



THE KENT GARDENS TRUST NEWSLETTER

Working for Kent's Garden Heritage

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A welcome
from the
editor

Elizabeth Cairns

Welcome to our new look Newsletter. I hope you approve. We decided to improve the quality of the Newsletter with full colour and more pages but as this is expensive to produce there will only be one issue each year. We hope to include more informative and interesting articles on garden history and conservation and book reviews and also to provide a forum for members to contribute your views with a letters page. So please do let us know what you think. We would love to include your letters, articles, pictures or other contributions in the next issue so do get in touch.

I am also delighted with our new Website www.kentgardenstrust.org.uk created for us by The Graphic Design Shop www.thegraphicdesignshop.co.uk which has already received enthusiastic reviews. Do please visit it to see reports on our research work, news about events and, most important, to exchange opinions on any subject relevant to the protection of gardens in Kent.

Elizabeth Cairns, Chairman

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Gardening is for Life

By Tom Wright



Squerryes Court, Kent

I have always thought of myself as a Man of Kent having been born in Gillingham South of the River Medway in 1928. When I was four my family moved to Canterbury and this is where my boyhood interest in gardening and natural history really began.

We had a large garden, and an orchard and a kitchen garden, and over a stream there was a wonderful woodland to explore. We had big beds of flowers and I do recall two of these full of Madonna Lilies that were taller than me. I used to get pollen on my nose from their wonderful scent. I have never been able to grow them so tall since!

During WWII I attended Simon Langton Grammar School in Canterbury - reputed to be the nearest school to the German occupation over the channel and still in operation. The school was partially bombed and we seemed to spend more time in the shelters below ground, but it kept going. I recall a balloon barrage tethered in the school playground that used to break loose at times.

In my early teens I became interested in alpinas and started to build small rock features in safe 'pockets' of our gardens, not threatened by the ever increasing number of cars and motorcycles my brothers and Father were accumulating.

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Tom Wright, a founder member of Kent Gardens Trust, plantsman, lecturer and writer who has done so much to promote knowledge of garden history, reminisces about his life.

Continued from page 1

They tended to be the 'Dogs Grave' type of rockery referred to by that great Father of English Rock Gardens Reginald Farrer, whose book I had been given. I created a table scree garden based on a magazine article with a miniature alpine landscape with valleys and outcrops, and gradually planted it with real and rather special alpinists bought with my pocket money.

Another inspiration came from special garden visiting with a few like-minded school friends. A very special visit I made with school friends who felt the same, was to Sissinghurst Castle gardens. This was a 20 mile or so cycle ride from Canterbury, and on arriving at the famous gatehouse there was a collecting tin by the great door where one was requested to put in one shilling (I think it was?) and go inside. There we found a truly magical garden in all its early summer luxuriance. We had the whole garden to ourselves apart from a gardener and a lady working in the borders whom we think was Vita herself An unforgettable experience.

On leaving school, my mind had already been made up to take up horticulture as my way forward. I had some opposition from my father at first who did not see 'gardening' as a career but eventually I was accepted to start a Degree course at Wye in October 1949, and was granted a KCC award to cover this. I could write so much about my three years at Wye, its wonderful location, its gardens and orchards and the nearby Downs rich in botanical life, and the students and staff. A very friendly and lively atmosphere. We were very fortunate to have as our lecturer in 'decorative horticulture', Christopher Lloyd, who we found inspiring and entertaining. He had recently graduated from Wye and a privilege for a few of us was to spend a weekend at Great Dixter. Great memories of this and the commanding presence of Mrs 'Daisy' Lloyd to keep us in order!

