



THE KENT GARDENS TRUST NEWSLETTER

Working for Kent's Garden Heritage

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Leeds Abbey -where next?



The Capability Brown lake at Leeds Abbey

Capability Brown was born in 1716, an event celebrated by Kent Gardens Trust in several ways including the publishing in 2016 of *Capability Brown in Kent*. That book had a chapter on the fascinating history of Leeds Abbey and its Brown Landscape Garden written by Hugh Vaux, and drawing upon years of research on the site by some of our members. Unknown to us at the time, the c.30 acre site (right in the middle of Leeds Village) was about to be sold by The Rochester Bridge Trust to Fernham Homes.

Last year, Harry Fern (of Fernham Homes) submitted an application to Maidstone Borough Council to build a Mansion on the site as well as two Gatehouses. It was hoped that the enhanced market value of the site would then be sufficient to restore the Listed Heritage Assets (principally two remnants of the 12thC Leeds priory), as well as the important – though unlisted – Capability Brown landscape.

However, there were insufficient details with the application with

many key questions unanswered, so we, along with many other individuals and organisations, recommended refusal. Maidstone Borough Council duly turned down the application.

In September, Harry Fern, submitted a new application. In many ways the new plan for the site was similar to the first one, though more archaeological investigations have been carried out in the area where the proposed mansion is to be placed, the idea for a second large pond has been abandoned, and the style of the gatehouses has been toned down.

From a Kent Garden Trust point of view the concept of a new large mansion effectively financing the restoration of the Brown landscape is an attractive one. After all, the landscape has been derelict for many years, and there would little prospect of saving it by other means. However, we retained significant concerns about key features of the plan and decided to engage John Phibbs – the country's leading Capability Brown expert – to help us to understand

the landscape elements in more detail, and use this as the basis for a critically constructive response to the application. You can see our Comments, as well as all the other – voluminous – documentation relating to the Application on the Maidstone Planning Portal at 23/503997/FULL.

We have two key problems with the current application. Firstly, and most importantly, we require the restoration plan for the landscape to be spelled out in far more detail than at present, and the commitment to do the work underwritten. Secondly, we strongly oppose the plan to build the mansion in William and Mary style and of red brick. The landscape by Brown was fashioned in about 1770, and since the new mansion will be seen as integral with the restored landscape, we believe that a restrained neo Georgian design, built predominantly of local stone - as were the 12thC Priory, and the 16thC mansion that followed it - would be far more appropriate.

This is one of the most important Planning matters the Trust has been involved with recent years. As John Phibbs says in his report "Leeds Abbey is an important site in the oeuvre of Capability Brown, particularly for its small scale and because it is surprisingly intact and entire". We hope that its restoration can proceed and provide Kent with a new highlight of its garden history.

As we go to press, no decision has yet been made by Maidstone Borough Council. We will keep you posted!

Mike O'Brien and Richard Stileman

From the Editors

Mike O'Brien and Richard Stileman
Co-Chairmen

The leading article on what is going on at Leeds Abbey and our involvement with it illustrates just one strand of the continuing activities of Kent Gardens Trust. Whilst our overall objective is to conserve historic gardens and designed landscapes, we achieve this practically through a dogged review of those Planning Applications that may affect listed gardens in Kent, through conducting Research designed to identify and record historic green spaces, and through arranging

relevant Events, including lectures, visits to gardens (both old and new), parks and other urban green spaces. Occasionally we publish printed books (like Capability Brown and Humphry Repton in Kent), and our website records all our published Research Reports.

This Annual Newsletter provides a glimpse of what we have done in the year and illustrates the range of our activities in pursuit of our mission. In this issue, the Leeds Abbey 'story' dominates our key role in Planning. With Research at Swale now reaching its conclusion, Karen Emery provides a succinct overview of what has been achieved, and our photographic essay on visits demonstrates the wide range of interests – from gardens that illustrate current and past KGT involvement, to green spaces which show what is happening to both

gardens and wildlife in the face of climate change (like The Pines, Ranscombe and the Barbican), and to recently created gardens that are clearly 'history in the making' (like Thenford).

