



# THE KENT GARDENS TRUST NEWSLETTER

*Working for Kent's Garden Heritage*

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## From the Editors

*Beverley and Paul Howarth*

Welcome to this year's newsletter which we hope you will enjoy reading. As you know, we have just celebrated the 300th anniversary of the birth of Capability Brown, one of our greatest landscape architects. So, for this edition, we are devoting several pages to the part we have played in the celebrations. On 21st August we had a highly memorable day at Chilham Castle and we include reflections about the day by several members. And in April we published our book *Capability Brown in Kent* which has been very well received. Many of you have been kind enough to buy a copy, and sales continue to go well. We are particularly pleased that well-known commentators including several academics who specialise in Brown's work have been very complimentary in their reviews of the book. So we are delighted to publish on page 6 a review by Dr Susan Pittman on behalf of the Kent History Federation. Continuing the 18th-century theme, you will find on page 7 a review of Thomas Whately's re-published book

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## *Celebrating Capability Brown*



*Our chairman, Elizabeth Cairns (left) with our guest speakers, Steffie Shields (centre) and Kate Felus (right)*

Our main event of the year was dedicated to Capability Brown. On August 21st, we spent a wonderful day at Chilham Castle which Brown visited in 1777. We asked some of our members to reflect on the day.

### *Valerie Hodgson writes.....*

I would like to thank the organisers of the Capability Brown celebration event at Chilham for a wonderful and informative day. The setting was perfect and the organisation of the event was top notch. There was a good balance of time in lectures, with time to browse the books on sale and also meet other members. The catering was excellent, with good quality food and plenty of refreshments. I really appreciated time to wander in the peaceful gardens and around the lake, as one of the speakers suggested that this was the best place to appreciate Brown's landscapes!

Both speakers were informative and knowledgeable on their subjects, and I personally found Steffie to be inspirational. Her wonderful photography also captured the essence of Brown's work. I am now converted, and plan to visit many other examples of his work around the UK!

Thank you for a day to be remembered.



*Lancelot 'Capability' Brown*

*Continued on page 2*

*'From the Editors' continued from page 1*

*Observations on Modern Gardening, edited by Michael Symes, who some of you may remember gave our Spring lecture earlier this year.*



*Tom Hart Dyke speaks to members at Lullingstone*

*Our research team continues to flourish and is currently working on a project commissioned by Dover District Council. One member of the group, Rosemary Dymond, has written an account of her experiences so far.*

*We also have a very interesting article by Caroline Jessel who explores the importance of biodiversity, and the impact of climate change on our gardens. She throws out a challenge to all of us by contemplating broader objectives for the Trust. And we have an eye-opening account of some of the oldest trees in Kent by Pamela Stevenson on behalf of The Tree Register.*

*Finally, we celebrate the life of Tom Wright, one of the founder members of Kent Gardens Trust, who died earlier this year. Our former chairman, Allison Wainman, reflects on his major contribution to garden history.*

*We have had a particularly full programme of events this year and we would like to thank all of you who have helped to make it so successful. Our special thanks go to all of you who have written articles and provided photographs for this newsletter. We look forward to your continued support.*



*Troy Scott Smith with members in Sissinghurst's White Garden*

*Celebrating Capability Brown continued from page 1*

### **Paul Lewis writes.....**

#### **THE BEST BITS**

The lovely weather. Not too hot, not too wet, not too windy.

The beautiful surroundings - thanks to L. Brown, J Tradescant and all the various owners of the Castle.

The splendid organization, especially the delicious, smoothly-arranged lunch.



*Our President, Lady Kingsdown enjoying the Chilham landscape*

Two very interesting lectures. I had not realized that 18th-century landscapes were so populated. My preconception was of sheep and little else in the prospect. I was delighted to hear that Brown arrived with masses of seeds from native trees in his pockets and told his clients to grow their own trees. Both lecturers joined in a vigorous defence of aristocratic owners against the egalitarian disdain for them from the likes of Richard Mabey.

Various curiosities in the grounds. The polygonal well-house with its giant



*Virginia Hinze chatting on the terrace with new member Derek Humphries and trustee Andrew Wells*

gears. The Elephant House with its oversized arches on the façade. The strange sculpture commemorating the Holm Oak and its demolition team. The beautiful square of the quiet garden in which the closely planted trees seemed more beech and lime than hornbeam.

### **Anne Evans writes.....**

We learnt from Steffie Shields that Brown was an 18th-century man of his time. The agricultural improvements of the period were increasing the prosperity of his many clients. They in turn wished to follow fashion and modernise the surroundings of their properties. But what a man! We are used to the rather staid portrait of Brown by Nathaniel Dance, but Steffie brought him to life. From her extensive research, ably illustrated, she spoke of his career as a dynamic individual, networker, engineer, landscaper and a man with vision. For the first time, I realised his attention to detail, even advising on the supply



*The Kitchen Garden*

of wheelbarrows and the victualling of his workforce. He was extremely practical, realising owners would have difficulty obtaining the number of trees he advocated, so he suggested they set up tree nurseries. Steffie drew attention to his extensive water engineering and advice he had given at Chilham, although the lake was of a later date.

