



Kent Gardens Trust Newsletter

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Autumn 2009

GODINTON HOUSE

Head Gardener Viv Hunt tells how she succeeds in keeping a historic garden interesting to visitors while retaining its original character.

For anyone managing a historic garden each one presents its own particular challenges. Here at Godinton House we hope to retain the atmosphere of a private country house garden whilst encouraging many new visitors to enjoy it with us. People often comment on the peace and tranquillity of the garden and although we don't want to spoil their experience, of course our aim is to see lots of people enjoying our hard work.

When the Trust took over running the estate in 1996 decisions had to be taken regarding the direction the gardens would take for the future. The formal gardens were laid out at the turn of the twentieth century by the architect Reginald Blomfield after modernisation and remodelling of the house. His beautifully proportioned, terraced design was very simple, even rather stark, with topiaried hedges enclosing and dividing areas of lawn and gravel walks. A large formal pond sunk into turfed banks, a rose garden laid out below the south terrace of the house and a functional kitchen garden within eighteenth century walls were the more decorative features. The aim of Blomfield's theory of formal gardening was to 'bring house and garden into harmony, to make the house grow out of its surroundings and to prevent it being an excrescence on the face of nature.' A sentiment we try to bear in mind when making decisions.

One of the Trustees who had known the house and gardens under private ownership told me to take a look at all new plans for the garden from the viewpoint of the interior of the house. As Head Gardener it is all too easy to forget that the pile of bricks is not just a façade providing an attractive support for our climbers.

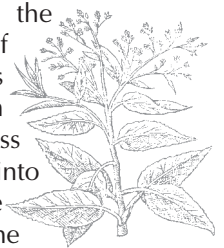
The first decision to be made for a



garden is whether to restore it to some particular date in its history. For us that would have meant removing the modifications and plantings of the last century to return it to the original Blomfield plans. Whilst we have reclaimed some of Blomfield's formality by cutting back the yew hedge to restore its perfect geometry and re-laid the gravel paths, we are keeping and improving the later planting, which has softened and enhanced the design. As a private garden the architectural formality of the design may be very pleasing but as an attraction for the public compromises have to be made. We have to remember that we are putting on a show and that whilst visitors may unconsciously enjoy the proportions of the formal layout, what they will remember best is the intimate Italian garden with its scents of the mediterranean or the spectacular show of the delphinium collection in the walled garden. The typically Edwardian rose garden, which Blomfield laid out with small beds planted with single rose cultivars, had

been neglected and many of the beds grassed over. This gave us the opportunity to re-design and use a planting which gives year round interest in a romantically voluptuous mix of shrub roses and herbaceous plants.

We also have had to consider the practicalities of moving visitors around the garden. Ideally they want a route that takes in the whole garden without having to go back on their tracks – not necessarily a concern in a private garden. We have added and removed some sections of the gravel paths to make it easier for visitors to find their way. Although we are happy for visitors to walk on the grass here they are generally far too well behaved to leave the gravel. On one of our larger lawns we have grown areas of longer grass with paths mown into them to encourage visitors to take the leap.



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We provide a plan with a route marked but draw the line at putting up signs around the garden – if visitors get lost it is surely a happy accident.

In our choice of planting we again have to reach a compromise between historic accuracy and the practicality of running a modern garden. Although 'heritage' seeds are listed in all the catalogues we tend to use modern, disease resistant cultivars in the kitchen garden so that we can grow vegetables and cut flowers

without applying a lot of chemicals. In our planting designs for the borders we never restrict our choice of plants but rather how they are used. Grasses, verbascums and eryngiums which are so fashionable in modern dry gardens are all used to elegant effect in our mixed herbaceous borders without looking out of place. In the tree planting programme for the parkland, which forms the backdrop to the gardens the decision has been taken to use only species which would have been available in the eighteenth century when the park was laid out

but the more ornamental additions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries remain.

Our responsibility in presenting an historic garden is to make it accessible and interesting to the public without losing the atmosphere of the private.

Viv Hunt

The garden is open between March and October. For details of opening and special events: Tel. 01233 620773 www.godinton-house-gardens.co.uk

Visit to Godinton House and Gardens 1st July 2009

Eleven of us met on a lovely day in July to visit Godinton House, where Viv Hunt, the head gardener, took us for a personal tour. Starting with a view of the lovely front façade of the house, we saw how in the early eighteenth century the Toke family reconstructed the house, incorporating the old hall house. The 'Dutch' gables are in fact a local Kentish style of the period, we were told.

