



Kent Gardens Trust Newsletter

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TWENTY YEARS AFTER THE GREAT STORM OF 1987



Photo: Tom Wright

The Great Storm of 16/17th October 1987 was the worst to hit the south of England for 250 years and Kent was particularly hard hit. Dutch Elm Disease killed 10,000,000 trees over several years and permanently changed the landscape but the Great Storm destroyed 15,000,000 trees in the south east of England in a single night. No-one who experienced it will ever forget the fury of the wind and the dreadful scene of destruction which greeted them when daylight came. Ancient trees were tipped like spillikins and the trunks of young trees were snapped by the force of the wind leaving a landscape reminiscent of pictures of the battle fields of the First War. Six of Sevenoaks' famous oak trees were felled and Toys Hill, owned by the National Trust lost 99% of its trees. Many villages were without power (often for weeks), roads were blocked, livestock suffered from lack of water, buildings were damaged and gardens ruined. The labour and effort involved in clearing up the debris was enormous and took many months.

Now twenty years on we can perhaps look back on that dreadful time with some detachment. I recently joined a conference and tour arranged by the International Dendrology Society to visit some badly affected areas and assess the consequences of the storm and the lessons to be learned from it

and I thought that members might be interested to hear what was said. The tour was led by Tony Kirkham, head of the arboretum at Kew so we were in the hands of a real expert.

First, the storm was not entirely a bad thing. Some old trees which no-one would have had the heart to fell were destroyed, opening up long lost views and providing space for new planting. Generally the treescape has improved. Owners have had a wonderful opportunity to fill the gaps in their gardens with new introductions from all over the world so the variety of trees and shrubs in gardens has increased.

On the downside, the use of heavy equipment to clear some devastated areas caused serious soil compaction with long term bad effects. Some owners, anxious to restore the landscape as quickly as possible, replanted too closely and not always with enough thought and many of these plantings are now having to be removed or thinned. The dead and dying plant material in the ground has led to an increase in unwelcome pathogens such as honey fungus.

Study of the fallen trees has led to a reassessment of how trees grow and consequently how they should be planted and cared for. The enormous shallow root plates which could be seen everywhere after the storm

showed that, contrary to general belief, trees do not grow deep roots but on the contrary tree roots are shallow and wide. One huge fallen *Nothofagus dombeyi* we saw had a root plate 19 feet across but only 18 inches deep. Tony Kirkham explained to us that buffeting by the wind encourages the tree to expand and increase its root system into the ground, a process called seismorphogenesis. The roots of the tree strengthen and develop when the trunk and branches sway in the wind. The conclusion he drew was that the practice of planting young trees with tall, stout stakes for support should be abandoned. Far better to use short (he said 10-12 inches) stakes to allow the young tree to move in the wind and develop a healthy root system as early as possible. Planting depths can be relatively shallow and tap roots, which we now know do not grow very deep, can be trimmed off to improve the growth of feeder roots, no organic matter needs to be added and holes should preferably be square rather than round because corners are weaker allowing roots to break out more easily. Microrhizal fungi should be added to encourage development of the feeder roots.

Another interesting lesson from the storm was the damaging effect of compaction round the roots of trees. Prior to 1987 some of the trees at Kew were showing signs of stress but in the years after the storm they recovered their health and vitality. The conclusion was that being rocked and shaken for many hours had loosened the soil around the roots and introduced oxygen. As a result Kew now uses gas pumped into the root ball of compacted trees. Many estates which are open to the public now try to prevent cars being parked close to old trees to avoid the damaging effects of compaction.

I hope that the lessons of the Great Storm will help us to plant gardens which will flourish and with luck survive the next one which, because of climate change, is likely to occur in less than 250 years time.

Elizabeth Cairns

VOLUNTEERS WANTED

If you are interested in gardens and gardening and would like to help to protect gardens in Kent we need your help. Kent Gardens Trust is planning to undertake a review of the *Compendium of Parks and Gardens in Kent* to provide an up to date record of all the significant gardens in the county. The work will involve visiting and recording gardens and, for those who may be interested, historical research.

The *Compendium* was compiled in 1992 and updated in 1996. It contains detailed records of 81 historic parks and gardens and brief details of about 250 gardens mainly of horticultural interest. This was a pioneering work and a valuable resource for anyone interested in learning about and protecting Kent's rich garden heritage. Twelve years later the records need updating and Kent Gardens Trust is planning to undertake this major task with the support of Kent County Council. A pilot project is planned within the Tunbridge Wells district.