The day was well-organised with a break to view the garden and park at Chilham. It was interesting that Brown had altered the top terrace to fit in with his idea of the house sitting on rolling lawns, and had installed a curving ha-ha which still provides the link between the garden and the park. It is a very steeply-sloping site and in the 19th century the top terrace was restored, I suspect, to provide a flatter area round the house.

After lunch, Kate Felus spoke on Experiencing Brown and putting his landscapes in their social context. She drew attention to the fact that, in paintings of the Georgian period, few people were shown. This was not to say that good use of the gardens was not made. From research for her book she had found accounts of entertainments, eating outside and carriage drives. I had not realised that the provision of grassy rides with short grass made it so much more comfortable for women to go out on their estates. Kate had found a particularly good illustration for this. As the century progressed, clothing also became more countrified for outdoor activities.



*The top terrace, topiary and chestnut avenue*

The Kent Gardens Trust has set a high standard for a whole day's study on a particular topic, together with the extremely good exhibition displays on Brown's gardens in Kent. I hope this is something to be repeated.



*Lunch at the village hall*

### **Maitland Howard writes....**

It was an enjoyable and inspiring day. Steffie and Kate covered a vast field relating to the aesthetic, social and political aspects of Brown's working life, and did so in an engaging and pleasant manner. The entire event was well-organised and had a relaxing atmosphere.

### **Peter Cobley writes.....**

We spent a fascinating day at Chilham Castle as guests of the owners, Stuart and Tessa Wheeler. We met to learn more about Brown's life and work, in this tercentenary year of his birth.

After an introduction by Virginia Hinze, who reminded us that the Post Office had issued a set of special

## From the Chairman

*Our successful and interesting year, the tercentenary of 'Capability' Brown, is well reported in this edition of our annual newsletter. We have tried as always to provide members with a varied programme of events linked to the history of parks and gardens in Kent. We aim to make these both informative and enjoyable.*

### **Retirements**

*Four trustees of Kent Gardens Trust retired over the last year or so. Peter Cobley, has been a trustee for 20 years. A former conservation officer at Sevenoaks Council, Peter played a vital part in setting up our very successful research group. Judith Norris, a landscape architect, was responsible for responding to planning questions relating to registered parks and gardens. Geraldine Moon has been a very hard working member of our research group and contributed a great deal to our celebration of the Brown tercentenary. Wendy Rogers, senior archaeological officer at Kent County Council, was involved with the research group in its early days. We are extraordinarily grateful to them for all they have done for Kent Gardens Trust and will miss their insights, knowledge and expertise.*

### **New Trustees**

*We are delighted to welcome two new trustees. Richard Stileman, a retired publisher has been invaluable in producing our book Capability Brown in Kent and will I am sure contribute to the future development of the Trust.*

*Mike O'Brien is a longstanding member of the research group and also contributed to Capability Brown in Kent. A retired engineer he brings a practical approach to any problem and is a ready and willing volunteer. We very much look forward to working with them.*

### **Finally**

*I shall be standing down as chairman at the end of the year after 9 years. I am confident that I am leaving the Trust in good hands and in good shape. My successor will be announced in due course.*

*Elizabeth Cairns, Chairman*

*Celebrating Capability Brown continue to page 4*

*Celebrating Capability Brown continued from page 3*

Capability Brown commemorative stamps, Steffie Shields discussed the impact of his revolutionary 18th-century landscape designs on many large estates throughout the country.

She described in particular his developing interest in water engineering, land improvements and enhancing the aesthetics of estates. He became a journeyman engineer at Stowe where his ability to mix with all levels of society led him to be appointed as head steward and gardener. Although best known for trees, lawns and large-scale designed landscapes, Brown also used flowers – including hollyhocks – for effect. He was a true polymath using all his knowledge to create beautiful landscapes with over 200 commissions.

At midday, we explored the Castle grounds and had a very good lunch at the village hall. The lunch with wine, however, made climbing the hill back to the house for the afternoon talk something of a struggle for some of us! It was, nevertheless, well worth the effort to return for a very interesting talk by Kate Felus. She explained the various ways in which Georgian gardens were used for all kinds of social activities and amusements that landscape architects such as Brown had to allow for in their designs. Eighteenth-century gardens were busy with visitors (10,000 mentioned on large estates) and many stayed over as country travel was uncomfortable and slow. The shallow lakes were used for recreational sailing and fishing; everyone helped with haymaking, a

necessity due to the number of horses in need of feeding during the winter.

Kate opened up another dimension after Steffie's morning talk, and the two complemented each other to give a rounded picture of the life of the country's elite during the 18th century.

I thought the day was a great success, helping us to understand the life of those who lived on those estates from the richest land owner to the poorest estate worker; it was all the better for the lovely summer weather and efficient organization. Fittingly, the end of the day was marked with a presentation to Stuart and Tessa Wheeler, as a thank you for allowing the Kent Gardens Trust to visit their home and wonderful gardens.