After leaving Wye with my Degree, jobs were in fact not too easy to be found and it was some years before I found a post as manager of a nursery and flower growing business in South Devon. I was only 28 at this time and recently married and becoming a Nursery Manager was a new and rather daunting experience but it proved to be a full and rewarding job, getting to know more plants, and West Country gardens and the management of existing staff. I had also been doing some local talks to groups such as the W.I that I quite enjoyed. After some ten years in Devon, I accepted a lecturing post at Pershore Institute of Horticulture (now a College) in Worcestershire where my subjects were nursery practice, plants and garden and landscape design. Another range of experiences, in the centre of a rich horticultural region, with nurseries and gardens to visit with students. Hidcote Manor was one of these, and Wheatcrofts Rose business near Nottingham among many more.

I found lecturing very rewarding and when a post became available back at my old Alma Mater at Wye, in 1978, I was tempted to apply and was accepted, and so my wife Shirley and I moved back my home county. This was an exciting time to be at this college of the University of London when the more traditional courses in Agriculture and Horticulture were being widened to include more management and environmental studies and new courses in Countryside Planning. The former Decorative Horticulture undergraduate course became Landscape Horticulture at my instigation, and we were able with colleagues, to start a successful Masters Course in Landscape Ecology, Design and Management. We also included garden and landscape history and the restoration and management of historic gardens in our course studies.



Sissinghurst Castle, Kent

I was commissioned to write a book for Batsford as part of their series on The Gardens of Britain covering Kent, Sussex and Surrey which was published in 1978. One of my Wye students prepared the garden plans. In 1982 I was asked by KCC planning staff to undertake a Survey of historic gardens in Kent. The County Garden Survey was completed in 1985, with a summary by the County Planning Officer. This was also an important time when the Kent Gardens Trust was formed with a group of interested

gardens people and assisted by KCC. This first Survey was a useful basis for later surveys and reports by the Trust.

The October 1987 storm was devastating to many gardens in the South. I was appointed by English Heritage and the Countryside Commission Task Force Trees to undertake studies and restoration proposals for a number of Kent gardens including Olantigh, Godinton Park, Hever Castle and Squerryes Court.

We took an early retirement offer from the University in 1990 and moved to West Sussex. I continued some advisory work in Kent and retained links with the Kent Gardens Trust. I also joined the Sussex Gardens Trust and have given advice to some Sussex historic gardens.

I have never once regretted taking up horticulture as a life's career. I have so many memories of my Wye days and can take some pride in the successful careers of many of our students. These include Fergus Garrett from Great Dixter, and Mike Calnan who has been Head of Gardens and Landscapes with the National Trust for some years now.

A respected friend in later years was that great plantsman, the late Graham Stuart Thomas and he observed that "Gardening and working with plants is a constant learning experience throughout one's life."

Volunteers Research Group

By Hugh Vaux, Chairman Research Group

This year has seen the completion of the Sevenoaks project and the start of a new one in Medway. In addition, other work has been carried out for Margate and Tunbridge Wells. The number of volunteers has varied between 14-20 and the trustees of KGT would like to thank them all for their enthusiasm and hard work. Because of other commitments, a few have had to leave and we wish them well.

Over 20 properties in Sevenoaks District have been investigated and written up in the past two years. The results are to be published shortly and we hope to have these on the new KGT website. The whole process always takes longer than one would wish but it is important to produce the best finished product possible. Not only is this written to English Heritage standards as an easily readable record but it is accessible to local authorities and others concerned with conservation and changes in the planning process. An important section has been added at the beginning of the documents which is a 'statement of significance', summarising the main features of importance at the site and allowing a quick evaluation.

We started the Sevenoaks project with 10 volunteers who had worked in Tunbridge Wells. We were lucky that a further 10 joined us and quickly became absorbed into the group by working with established members. We hope that the process can be repeated in Medway.

The Sevenoaks properties varied from a small town garden in the High Street to a large country house (St Clere), from houses associated with famous names such as Gertrude Jekyll (Chart Cottage and Stonepits) to a garden that can only be traced with archaeological expertise (Knockholt House). Capability Brown carried out work at Valence while Larksfield was the home of Octavia Hill. Constance Spry lived at Parkgate House, Samuel Palmer is associated with Underriver and Sir Harold Hillier worked at Tanners. Some now provide communal benefit (Hextable Gardens, Swanley Park and Bradborne Lakes Park) and one possibly has the remains of a Tudor garden (Hendon Manor).