We then have an article on the Kent activities of the relatively little known, but clearly under-rated, architect and garden maker George Devey, whose work in Kent ranged from major commissions (like Penshurst and Hall Place) to more modest domestic houses and their gardens. We then carry tributes to our fondly remembered past Chairman Gill Yerburch, and to John Sales, for many years Head of Gardens at the National Trust. There is a book review, and update on our Board of Trustees and biographies of our new Trustees.

Researching Landscapes in Swale

By Karen Emery

The role of the Garden Trusts to 'Conserve – Research - Campaign' on behalf of historic gardens and landscape has an excellent track record here in Kent. The KGT has been lucky to have a keen group of researchers who have since 2008 worked on recording the history and significance of more than 100 sites.

The latest project since 2020 has involved landscapes in the Borough of Swale: a fascinating set of sites including walled gardens, parks, cemeteries and, unusually, landscape associated with the gunpowder industry at Faversham. Inevitably, progress during the Covid pandemic was curtailed as in-person visits to sites, libraries and archives was difficult. We were sorry to lose a few volunteers as peoples' circumstances changed, particularly Cilla Freud who had so ably co-ordinated the group until Summer 2022. However, new volunteers were able to pick up the thread and continue the good work within the welcoming atmosphere of a group united by an enthusiasm for discovering information on the



KGT Volunteer researchers with Simon Algar, Conservation & Design Manager at Swale Borough Council (blue helmet) and Tim Chilvers of the development company Anderson Group (3rd left) at the former Marsh Gunpowder Works at Oare near Faversham.

history and development of our local green spaces.

Meetings co-ordinated by Karen Emery include sharing our findings, discussions on source material, guidance on writing statements of significance and learning how the resulting HER (Historic Environment Records) can be used for supporting conservation issues. The group also appreciated site visits at the former Marsh Gunpowder Works near Oare, a park and cemetery at

Sittingbourne and a recent meeting at Judd's Folly Hotel, located in the landscape of the former Syndale Estate near Faversham.

Research reports can be found on the 'Publications' section of the KGT website. A Zoom lecture in February 2024 in association with The Gardens Trust will feature some of the recent research on parks in Swale.

George Devey, not only an architect but a garden maker

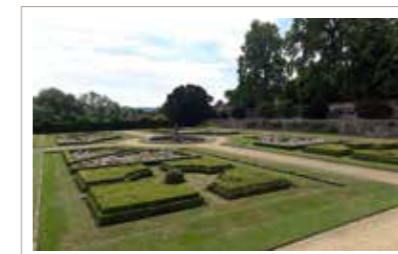
By Dr Sara Tenneson

When the name George Devey (1820-1886) comes up, first thoughts tend to go to the picturesque cottages and other estate buildings he designed for the large estates in Kent. There is the collection of his cottages at Leicester Square in Penshurst, gate lodges for Hall Place and Swaylands, as well as Betteshanger House and St Albans Court now known as Beech Grove. With many of these estates Devey did not just build new houses or remodel existing ones, he also designed and arranged the gardens. Devey was a private man, he did not promote his work nor leave any notes. There is a collection of his architectural plans, drawings and sketches, together with some garden plans, held at the Royal Institute of British Architect's archives and it is from these that research has discovered that Devey was not only an architect but an accomplished garden maker in the formal style (Figure 1).



Hall Place

The first garden Devey arranged was at Penshurst Place in the early 1860s for the second Lord De L'Isle. Devey was restoring the house when he was asked to arrange gardens. What is known today as the Italian Garden was designed by Devey and based on an illustration of the seventeenth century garden layout of Penshurst Place by Joannes Kip dated 1701. Devey recreated this parterre design with a central oval pool with a statue of Hercules that had come from the family's seventeenth century house in London's Leicester Square (Figure 2). Other parts of the garden by Devey were the east-west vista ending in a demi-lune where a Venetian sundial was displayed, flights of stone steps, and the avenue on the north side of the walled garden, which today is the entry point for visitors.