### *Hugh Vaux summarises Steffie's talk...*

#### MOVING HEAVEN AND EARTH – CAPABILITY BROWN'S GIFT OF LANDSCAPE

Steffie's enthusiasm for Capability Brown began following the enormous damage to the landscape caused by the storm of 1987. Brown's landscapes were already at risk simply because of their age and the changes over 250 years. Thus a photographic record seemed important before further harm occurred. This led to a quest to discover the history of the sites and how they came to be created. Many Brown landscapes have become timeless and modern artists continue to resort to them for inspiration whether in painting, photography or the creation of new gardens. The county garden trusts play a major part in ensuring that everyone is aware of their importance and their value as heritage assets.

Lancelot Brown came from a yeoman-farming family. While his brothers were also achievers, hard work, an eye for the ground, an ability to cope with

complexities of both water engineering and architecture, and his remarkable drive, turned him into a celebrated genius. From his initial employment by the Loraine family at Kirkharle in Northumberland, he ventured south to Lincolnshire and the challenges of Grimsthorpe Castle. To drain the boggy valley of the River West Glen, he created the original 10-acre Mill Dam Pond. Inspired by Stephen Switzer's study of hydraulics here, he initiated experiments

in building conduits to feed spring water, both by gravity and with experimental pumps, a considerable distance up to the castle.

This new-found expertise took the young journeyman improver to Stowe where the severe winter of 1739-40 had damaged William Kent's dam in the Elysian Valley. Brown was rewarded by a permanent appointment as steward/head gardener to Lord Cobham, leading in turn to the appreciation of his multi-faceted skills by the eminent circle of guests who visited Stowe. Here it was that he married Bridget Wayet, from Boston, Lincolnshire. A period of stability enabled him to develop skills as a designer and architect in the footsteps of Vanbrugh, Bridgeman, Gibbs and Kent.

Inspiring great loyalty in others, he ensured his labourers had sufficient beer to keep going. In return they gave a decent day's work which, after all, had to be done with spades and wheelbarrows. In later years, as his wide-ranging professional business developed, it becomes apparent that Brown was a communicator of the highest order whether in talking to

high-ranking client, foreman, plumber, carpenter, mason or gardener: he was the 'improver' who could deliver on his contracts.

Against the backdrop of the Seven Years War, 1756-1763, and during an entire decade of wet weather, both the setting of the house, so important to the ladies, and the entire estate, became more easily negotiable. With well-

built but largely invisible dams, one could relax in security and admire the amazing 'new river' lake, where nothing had existed before. The landscape now began to imitate the picturesque ideal of Italian painters while, at the same time, becoming more functional with a significant economic



*The curved ha-ha at Chilham*

return. His cascades and series of lakes on different levels assisted water-management and prevented the build-up of silt. He advised raising lake water-levels annually to flush out house-drains into water-meadows (today's reed-bed filtration.) Brown made sure that this was not a temporary vision but one that was there to last.

Although he often planted for posterity, he was also concerned with immediate effects and so planted an increasing variety of exotic trees, shrubs, roses, herbaceous plants and bulbs informally, where they could be seen to advantage. This was not purely decorative. Extensive plantings of Scots pine, fir and larch were used in shelter belts to 'nurture' the young deciduous trees and then 'cropped' for timber when their job was done, allowing great stands of beech and oak. Attractive plantings of gorse were used for the utilitarian insulation of pipes and for fodder for increasing numbers of horses.

As an architect, Brown could build a house, a gazebo, a monument or even a church. He could provide a kitchen garden complete with the latest heated walls and greenhouses so essential for growing the exotic fruit which society demanded. Brown, with the help of his loyal teams of foremen and contractors, would deliver a complete package of improvements. But, and Steffie emphasised this point, he considered the purse of his employer when proposing modern facilities and he knew, as at Chilham, when not to change the landscape too much but simply add the finishing touches by allowing space to 'read' its natural beauty.

### *Hugh Vaux summarises Kate Felus' talk...*

#### EXPERIENCING BROWN: PUTTING HIS LANDSCAPES IN THEIR SOCIAL CONTEXT

Steffie showed us in her lecture that Stowe was where Capability Brown was able to develop his ideas of landscape creation, his administrative skills and his network of

contacts. In her talk, Kate, having worked at Stowe as an historian while living in one of the Georgian buildings on the estate, was able to give us a first-hand insight into some of the discomforts and disadvantages of an 18th-century building. However, this has only served to help her in her quest to discover what could be achieved when the owner had the money and the services of the great 'improver'.

Brown's landscapes were created to be used and enjoyed, and not just viewed as a painting. Whether grazed or occasionally farmed, the products, mainly hay, meat and timber, were daily necessities and the estates had to pay their way. But above all, the landscapes were to be used by people and to be enjoyed; they were an escape to the country and a world of relaxation; the summer holiday par excellence.

After an uncomfortable journey on the roads of that time, it was a relief to enter the park and follow the long sinuous tree-lined drive, broken to allow views of the house on the approach and, finally, to reach home. But across the park were also other drives, created from tightly cropped and mown turf. These were ideal for the leisure activities of riding or for driving an open carriage or chaise, very smooth and very comfortable, allowing everyone to try their skills. There were plenty of other activities: the ladies could wander or simply look elegant or they might even try their hand at hay-making. The gentlemen were keen to fish, to shoot game or plot their next political move. Cricket was becoming popular and the smooth sward was ideal for this.

