Just a list of main character areas, e.g. gardens, parkland, kitchen gardens (helps when writing report)
Views and vistas	Record direction and features. You can mark these onto a map. Any changes, through different phases of development?
Landforms and earthworks*	Location, brief description including size, mark on maps if not obvious. Archaeological features will probably be on HER.
Water features*	Location, brief description including size, mark on maps if not obvious.
Tree species and specimen trees	ID species. Estimate how old, from girth. Or just say "young, semi-mature, mature, ancient or veteran".
Structural planting	E.g. lime avenue, clipped yew hedges, clumps of trees, rose gardens
Buildings, constructions and ornaments*	Statues, aviaries, summer house, ice house, temples, seats etc. Check NHLE. Check LA websites to see if locally listed. Mark on a map.
Pleasure grounds/gardens	Location and description
Parkland	Extent and character
Land beyond the boundary that makes a contribution to significance	Near and distant views and vistas, other elements of setting, eg sound of a neighbouring stream, "borrowed" landscapes, neighbouring historic buildings etc which adds to character.
Kitchen gardens and productive/service areas*	Description.
Modern features	Anything been added in later? Swimming pools? Modern glasshouses, housing etc
Boundaries*	Describe the boundary walls/fences/ha ha etc. Any parts missing? Been replaced?
Other features or	

This is the part that refers to your site visit and it would be a good idea to take this page with you as a checklist on the day.

You can see that we want to collect information about all the designed elements of the landscape, from buildings, paths, boundaries, water features and planned views, to planting beds, trees and woodland, as well as any archaeology which may pre-date the site. We want to know how the site was divided up. How people were meant to move around it; where they were supposed to stop and admire the view. And, as landscapes are not static, we also want to work out what has changed since the original design was laid out.

Recording Form

Section 5: Concluding

Final Comments	
Site map attached?* (Please indicate ownership boundaries where known)	Yes / No May be an historic OS map you've drawn on in the field, or later, then photographed/scanned. Could do separate maps for planting, statues etc.
Labelled photographs attached?*	Yes / No Essential to label each photo, preferably including direction you took photo in, plus date.
Photo permissions attached?	If using photographs for any purpose other than creation of this report. Tamsin McMillan to organise, with site owner and photographer.
Copies of useful source material attached?	Yes / No E.g. online articles and clear photos of archive material
Data protection form attached?	You only need this if you think your landscape is suitable for putting forward for Registration on HE's National Heritage List.

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The last section refers to any attachments you'll be submitting with the main form.

Before you go

- Start researching history – make a timeline
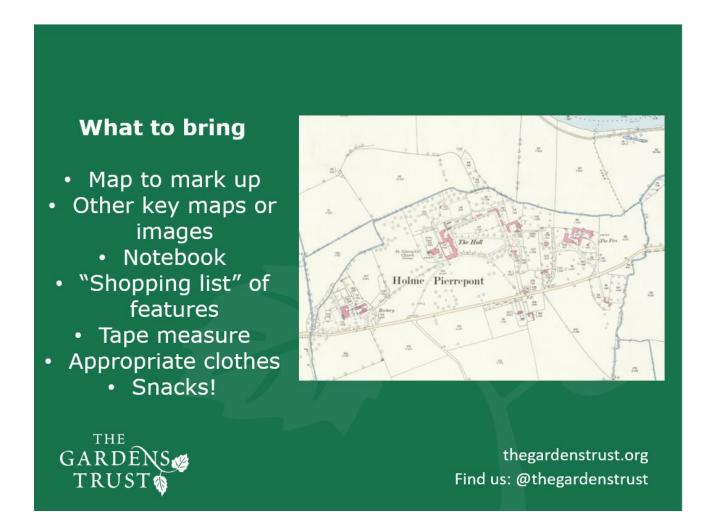- Collect key maps, images
- List features to look for