The Italian Gardens at Penshurst

When Devey was engaged at Penshurst Place in the late 1860s, he was also working for Sir Walter James at Betteshanger House (now Northbourne Park School) near Deal. Here he was commissioned to remodel the house and arrange the gardens which included a terrace running north east to south west from the house, leading to a further terrace with a glasshouse, now gone, a small paved rose garden leading off the front courtyard, and perhaps one of his most important designs, a series of seven terraces of approximately 82 metres in length leading down to St Marys Church which stands in the grounds (Figure 3).

These terraces have an air of seventeenth century formal style, starting with the top terrace with two curved staircases leading to a circular terrace decorated

with a balustraded wall with urns and finials. A set of steps with more finials and urns leads to a grass terrace and on down to a further grass terrace that displays an old well head turned into a planter. There are three more terraces of grass but this time the steps have been replaced with grass banks, all designed to make a pleasant walk to the church.

Although Devey did not write anything down, his assistant and later partner James Williams did leave notes of what was important to Devey. He wrote that Mr Devey liked to work in the olds ways, he believed in the whole, 'that the connection of gardens to a well-appointed house was the province of every competent architect'. Devey took great pleasure in designing terraces, walls, the disposition of steps and entrance courtyards. Here Devey liked to give an air of mystery,

with a wall, a gateway, preventing the visitor seeing everything at once. There are two good examples of this in Kent. At St Albans Court, now Beech Grove, in Nonnington he used an archway to hide the house, which stood high on the rise with a series of terraces down to formal gardens. Beside the house at Hall Place, Leigh, he built a striking and decorative gateway of red brick with stone finials that hides the formal gardens.

Hall Place was an important commission for Devey, working for the hosiery manufacturer Samuel Morley. Devey built the house and also designed terraces and formal gardens around the house. Robert Marnock, a well-known landscape gardener, also worked at Hall Place at this time. Marnock's style is described as 'picturesque', which was sometimes said of Devey, so it is likely that they worked there together, Devey on the 'hard' landscape and Marnock on the 'soft' landscape (Figure 4).

This is just a brief introduction to what is known about Devey's garden making in Kent and these examples demonstrate his methods in connecting the house to the garden. He worked around the country, mainly on domestic architecture and there are also fine surviving examples in Hampshire, Shropshire and Yorkshire of how he connected the house to the garden.

Dr Sara Tenneson is a garden historian specialising in the gardens of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

IMAGES OF 2023



The Priory, Lamberhurst



The Pines, St Margarets



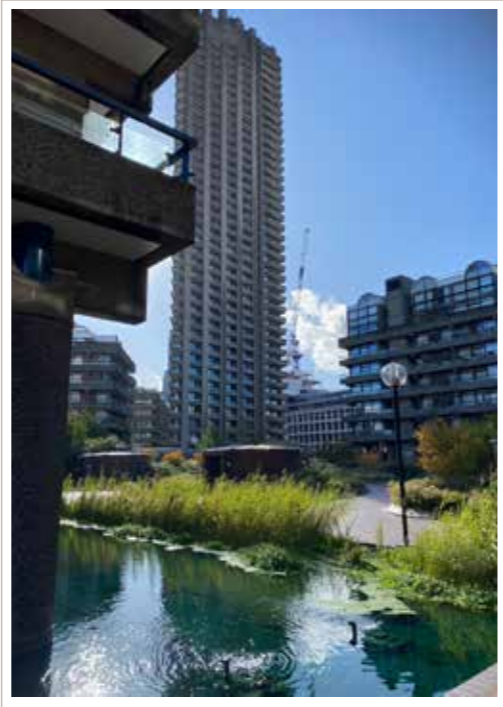
In the garden at Bourne Park



Chapel at Tonbridge School



View South from Bourne Park



The Barbican



At the Garden Party in Doddington Place



In the Calyx at The Pines

Our Day at Thenford

In addition to our regular visits to London green spaces, we hope to arrange at least one visit a year to seminal gardens outside of Kent. This year we visited Thenford near Banbury, the truly remarkable 70 acre arboretum and garden created over the past 50 years by Michael and Anne Heseltine.



