



Kent Gardens Trust Newsletter

Issue No 33

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Spring 2009

THE ALMOST LOST GARDEN OF BITCHET WOOD

One sunny Sunday afternoon in October, a group from a local garden society visited our Japanese style garden in Sevenoaks. Towards the end of the visit, Ruth, a lively 86 year old, showed me two black and white photographs of what was clearly a Japanese garden.

She explained that the photographs were commissioned in 1920 by the garden designer when the garden was first built. Her father, Douglas Woodcock, was the head gardener for the estate in which the Japanese garden was located, and she had happy memories of being allowed to play in the garden with her sister when the owner was away on business. She could not remember the name of the house to which the garden was attached, or its exact location, other than it was in Bitchet Wood, near Seal.

I was intrigued by the photographs and Ruth's story and decided to find out more about the garden, especially as it was only a few miles from where I lived.

After some research in Sevenoaks library, receiving information from

members of the public following an article written for the local newspaper, and a visit to Bitchet Wood, the story began to unfold.

The Japanese garden was originally part of a 25 acre estate owned by Hugh Micklem a Kentish fruit farmer, known for his support of local activities (he was part benefactor of Sevenoaks Hospital). Mr Micklem wanted to give work to former employees returning from the forces following the 1914-18 war. He decided to build an authentic Japanese style garden on his Bitchet Wood estate, at the rear of Lantern Cottage. He travelled to Japan to source trees, plants, rocks, large stepping stones, a Tea-house, garden ornaments, including granite lanterns and two large bronze cranes. These were then shipped over to the UK and

went by rail to Sevenoaks Bat and Ball railway station before making the final part of their journey on a specially laid temporary track to Bitchet Wood.

Raymond Barrow, a garden architect from Wadhurst, was commissioned to design the garden and from the study of his original plan, it would seem that the design was based on Plate XXV 'Hill Garden Finished Style' from Josiah Conder's book 'Landscape gardening in Japan (1893) fig. 101. The garden certainly contains all the features included in the Conder illustration: grassy hills, a stepping stone path, a pond crossed by bridges, large rocks, a Tea-house, an umbrella arbour, a garden well and the same types of tree. Indeed many of the rocks and principal trees are individually named on the Barrow plan, including the Guardian stone, Moon Shadow Stone, Seat of Honour, Solitude Tree, Stretching Pine and the Cascade Screening Tree. All of these features are in similar positions to those in the Conder illustration.



The major divergence from Conder is an area of bog garden to the west of the pond, stocked with irises and crossed by a *Yatsunashi* bridge (zig-zag planks). The garden also included the use of borrowed scenery (*Shakkei*) with a view of a sandstone escarpment, which has now been obscured by subsequent plant growth. Professor Christopher Thacker, the eminent garden historian, makes reference to the garden as "the most convincingly authentic of the Japanese gardens created in the British Isles" whilst in the Kent County Register of Gardens of Special Interest, the garden is classified as "of outstanding National and County importance and of great quality".

Hill 1.
Near
Mountain.
Hill 2.
Companion
Mountain.
Hill 3.
Mountain
Spur.
Hill 4.
Near Hill.
Hill 5.
Distant
Peak.

Stone 1.
Guardian
Stone.
Stone 2.
Cliff Stone.
Stone 3.
Worship-
ping Stone.
Stone 4.
Perfect
View Stone.
Stone 5.
Waiting
Stone.
Stone 6.
Moon
Shadow
Stone.
Stone 7.
Carve, or
Kwanan
Stone.
Stone 8.
Seat of
Honor
Stone.
Stone 9.
Pedestal
Stone.
Stone 10.
Lidling
Stone.



Tree 1.
Principal
Tree.
Tree 2.
View-
perfecting
Tree.
Tree 3.
Tree of
Solitude.
Tree 4.
Cascade-
screening
Tree.
Tree 5.
Tree of the
Setting
Sun.
Tree 6.
Distancing
Pine.
Tree 7.
Stretching
Pine.
A.
Garden
Well.
B.
Snow-view
Lantern.
C.
Garden
Gate.
D.
Boarded
Bridge.
E.
Plank
Bridge.
F.
Stone
Bridge.
G.
Water
Bazin.
H.
Lantern.
I.
Garden
Shrine.

Plate XXV. HILL GARDEN—FINISHED STYLE.

continued from page 2

The garden has remained in private hands and has not been open for public viewing, although for a number of years it was open to Bitchet Wood residents on one day each year. In recent years, a professional gardener (who showed me round the garden) has spent one day each week valiantly attempting to preserve the natural beauty and harmony of this historic garden.