But above all there was the water on which everyone could make an adventure whether by rowing, sailing or even by 'kanoe', all of which usually ended in a delightful picnic, tastefully arranged to enjoy the vista. As the water features became larger to complement the rest of the park,



*Looking south-east from the castle towards the lake*

these activities became more elaborate allowing virtual sea battles to be re-created, in theory to educate younger sons but perhaps in reality to entertain retired admirals. The ladies might be allowed their own yacht, described by Elizabeth Anson as a 'pretty moving summerhouse'.

Picnics may have happened in the open but it was the artfully placed buildings forming the 'eye-catchers' which really allowed dining in the open air to be realised. Music was a frequent accompaniment and if a building was not available, a tent could easily be put in the appropriate



*Guests enjoying the gardens before lunch*

Hugh Vaux summarises Kate Feus' talk continued from page 5

place. It was the tea-drinking and eating which were important, especially the newly discovered varieties of strawberry and exotics, such as melons and pineapples but, above all, the most delicious syllabub. Eye-catchers took all sorts of forms and the grander the owner, the more elaborate the constructions. Large-scale landscapes, such as those created by Brown, were used by the grandees for the mass entertainment of lesser mortals to celebrate special occasions; these events cost vast sums of money and were complemented with fireworks and illuminations. There are simply not enough records describing these events. Those which do survive whether in prose, poetry or painting, suggest that the 18th-century landscape was not complete without people. Brown and his followers provided the stage for the players.



View of the castle from the terraced garden

## Capability Brown in Kent

### Our book about Brown

Our other major contribution to the Capability Brown celebrations was the publication in late April of our book *Capability Brown in Kent*.

For those of you who have not yet had the chance to buy the book, it is available online (go to [www.kentgardenstrust.org.uk/Capability-Brown/](http://www.kentgardenstrust.org.uk/Capability-Brown/)) or at many bookshops in Kent. It is also available at some National Trust outlets.

We are very grateful to the Kent History Federation for allowing us to re-produce from their newsletter this review by Dr Susan Pittman.

This book is pleasing on the eye with clear text and numerous illustrations and maps. It seeks to mark the tercentenary of the birth of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown by documenting the landscape history of the five county estates on which he was employed, namely, Ingress, Leeds Abbey, Valence, Chilham Castle and North Cray Place. As is acknowledged in the book, Brown's greatest achievements lay outside Kent (195 out of 200 commissions), and, with little of his landscapes within the county surviving, reconstructing his contribution was a daunting task. However, the ten researchers must be congratulated on bringing what remains to light.

After Preface, Acknowledgements, information on Kent Gardens Trust and Foreword, the Introduction gives a brief outline of Brown's life, the influences that shaped his ideas and style, and puts Brown's Kent contribution as landscape gardener, architect and businessman into the wider

national setting. The rest of the book deals with each of the Kent properties in turn. Each section is an entity, so those interested in a particular estate can clearly see how Brown's influence shaped that area, but the five sections overall give a fuller understanding of his work. The backgrounds of patrons, the collaboration of their contractors, and the close network of eighteenth-century society come across vividly.

There are clear maps at the beginning of each section showing the planned landscape in today's setting and marking features of interest. Despite existing landscape revealing only the slightest mark left by Brown, the unravelling of what remains makes for fascinating reading. The authors describe the earlier landscape so that Brown's influence can be more clearly understood, consider Brown's alterations, and then explain the deconstruction or partial deconstruction of his work in later decades as fashions changed, or properties lapsed into neglect, or the world around them disappeared.

An impressive range of source materials is both referred to in the text and listed at the end of each section. It is clear that the survival of evidence is patchy, but the most is made of the available sources, e.g. the letters of Thomas Heron to his brother, Richard, over Brown's advice for Chilham. Cartographic evidence provides a key to understanding alterations over time, and it was a frustration that, perhaps due to publication restraints, some maps were too small for clarity of detail. One example of this can be found on pages 30-31 where three maps of Ingress are squeezed across the bottom of the pages. If space was not an issue then it would have been better to have had the maps on one page below each other; that said, it is possible to find most of the textual references on the maps.

The appeal of this book goes further than garden historians, with much to interest those who appreciate the landscape of Kent, as well as the local historian and general reader. It was hoped that this book would raise awareness of Brown's designs in Kent so that they might be more highly valued and perhaps better preserved. The former hope has been achieved at least with this reader, but the latter will need time, commitment and investment before any assessment can be made.



## Book Review

### *Observations on Modern Gardening by Thomas Whately: An Eighteenth-Century Study of the English Landscape Garden*

Published by The Boydell Press, Woodbridge 2016

ISBN 978 1 78327 102 3

RRP £25.00



The book that I have chosen for this year's review is the timely re-publication of Thomas Whately's *Observations on Modern Gardening*. With an introduction and commentary by Michael Symes, we learn that when it was first published in 1770 it was met with critical acclaim at home and abroad, quickly becoming the standard text on the dos and don'ts of 18th-century English landscape design.

This is a transcription of the third edition, faithfully followed by Symes, and deliberately includes some inconsistencies in Whately's spellings. Unlike the third edition however, Symes includes illustrations of contemporary gardens and natural locations which Whately deliberately omitted on the grounds that, in his view, illustrations could never accurately represent a garden or location.