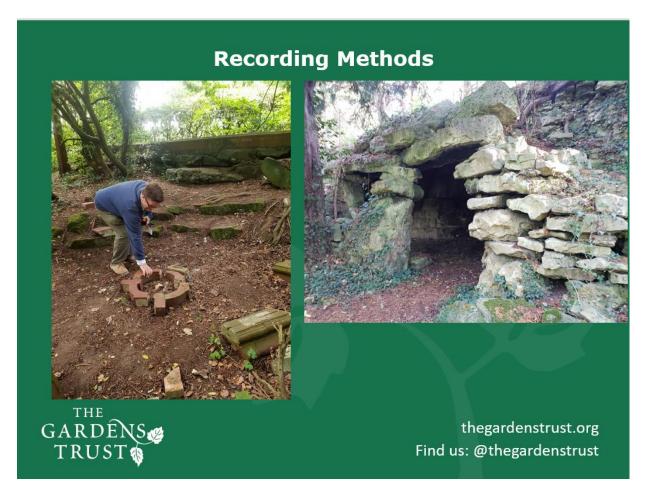thegardenstrust.org
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Before you go

- If possible, research the site's history using maps and doc sources. It can be useful to make a simple timeline for your site, so you are familiar with its key dates and the people involved.

- It's important to keep good records of your source materials and the HER has asked that we format these in a specific way, which you'll see on the recording form.

- Also, list the names of things you hope to find on site, based on the documentary research you have already done. That way you will not forget any of them once you are there. These may be significant trees, statues, garden buildings, ponds etc. And if they're now ruined or buried in undergrowth, they may be hard to find. It's actually great that you're doing your site visits in winter, as the lower vegetation makes it easier to spot features both above the ground and buried lumps and bumps.

What to bring

- Map to mark up
- Other key maps or images
- Notebook
- "Shopping list" of features
- Tape measure
- Appropriate clothes
- Snacks!

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What to bring

- Map to mark up – perhaps put this on a clipboard and bring a large, clear plastic bag to put over, in case it rains. Print this out as large as you can. If you only have access to an A4 printer, blow it up and print on several pieces of paper. For those of you coming to Holme Pierrepont next week, this is the base map we'll be scribbling all over. It's the 1884 25" to 1 mile OS map from the National Library of Scotland. This is a screenshot, which is perfectly good quality for this purpose.

- Print outs of any other key maps/images you might want to check against the landscape

- A Notebook

- List of things you're looking for, or the recording form

- A long tape measure, if you're particularly interested in trying to work out the age of old trees. But you don't need to do this for the report.

- Don't forget comfort and drinks and snacks! Dress for the weather. Fingerless gloves are really useful, so you can write in the cold.

Recording Methods

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How to tackle recording each area – whatever works best for you! You'll probably develop your own way.

- You really want to look hard at the landscape as you move slowly around it.

- I suggest taking a map and notebook – plot features onto map as you come across them. Give them a number then write notes in the notebook, against each number. Use maps on your phone, or a GPS app or grid reference finder app, if you're not sure where you are. E.g. if you're in the middle of a huge park and you come across an interesting feature.

- If you find a feature not already marked on your maps, roughly sketch it onto your base map and then you can try and work out later what it might be.

- If you're looking at a very large landscape, divide it into character areas, e.g. West park, pleasure gardens, woodland, kitchen garden. Check with the owner if they use particular names for each area.

- Try and walk as much of the site as you can, not just sticking to the paths. If you venture into parkland, woods and scrub, you may well find the remains of all sorts of interesting garden structures, planting, old routes and archaeology, which you'd never have spotted if you stayed on the path. But do be safe. Ask the owner beforehand if there are any particular dangers you need to be aware of.

- Make sure you've covered your "shopping list" of features, e.g. describe routes, materials, age, condition (if obvious, e.g. ruined glasshouse). It's likely that you'll want to make more than one visit – as you start to write up, you'll probably find there are a few things you forgot to check for. (However, if you're visiting a private site, do your best to just make one visit, as most owners will probably be happier with this, unless they are very interested in what you're doing).

Recording Methods

- Take lots of photos on your phone. These will really help you as you write up. If you take these in the order you make your notes, you should be able to remember where they are when you go through them later. Once you've uploaded them to your computer, remember to label them, including the site name and date. If we want to use any photos for anything other than the report, we'll need to get permission from the site owner and from you, the photographer.