Following some restoration work several years ago, the garden was featured on local television and within a few days of the broadcast, thieves

had stolen the two large bronze cranes from the pond, as well as other Japanese statuary.

Sadly, the garden is slowly deteriorating and requires essential maintenance. The Pond is heavily silted and no longer holds water, the mature trees require careful pruning, especially in and around the bog garden area and the Tea-house needs some attention, but despite all this, the quality and charm of the original garden are still evident.

Even in its present condition, walking through the entrance gateway is like entering into a different world – a

rather special world. One can fully understand the high ratings given by Christopher Thacker and Kent County Gardens of Special Interest.

The Japanese Garden Society feels that this once jewel of a garden should not be allowed to slowly fade away, and plan to organise some assistance in bringing it back to its former glory.

*Jack Wheeler
Committee member, Japanese
Garden Society (S. E. Region)*

Jack Wheeler will be giving a talk on The Splendour of Japanese Gardens on 24th February. (See Events page)

Create a garden haven for wildlife

Everyone knows gardens can be wonderful places for wildlife and it really is easy and inexpensive to create a mosaic of wildlife rich areas - from a simple window box to an imaginatively planted vegetable plot.

So if you're proud of your wildlife friendly garden, then why not share the secrets of its success with Kent Wildlife Trust?

The 2009 Kent Wildlife Gardening Awards Scheme, to be launched in the spring, is a partnership between local

authorities, the Royal Horticultural Society and Kent Wildlife Trust.

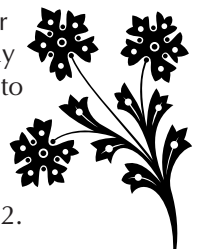
It's free to enter and open to anyone who gardens in Kent however large or small their plot and whether they are a business, community group, school, allotments, private garden or even a collection of adjoining gardens.

Gardens entered into the scheme will be assessed by Kent Wildlife Trust in late summer and every garden will receive an award of bronze, silver or gold. Gold winners will also get a

commemorative plaque to display.

Details of the scheme will be available on our website:
www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk
from 21st March.

We are also keen to hear from volunteers who may be interested in training to become a volunteer assessor/advisor. For details contact Maureen Rainey on 01622 662012.



VOLUNTEERS

TUNBRIDGE WELLS HISTORIC PARKS & GARDEN PROJECT

Members will recall from the last Newsletter that a partnership has been formed between Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, English Heritage, the High Weald AONB Unit and Kent Gardens Trust to update the records on historic parks and gardens within the Borough. A vital part of the Project has been to recruit and train volunteers to undertake the work of researching and recording sites and this will be KGT's contribution.

The Project was launched in October at Bedgebury House by kind permission of the Bedgebury-Bell International School. Potential volunteers heard from David Scully, Landscape Officer at Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, who is co-ordinating the project, Dr. Andrew Brown, Regional Director south east for English Heritage and Tom La Dell, a KGT Trustee who inspired the volunteers by describing his excitement when he discovered the remnants of the Humphrey Repton garden at Vinters Park Virginia Hinze, a landscape historian who is overseeing the Project introduced potential volunteers to the research and recording process and later, after

an excellent lunch, we toured the garden at Bedgebury with Virginia to get a taste of what is involved in surveying a historic landscape. The School gave us a wonderful tea and the success of the launch can be gathered by the fact that we now have fourteen volunteers who are being trained in the art and skill of researching and recording parks and gardens. The various training days which have already taken place are described below and more are planned culminating in a celebration at Finchcocks on 15th May.

The Project is proving to be a tremendous success. 28 historic gardens are being researched by the volunteers and the results will be written up by the Project Consultant, garden historian Dr Barbara Simms. The process should be complete by the end of March by which time the volunteers will have received interesting hands on training and practical experience of researching old gardens and, I think, have really enjoyed themselves.

I hope that KGT will now have a permanent group of trained researchers who will be able to undertake research work elsewhere in Kent. This will be extremely useful in helping local planning authorities to protect a very important part of Kent's historic landscape.

Elizabeth Cairns



Volunteers in the park at Doddington Place

TRAINING DAY AT NATIONAL MONUMENTS RECORDS

As part of volunteer researchers' training in historical research and recording techniques for parks and gardens the group visited English Heritage's public archive at Swindon.

