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The Kent Gardens Trust Newsletter

Working for Kent's Garden Heritage

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From the Editor

Richard Stileman

This year's Newsletter starts with an appreciation of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, and recalls the Platinum Jubilee. The Chairmen's report follows providing an overview of the Trust's activities throughout the year. Since safeguarding historic gardens and designed landscapes is our primary function we then provide a separate section on the main planning issues with which we have been involved this year.

Though COVID is now largely behind us we felt it would be nice to have a look of at one of the more positive outcomes of that miserable period. So we invited John Bunyard to write a personal reflection All is Well in the Garden.

Our events programme for 2022 went ahead almost entirely unscathed. There's a selection of photographs providing a reminder of each event. Rather than also having descriptions of each of the actual visits, we felt it would be more interesting to focus on those places where the Trust has had a particularly important role (the Franciscan Gardens and Kearsney Abbey), or where the site has an especially intriguing history (The Stonebridge Allotments).

On other pages you will find a note on changes to our Board of Trustees; a reminder of our relationship to our affiliate The Gardens Trust who, incidentally, offer a most comprehensive range of ZOOM lectures; and then we have disturbed Hugh Vaux' retirement in Wiltshire by asking him to review Darwin's Most Wonderful Plants!

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II



Whilst deeply saddened by the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, we salute a long life that enjoyed and encouraged the appreciation of beautiful landscapes, gardens and gardening.



The Jubilee Superbloom in the moat at The Tower of London



A small section from one of several special plantings on the farms of Laurence J Betts Ltd around Offham.

© Kent Gardens Trust

From the Chairmen

What an extraordinary year! The sharpest abiding memory is of course the death and then funeral of HM The Queen. We acknowledge her enormous love of, and support for, all things close to our special interest in the history of designed landscapes, gardens and gardening. It was ofcourse just in June that we were celebrating her Platinum Jubilee, with its plentiful associations with with her interests in flowers and gardens.

Then, between June and September it hardly rained! Those of us that are gardeners had to resort to wily means to keep our pots watered, and our lawns green – at least until August when the repeated heatwaves forced on us a little retrenchment.

The activities of the Kent Gardens Trust continued more or less unaffected (though we felt we had to cancel the visit and walk at Ranscome Farm, scheduled for the hottest day of the year!), and fully subscribed visits were made to varied parks, gardens and other green spaces. Several of the visits were made to private gardens where the owners gave a close up view of the history and development of their garden. We are enormously grateful to these owners and want to thank, in particular, the following: Hugh and Angela Ellingham,Lucie and Jonathan Neame, Su and Paul Vaight, Alan and Mary Gibbin, John Pfeil and Shirley Briggs, Tavia and Tristram Gethin, and Jane and David Pennock.

Our key function in looking closely at planning applications that could impinge upon Listed Parks and Gardens kept us very busy, especially because a few were at particularly important sites. There is separate report on this area of our work in this Newsletter.

The team of dedicated volunteers working on the project to chart the many historic garden sites in Swale District had another rather frustrating year with the local authority taking its time to come out of Covid hibernation. We thank all the team, and in particular Cilla Freud who lead us through the first phase of sites, and Karen Emery who has now taken on the leadership for the second phase of the project.

Two of our Trustees – Lesley Dawes and Tom La Dell - have retired during the year, and we shall miss their contributions enormously. There is an appreciation within the Newsletter. We are delighted to announce that Francois Gordon has joined our Board. There is a note of Francois' experience and interests in the Newsletter.

Our President, Lady Kingsdown was 90 in July! She seems as sprightly and energetic as ever, and we continue to enjoy her support and wise counsel.

And finally we thank YOU, our members - not just for being members and thus helping us financially, but also for helping us spread the word of our conservation mission. An increasing number of our members are helping us practically in our work. This includes involvement in arranging events, joining the research team, and advising on planning issues. We welcome this and would encourage even more of you to join in!

Onwards to 2023!

Mike O'Brien and Richard Stileman.

All is Well in the Garden

By John Bunyard

The title of Baudelaire's collected poems 'The Flowers of Evil' hints at the saying that it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good. My personal legacy of the Covid era is a new-found love of Kent's formal gardens. It started when I had the idea of creating an online compendium of curiosities to cheer up the people of Kent in their enforced isolation, an acorn that grew into an expansive free online encyclopedia. Undertaking field research whenever regulations permitted took me from Dover to Hever, from Dungeness to Sheerness. Admittedly I was more preoccupied at first with Kent's countless historic houses; but my passport to seeing them up close was most often a visit to their gardens. Given that my fellow Maidstonians George Bunyard and his son Edward were eminent horticulturalists, and my first cousin Major Terry Bunyard a horticultural society chairman for three decades, it shames me to admit that the beauty of formal gardens had rather been lost on me until then. Luckily my wife, a woman with green fingers, usually accompanied me, and quickly taught me how to tell a camellia from a rose.