Moving onto Medway, we have found a very different group of sites. Many of them belong to the Medway Council who are very keen to make an assessment of their heritage assets. They hope that the volunteers will be able to sift through all the material available and by surveying the properties and creating reports with the statements of significance, allow judgements to be made about future development in the Medway Towns. We have started with 29 gardens and

held our first meeting 13th August at Eastgate House in the centre of Rochester. Many of you will remember this as a museum and the Dickens Centre. This grade I listed building with gardens which can be traced back to 1800, is being refurbished and the volunteers work will contribute to the Heritage Lottery Fund bid needed to complete the project.

During our study day we walked round the area of the city between Eastgate House, the Cathedral and Castle and were impressed with the number of green spaces which were

being enjoyed by families in the sunshine. Clearly these sites are smaller and more numerous than the larger gardens of Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks but they will provide just as many challenges. Fortunately some of our members have acquired experience in Margate where they have carried out a survey of Dalby Square. It is possible that there may be more work there, should funding become available.

The write up of St Ronans School in Hawkhurst was completed for

Tunbridge Wells who also requested a survey on Sherwood Park which was duly carried out. A further report on Surrenden Dering in Pluckley was made in the hope of tempting Ashford, should they be in a position to look at the gardens in their district.

Funding is one of the major limiting factors to expanding the volunteers' work. We have been lucky with generous grants from English Heritage for our first two projects, together with top ups and support from both councils. In addition, Kent County Council have provided practical help for each scheme and KGT added £500 to help the start up at Sevenoaks. Medway Council have kindly agreed to finance the new project and KCC have not only offered to continue to provide help but also made a grant of £1000. We are very grateful for all this help but above all, we have to thank the owners for letting us visit the parks and gardens and hope that they have found the results interesting and rewarding.

The projects only work because of the effort put in by the volunteers and the council officers who are our contacts with the authorities. The standards of the reports are maintained by the training we receive and the rigorous editing for which we have to thank Virginia Hinze. We hope you will visit the new KGT website and discover more of what we do. Who knows, you might even want to join the volunteers.



Hendon Manor

The lost garden and landscape of Redleaf

By Andrew Wells

REDLEAF HOUSE, situated west of the Leigh-Penshurst road, was celebrated through much of the 19th century as having a garden of national and innovative importance. It was created from 1807 by William Wells round his 17th century house, similar to Groombridge Place (c. 1660) but demolished in the 1870s. Since the 1950s the site of the garden and park has been in multiple private ownership, strictly not accessible to visitors. There is little evidence of its past significance, though the natural and contrived rock formations and many conifers survive. This short article can only touch on the early history of the garden. Wells was fortunate in his elevated location, 200 feet above the River Eden to the west, and sloping towards Penshurst to the south. The principal features of the garden were underlying sandstone and striking rock formations. To the north of the site of the house is a major outcrop, one hundred yards long by some five yards wide, forming a west-east causeway, which Wells planted with mixed woodland. Plate 1 shows him standing by this, in front of the 20-mile westerly view he opened up across the valley. He enlarged the garden and park to extend to some 180 acres, down to the river which he widened.