None of the party had ever been to the NMR before, a few had never heard of it! However, all were surprised at the sheer scale of the site which turned out to be the original works of the GWR complete with all the old Victorian buildings and even a token area of rails still in place. A huge designer outlet mall now occupies one enormous building, the Steam Museum another with the National Trust's library and archives housed nearby.

The Record Office is housed in the old drawing offices of the GWR, a four storey Victorian edifice with original sash windows, grand wrought iron staircases and huge open-plan floors where the draftsmen used to work,

now filled with long desks of researchers at computers, or banks of archive material. A recent extension at the back of the building now houses a state-of-the-art climate controlled section for the most vulnerable items in the collection.

We were given an excellent introductory talk and slide show covering every aspect of the collection which currently comprises over 8 million photographs, some dating back to the 1840s, as well as thousands of plans, drawings and reports. Some of these are now available on line with more being added all the time and cover all aspects of England's industrial heritage, social history, architecture and archaeology. Aerial photography, mainly started by the RAF in the 1940s, has been updated to show the march of time on the different communities and contemporary photographs have been commissioned to keep abreast of modern changes to

streetscapes and landscapes. We were also shown how to access some of this material on line
www.english-heritage.org.uk/NMR
or www.imagesofengland.org.uk
or www.pastscape.org/homepage

After this we set off on a tour of the building walking through the working offices, having a peek at the contents of some of the red box files lining the miles of shelving in the public search rooms. We finished in the very modern library which holds an extensive reference collection comprising 60,000 book titles and 400 current journals all housed in electronically controlled mobile shelving units to make the most of the space. This facility is open to the public with staff on hand for help and advice. We had a short opportunity to peruse some of the material before leaving. As we left the building and set off back to Kent, Swindon was transformed by the pinky orange glow of a spectacular sunset, a fitting end to a memorable day!

Peta Hodges

THE CENTRE FOR KENTISH STUDIES

On 24th November, 14 volunteers visited the Centre for Kentish Studies in Maidstone. There we were given a day's intensive training by welcoming and expert members of the staff who were very helpful and extremely patient in explaining the intricacies of the archives. They had already anticipated some of our needs by preparing a large amount of material to help us on our way.

The purpose of the visit was to receive guidance in how to undertake research into the history of gardens and what books, maps and other information is available.

The Centre for Kentish Studies has a vast archive not only in Maidstone but also in Canterbury, Dover and Medway. Records cover a period of a thousand years and come in a great variety of formats from parchment, paper to film and CDs. As well as the collections of



deeds and official records, there are unique collections of parish records and estate maps, the day books and accounts of institutions such as poor houses and hospitals, the day to day proceedings of the quarter sessions and much more.

We were taken behind the scenes to see how all this is stored at suitable temperature and humidity in secure rooms which can protect the contents in case of fire. This great quantity of material, much of which is unique and irreplaceable, is only of value if it can be used and to do that it has to be accessed through catalogues. Increasingly this can be found 'on line' which has the advantage that the reader can request records before visiting, at the time of booking a place in the search room or the microfilm room. This not only saves time for the visitor but makes life easier for the staff.

There are good manual indices which can be related to the catalogues

containing calendars of the documents so making sure that the right one is selected. Thus the garden historian can search by place, name or subject and have access to photos, pictures, postcards, maps (tithe, estate and ordinance survey) deeds, bills of sale, books and other means to throw some light on the past life of a particular property.

The Centre for Kentish Studies is keen to attract more visitors and to provide help and advice to both individuals and groups. To some, the materials may seem dry and dusty but it is the facts which are contained therein that can bring the history of a garden to life, the people who created it and the people who have changed it and the people who have cared for it.

On behalf of the volunteers who went, I should like to thank the archivists and staff who gave us such an interesting and fruitful day.

Hugh Vaux

TREE IDENTIFICATION DAY AT DODDINGTON PLACE

On a bright early December morning 10 of the volunteers spent a fascinating day at Doddington learning to identify trees likely to assist in researching the histories of their allotted gardens.

Doddington near Faversham is the home of Richard and Amicia Oldfield. Richard's family have lived at Doddington for just over 100 years and it proved ideal for our purposes. We were greeted by Amicia Oldfield in the great hall of the house for a warming cup of coffee and a brief talk on the history of the garden for which designs were produced in the 1870s by Markham Nesfield son of the more famous designer WA Nesfield Little remains of his design but the rock garden and the sunken garden are being restored.