There was something marvellously liberating about wandering around the county's great old gardens in the spring of 2020, even if they were not looking their immaculate best, what with so many gardeners being laid off; but the fact that they often were deserted meant we had ample time and space to revel in their idiosyncratic appeals. Those visits brought home the priceless legacy left by history to posterity, and the onus on our generation to sustain it. In the course of visiting the best part of fifty Kent gardens since the start of the epidemic, I've acquired the classic acolyte's passion for the subject. Certainly we've been spoilt for choice, from the studied magnificence of Hever, Scotney, and Leeds Castles and Kent's stateliest homes (Knole, Penshurst, Chilham) to the more intimate delights of Chartwell, Emmetts, Groombridge Place, Riverhill, St Clere, Ightham Mote; or, east of the Medway, Nettlestead Place, Sissinghurst, Godmersham, Mount Ephraim, Goodnestone… Some of the gardens closest to my home, such as Belmont, Doddington, Godinton, and Hole Park, now feel like old friends. If however you asked to know my personal favourite, I'd have to give the same answer as if you inquired which is my favourite child: I really couldn't say!

***John Bunyard** FRSA, BA (Oxon), a retired communications specialist, was born in Maidstone, and following 15 years in London has lived for three decades near Ashford. His acclaimed celebration of Kent people, places, and practices, Old Bunyard's Kent Pride (www.oldbunyardskentpride.com) has so far been viewed by visitors from over 70 countries. The supplementary Old Bunyard's Tour of Kent (www.oldbunyardstour of kent.uk) showcases many of the pictures he has taken of Kent's loveliest gardens.*

The Planning Challenge in 2022

By Mike O'Brien

Some planning officers and district councils appear to be unaware of the requirement to notify our affiliate Gardens Trust (GT) of any planning application which affects a Registered Park and Garden. Nevertheless, the GT received almost 2000 planning applications in the last financial year which were forwarded to the relevant county gardens trust for comment. Approximately 1300 or 65% prompted a response, other than "no comments," within the usual statutory limit of three weeks. A further 400 or so notifications such as local plans and Forestry Commission licenses were also circulated for comment.

In Kent, we have received about 45 planning applications in the last six months from the GT, a significant increase. Only about one third require a response other than "no comments". Here are some of the more interesting recent ones received by KGT.

KGT were asked to comment on the repairs and restoration to the Ice House at Lullingstone Castle which we fully supported.

Concerns were raised by the occupants of the main house and neighbours at Waldershare Park near Dover, a Registered Park and Garden (RPG), as parts of the estate were being put up for sale. This has occurred as various planning applications have been submitted around the estate's perimeter. The local gliding club is having to move with the club's premises being planned to convert into an estate worker's accommodation and a holiday let. Just outside one of the original entrances to the park an application has been submitted for change of use to a Gypsy/ Traveller site which has raised local objection and that of KGT. Our initial comments, that it harmed the setting of the original entrance, were raised over a year ago but the planning application still at the time of writing has still not been resolved, although several changes to the application have been made to mitigate the various objections which have been made.

KGT and GT had originally objected to plans for the building of a pergola and temporary siting of glass marquee for weddings and functions at Port Lympne Safari Park, near Hythe, in the grounds near the house which is a Grade II* RPG. A zoom meeting was arranged by the planning officer between all interested parties in which the owner explained the application and their future plans. KGT/GT withdrew their objection provided that the application was limited to three years. A recent visit to Port Lympne found that the two structures were in use to provide an excellent wedding venue.

The majority of planning applications which are received are from Sevenoaks District Council, which reflects the number of RPGs in the borough, originating from the 17th and 18th centuries before the advent of the railways which made the land more profitable for the building of large houses for gentlemen who worked in London. Subdivision of these estates continues today with every possible building being considered as a potential dwelling unit. Most recently a potting shed received planning permission for conversion into a 1-bed annex to the main house, although KGT raised the objection that it exceeded the permitted increase in floor area.

More recently we and GT have been involved in commenting on an application to build a large house at Leeds Abbey near Maidstone. The site is one of Capability Brown's commissions and featured in our book "Capability Brown in Kent" produced in 2016 to celebrate the 300th anniversary of Brown's birth. The site has laid dormant for many years but includes a registered monument of the foundations of 14th century priory. KGT objected to this application as the developer was not committed to restoring the Brown landscape. In the event, the application was rejected.