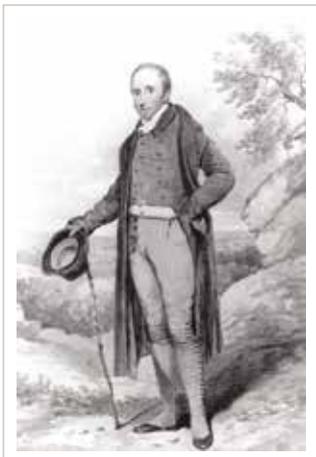


Plate 1. Henry Edridge ARA - William Wells of Redleaf, c.1812

The cultivated gardens lay to the south of the house, and were well established when John Loudon eulogised them in *The Gardener's Magazine* in 1839, the first of many articles on Redleaf. He commended Wells for preserving 'the natural character and expression of the surrounding country', while introducing newly discovered plants. The head gardener, Joseph Wells (no relation; H G Wells's grandfather), won (Royal) Horticultural Society prizes for raising new varieties. Wells was particularly interested in pines and ferns, David Douglas, the great collector, providing some of his conifers. Loudon considered that the 'most singular feature ... totally different from anything else of the kind in England' was the rock garden (Plate 2) on the 'rocky lawn' south of the house, comprising stacks of rock,

'not little pigmy imitations ... but large blocks ... measured by the cubic yard'. He viewed the indigenous rock as more naturalistic than artificial or imported stone, increasingly used elsewhere. Here Wells grew flowers and plants, partly concealed in beds raised within rockwork, reached by rock steps, to harmonise with the natural character of the site.



Plate 2. Redleaf: The rocky Lawn, c.1839

East of the rocky lawn was the circular English Garden, located in a former quarry (Plate 3), and beyond this was the Dutch garden, the only formal element at Redleaf, containing a diagonal grid of small beds separated by brick paths, overlooked by a thatched rustic orangery, a Chinese dairy and a rustic billiard-room. South of these were the kitchen garden, conservatories and the 'experimental garden'. A path encircled the whole site, dotted with wooden rustic seats, resting places and a fishing hut on a bridge over the river, all designed by Wells. He also designed two surviving staff cottages in the picturesque tradition. One is an early example of half-timbered revival, with braces forming 'WW' under an end gable.



Plate 3. Redleaf: English garden and summerhouse east of the rocky lawn c.1839

Wells's background, running the largest Thames shipbuilding partnership and commanding an East Indiaman to China and back aged only 25, must have sparked his imagination and familiarised him with timber construction. His alter ego was as a major arts patron and collector, and Trustee of the National Gallery. Frederick Goodall, RA, said his death in 1847 'left no one to take his place as a true friend to artists', and had met almost every Academician and connoisseur of the day at Redleaf. Wells's collection included several paintings by Claude Lorraine, and at Redleaf he had the means and vision to create his own Claudian landscape.

Researching Swanley for KGT

By Paul Lewis

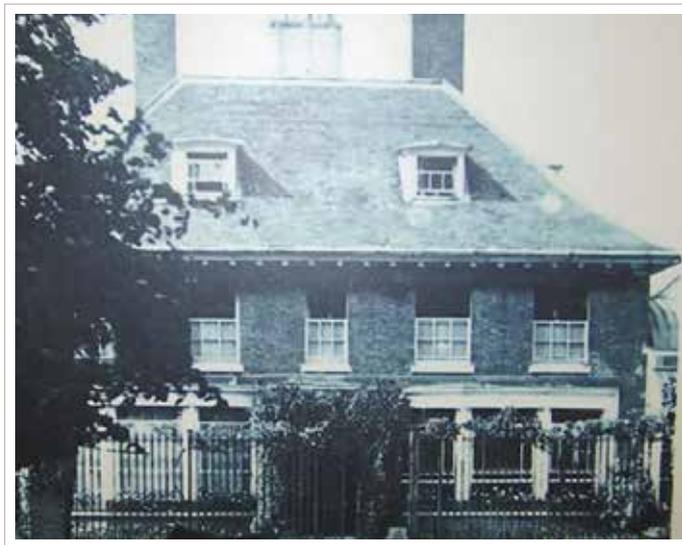
Most people would not regard Swanley as one of Kent's more glamorous towns and I felt some misgivings when I was asked by the research group of Kent Gardens Trust to look at a park and a garden on the outskirts of the town.

The town of Swanley developed in the latter half of the nineteenth century around the railway junction which served as a hub for the many orchards and market gardens sending their produce to London.