Most of our day was spent in the park where Jane Cordingley Head gardener at Eltham Palace guided us and passed on to us with much charm some of her great knowledge and love of trees, their shape and age gleaned from many years of experience looking after them

As she explained, with a little practice even garden historians should be able to distinguish trees by their shape from a distance as all have distinctive outlines. However close inspection of the twigs would also reveal identity before resorting to hunting among the fallen leaves when presented in the winter with a particularly difficult specimen.

We were urged to equip ourselves with Alan Mitchell's Field Guide to British Trees but Jane firmly left her copy at the house before we started our walk.

Our first victim was *Aesculus Hippocastaneum*, the horse chestnut, now threatened by the miner leaf moth although we were assured this was not fatal but merely debilitating. All the fault of climate change. We passed on to alder, larch, beech (plenty of honourable beech at Doddington), the not so easily identified hornbeam, lime and the native cherry with its shiny-banded bark.

Jane even managed to persuade the sceptical of the elegance of the

Sycamore and the Ash more usually spurned by gardeners. As for the noble Oak we were urged when planting these to use local acorns or small whips from local forestry nurseries and not be seduced by 5 ft standards for quick effect.

Mat Jackson, the head gardener, and his dog joined for the second half of our tour and rejoiced in seeking out venerable trees and boundary marker trees. As we came towards the end he took us through the great *Wellingtonia* avenue and we learnt to distinguish the *sequoia wellingtonia* from the *sequoia sempervirens*.

Thanks are due to the Oldfields for their hospitality and to Mat and Jane for so graciously sharing their knowledge with us

(Doddington is open from Easter to the end of September on Sundays and Bank Holidays from 2pm to 5pm. Some of these openings are for the National Garden Scheme)

Simon MacLachlan
Kent Gardens Trust

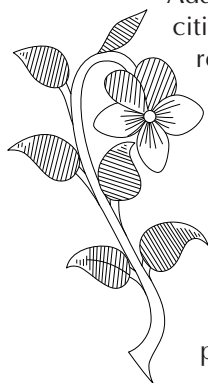
ME, MY LIFE AND MY ALLOTMENT TALK BY ANDY GARLAND 6 NOVEMBER 2008

Andy Garland, who presents the Gardening Programme on BBC Radio Kent talked about the history of the allotment from its beginnings to the present. He extolled the practical and social virtues of the allotment particularly by describing his own in the centre of Sevenoaks.

He explained that allotment history goes back to Saxon times when villagers cleared deforested land which was then shared as common land. The first mention of allotments came in Queen Elizabeth 1's time, tenants were "allotted" land to compensate for enclosures by the church and lords of the manor. The General Enclosure Acts of 1836 and 1840 led to land owners dispossessing tenants of their land but the 1845 Act also provided for "field gardens" for the landless poor of up to a quarter of an acre. This was not very successful, of the 615,000 acres enclosed only 2,000 acres became allotments. The Allotments Act 1887 and the Smallholdings and Allotments Act 1908 (the latter still relevant today) encouraged the creation of allotments.

Additionally the growth of cities during the industrial revolution meant that gardens and open space were lost to building.

The first and second world wars encouraged the production of home produced food. In WW2



for example, an extra 1.4m tons of food was produced as a result. The most recent Allotment Act of 1950 recognised the need to maintain the ability to produce home grown food by encouraging allotment provision. Some 500,000 existed in 1970 but this was reduced to an estimated 300,000 in 2008, mostly by development and some of this probably illegal.

Andy then described his own allotment. It is situated in central Sevenoaks on prime development land. Originally larger but now of 11.5 acres, 40% has been developed for housing. It costs £7 per year to rent and is wholly used with a long waiting list. He said that the character of the site has changed and the more traditional straight line gardening had partly gone and more family orientated informal layouts are more common. The Allotment Association (sevenoaksallotment.co.uk) has a newsletter called Compost! It gives advice and advertised events. It also opens as part of the National Gardens Scheme. The allotment is 10 rods long (a rod is 5.5 yards and is thought to be the length from the tail to the nose of an ox) but size varies although there are ten standard size allotments to the acre.

The presentation ended with questions and this highlighted memories of those present. Although a rather small audience the talk was very well received.

Peter Cobby

GILL YERBURGH

Gill Yerburgh retired from being a trustee of the Trust in November. She has been a trustee and then chairman since 1992. During her time as a trustee of the Trust Gill has worked indefatigably to make it a successful and innovative organisation dedicated to encouraging interest in Kent's wonderful garden heritage.