The Gardens Trust and Kent Gardens Trust – working together

The Gardens Trust was formed in 2015 with the merger of the Garden History Society and the Association of Garden Trusts, which had represented the County Gardens Trusts of England and Wales.

The government appointed the Gardens Trust to be the statutory consultee in relation to planning applications which affect the designed historic landscape, a role previously undertaken by the Garden History Society. All designed historic landscapes are listed on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest held by Historic England.

The Gardens Trust is the only national charity dedicated to the protecting and conserving our heritage of designed landscapes and relies on individual members, county gardens trusts, donors and grants to support its work. Currently more than 35 County Gardens Trusts including Kent are members of the Gardens Trust.

A large range of support material is held online by the Gardens Trust, which can be used by the County Gardens Trusts, along with series of lectures and courses. Kent Gardens Trust are not commissioning any online lectures for the forthcoming winter period, but for those who wish to ZOOM, the Gardens Trust is the most active organization commissioning and making available online a wide range of lectures covering a multitude of topics in the general area of garden history. They usually only cost £5 a lecture. Further details can be found at *www.thegardenstrust.org*

IMAGES OF 2022



Lossenham Manor, Newenden. Tavia Gethin talking to our group.



In the garden at Went House, West Malling.



The north side garden at Pheasant Barn, Oare.



In Stonepitts garden



A glimpse of St Paul's on our Dickens Walk from Charterhouse to Marshalsea



Lady Kingsdown in the rose garden at her home Torry Hill with the painting of Just Joey and standing next to a flowering Just Joey



Just Joey
by Sue Williams



Across the garden to the creek at Pheasant Barn, Oare

The Franciscan gardens

By Sarah Morgan

In 1999 I was contacted by the Trustees of Eastbridge Hospital to design a Masterplan for a garden tucked away to the South of the busy High Street in canterbury and unknown to most. On that first meeting I walked over an old mediaeval bridge, traversing the East Stour and entering a site of derelict glasshouses, peppered with used syringes and rubbish. However, nothing could detract from



Derelict nursery in 1999

the tranquillity and beauty of the setting. Surrounded by ancient walls and harbouring a 1267 Franciscan dormitory converted into a Chapel still used for services, with glimpses of the Cathedral in places, this place moved the spirit and imagination. I enthusiastically accepted the challenge.

I embarked on researching the site using old maps and records in the Canterbury Cathedral archives and the Franciscan Study Centre at the University of Kent where I lectured at the time in Garden History and Design. The main historical thread is well documented - Franciscan missionaries sent directly by St Francis settled on this site in 1224, known then as the isle of Binnewith. Creating a way of life to minister to the poorest of Canterbury and to bring healing from medieval pestilence, the Friary grew until it's dissolution in 1538. The gradual decline of the religious buildings made way to other gardens and horticultural legacies to the present day, mercifully spared from modern development, and retaining architectural layers from each period of its history.

After my initial proposals, a generous grant from the Weltkunst Foundation aided travel to Franciscan sites, Assisi, Perugia University, Mediaeval Herb gardens and museums to research further the Franciscan way of life and the herbs and medicines the friars were likely to have brought with them to England. The final proposal, planting and layout drew these precedents together to 'recreate' aspects of the Franciscan monastic life by dividing garden areas into themes such as 'cloister garth', perfumery, medicinal, symbolic, orchard, meadow, coppice etc, plus a nod to later horticultural legacies. Circulation of the site and attention to how the garden would be maintained in the long term were high priorities.

The clearance and layout of the main 'Cloister Garth' and development of the meadows in 2001, exhausted the limited budget, but transformed the site to be safely used as a garden again. Planting was added to by the gardeners, mainly to plan, and with donations from various visitors to the Chapel.

In 2019, Eastbridge Hospital took back an adjacent shop on the High Street and which backed on to a narrow, overgrown area, potentially linking the gardens with the main tourist route. I was asked to revisit the design, one that would bring a wider audience of visitors through the shop and seamlessly link with the rest of the Franciscan



First phase and paths competed in 2001 - The 'Cloister garth'

Gardens. Construction and planting successfully continued throughout the pandemic enabling the gardens to reopen after the restrictions lifted.

My pilgrimage with these gardens continues, working closely with the gardeners to develop and manage the grounds using organic principles, encouraging wildlife and pollinators and providing a haven from the hectic City – I think St Francis would approve!