From the outset, Whately declares the 18th-century garden as having reached 'perfection' deserving 'a place of considerable rank among the liberal arts'. Thereafter, he provides a detailed examination of all the natural and built elements of a garden (of ground, wood, water, rocks and buildings) before considering the visually appealing and emotional characteristics of the Picturesque, and clearly drawing upon the influence of Edmund Burke's philosophy, the Sublime and the Beautiful.

Each chapter also describes some of the greatest gardens of the day (22 altogether) including Blenheim, Claremont, Painshill and Stowe. Throughout the book, Whately's approach is prescriptive, idealistic yet authoritative, so it becomes easy to understand why his text (translated into French and German) was so widely read throughout Europe. Yet the author is also selective in his approach. As Symes readily points out in his own introduction to the book, many established gardens in Yorkshire, Wales and Scotland are not included. Nevertheless, Whately's breadth of knowledge of some of the most prestigious estates in the country reveal not only his links with the most influential Establishment figures of the day, but reinforce the notion that present-day garden historians have now come to recognize, namely the correlation between 'commerce, empire and the landscape garden'.

Emphasis is placed on the naturalistic garden: Whately's dislike of garden statuary, inscribed monuments, artificial

lakes and ruins which appear too contrived did not sit well with his ideas that gardens should fire the imagination, allowing scope to evoke different moods. As one would expect, parks are analysed in some detail. But perhaps surprisingly to the modern reader, Lancelot 'Capability' Brown is not mentioned by name, though his reputation had grown considerably by the 1770s. That Whately admired Brown in some respects, however, is made clear in the author's discussions about Brown's obvious contributions to Blenheim, Caversham, Moor Park, Wotton and Stowe. But this is tempered by observations that the frequent use of the ha-ha was ill-advised, and expansive lawns eminently suitable for the park had no place in the garden which would 'fatigue for the want of variety'. And Brown's signature piece in the landscape, the tree clump, planted on the brow of a hill, is to Whately, 'artificial to a degree of disgust'. Yet, as Symes' incisive commentary reveals, as Brown's name is never mentioned, the foreign reader would be unaware of Brown's considerable contribution to the English landscape movement from the text itself.

A significant addition to the book is the quite revelatory commentary by Michael Symes on François de Paule Latapie's preface to the French translation (*L'Art de former les jardins modernes... ou L'Art des jardins anglois*) which was published in 1771. Symes argues that Latapie, a botanist, significantly influenced the promotion of Whately's book throughout Europe. But Latapie was in some ways critical of Whately, seeking in particular to deny England's claim to be the original source of the landscape garden. Whately's response appears in his partly reproduced letter, where he reproves Latapie's criticisms concerning the lack of engravings in his book together with his view of symmetry. He also provides Latapie with a 'tongue-in-cheek' lesson on how to address the problems of creating an English-style garden in France. Written with such aplomb, it is worth buying the book for the pleasure of reading Whately's letter alone.

That said, Whately's 18th-century writing may pose something of a challenge to the 21st-century reader. In particular, he provides detailed descriptions and characteristics of trees and shrubs but omits to identify their botanical names. When our knowledge of 18th-century planting remains incomplete, the absence of botanical names is somewhat frustrating. The value of the book however is made clear: to the 18th-century gardener it resided in Whately's ability to define taste and to prescribe an approach to landscape design that a person of means would have done well to observe; to the modern-day reader it lies in its rarity in providing a first-hand account of how Georgian gardens were viewed and appreciated. It also provides an invaluable aid to present-day historians and conservationists.

By Beverley Howarth

# Gardens now and in the future

By Dr Caroline Jessel, Co-chair Kent Nature Partnership and Trustee of Kent Wildlife Trust

*This article explores the importance of biodiversity, and the impact of climate change on our gardens.*

Historic gardens have necessarily adapted over the years to the prevailing zeitgeist of their day. In many cases they endure for generations and still provide us with joy and delight. What are the factors which should be shaping them today and for the future? I shall argue that their prime role, in addition to giving pleasure and providing welcome respite from the travails of modern living, is to address the huge challenges we now face of biodiversity loss and climate change.

*Some tips to support improved biodiversity:*

- Don't be too tidy - leave rough unmown areas, especially near water, or protective shrubs. Leave some fallen wood to rot
- Plant pollinator-friendly annuals and perennials
- Leave compost heaps as long as possible to mature fully and provide habitat
- Cut hedges in late November when the birds have had their fill of berries
- Take care when introducing new plants to avoid imported diseases.

Over 23,000 species of plants, fungi and animals are known to face a high probability of extinction<sup>1</sup>. Human activities are causing species extinctions at rates between 1000 and 10000 times higher than the natural rate throughout the Earth's history<sup>2</sup> Many of us enjoy seeing insects, birds and butterflies in the garden but to many gardeners these are an incidental effect of their primary duty to create beauty with plants. I wonder if part of the Kent Gardens Trust remit could be to encourage the owners to think about



more than the visual impact and historic interest of the garden. If there are plenty of trees and shrubs as well as nectar-rich flowers the scene is perfect for protecting biodiversity. If a pond or stream is present there may also be reptiles, amphibians, fish and water fowl in the mix. Some of our historic gardens provide wonderfully rich habitat which is especially precious if managed without reliance on herbicides

and pesticides. If these gardens are linked via woodland and other natural habitat to other similar gardens that provides a much more resilient framework as the wildlife needs to move and breed freely if it is to thrive. Kent

Nature Partnership has mapped the areas of especially rich habitat in Kent (Biodiversity Opportunity Areas <http://www.kentbap.org.uk/kent-boas>) and awareness of these could help when thinking about present and future management of historic gardens.

