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The Kent Gardens Trust
Newsletter
Working for Kent's Garden Heritage

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Conserving Kent's Parks and Gardens: Clouds on the Horizon

Kent's historic parks and gardens are precious and vulnerable. Many are under threat from fragmentation, a lack of resources or of knowledge, the impact of climate change, and development pressures. To conserve them we need to understand what gives each site its special significance – the spirit of the place - and to seek to maintain that through planning policies and decisions.

Straightforward, you may think. Everyone admires the gardens of Penshurst Place, or Cobham Hall, or Sissinghurst. But the value placed on history and heritage in public estimation seems to be declining, as myths become more important than evidence. Country houses and their estates have been associated with colonial evils. Rewilding – or a poorly-understood version of it - is popular for public parks; it saves money and gives the rewilder a warm green glow. There are fewer conservation officers in local planning authorities. Also unhelpful to the survival of historic sites is the financial imperative to increase footfall by expanding car parks, cafés and play areas, and holding events.

At the same time, the importance of the natural environment is increasingly well-understood. Statutory protection for species and habitats is not new. Legislation introduced in April 2024 goes much further by requiring a 10% Biodiversity Net Gain from new developments, so that they leave



habitats for wildlife in a measurably better state than they were before. This regime is still finding its feet as the complex methodology for assessment - and for offsite mitigation where the gain cannot be met on site - is tested in practice. Not a sparrow falls, and not a bat dropping goes unrecorded. No-one would argue with the extra protection given to habitats, but because it is quantifiable and regulated it is likely to be more prominent in the minds of developers and planners than the more nebulous claims of the historic environment.

The National Planning Policy Framework gives some protection to the nationally-important historic landscapes, Registered Parks and Gardens (RPGs). More protection came with the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, with the requirement for planning decisions to have special regard to preserving or enhancing the historic interest in RPGs. Locally-significant gardens too should be identified by councils through their local plan policies, so that they are a material consideration.

The Gardens Trust is the statutory consultee for planning applications affecting RPGs. Our role is to advise the Trust from our more detailed knowledge of the sites, taking a view on whether proposals would preserve or enhance the site and how any potential harm could be reduced. "Harm" is a more elusive concept for a garden than for a building. It is not just about the structure – walls, terraces, paths, avenues, lakes - but about views, openness, setting, and the relationship of the designed landscape and its buildings.

Further changes are afoot. The Government is proposing mandatory housing targets and the relaxation of green belt protection in "grey belt" areas. Decisions on the massive energy infrastructure needed for transition to net zero are to be taken nationally, not locally. We all have our own views on the necessity and efficacy of these changes, but mandatory requirements are likely to trump well-meaning aspirations to conserve the historic environment. As a county gardens trust we need to value our inheritance of parks and gardens, champion them and the owners and gardeners who support them, and enjoy them.

Caroline Bowdler

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From the Editor

Richard Stileman

Our first page article by our planning expert Caroline Bowdler succinctly summarises the conflicts currently confronting most heritage organisations, and of course underlines why our existence is so important. A good example of the kind of tussle we can expect is described in the piece below on Leeds Abbey where a late intervention by ecologists wanting additional birds nest surveys led to concessions by the owners which will probably make the restoration of the Capability Brown landscape more difficult.

That aside, it has been a positive year. Here's a brief resume of what we have been doing....

January

Developing a new website.

First meetings were held to discuss the development of a new Website. This major project, led by Terri Zbyszewska and Annette Fettes, is to radically update the appearance and ease of operation of our website making it both easier for both Members and others to see what we are doing and to buy tickets for events, books and other items. The aim is to go 'live' in January 2025.

February

Two ZOOM lectures.

Headed "Restoration in Action" and presented in conjunction with The Gardens Trust. Sarah Morgan on "Friars and Flora – Recreating the Franciscan Gardens in Canterbury", and Karen Emery on "Pathways to Public Landscapes (in and around Swale)".