If you would like to be involved in this interesting and exciting work please contact us. We will be arranging training for volunteers in the autumn when they will be instructed in recording techniques and for those interested in historical research, the use of maps and other records, interpreting historical information and identifying and dating garden features. Anyone with an interest in social and cultural history will find researching and recording gardens a fascinating and rewarding experience.

We also intend to submit the records of historic gardens in Kent which are already in the *Compendium* to be included on the Parks & Gardens UK database. This is a new national web resource described in more detail in this issue. We will be contacting owners to inform them of our plans and to assure them that no personal or sensitive information will be available to the public on the Database.

To find out more please telephone Elizabeth Cairns on 01622 858191 or email elizabeth.cairns@btinternet.com

Parks & Gardens UK Project

Parks & Gardens UK (PAGK) is a three-year project, which has received £1 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund. It is a joint initiative of the Association of Gardens Trusts and the University of York.

Parks & Gardens UK aims to stimulate interest and deepen understanding and enjoyment of historic designed landscapes and green spaces in the UK through the development of a records database and website. The database, now holds information on 4,000 sites and will hold records on some 7,000 historic parks and gardens in the UK by the summer. At least 500 of the records will provide in depth information about sites, and will be linked to other digitised resources, such as historical documents, maps and photographs. The database will encompass much of the existing research material on individual parks and gardens which is held by County Gardens Trusts and will include the information contained in the United Kingdom Parks and Gardens database at York University.

A key part of this project will be to encourage volunteers to get involved in researching and recording historic parks and gardens. Parks & Gardens UK has prepared a Volunteer Training Manual and Researchers' Resource Guide for each County Gardens Trust. This manual will offer a practical guide to aid volunteers at all levels of experience on how to research and record parks, gardens and other types of ornamental landscapes as well as it will provide guidance on how to contribute information and materials to the Parks & Gardens UK database and website.

The website and database went live in October 2007. The database is not yet complete. It will be added to until the Project ceases in August 2008.

Some frequently asked questions about the Project

What and how should County Gardens Trusts record for the project and how should the research be carried out?

The Parks & Gardens UK project does not wish CGTs to alter their methods of research and recording. The database and website are being developed to accommodate current research and recording practices.

What if a private owner is unwilling to have the private research included on the website?

Information, gained privately by a CGT or researcher, will only be available to the public on the website if consent from the owner is obtained. If no consent is obtained, only information that is in the public domain will be included.

Does the size of garden make any difference?

No. If the garden, whatever size, contains 'special' or unique features that are worthy of note and the researcher feels should be recorded, it can be included.

How will the P&G UK project ensure data quality control?

The project has put together a 4-tiered system to ensure quality of data.

1. CGTs should carefully inspect their records before submitting them for entry into the database.

2. The Data Entry team are well qualified both in the subject area as well as in strong data entry experience.

3. Once information has been entered into the database, CGTs will be able to check their data and submit corrections

4. The project will be involving a garden historian as a consultant to screen approximately one in five records for accuracy of research, information provided, and garden terminology.

Do volunteers have to enter their own research onto the database?

Volunteers can enter the information themselves or they can submit their records to PAGUK which will complete the data entry for them.

Anyone who is interested in finding out more can ring 01904 433965 or visit the website at www.parksandgardens.ac.uk

This is an edited version of an information sheet produced by PAGUK.

Retirement of Peter Stevens

Peter was appointed a trustee in 1998 and became Vice Chairman of Kent Gardens Trust in 2001.

Peter Stevens worked extremely hard with both myself and Roly Franks to enable KGT to enrol as an Environmental Body with ENTRUST. As a result KGT was able to access funds from a Kent landfill operator to pay for the creation of a public garden on a former landfill site at the Sturry Road in Canterbury. The site was heavily contaminated so the first task was to ensure that any contamination could be dealt with. Peter's expertise on environmental issues proved invaluable. With the help of Sir Charles Jessel, who was then a trustee, we were also able to persuade both Canterbury City Council and KCC to support our bid for funding..

Several years later the Sturry Road Community Garden is now a reality and a trust of local residents now manage the 45 acre site.