When it comes to climate change mitigation all gardens can play a valuable role if well managed. Extreme

weather conditions, particularly heatwaves, flooding, and increased wind and storms are already becoming more frequent and the prediction is for this to get much worse, in spite of the historic agreement in Paris last year. This is because so much climate instability is already locked in from the greenhouse gas emissions of the past 150 years. This is not to say action is pointless though, without concerted world-wide action the situation will be very much worse. The microclimate in established gardens is less extreme than in open spaces or urban settings. The effect of mature trees and especially standing water is to maintain temperatures that are cooler in a heatwave and warmer in a cold spell than they otherwise would be. All gardeners know the value of a shelter belt and what helps protect plants also benefits humans and wildlife. Soil is vitally important too, and good soil management has a strong mitigating effect on greenhouse gases as well as improving water management and fertility. This applies as much to gardens as to agricultural use. Soil can act as an effective carbon sink offsetting as much as 20% of carbon dioxide emissions annually. Soil carbon has been declining significantly over the past century in the UK with impacts on food production (less nutritious food), the water cycle, the nitrogen cycle and flora and fauna. The soil in south east England on average has the potential to sequester 75% more carbon<sup>3</sup>. Further opportunities to reduce water loss and support a healthy soil come from less frequent mowing which has the added benefits of directly reducing carbon emissions and reducing costs.



*To improve soil health:*

- Fertilise with organic matter
- Avoid ploughing
- Mixed planting and crop rotations
- Rotational grazing or mowing
- Plant trees and shelter belts

So I would urge us all to think about the vital job a garden is doing now and into the future to help stabilise the environment as well as providing beauty and historic interest.

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<sup>1</sup> UN report on the Sustainable Development Goals 2016

<sup>2</sup> World Wildlife Fund report on species extinction rate 2015

<sup>3</sup> Seven Ways to save our Soils – <https://www.soilassociation.org/media/4672/7-ways-to-save-our-soils-2016.pdf>

# The Tree Register

By Pamela Stevenson  
Hon. Secretary, The Tree Register

*An account of some of the oldest trees in Kent by Pamela Stevenson on behalf of The Tree Register*

The Tree Register (Tree Register of the British Isles or TROBI) is a registered charity collating and updating a database of notable trees throughout Britain and Ireland. The database comprises 211,000 trees, including historical records taken from reference works going back more than 200 years, providing a valuable record of growth rates. One of our biggest oaks grows on private land in Fredville Park, near Dover. Called 'Majesty' it has been documented since 1793 and with a clean 6m high bole and a girth of over 12m, it is probably the most impressive oak in Britain!

The Tree Register is run solely by volunteers, overseen by trustees, and its patron is HRH The Prince of Wales. As an organisation it is the founder member of the European Champion Tree Forum and is a partner with the Woodland Trust and Ancient Tree Forum, mapping the UK's oldest veteran and ancient trees [www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk](http://www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk). A volunteer network of over 50 tree measurers help the Tree Register record over 2,000 new trees each year and update many others. The most prolific tree recorder is the Tree Register's Registrar and keeper of the records, Owen Johnson. Owen is author of the latest Collins Field Guide to Trees of Britain and Northern Europe (a book first published in 1974, as written by the late Alan Mitchell, co-founder of the Tree Register) and he has personally visited and recorded almost half of the trees on the Register.



Unlike other organisations, the Tree Register records all trees that can be found growing and appearing hardy in Britain and Ireland. This now totals 6,523 taxa, of which some 30% are represented by only one specimen, often found in a private collection. However, 353 species, varieties and cultivars are now represented by at least 100 recorded

examples – enough to offer a detailed picture of the performance of those trees across these islands.

Recent technology has armed a number of enthusiastic volunteers with laser measurers, allowing more accurate heights of trees to be more easily recorded. Until now,

our height champions have been dominated by the giant conifers from western North America as early plantings standing singly in Victorian estates. Forestry plantations, particularly in areas like Snowdonia where the climate closely matches that of the American west coast, offer more congenial conditions as the trees all shelter each other and draw one another upwards. The tallest trees now appear confined to a plantation of Douglas Firs, planted by the Forestry Commission in 1921, in the Coed Craig Glanconwy just south of Betws-y-coed, which are now up to 68m tall and adding height as fast as ever. Although 550 trees on the Register are at least 50m tall it is rare to find one above 40m in Kent – even before the 1987 storm. The tallest ever recorded was a 48m Grand fir at Bedgebury National Pinetum, before suffering storm damage recently, but the tallest ever native Sessile oak at 39m can still be seen at Knole Park, Sevenoaks. A 41m Giant sequoia at Emmetts (National Trust) appears to be maintaining its height despite the challenges of exposure, and several Common limes at Godmersham Park, Ashford are around 40m.