Franciscan Garden

March

1. Strategy Meeting.

The Trustees held a day long Strategy Meeting, moderated by Linden Groves of The Gardens Trust, and attended by Peter Hughes, the then Chairman of The Gardens Trust. The objectives were to chart our way forward for the next few years including our relationship with The Gardens Trust and other County Gardens Trusts.

2. The Leeds Abbey Farm Planning Application.

After a very protracted Planning Application process, Maidstone Borough Council eventually gave permission for the building of a new mansion on the Leeds Abbey Farm site, much of which consists of a Capability Brown landscape, described in detail in our book Capability Brown in Kent. We discussed the planning application in our Newsletter last year and reported that we had given it our conditional approval, the key condition relating to the restoration of the Brownian landscape. A late intervention in the planning process from ecologists at Kent County Council requiring the developers to undertake an additional bird nest survey, and the developers then conceding further restrictions on tree felling, may make the landscape restoration more difficult to achieve. We remain in contact with the developers and stand ready to offer advice as necessary.

3. The new Events Brochure.

This was mailed to Members resulting in record bookings for a programme offering eight days of visits (see a photographic record on pp 4 and 5), and one lecture. Sadly, the Spring Lecture had to be cancelled because of Michael Charlesworth's indisposition, but we are delighted that he will now be offering in it (from Texas!) as a ZOOM lecture on December 11th. (See back page).

April

Completing Research in Swale.

Under Karen Emery's leadership the Swale Research project approaches completion. There are now eight Project Reports in final form on our website.

May

Treasurer and other Trustee changes.

At our Trustees' meeting, Evie Burton presented her last Quarterly Report before resigning her position and flying off to a new life in Australia! Mike O'Brien, having stepped down as Co-Chairman and offloading his role as Planning Review expert to the more than capable hands of Caroline Bowdler, has subsequently taken on the role of Treasurer, albeit on a short-term basis. Richard Stileman assumes the role of Chairman.

June and July

Visits galore

A very busy period of garden visits culminates in an evening with the celebrated garden designer Jo Thompson at Water Lane, the walled garden part of the original Tongswood estate just outside Hawkhurst, now being turned into a marvellous combination of restaurant, organic garden, shop and educational workshop.



Water lane

August

Our new bursary scheme.

Our currently healthy financial position has allowed us to start a new bursary scheme (details on the website) overseen by Francois Gordon. The first award is to fund horticultural student Eileen Gahan for four weeks at White House Farm where she will be involved in the updating of their several databases and the subsequent relabelling of many of the special specimens of the genera for which Maurice Foster's Garden now has worldwide fame.

September to November

Planning for 2025

As well as the final visits of the year – a day of joyous weather at Long Barn and White House Farm, and an equally enjoyable though wet and windy walk around Faversham - these three months are the time we plan the following year's events, and this year also the all-absorbing work of getting the new Website ready for a launch early next year.



Faversham and gunpowder!

December 11th

A KGT ZOOM Lecture.

"Queen Caroline and the Invention of the Landscape Garden" by Michael Charlesworth. See back page for details.