Peter made an enormous contribution to KGT and was always willing to help with KGT's many social events and persuade his wife, Beryl, to help as well. Both I and the other trustees are most grateful for all their hard work.

Allison Wainman

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

At the Head Gardeners Forum on 30th October a lively discussion ensued when a question was asked about the feasibility of restoring historic gardens when it was almost impossible to find trained gardeners to maintain them. I write from Folkestone where, alas, Council apprenticeships with the Parks and Gardens Dept. are no longer available. Those who took up apprenticeships would not have been attracted to a full time horticultural college, so now, with no alternative, they are slipping through the net.

We hear a lot about initiatives taken by the RHS to encourage gardening in schools but after that how much chance is there for a young person not interested in book-learning to discover what a difference he or she can make in garden or landscape. It seems that it will take an imaginative, softly-softly approach to involve and inspire today's youth.

Folkestone has a brand new Academy School. It cost £38 million and was designed by Foster and Partners. As well as being an A-Level school a wide range of vocational courses are offered: catering, plumbing, vehicle maintenance, and hairdressing. Students have the chance to leave school with NVQ's in all these subjects but when horticulture was offered there were no takers..

So, is there another approach? The object is so simple: to give young people the experience of working the ground. Growing stuff is getting your hands dirty and making a difference on a patch of land. I wonder if each class might have its groundwork team?, each class with a designated patch to do something with. An element of competition might liven things up? But how to encourage them to 'give it a go'? Geraldine Fish

ANNUAL MEETING REPORT 2007

A particularly successful and well attended annual members' meeting followed by a 'Head Gardeners' Forum was held at Lenham Village Hall, chaired by Jane Streatfeild, former Kent County Organiser of the National Gardens Scheme and a regular gardens broadcaster on local radio. The panel comprised Jane Cordingley, head gardener at Eltham Palace; Vivien Hunt, head gardener at Godinton House; David Roots, head gardener at Cobham Hall, and John Wellard, head gardener at Goodnestone. They all managed well known gardens open to the public, with the many extra challenges this brings. Only Goodnestone is a private family house, the other three being corporately owned but nonetheless retaining a strong flavour of the families which had lived in them.

There is not space here to enlarge on the many questions or answers, which covered a wide range of subjects, including climbers, fruit, irrigation, lawns, shrubs, trees and vegetables. More questions were received beforehand than the panel had time to answer.

One question generated a long discussion on whether garden plans for restoring historic gardens were too ambitious, given the difficulty of finding and then funding the cost of employing trained gardeners. This is a problem central to Kent Gardens Trust's mission, and it was felt that gardens had to develop if they were to continue to attract visitors and interest. Ambitions should be tailored to funds available but progress should always be an important aim if gardens were not to become stale. The difficulty of attracting young entrants as professional gardeners was discussed, the panel noting the trend towards more people, particularly women, retraining as gardeners in career changes.

The Trust is most grateful to these four experts for giving such informative and useful views, and generally agreeing in their answers!

Andrew Wells

WHAT'S ON

HARDY PLANT SOCIETY

30th March 11 am
Lenham Community Centre
Plant Sale and 2 pm lecture on *The Restoration of Osborne House Gardens*

20th April 2-5 pm
Great Comp Garden Plant Sale

17&18th May 11-5pm
Doddington Place
Garden Show & Plant Sale

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR CONSERVATION OF PLANTS & GARDENS (Kent Group)

Plant Fairs:
27th April
Belmont Gardens near Faversham
7th September
Hadlow College Near Tonbridge

WHAT'S ON

GARDEN HISTORY SOCIETY

For tickets and information contact Robert Peel - rma.peel@btopenworld.com or The Garden History Society 0207 608 2409

26th April
Exploring the Landscapes of East London
A conducted tour of Mile End and Wanstead Parks £12

17th June
Evening Visit to Kenilworth
Guided by John Watkins. This is a good opportunity to see English Heritage's reconstruction of the Elizabethan garden £20

24-27 September
Trip to Gardens in Belgium
Based in Brussels and will include modern gardens, the royal gardens and Rubens' garden in Antwerp

Book Review

THE MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF HISTORIC PARKS AND GARDENS

Tom Wright & John Watkins

It is now nearly twenty years since *'Large Gardens and Parks, Maintenance, Management, and Design'* was published. It addressed the fundamental question posed by owners of any largish garden – how to continue to pay for it's upkeep. Some of the answers included large machinery for the grass and chemicals for the weeds.