The idyllic country was particularly suitable for fruit growing and this led to the establishment of Swanley Horticultural College in 1889. The main building of the college, Hextable House, had an interesting history. An older timber house dating back to at least the early 16C was replaced by a brick one in the later 17C. At about this time a magnificent lime tree avenue was planted using slips said to be taken from two lindens imported from Nuremberg by Queen Elizabeth's jeweller, Sir John Spielman. The avenue still exists and contains some 60 trees of which about a third are probably original. The house was extended in the 18C and again in 1860. It was then bought by a naval architect, Sir Edward James Reid who installed a curious saloon taken from SS Bessemer which he had designed. This saloon was used for lectures and concerts until 1939. The house was badly damaged by bombing in 1944 and was eventually pulled down a couple of years later.

Swanley Horticultural College became a renowned training place

for female gardeners. For the first two years of its existence only male students were admitted. This was not financially viable and after 1891 five female students were admitted and were educated together with the men which would have been very unusual at this time, although their living arrangements were highly segregated. By the end of the century the student intake of the College had



Hextable House

become entirely female. A particularly formative influence was the strong minded Miss Emma Cons who was one of the governors of the college and who was also responsible for the founding of the Old Vic theatre in London and building 'improved dwellings for the poor'. A number of highly regarded plantswomen and authors were trained there, including Dame Sylvia Crowe, Brenda Colvin and Frances Perry. After the bombing, in which one of the students was killed, the College grounds were bought by Kent County Council.

The college never really recovered although its grounds were used as the Kent Horticultural Institute initially for

the training of ex-service men. In 1967 the institute moved to Hadlow. The grounds became very neglected but a volunteer group started to restore the current 2ha area of the Gardens. Plans were drawn up for Swanley Town Council in 1994 but it has only been possible to partially realise these plans. Hextable village had wanted to separate itself from Swanley Town Council for many years and following a petition was set up in 2008 as an independent parish council.

Hextable Gardens are linked by the lime avenue to Swanley Park. The latter is a 60 acre public park formed by Swanley Town Council in 1983 from various parcels of land including part of the grounds of the horticultural college. It is an enjoyable place and the council are to be congratulated both for creating it in the first place and for the way they run it. There are various attractions including a miniature railway and a boating lake

as well as a wild flower garden, a good collection of water fowl, many ornamental commemorative trees and extensive views north towards the Dartford crossing.

I very much enjoyed visiting the park and garden as well as walking along the avenue between them. Hextable Parish Council offices are housed in the old botanical laboratory of the horticultural college which also contains a fascinating heritage centre set up by the local history society. It is certainly *mérite un détour* if not quite *vaut le voyage*.

Gardens of California

GHS Tour April 2013 by Elizabeth Cairns

It is good to have one's ideas shaken up from time to time and this happened to me on a recent Garden History Society tour to California. We travelled from Los Angeles to San Francisco up the Pacific coast and visited some of the country's most interesting, innovative and important contemporary and C20 gardens.

The most important lesson I learned on this trip was how good a garden created with a limited palette of plants

can be. Discipline and restraint are not concepts that usually come to me when thinking of garden design. The underlying structure is always important but usually only as a background to luxuriant planting. Being a plant lover, compulsive plant shopper and someone who adores colour, texture and contrast in the garden, I was astonished to find many of the almost minimalist gardens we saw so very satisfying and beautiful. I will just mention four which were especially memorable.

Pamela Palmer Courtyards, Brentwood

The California climate does of course lend itself to outside entertaining and designer Pamela Palmer had created an expansive space in a house in Brentwood Los Angeles by linking an internal courtyard with another outside using similar materials to

connect the two. The outdoor planting was subtle and limited to a few drought resistant plants and some grass for the owners' dogs to disport themselves on. Elegant and simple planters containing single species of succulents brought the outside within the house. This was a space to be used and enjoyed.