The formal garden was laid out by Reginald Blomfield early in his career, to incorporate the external landscape with its rising parkland. Originally a purist design of grass and topiary, the lines of the formal garden were softened by Alan Wyndham-Green with herbaceous planting, and it is this period which the Trust, which now owns the property, has decided to conserve. Box and yew hedges form the enclosures in this formal part of the garden, and we heard how these are being rejuvenated gradually. The Long Borders, although designed to be at their best in late summer, were full of interest; we heard how they have been slightly extended and this successfully refined their proportions. The Lily Pond at their terminus was originally designed as a swimming pool. It was cleared in 2008 and is being restocked with lilies. Fed by a spring, and receiving run-off from the parkland which is full of nitrogen, it provides a challenge for those attempting to keep the water clear.



Planting has added interest to

the Tennis Lawn, and we were intrigued to learn of the difficulty staff have in preventing squirrels from nibbling the toes of one of the statues! The Wild Garden is planted with spring bulbs, and is cut in late July or August.

Blomfield planned a simple arrangement of cypresses and grass for the Italian garden, but when it was finally completed in 1920 it was planted with herbaceous plants. Now these have been replaced with Mediterranean plants. A path through the summer house leads into the walled Kitchen Garden, with its spectacular display of Delphiniums, a significant collection of varieties. A potager design occupies part of the garden, and there are further

plans for glasshouse.

Inside, we were given a tour of the house with its magnificent collection of porcelain and then had the privilege of seeing Blomfield's original drawings for the design of the garden. Over tea and enormous slices of home-made cake in the house, we heard how the Godinton House Preservation Trust was formed by Alan Wyndham-Green, and how it is managed today. The gardeners are assisted by volunteers, including members of WRAG (Women Returners to Agriculture). It must be a great joy and privilege to work in such lovely surroundings.

Imogen Wedd



VOLUNTEERS

TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH HISTORIC GARDENS REVIEW

Celebration of the Tunbridge Wells Historic Gardens Project

Finchcocks Musical Museum was the venue for this event held to mark the completion of the research for the Project. We were very grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Burnett for so kindly allowing us to use their beautiful house and gardens and for their support of the Project.

Greg Clark, M.P. for Tunbridge Wells, who has done much to raise the issue of the importance of protecting gardens from development opened the proceedings which were attended by representatives of several Kent planning authorities, KCC and the High Weald AONB Unit both of which have supported the Project, the volunteers who have carried out the research and owners of the gardens. All the volunteers enjoyed their experience of the training and research work immensely. The bonus for Kent Gardens Trust is that we now have a group with training and experience who are keen to use their new skills to identify, research and record parks and gardens in the county. I hope that this Project has increased interest in the history of parks and gardens in Kent.

Knowledge and understanding of these important parts of our cultural landscape are an essential first step if they are to be protected for future generations.

Elizabeth Cairns

Dr. Barbara Simms, Garden Historian and the Consultant to the Project summarises its findings

During Autumn 2008 and Spring 2009, about a dozen volunteer researchers contributed to a review of 28 historic gardens in Tunbridge Wells Borough as part of a pilot project to establish a methodology for the review of the Kent Compendium and to provide an example of good practice across the county. Following a series of training days organised by Kent Gardens Trust the volunteers began archival research on specific gardens to source historic maps, paintings, written descriptions, sales particulars and photographs to enable the compilation of a chronology of the garden's development. The generosity of owners in allowing access to their gardens and sharing their archives, memories and (in some cases) that of their gardeners also contributed significantly to the success of the project.

These were 28 gardens of diversity, interest and beauty and only a few features from the review's findings can be mentioned here. There is scant documentation on the early Kent gardens of the C15 and C16, which were typically layouts of a number of enclosed gardens around the house and their interest lies more in the extant features of the gardens, such as moats, bastions or garden walls, and their incorporation into later gardens. A well-known example of a moated

garden is at Glassenbury Park, but a house of a similar period is Sprivers, a National Trust property, which also has a garden of formal enclosures and, what has been described as, a 'feature resembling a moat'. The 'moat' is clearly shown on an C18 estate map, but it is thought that the present formal enclosures were laid out in the early C20 by the Courthope family.