New path and planting completed 2021 linking high street with gardens

Kearsney Abbey and Russell Gardens, Alkham

By Elizabeth Cairns, Chairman KGT, 2005 - 2016

It was a great pleasure to return to Kearsney this year six years after Kent Gardens Trust was asked by Dover District Council to research the historical development of the site which was owned by the Council and managed as a public park. I felt a frisson of pride because with the benefit of a £3 million grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund it had been transformed. The café had been extended and modernised, the landscape restored and access immeasurably improved. The research and report carried out by Peter Cobley, Cilla Freud and myself apparently played an important part in achieving this.



In the Russell Gardens

The site has a complicated and interesting history. The estate formed by the valley along the river Dour was bought in 1799 by a prosperous Dover businessman Peter Fector and his son John Minet Fector built a grand house in the fashionable Gothic style overlooking the river in about 1820. He called it Kearsney Abbey although the estate had no ecclesiastical connections. The river was dammed to create a lake with two islands, fountains and an elegant bridge which still survives. A picturesque garden was made along the river Dour and a castellated wall was built very much in the romantic style where the river cascaded down a waterfall. Mock ruins were created to the west of the house using old stones brought from Dover and a Tudor period mill transported from Dover was used to pump water to the house. Some remnants of these features can still be seen.

The Fectors sold the estate in 1844-6 and it was sold several times again between 1860 - 1900 during which time the estate was reduced in size and gradually divided up. It was requisitioned by the army in WW2 and bought by Dover Council in 1945. The house was demolished apart from the billiard room which has now been given a new life as a café for visitors to the park.

An area of land to the north and west of the Abbey was sold in 1898 and a new house, Kearsney Court, was built on a high point overlooking the river by Edward Barlow, manager of the well known paper manufacturer Wiggins Teape. He employed the eminent garden designer Thomas Mawson to create a spectacular garden of terraces descending the slope to the river which was transformed into a formal canal crossed by pergola bridges. Sadly Kearsney Court and its gardens did not last long. The house became a military hospital in the First World War and was later converted into flats. The gardens, except the area immediately in front of Kearsney Court, were acquired by Dover Council in 1950 as a public park together with the grounds of Kearsney Abbey which had been bought by the Council in 1945. The gardens have now been well restored and replanted and are a remarkable example of Mawson's work.



Kearsney Abbey – the Billiard Room and new cafeteria

The Story of Stonebridge Allotments

By Bob Gomes

Situated just outside Faversham town centre, Stonebridge Allotments are the most picturesque allotments in south-east England. A haven not just for gardeners but for bees, butterflies and birds, particularly waterfowl.

The allotments also have a fascinating history because they occupy a former gunpowder works; hence the several watercourses running throught the site, that were formerly used for transporting gunpowder on shallow draft punts. The first works were established in 16th Century and Faversham was well placed for the industry. The Westbrook Stream, a globally important chalk stream, provided a source of water that could be dammed to power watermills. Low lying areas nearby provided Alder and Willow as a source of charcoal. The stream fed into the tidal Faversham Creek where sulphur could be imported by water and the finished gunpowder loaded for dispatch to the Thameside magazines. Several of the old millstones used in the manufacture of gunpowder can still be seen within the allotments. The first factories were small, situated between the A2 to the south and the head of the tidal Faversham Creek. Up to four mills were present. By the early 18 C these had coalesced into a single plant to form the Home Works. All the Faversham works, after nearly 400 years of operation closed in the period 1925 -1934 and Faversham ceased to be the centre of the nation's explosive industry.

The water channels, together with numerous native and naturalised trees provide habitats for a whole range of wildlife. Where else can you dig your plot while at the same time watching Kingfishers, Little Grebes, numerous ducks and witness dragonflies darting over the water alongside your plot? Our local pair of resident Mute Swans with their cygnets in the spring are a real favourite with the plot holders. 82 species of birds have been recorded in this green lung in the heart of Faversham. We have also provided eel passes to help glass eels – the young of the critically endangered European Eeel - negotiate the sluices and concrete weirs at the junction of freshwater and the brackish water of the creek, after their long journey across the Atlantic from their birthplace in the Sargasso Sea.

Following the closure of the works the land was purchased by a local business man. The freehold later passed to Swale Borough Council and then in 2015 to Faversham Town Council. The Stonebridge Allotment Society now manages this land under a tenancy agreement with the Town Council. We currently have 134 plots on the site, ranging in size from 1.5 rods to 11.5 rods (a rod being an ancient measure approximately 25 square metres in area.). It is an extremely popular site and we have a waiting list of over 70.

A partially walled site, the main access is through large wooden gates and being at the allotments is best summed up in the words of one our plotholders. "As soon as I come through the gates, I feel that I am in a different world and experience a real feeling of tranquility".