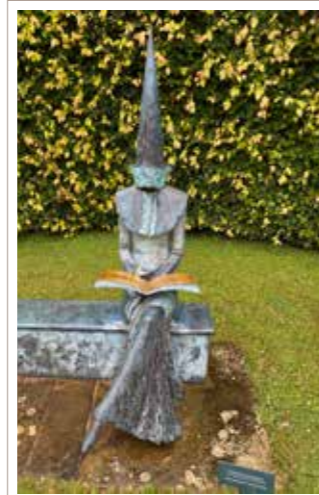
Thenford House from the lake



*Maurice Foster presenting a *Pterocarya macroptera* to Michael Heseltine*



The Herbaceous Garden by the house



Reading Chaucer



The Rill

The Hydrangea - A Reappraisal. by Maurice Foster

Our good friend and the creator of the garden at White House Farm, Sevenoaks, Maurice Foster, has written a key new work *The Hydrangeas*, due to be published in December.

Crowood Press £25



Tributes to Gill Yerburch and John Sales

Gill Yerburch

Gill Yerburch, who died recently, was involved with Kent Gardens Trust from its earliest beginnings. The Trust was established in 1988 with support from KCC and was one of the first county gardens trusts set up to encourage knowledge and interest in historic gardens in order to protect and preserve them for future generations. Gill became chairman in 1992.

Gill was enthusiastic, outgoing and sociable and was ideally suited to establishing a network of supporters and friends for the Trust in its early years which has stood the Trust in good stead. It still relies greatly on volunteers for its research projects. Gill was very hands on and always prepared to get involved in every project. Allison Wainman who succeeded Gill as chairman recalls Gill's enthusiasm and ability to make everything great fun for everyone involved.

During those early years under Gill's chairmanship much work was begun on which the future activities of the Trust would build. In conjunction with KCC a survey of the historic landscapes in the county was conducted by Tom Wright, garden historian and lecturer at Wye College. The reports were printed and made available in local libraries for study and further

research. The process of developing and expanding this resource and making it available online is still continuing and the Trust hopes eventually to survey and record all sites in the county which are of historic interest. Financial restraints on local planning authorities have held up the project but it is hoped that in due course the small amount of money needed for each survey will be found.

Alongside the main survey a group of volunteers was recruited to record the many smaller gardens in the county which, although perhaps not of any historic interest, were nevertheless socially and culturally important. Gill was closely involved with this project and her enthusiasm and encouragement contributed much to its success. Gill also promoted work in schools to encourage children to take an interest in gardening.

Gill was closely involved in the production of KGT's first publications. *The Garden of England* written by Elisabeth Hall, an account of the history of garden design and the historic gardens in Kent was published in 1995. This was followed by *A Presentation of Parks*, a survey of public parks in the county researched and recorded by a group



of KGT volunteers. Both these books broke new ground and still provide invaluable information on parks and gardens in Kent.

Gill will be affectionately remembered by many KGT members and she will be greatly missed.

By Elizabeth Cairns

John Sales

We cannot let the year go past without recording the sad death of John Sales in December last year.

John was appointed Head of Gardens at The National Trust in 1971, and in that role oversaw the restoration and conservation of over 200 gardens, including Sissinghurst, Chartwell and Scotney in Kent. He gave the KGT annual Autumn lecture in 2011, and published a marvellous biography *Shades of Green* in 2018, in which he describes in detail the care of many of his charges, as well as the deft human relations he had to employ at The National Trust, and in particular with several strong-willed former owners! He did it so well.



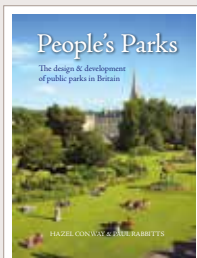


Book Review

People's Parks: The design & development of public parks in Britain.