Funding for the Tree Register is from private donations and a modest membership scheme that helps support its work and allows members online access to the ever changing list of champion trees at [www.treeregister.org](http://www.treeregister.org) and an annual newsletter. There are currently over 2,000 trees recorded as champions of Kent, of which 244 are the biggest and or tallest known throughout Britain and Ireland. For more information contact the website or email [info@treeregister.org](mailto:info@treeregister.org).



'Majesty' Fredville Oak, Kent

# Exertions of a novice Gardens Trust researcher

By Rosemary Dymond

*Our research team continues to flourish and is currently working on a project commissioned by Dover District Council. A new researcher shares her experiences.*

I have always had a deep interest in gardens and gardening, stemming, I'm sure, from having grandparents and parents who designed their own gardens from scratch which inevitably involved ponds, waterfalls, as well as flourishing vegetable gardens and herbaceous borders. As a history student, I am always conscious of the process of growth and adaption and as an eight-year-old, and beyond, spent many happy hours in my grandparents' garden as the maintenance workforce, but also introducing new designs and borders. It was then that, to my mind, I made an astonishing discovery of a Second World War air raid shelter under the vegetable garden. Little did I realise what a foundation I was laying for my future involvement with Kent Gardens Trust! From then on, snippets of horticultural opportunities and experiences began to sprout forth. A place at Wye College in Kent was replaced by one at London University's Education Dept. where pension prospects seemed far safer- apologies to Perennial! But my teaching career inevitably involved me in children's gardening too, and much to the delight of the children and the school they received gold awards several times through the Britain in Bloom competition. Due to my work with the Friends of Cobham Hall Heritage Trust, I had the pleasure of Tom Wright's company and expertise through several landscape projects and community events at Cobham Hall. It was easy to see the visual effect of his work on the heritage and history of this Repton site and it was a sad loss to all involved in landscape and garden heritage when we heard of his death this year.

So the experience of the done deed has been presented to me "on a plate" in a multitude of ways but what comes next must be the greatest challenge and that is to undertake the actual research and the multiplicity of evidence bases. Perhaps Elizabeth's remark at only my second garden visit with KGT should have been politely acknowledged rather than enthusiastically accepted, for I was now speedily entrenched into a team of very experienced and well-qualified researchers of garden history. Tom Wright

and Sarah Morgan would have had quite a chuckle to themselves – how would I read an historic landscape?!

Daunting though that first appeared, the collegiality of the experienced team and knowing that there were other newcomers too, ensured that the first discussion of the new project was hugely enjoyable, and it was obvious that there were specific research centres that could be used. In the past, the team had undertaken research on various parks and gardens at the request of the councils in Tunbridge Wells, Sevenoaks, and Medway. Now, at Dover's request we were to investigate the history of the gardens there. From a long list of gardens, we could choose the one that we wished to study, and knowing something of the coastal area, I chose St Margaret's at Cliffe with the Pines Garden. Leading professionals spoke of archival research both with Dover Council and KCC. Council officers spoke of plans, maps, planning department documents, population masses, heritage sites and First and Second World War monuments. To say that we were bombarded with documentary evidence and landscape architecture would be to criticise what was an excellent day's presentation, but to newcomers it was a huge amount to assimilate. Then suddenly a glimmer of light shone, for it was announced that we new ones would have mentors and that there was



Looking beyond the tea room at the Pines Garden

the opportunity to work in pairs. The mentors spoke of the fascinating family and heritage history of the areas they had investigated. We had an opportunity to view some of the previous studies which ensured we all took, very seriously, the need for accuracy and thoroughness. Could be a case of going back to the red pen scrutiny!

In January, the expected documentary evidence from KCC arrived and these became a study in themselves. It was useful to share them with a colleague to make sense of the evidence in the plans, though it was only after visiting the site that they made any real sense. These, together with meetings of the St Margaret's at Cliffe Historical Society, local church visits and speaking to lifelong villagers helped to paint a picture of the origins of these gardens. Due to this area's proximity to the coast and involvement in both world wars, KCC were also able to supply reports on monuments and buildings in the area from craters and machine gun posts to pillboxes. It didn't take long to find quite a few of these and once again they were useful in presenting a picture of the site over a period of one hundred years.



The Pines Garden

Postal letters, emails and telephone calls to the owner were very productive; and so it was that my mentor and I arranged a day visit on what turned out to be a gloriously hot and sunny one, just right for touring the whole estate. It was useful to understand the preliminary walk first, following the visitors leaflet and having a feel of the size and layout of the gardens, noting of course the very few mature pine trees! This visual tour of the site created some excitement with little discoveries (not on the plans) of hidden brick pillars and iron gateways behind the ivy. A visit to the tea-room is a must, and here it was a splendid one, complete with a museum of First and Second World War history, local history and photos of the garden, village and surrounding area. The tea-room provided an opportunity to speak with visitors, many of whom were local as were those serving the tea. Next came a two and

half hour tour of the grounds with the owners, which was incredibly useful. All of a sudden, I was presented with a garden where history was in the making, and where environmental issues of today were being addressed using gardening and growing techniques that could be dated back to Roman times and before. But the challenge for me was to find any hint at all of historical background.