***Bob Gomes** has a degree in Zoology, and has pursued a lifelong interest in ornithology, with a working life in conservation, initially for the National Trust and then for many years managing Nature Reserves for the RSPB. In retirement he monitors and advises on wildlife management at Stonebridge.*

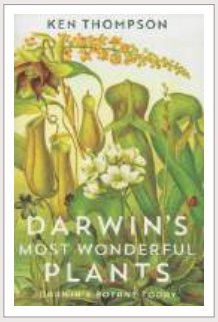


Stonebridge Allotments



Book Review

Darwin's Most Wonderful Plants. Darwin's Botany Today.



Published by Profile Books,
paperback edition 2019, 255 pps.
ISBN 978-1788160292.
List Price ***RRP £8.99***

Charles Darwin returned from his voyage on the Beagle in 1836 but it was not until 1859 that he published his momentous work The Origin of Species. During this time he carried out an immense amount of experimental work and data collection, much of it with plants, looking for support for his theories. Darwin was not a qualified botanist but he had the support of Sir Joseph Hooker, director of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, both as a friend and provider of specimens. Darwin's genius not only enabled him to provide answers to many of the puzzling botanical questions of that time but also, as Ken Thompson points out, this enabled him to ask and answer questions which no one had yet thought of.

Between 1865 and 1880 Darwin published six books on botanical subjects, orchids, insectivorous plants, climbers, primroses, movement in plants and natural selection at work. It is these books which Thompson describes, books for which Darwin himself provided a warning that they might prove boring due to the amount of data they contained and suggesting that the reader might do better to skip to the conclusions. Thompson has done even better in his account by both providing these and explaining them further as well as updating the research to the twenty first century. He points out how accurate Darwin has turned out to be in his conclusions about the way plants behave despite lacking the benefit of modern technology such as the high speed camera and developments in chemistry.

He was particularly interested in carnivorous plants and was the first person to realise that the reason for this behaviour was to obtain minerals and nitrogen for a plant living in conditions lacking these essentials. At a time when many doubted there was any value to the plant in this behaviour, he was able to demonstrate that these plants grew better as a result; proof finally provided later by his son, Francis who continued his work.

Ken Thompson was a lecturer in the department of Animal and Plant Sciences at Sheffield University for 20 years, the author of several books on eco-biology and a journalist writing on gardening for the Daily Telegraph. With this background it is not surprising that he knows how to keep his reader interested even when the subject becomes complicated. However after describing cross-fertilisation in the purple loosestrife, even he is forced to exclaim 'it's enough to make your head spin'. A really good read.

By Hugh Vaux

Our Board of Trustees

Two of our Trustees stepped down this year. For over five years **Lesley Dawes** has provided advice and practical help with our Events Programme, Newsletter and many other topics of importance to the Trust. Perhaps most notably, she and her husband Sandys invited the Trust to organise a memorable concert at their family home Mount Ephraim in 2019. We wish them well in the next phase of their retirement.

Tom La Dell has played a key role for KGT for over many years. Our past Chairman, Elizabeth Cairns writes:

As a botanist, landscape architect well versed in the intricacies of planning, knowledgeable on all matters horticultural, and interested in garden history Tom was an obvious candidate to be a trustee of KGT and he was appointed shortly after I took over as chairman. He had been involved in identifying and recording the Repton landscape at Vinters Park in Maidstone (now a rather run down wildlife reserve) and he tells how contractors had buried the remains of Repton's terraces under loads of rubble. We later researched the landscape for our book on Repton in Kent. Tom was an enormous help to me in my early days as chairman. He designed and printed the display boards we used to advertise KGT's work. Together we devised a talk about The Historic Gardens of Kent which we delivered as a double act to various Gardening clubs around the county in a, usually unsuccessful, attempt to interest their members in this rather overlooked part of our heritage.

KGT had for many years managed the small garden of the Archbishop's Palace in Maidstone for Maidstone Borough Council. Tom was able through his contacts to obtain funding to restore it and he was responsible for designing and replanting it to show how it would have looked in the early seventeenth century.

We are delighted to welcome **Francois Gordon** as a new Trustee. Francois retired from the Foreign Office in 2009. Since then, Francois has involved himself with many activities, not least writing a well – received book on the plant hunter Will Purdom, a lecture on whom he presented to the Trust in 2020. Francois and his wife Elaine live and garden in East Malling.

The current Trustees of KGT – Mike O'Brien and Richard Stileman (Co-Chairmen), Rosemary Dymond, Francois Gordon, Sarah Morgan, Alison Philip, Terri Zbyszewska. Treasurer - Lynn Phillips, Secretary - Pamela Hipkins.

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