A decade or two later we are not so sure about either – heavy machinery used over a long period may sometimes contribute towards soil compaction and chemical use is now carefully qualified, *'It is good management to have a presumption against the use of chemicals.'*

Today *'The Management and Maintenance of Historic Parks, Gardens and Landscapes'* takes over 360 pages to indicate the vastness of the range of knowledge, skills, craftsmanship and technical competencies which are essential if an estate or garden is to be run efficiently and without wasting any expensively procured effort. And underpinning all the technical detail there is a quiet but perceptible appreciation – even vision – of the 'artsmanship' inherent in all historic landscapes which makes it all worth understanding, worth doing and worth paying for.

The broad themes of British garden history, planning issues and conservation methodology are covered in the earlier chapters followed by an excellent section on vegetation management, introduced by a diagram of the varying life expectations of garden plants indicating a simplified ideal temporal and spatial relationship. Further sections cover trees in avenues, parklands and also in woodland. Later sections deal with shrubs, perennials and climbers with a particularly useful summary of historic rose varieties and their pruning and even the unpalatable subject of rose replant sickness is not shirked, with excellent advice on soil improvement and mycorrhizal inoculation.

Other inescapable realities are explored too, we are not spared the expatiation of the health and safety commission, *'while a maintenance contractor has primary responsibility for the health and safety of his*

staff..... owners and managersneed to ensure that.....the site is not unsafe and that work practices do not constitute a hazard'.

The concept of legally defined 'hazardous practice' would have been an anachronism to William Robinson in 1879 as he considered how to dig - *'An indifferent man will simply shuffle over the ground, turning the soil over to a depth of about 6 inches, whilst a man who understands how to dig and perform his work properly, will keep a straight and open trench.... I know of no single operation in gardening so illustrative of personal character as digging....'* Today skilled garden staff are becoming so precious and rare that economically-minded owners and managers will carefully ration out any digging whether it constitutes a 'hazardous practice' or not. Or alternatively, in the chapter on garden staff and organisation, one of the advantages of contract labour over directly employed labour is that of 'poor work savings' whereby a contractor is paid only on satisfactory completion of a task.

Reference to the excellent section on soil management should enable the avoidance of costs of further cultivations, but in the words of one of the book's editors 'learning to garden one's site takes time'.

Finally, there are ten sections on the maintenance of well-known and important gardens and landscapes which provide examples of good practice, for example, quality grass at Stonehenge in spite of 750,000 visitors a year and a perfect wild flower meadow at Great Dixter in spite of heavy clay soils.

Unusually for an almost inexhaustible compendium of essential references, this English Heritage Handbook is also a thoroughly good read.

Jane Cordingley

TRUST EVENTS 2008

2nd April 11 a.m.

Guided tour of the Millenium Seed Bank at Wakehurst Place

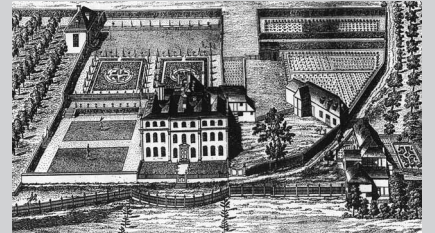
The Millenium Seed Bank Project has set up a worldwide network for the conservation of seed from the wild as insurance against the loss of species. Modern technology enables seeds to be kept alive for hundreds of years. We shall be able to see behind the scenes to understand how this is done.

Lunch is included and the gardens at Wakehurst Place will be a delight.

£25 including lunch and a donation to the Seed Bank

1st June 3 p.m.

Visit to Smith's Hall, West Farleigh, near Maidstone followed by tea.



The layout of the garden at Smith's Hall is remarkably unchanged since the 18C but with beautiful modern planting. This will be a rare treat for garden lovers and historians alike.

£12 including tea

2nd September 2 p.m.

RHS Lecture at Lullingstone by Chris Bailes, Curator of RHS Rosemore.

Chris will speak on African Plants in British Gardens. Tea and a tour of The World Garden is included.

£23 (£20 for RHS members)

6th November 7.30

Annual Members Meeting and lecture by BBC presenter Andy Garland at Matfield village hall

Please apply for tickets on the enclosed form

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