Published by John Hudson Publishing, £60.00

Digital Edition available in due course from Boydell and Brewer £19.99



This revised edition of Hazel Conway's 1991 *People's Parks* has brought her thoroughly academic study of Victorian parks right up to the present day. Paul Rabbitts - author, historian and park champion has augmented the original 10 chapters, followed by six new chapters with added material from Rabbitts, Harriet Jordan and David Lambert.

The early chapters describe the intent of providing urban green space and opportunities for 'rational recreation' for the working classes – the 'people'. The familiar components of parks are considered in detail with examples and illustrations from many areas of Britain. The design of Victorian and the later parks are given a thorough treatment, describing and illustrating beautifully the contributions of many famous designers.

The role of parks in town planning takes us into the twentieth century, as does the account of the transformation of parks to incorporate provision for active sports. The last two chapters are crucial updates laying out the bleak situation for municipal parks 40 years ago, and the gradual return to their being valued once more as important public facilities worthy of funding. This story involves politics and social policy - be prepared to delve into the workings of local government of the last 50 years! In this post-Covid world, 'People's Parks' is a timely reminder of the special heritage of public parks and as a detailed guide to the topic, a very important new edition.

By Karen Emery

The Trustees and key officers of KGT

We are delighted to welcome *Caroline Bowdler* and *Karen Emery* as Trustees, and *Evie Burton* as our new Treasurer. Short biographies of each follow. We were sad to say 'Goodbye' earlier in the year to *Alison Philip*, a much valued Trustee of five years standing, and to *Lynn Phillips*, who had been Treasurer - and for a while Secretary as well – for over 10 years.

President: The Lady Kingsdown

Trustees: Michael O'Brien (Co Chairman), Richard Stileman (Co-Chairman), Caroline Bowdler, Rosemary Dymond, Karen Emery, Francois Gordon, Sarah Morgan, Terri Zbyszewska.

Treasurer: Evie Burton **Secretary:** Pamela Hipkins

Caroline Bowdler

I have a longstanding interest in garden and landscape history, and some background in planning from my time at the Department of the Environment. After retiring I volunteered at the Bedfordshire archives service, trained as a Citizens' Advice Bureau adviser, and gained experience of the trustee role with two local charities. Having joined the Gardens Trust, and benefited from its training opportunities, I became Conservation Officer for Bedfordshire Gardens Trust and a committee member. I was also involved with research, talks, and the newsletter.

When I moved to Sevenoaks in 2021 I joined the research team at Kent Gardens Trust, and was delighted this year to be invited to become a trustee. Designed landscapes across Kent have similar challenges to those of Bedfordshire on a larger scale – development pressures, constrained resources for maintenance, and a changing climate. They have never been more in need of champions to understand, enjoy and protect them. I look forward to getting to know more about Kent's

wonderful range of historic parks and gardens, using my previous experience to contribute to the work of the Trust.

Karen Emery

Karen's background is in education with experience in schools, colleges and managing a prison education department, as well as working with industry to foster education-business partnerships. Nowadays she works as a private tutor and she is a qualified ITG (Institute of Tourist Guiding) Tour Guide for Canterbury and SE England.

Karen was born in Germany and is fully bilingual with German. Recently (in 2021) she obtained an MA (with distinction) in Garden and Landscape History from the University of London, with special interest in the history of spa parks and gardens. The MA, together with a BSc in Geology and a PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate in Education) in Science & Outdoor Education contribute to her wide-ranging understanding of landscape and the natural world.

Karen lives in Herne Bay and joined the KGT in 2021, getting involved with the Swale Gardens Research Group during Covid lockdowns. She is now co-ordinating the group and is keen on increasing participation in garden research as well looking at ways of disseminating the fascinating histories of local parks and gardens that are unearthed.

Evie Burton

Our new Treasurer is Evie Burton. Evie is a lover of all things "outdoors"; she enjoys mountain biking and hiking, as well as water sports. She graduated with an honours degree in Earth Sciences from the University of Glasgow, and when she's not up a mountain or in the sea she particularly likes helping to maintain her family's vegetable garden. Her mother is Debbie Burton - by happy coincidence - Treasurer of Kent Men of the Trees!

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