Queen Caroline

IMAGES OF 2024



Court Barn, Appledore



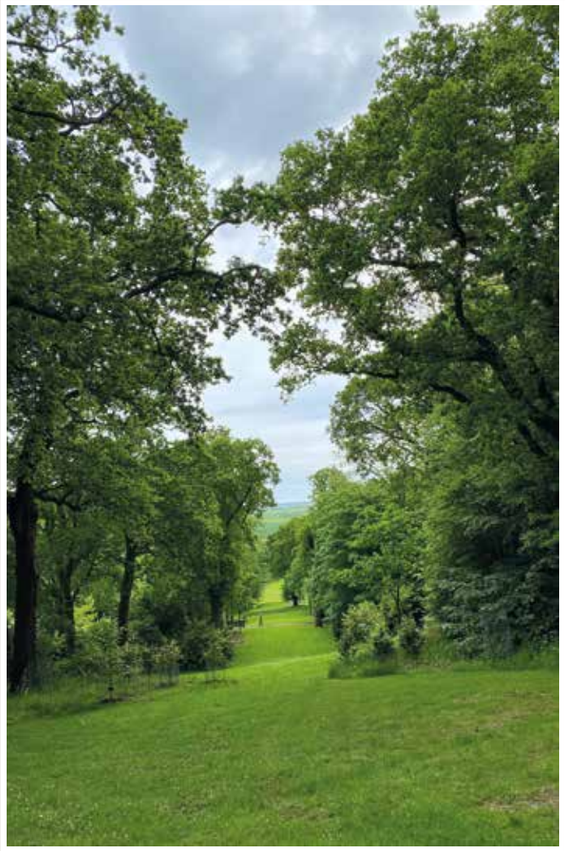
Long Barn, Sevenoaks Weald



Old Bladbean Stud, Bladbean



Ramsden Farm, Stone cum Ebony



The Knoll Farm, Aldington



Little Budds Farm CORAL CHARM



Hurst House, Hastingleigh



120 Fenchurch Street, City of London



Hales Place, Tenterden

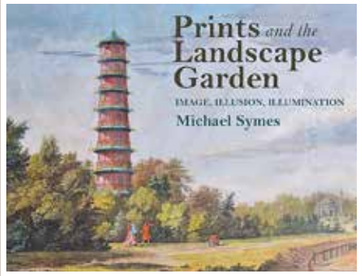


Sandling Park



Book Notices

There continue to be a remarkable number of good and attractive books published in our subject area. Thus we feel it is a bit invidious to select just one each year. So this year, we present three brief reviews of books we believe of special interest.

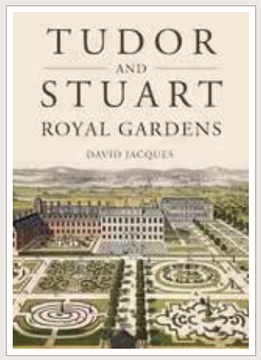


Prints and the Landscape Garden: Image, Illusion and Illumination
By Michael Symes

John Hudson Publishing,
Hardback ***£50.00****, e-book* ***£19.99****.*

Reliable evidence or wishful thinking? Image manipulation is not new, and the eminent garden historian Michael Symes shows how these popular depictions of the English landscape garden reveal the agendas of the garden owner, artist and publisher. Chapters on royal landscapes, Stowe, Chiswick and the London pleasure gardens are only part of this wide-ranging study, which also covers the influence of Horace Walpole, the use of prints in gazetteers, and the progress of the Picturesque. There are 244 images of 18th century prints, attractive in their own right, and valuable as historic documents. Illuminating indeed.

By Caroline Bowdler

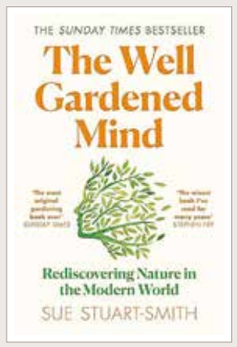


Tudor and Stuart Royal Gardens
By David Jacques

Windgather Press, Paperback ***£34.95***

This revealing book is about gardens as one way of creating favourable impressions in Tudor and Stuart times. It considers the backdrop of palaces, parks and gardens that were unspoken statements of authority and cultural achievements, and which gave status and credibility to the country's representatives. Garden history from this perspective has been neglected in the past. This book corrects this deficit by presenting a new analysis enabled by detailed research in the National Archives and elsewhere, and shows how statecraft, foreign influences, and native innovation interwove for two centuries in our royal gardens and parks.

By Richard Stileman



The Well Gardened Mind
By Sue Stuart – Smith

William Collins, Paperback ***£9.99***

Although published a few years ago, this groundbreaking and highly original book is now available in paperback. Since,ultimately, we are all interested in the therapeutic value of gardens and gardening, this lucid account – taking full account of contemporary neuroscience and psychoanalysis – shows brilliantly both how and why working with nature can radically transform our health, wellbeing and confidence.

"An important and timely book. I urge everyone to read it" Monty Don

By Richard Stileman

A Call for Plants with a Kentish Connection!