Lisa Gimmy Garden, Bel Air

*A garden in Bel Air set high in the hills and with extensive views had been ingeniously designed by Lisa Gimmy around a rather stark modern house. Along the edge of the steep slope a low zigzag hedge of tightly clipped silver leaved *Teucrium fruticans* was*

remarkably effective and bold plantings of Agaves and other large succulents complemented the geometry of the house. A stunning effect was created with a single plant of (I think) Californian Deer Grass silhouetted outside the large windows of the main reception room its fan of stiff evergreen leaves providing an eye catching architectural feature.

Narducci Organic Farm, Napa Valley

*The designer Topher Delaney created what to me was the most stimulating and thought provoking garden of the tour around another rectilinear modern house of glass and stone. A large area of gravel was planted entirely with *Euphorbia characias* generously spaced so that the architectural qualities of the plants could be appreciated. The massed effect of the lime green heads was sensational. Each side of the house had a different aspect*

which reflected the agricultural history of the Napa Valley so one side had been planted with citrus another with ranks of fruit trees. Everything had to be useful for food or picking. A remarkable sunken rose border was backed by rusted steel sheets with the effect that the brick red flowers seemed to float in air and the stems were hardly seen. There were no English style medleys of plants here. Precise gradations of level and different types of gravel were enhanced by simple plantings such as one border of feathery asparagus the spears just appearing.

Donnell Garden, Sonoma County

What an experience it was to visit what has been described as the most famous garden of the twentieth century - the Donnell garden Sonoma county designed by Thomas Church in 1948. We had drinks by what is said to be one of the most celebrated swimming pools in midcentury landscape architecture - something I shall long remember. The pool appears to be suspended over the distant landscape and its natural free form is reflected in the sweeps of grass and paved areas around. The shape of the well known sculpture by Adeline Kent is echoed in the large boulders which

*ornament the garden. The planting is restrained. The live oaks and sweeps of grass are characteristic of the area. Green is the predominant shade with just occasional touches of brighter colour from plants such as *Strelizia*, the bird of paradise flower.*

Photo from Charles Boot



My visit to California has given me so much to reflect on. Even if a style of garden developed for a hot, sunny and dry climate is unlikely to work well in our colder and wetter country, still the virtues of a limited palette of plants,

the beauty of shades of green and the value of balance, proportion and structure in the garden are lessons I have brought back with many happy memories.



Book Review

Todd Longstaffe-Gowan: The London Square

*Published by the Yale University Press, 2012 – 334pp,
RRP: £30, ISBN: 978-0-300-15201-2*

With painstaking research, Todd Longstaffe-Gowan has provided a fascinating account of the 400 year history and evolution of the London square from its mid-seventeenth century inception to the present day. Richly illustrated with old maps, plans and engravings, and peppered with social and literary commentary throughout, the author examines the ways in which the development of this 'English phenomenon' would come to define the physical landscape of London's metropolis, inform urban planning and bring about social change.

The author reveals that the simple act of using railings to enclose the wide open spaces of London's grand seventeenth century piazzas was mainly designed as a form of social control to curtail the riotous activities of the general populace who congregated there. During the 1680s and the 1690s, London's residential squares began to spread from the West End to the suburbs in order to accommodate the social aspirations of the rising professional and mercantile middle classes who also required a healthier way of life. Devonshire Square, New Square, Lincolns Inn and Bridgewater Square were all built during this time. By the early eighteenth century, the growth of pre-eminent stately squares such as Lincolns Inn Fields, Grays Inn and Kings Square gained international acclaim for their unique character. Similarly, the practice of building squares on the outskirts of town with open views to the countryside was seen as a peculiarly 'English phenomenon' that provided an affiliation, a *rus in urbe*, where country meets town.