- Please also take pics of yourselves, as you do your site survey. If you're happy for us to use them, they're so useful to us in promoting projects like this and the work of the GT and Notts GT.

- If you don't know what something is, e.g. a tree species, take a photo and send it to me so I can have a look or share it with some of the garden history experts in this group.

- You don't need to fill in every box on the form. Just do what you can. Any information you can add to the record is a bonus and will help others to understand and protect the site.

- If possible, talk to the owner/gardener/manager/regular visitors – they know a lot! They may be willing to have a session with you to record oral histories (we'll tell you how to do that at our webinar on 30th January).

If you get stuck with anything, you can email or call me.
tamsinmcmillan@thegardenstrust.org

Volunteer Expenses

- Help with travel costs
  - Archive costs
  - Contact Tamsin

- Holme Pierrepont travel help?

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You are generously taking part in this project as volunteers so you shouldn't be out of pocket because of it. We have a bit of project budget to help you with travel expenses and the cost of copying materials in archives, so please do contact me if you would like to claim these. I will need to have receipts please.

When it comes to costs of copying maps and documents, please try to minimise these if you can. For this project, you're unlikely to need really high resolution copies of maps so please do take photos and use screenshots instead, where poss. This is ok as this work is not for commercial use and will not be published.

If you see something spectacular that you need to pay £15 for a jpeg of, please could you let me know before buying, so I can check we have enough funds in the kitty.

If you are coming to Holme Pierrepont next week, this is only accessible by car, though you can get a bus to the national watersports centre, which is a 25 minute walk away. So if you need travel help, please let me know and we will book some taxis from West Bridgford.

Project timetable

- *Early January* – *Choose your site and ask owner for access*
- **16th January** – Walking an example site, Holme Pierrepont Hall
- **25th January** – Visiting Nottinghamshire Archives
- *Jan – Feb* – *Research and visit your site*
- **30th January** – Webinar: collecting memories and sharing your research via social media, leaflets etc
- **27th February** – Webinar: sharing research online
- *Early March* – *Write up and submit your reports. Consider contributing to social media, leaflets etc*
- **Mid-March** – Webinar: sharing project outcomes
- **Mid-April** – In-person end of project celebration for volunteers

Nottinghamshire's Garden Story is part of the Gardens Trust's Volunteers Save Space project, which is part-funded by Historic England and finishes at the end of March. This means that any reports that are going to be included in it will need to be completed by then.

So this is how the next three months will look: The bits in italics refer to your own site, the others are our training and events:

- **Now, in early January** – Choose your site and ask owner for access
- **16th January** – Walking an example site, Holme Pierrepont Hall, 11am-2pm
- **25th January** – Visiting Nottinghamshire Archives, 10-12am.
- **Through Jan and Feb** – Research and visit your site. If you want to wait until after the archive session to look for archive material, in the meantime you could be looking for some of the secondary sources Sally described in her webinar. Much of this can be found online.
- **30th January** – Webinar: collecting memories and sharing your research via social media, leaflets etc. This is about interviewing people who have knowledge and memories of your landscape. Frankie will also give an introduction to how we can share your research findings to inspire and educate others

- **27th February** – Webinar: sharing research online – we'll talk about where the research will end up, in addition to the HER, so that it can be used by others to understand and protect landscapes.

- **Early March** – Write up and submit your reports. Consider contributing to social media, leaflets etc

- **Mid-March** – Webinar: sharing project outcomes. It would be great if some of the volunteers who have taken part could say a few words about their experiences.

- **Mid-April** – In-person end of project celebration for volunteers, a meet up in a lovely Notts landscape.

Sally, Frankie and I will be here to support you through the project, so please get in touch if you get stuck at any point.

After April? ...just carry on!

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- **After April –** although this project will be ending, there will still be hundreds of Notts designed landscapes in need of research so, if you've enjoyed the process, Notts GT will be very happy to support you as you continue at your own pace.

Thanks very much for taking part. We hope you'll have a great time, digging in to your local landscape history.