Being a garden detective is fun, apart from the practice visits (of which there will be many more) there is always on-line information available and not just the garden's website but also archival material from Hasted, for example. But whatever it is, it must be accurate. History research can tell you the steady evolution of the site but what evidence remains today? What are the tell-tale signs of an old garden? What plants within the herbaceous border could denote an earlier period? There are clues from past planning documents, church history and tithes. So what will the Pines Garden actually reveal?

The climax and perhaps the greatest challenge of a KGT project is when you are asked to share your discoveries and your research in a guided walk of your chosen garden with equally enthusiastic, though more experienced, research colleagues; and that challenge for me is not too far off. But at least I know how to get there now!

Have I enjoyed it so far? Yes. Have I had reservations? Yes. Will my final report equal the quality of earlier research projects? No, but at least there is a horticultural scriptorium that can edit, correct and re-word the language of the deliverer. We shall see, but I'm sure I will put my name forward again to learn more. What do they say....."a little knowledge is a dangerous thing"?

## And finally.....

We are always very pleased to hear from members about the work of the Trust. If you have any ideas for future events, including gardens you think we should visit, please let us know. Also, if you have any comments about the work of the Trust, for example any activities you would like us to be involved in, do get in touch.

You can contact us through the website, either using the form on the 'contact us' page or the message board on the 'membership' page. Or email directly to [paul.howarth@kentgardenstrust.org.uk](mailto:paul.howarth@kentgardenstrust.org.uk). Or phone our secretary, Kelly Noble, on 07432 633697.

# Obituary: Tom Wright (1928-2016)

By Allison Wainman

Tom Wright always described himself as a Man of Kent as he was born in Gillingham, just south of the River Medway. When he was only four however, his family moved to Canterbury. And it was at Canterbury, now as a Kentish Man, where Tom's life-long interest in horticulture and natural history began. The family home had a large garden with not only a kitchen garden and an orchard but a wood and a stream as well.

Tom attended Simon Langton Grammar School in Canterbury before being accepted for a degree course at Wye College (University of London) in October 1949. His lecturer there in 'decorative horticulture' was Christopher Lloyd, who had recently graduated from Wye. Tom always described how privileged he'd been, not only for what he learnt from 'Christo', but also for the many happy memories he and other students had shared during weekends spent at Great Dixter.

After graduation, Tom became the manager of a nursery and flower growing business in South Devon, spending 10 years there before returning to Kent and to Wye to become Senior Lecturer in Landscape Horticulture at the college. Interestingly, one of his students during the 25 years he spent as Senior Lecturer included Fergus Garrett who now manages Great Dixter.

I first met Tom shortly after I became a member of Kent County Council (KCC). In 1982, Tom was asked by the council to undertake a survey of historic gardens in Kent. Realising how important gardens were to Kent's tourist industry, KCC decided it would be a good idea to get an up to date record of famous Kent gardens such as Sissinghurst Castle that attracted visitors from all over the world. The committee responsible for the survey, on which I served, enthusiastically supported it and the first county survey was completed in 1985.

The survey gave impetus to the importance of setting up a gardens trust for Kent. Other counties in the UK were already doing so and several garden owners such as myself all agreed that the Garden of England should not be left out. Along with Alan Hardy and Bill Deakin, the then County Planning Officer, a small group, including Tom and me, began to have discussions with Kent County Council about the possibility of it providing funding for a trust. Kent Gardens Trust was created in January 1988 just a

few months after the dreadful October storm. I felt greatly honoured to be asked to be one of the founder trustees along with Tom.

The October 1987 storm devastated many gardens in Kent, and in spite of helping set up Kent Gardens Trust, Tom was expected to do much more. He was appointed by English Heritage and the Countryside Commission Task Force Trees to undertake studies and restoration proposals for a number of Kent gardens that had been badly damaged including Olantigh, Godinton Park, Hever Castle and Squerryes Court. He also contributed greatly to one of the first projects in which Kent Gardens Trust became involved by helping train volunteers to update his original The

Historic Parks and Gardens of Kent. That provided a useful template for other surveys Kent County published including The Kent Compendium – A Comprehensive Register of Parks and Gardens of Historic, Horticultural, Amenity or Other Value in Kent published in 1996.

Tom retired from the University of London in 1990 and moved to West Sussex. But he retained his links with Kent Gardens Trust even after retiring as a trustee. Sadly, he died earlier this year in May.

Apart from sitting on various garden boards such as Hampton Court Palace, Cobham Hall Heritage Trust and Sir Harold Hillier Gardens, Tom was also a member of the Royal Parks Review group and the National Trust Gardens Panel. He also wrote several books including The Gardens of Kew and contributed to The RHS Dictionary of Gardening and The RHS Encyclopaedia of Gardening. One of his last contributions that I am fortunate to own is the English Heritage Handbook on The Management and Maintenance of Historic Parks, Gardens and Landscapes that he edited with John Watkins, another former trustee of KGT.

I do not own or even aspire to own a Historic Park and Garden, but the book contains a wealth of very readable advice for any garden owner, large or small, historic or otherwise that you can dip into at any time when you need help. It is perhaps typical of how good a teacher Tom was that everything he taught and wrote was not only easy to understand but practical as well.



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