Anisa Ferguson

Dear members of the KGT. I'm about to embark on some research into ornamental plants and trees which have some sort of Kentish connection and wonder if any member knows of any? It's really about searching for anecdotes and finding out which plants were raised in Kent or are named after Kent places and why.

Ideally, I am looking for plants which are still grown in gardens today so I can secure photography, and even better still, in commercial production and thus available for gardeners to buy. However, historical links and stories of plants perhaps long gone are still very much of interest.

An example is *Salvia* 'Dad's Brown Trousers' grown at Lullingstone Castle and sold in its nursery. This semi evergreen form has pink flowers which age to khaki and it was found as a sport growing in the garden by Tom Hart Dyke, the well known creator of The World Garden. He named it for his father who loved, and was well-known for, his brown gardening trousers!

Another is *Buddleija davidii* 'Darent Valley', a compact grower with a profusion of clear, white blooms. It was discovered in the late 1980's growing along the banks of the River Darent. Today it has an RHS AGM.

There is also the collection of dahlias named after Bishops. I have found 'Bishop of Canterbury' was introduced by Dutch company Van der Linden…I need to do more research to find out about the Bishops of Dover and Rochester but perhaps someone reading this already knows.

Hopefully this gives you some idea of what I am looking for. Please do get in touch if you think you have a story to tell or can put me on the trail of something worth investigating.

Thanks in advance
Anisa Ferguson
Anisa.gress@gmail.com
07941 915652



Buddleia



Salvia

A quick look at 2025

Our full programme of Events is being worked on now and will be offered to Members in our regular brochure in early March next year. However, some dates are already fixed, and you might want to make a note in your diary:

Tuesday June 3rd	GODDARDS GREEN, CRANBROOK and PYMPNE MANOR, BENENDEN
Tuesday June 17th	REGENT'S PARK
Tuesday July 8th	STOWE HOUSE AND GARDEN
Wednesday July 23rd	LULLINGSTONE CASTLE AND WORLD GARDEN
Friday August 8th	GARDEN PARTY at BOUGHTON MONCHELSEA PLACE



Boughton Monchelsea Place

Our team

President: The Lady Kingsdown

Trustees and Officers: Richard Stileman (Chairman), Caroline Bowdler, Rosemary Dymond, Karen Emery, Annette Fettes (Website), Francois Gordon, Pamela Hipkins (Secretary), Sarah Morgan, Mike O'Brien (Treasurer), Terri Zbyszewska

A KGT ZOOM LECTURE

Wednesday, December 11th, 6pm

Queen Caroline and the Invention of the Landscape Garden

Michael Charlesworth



Conventional ideas of the invention of the landscape garden in 1730s England attribute the creation of this new form of naturalistic garden design to male gardeners (William Kent, Charles Bridgeman) and/or landowners (the Earl of Carlisle, the Prince of Wales, Lord Cobham, General Dormer, etc.).
This talk will consider the activities of Caroline of Ansbach, Queen Caroline 1727-37 (wife of George 2nd), and debates within her intellectual circle. The focus will be on underlying religio-scientific concepts crucial to developing views of the natural world that were taking place in Caroline's lifetime (1683-1737). Such views were a pre-condition of the new form of garden that took shape in the 1730s. We will also focus on the intellectual ramifications of her transition fromAnsbach to England, as Princess of Wales, in 1714. For particular reasons she was responsible for the design of a garden building that the talk will represent as seminal to the landscape garden.
The gardens involved are those at Richmond, Kensington Palace, and Stowe.



Michael Charlesworth gained his PhD in History and Theory of Art from the University of Kent at Canterbury. He is currently a professor of art history at the University of Texas at Austin teaching 19thC European painting and photography. He has written the first full length biography of Reginald Farrer, a critical life of Derek Jarman, as well as major articles on early photography, the picturesque, and 18thC panoramic drawing. His book Landscape and Vision in Nineteenth-Century Britain and France was published in 2008.

Available for KGT Members at the special price of £6 via The Gardens Trust website
www.thegardenstrust.org/events