Gill was particularly involved with the Trust's work to encourage schoolchildren to become interested in gardens. She was responsible for setting up and organising the survey of small gardens in Kent in the early 1990s in which a group of volunteers surveyed and recorded around 280 of the smaller gardens in the county which, although not necessarily of historic interest, were nonetheless an important part of the cultural landscape. This will be an invaluable record for future researchers and is a remarkable achievement

At the winter lecture at Matfield in November Gill was presented with a black Mulberry tree by the trustees to thank her for all she has done for the Trust over the last 16 years.



Gill Yerburgh (left) receiving a black mulberry tree from KGT Chairman Elizabeth Cairns

THE FINCHCOCKS GARDEN FAIR & MUSIC FESTIVAL 24 - 25th May 2009

We shall be having a stall at this event and hope that you will join us.

There will be stalls selling plants, pots, tools and all kinds of other garden items. Garden and botanical artists will exhibit their work and there will be many other stalls with a rural theme.

Strolling players will fill the air with music and inside the house there will be demonstrations and recitals on Finchcocks' collection of historic keyboard instruments.

Volunteers are needed to help with this event. Please contact Sue Chipchase on 01233 811611.

Contact details are:
Finchcocks Musical Museum
Gaudhurst
Kent TN17 1HH
Telephone 01580211702
Email: info@finchcocks.co.uk
Website: www.finchcocks.co.uk

TRUST EVENTS 2009

24th February 2009
7 p.m.

Lenham Village Hall
Near Maidstone
ME17 2QT

Light refreshments
followed by

The Splendour of Japanese Gardens

Jack Wheeler is a member of the south eastern committee of the Japanese Gardens Society and we are fortunate that he has agreed to give a talk on the philosophy, development and history of Japanese gardens and their influence on western garden design. He will also explore the fascinating story of the rediscovery of the Japanese garden at Lantern Cottage, near Sevenoaks

(Note: this event replaces the talk which was to have been given by Jane Cordingly)

25th March 2009
10.45 a.m.

Guided Tour of the Millenium Seed Bank

at Wakehurst Place
Ardingly
Haywards Heath
West Sussex
RH17 6TN

We have rescheduled this visit and we can arrange car sharing.

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 at their best. Numbers will be limited to 20.

Please arrive promptly at 10.45 at the Visitor Centre from where you will be taken to the Seed Bank for an introductory talk at starting at 11.0

15th May 2009
12.30 p.m.

A Celebration of the Tunbridge Wells Historic Gardens Project
at Finchcocks Musical Museum,
Gaudhurst
TN17 1HH

A lunch will be followed by talks on the Project and the need to protect the garden heritage of Kent with Greg Clarke MP for Tunbridge Wells who is well known for his concern about the impact of building developments in gardens

The volunteers who have been working on the project are invited and there will be space for a small number of KGT members. Anyone who would like to come should apply soon

1st July 2009
2.30 pm

Visit to
Godinton House
Ashford
TN23 3BP

This wonderful garden was the first that Sir Reginald Blomfield designed in the formal style, a reaction against the fashion for informal planting promoted by William Robinson. We shall be able to see the original plans for the garden and Viv Hunt, the head gardener will guide us round the garden when the delphiniums should be at their best. There will also be a guided tour of the house.

We plan to have a picnic tea.



21st October 2009
10.30 a.m.

A celebration of Humphrey Repton
at Cobham Hall
Cobham
DA12 3BL

Our speakers will be Tom Wright and Stephen Daniels both experts on the great garden designer who worked for so long at Cobham. Tom Wright who has been involved with the restoration of the gardens at Cobham for many years will talk about Repton's work there. Stephen Daniels is Professor of Cultural Geography at Nottingham University and wrote a magnificent account of Repton's life and work in 1999 will talk on Humphrey Repton and the Art of Landscape. Lunch is included and a tour of the house.



3rd December 2009
7 p.m.
Lenham Village Hall
ME17 2QT

Light refreshments
followed by

Four thousand years in the making of Sissinghurst

Tom Turner, Landscape Architect and Garden Historian teaches at Greenwich University and is the author of many books including Garden History – Philosophy & Design 2000 BC to 2000 AD. He will talk about the garden at Sissinghurst and the origins of the ideas it represents.

Please apply for tickets on the enclosed form
or
telephone 01233 811611

Kent Gardens Trust
Tel. 01233 811611
email mail@kentgardenstrust.org.uk
website: www.kentgardenstrust.org.uk