Axial links to other squares were also created, but criticisms about the ubiquitous use of gravel paths and grass plats, and the lack of ornamental planting, gave rise to the horticultural innovations of nurserymen and gardeners such as Thomas Fairchild and William Robinson. Fairchild in particular, denouncing rigid designs, favoured

the introduction of trees, shrubs, parterres of fragrant flowers encircled by elegant railings, thus unifying the garden enclosure with its surrounding architecture. Gradually, these fast growing garden enclaves became the responsibility of the privileged residents who lived around them, so they were encouraged to make 'civic improvements' by considering ways in which design features and planting could be improved. Today, in the twenty-first century, a number of London's important squares have for various reasons suffered neglect, but a campaign to improve and conserve them for future generations is well underway. As the London square

continues to evolve, it is still seen as synonymous with privilege, and nature continues to be an inherent part of the urban plan.

In his survey, which is over 300 pages long, Longstaffe-Gowan acknowledges that he does not 'subscribe' to the official view that there are more than 600 squares in Greater London, but more like 300 according to his quite strict definition. Even so, the absence of space and a personal wish to be selective prevents his analysis of all 300 of them. Be that

as it may, the author's meticulous research and detailed analysis of many of those he chooses to include represent the pinnacle of taste and influence, and so this survey does not disappoint. It is both eminently readable and scholarly, and a source of pleasure to the general reader and garden historian alike.

By Beverley Howarth

Footnote

We are delighted to announce that Todd Longstaffe-Gowan has very kindly agreed to deliver our Spring lecture in 2014. As many of you know, he is a well-know landscape architect who recently re-designed the gardens at Kensington Palace. He is also the garden adviser to Hampton Court Palace and President of the London Parks and Gardens Trust. The lecture will take place in April 2014 at Riverhill House, in Sevenoaks. More details will be published in due course in our 2014 events programme and on our website.



Grays Inn, London

Making more use of our website

By Paul Howarth

I hope that you have all taken the opportunity to visit our new website over the last six months or so. We launched the new website back in April and we are very proud of it. So far, all the feedback we have received has been very positive and everyone considers that it is a distinct improvement on the old one. We were very fortunate to get a grant for the development of the new website, so the Trust has not had to spend any resources that we can better use on other priorities. We have been updating the homepage regularly with news items, featuring our research projects at Thanet and Medway. We also have a message board which all members can use to comment on the Trust's work, to ask for help and advice, or simply to start a discussion. We have had a few messages but could do with more – we are hoping that members of the Trust will start more discussions in the coming months.

Now that we have such a good website, we think we should make

even more use of it. We intend to have more pages containing the research reports on historic gardens from our various projects across the county. And we are sure that we can make efficiencies in the administration of the Trust if we allow members to join (and pay subscriptions) on-line and to book, and pay for, events on-line. So we are in the process of developing these functions for next season. We are investing some funds into these improvements in the expectation that the savings we make will more than cover our costs over 2 years, saving more money for other things. To make this work really well we do need your support. We hope you will use the new functions to help us put more funding into research and conservation work and less in administration.

The website address is still www.kentgardenstrust.org.uk. If you have any comments or questions about the website do feel free to get in touch with me at paul.howarth@kentgardenstrust.org.uk or simply use the message board!



Welcome to two new Trustees

We are delighted to announce that Paul Lewis and Geraldine Moon have agreed to become trustees of Kent Gardens Trust

Paul Lewis has been a valuable member of our research team for some time. He is a retired GP. He says of himself that he has been interested in history and architecture since childhood but knew very little about gardening until he was aged 31 and bought his first house. Over the years he has acquired a good knowledge of plants but until he joined Kent Gardens Trust little expertise in garden history and how to research it. Joining the research group of the trust has been an excellent way to remedy some of these deficiencies.

Geraldine Moon has also been involved with the research group for some time. She is a retired Landscape Architect and worked for many years as designer and project manager, mainly on public projects including housing estates, urban greenspace, country parks and play areas. She says that she has always been interested in how the history of a garden, park or landscape can tell a story and enhance our enjoyment of it today.