The architect Decimus Burton worked extensively around Tunbridge Wells and contemporary paintings depict villas he designed at Blackhurst Park (1828) and Bentham Hill House (1830) with Regency gardens characterised by 'dressed grounds' of flowerbeds, trelliswork, ornamental ironwork, garden seats, conservatories and, most characteristically, sinuous shrubberies. Also described as being in an Italianate villa style is the mansion at Ladham House enlarged by the Jessels when they bought it in 1895. The ornamental gardens are thought to have been laid out by the celebrated Edwardian designer William Goldring at the same time but the parkland enclosed by a ha-ha still retains the picturesque appearance described in 1870: 'A beautiful miniature park, studded with oaks and other thriving timber' (Sales Particulars).

The undulating woodlands, rivers, natural springs and rocky outcrops of the High Weald have encouraged the development of woodland, water and rock gardens. These have sometimes included the use of medieval fish ponds and former hammer ponds and marl pits. At Marle Place, in a newly planted arboretum, a lake has been developed from an existing pond, which is thought to have been a C19 marl pit, and at Crittenden House a hammer pond is the centerpiece of a 1950s water garden.

From 1919, the horticulturalist and plant hybridist, Collingwood Ingram, also incorporated an existing pond into a newly laid out informal woodland and shrubbery with a



Ladham House Ha Ha

notable Japanese cherry tree collection, some of which survive. Rock gardens were also popular features in the C19 and early C20 centuries and a number of gardens reviewed had rock gardens surviving from these periods.

The majority of the gardens in the review were laid out in the C19 or early C20 but four gardens created from the 1950s were the work of celebrated designers. The Postern, a formal garden divided into compartments by yew and copper beech hedges, was laid out in 1952 around an C18 house by the landscape architect Anthony du Gard Pasley (b.1929); The Owl House, a formal garden around a C16 house set in extensive and informal water and woodland gardens was laid out from 1954 to the designs of James Russell for Maureen, Marchioness of Dufferin and Ava; at Danemore Park in 1986 the landscape architect Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe (1900-96) was commissioned



Crittenden House Hammer Pond

to design a raised terrace garden on the north and west sides of an early C19 house; and finally, at Brattles Grange in 2003, the garden designer Ryl Nowell re-modelled the 1930s water and woodland gardens around a

C16 Wealden timber-framed house to include a rill with fountains and an ornamental grass meadow.

These highlights demonstrate the wealth of historic gardens in Tunbridge Wells Borough. The volunteer researchers' work in helping to record their development has been an essential contribution to our understanding of their significance and a model for further similar partnership research projects.

Barbara Simms



Danemore Park Terrace

THE SITES

Angley House Cranbrook
Ashurst Place Speldhurst
Bedgebury Park Goudhurst
Bentham Hill Manor Southborough
Blackhurst Hall Tunbridge Wells
Brattles Grange Brenchley
Brenchley Manor Brenchley
Broomlands Speldhurst
Crittenden House Brenchley
Danemore Park Speldhurst
Finchcocks Goudhurst
Gleassenbury Park Cranbrook
Grosvenor & Hilborough Park
Tunbridge Wells

Hole Park Rolvenden
Ladham House Goudhurst
Lilliesden Cranbrook
Marle Place Brenchley
Oak Hill Manor Cranbrook
Old Wilsley Cranbrook
Owl House Lamberhurst
Rectory Park Horsmonden
Salomons Tunbridge Wells
Sissinghurst Place
Sprivers Horsmonden
The Grange Benenden
The Grove Tunbridge Wells
The Postern Capel



KENT GARDENS TRUST RESEARCH GROUP

Kent Gardens Trust now has a group of about ten volunteers who have been well trained in the techniques of researching the history of old gardens. We are very keen to practice our newly acquired skills and hope that hope that we can help

- owners who want to know more about the history of their gardens and
- planning authorities wishing to identify parks and gardens of historic interest or update their records

Please contact Elizabeth Cairns by email:
mail@kentgardenstrust.org.uk
or telephone 01622 850240

VISIT TO THE MILLENIUM SEED BANK PROJECT

The Kent Gardens Trust was very privileged to have a visit arranged to visit the Millennium Seed Bank AT Wakehurst Place. Parties are not normally able to penetrate beyond the central viewing area, which is open for all visitors. The visit started with an explanation by Roger Smith O.B.E (the past Head) of the reason for the Bank, as part of a global network to conserve seeds from as many of the wild species of plants as possible. The Bank works in conjunction with 54 different countries. Species collected are also stored in their country of origin and some seed is distributed Kew and Edinburgh as backup for Wakehurst.

The introductory lecture. included a frightening scenario of population increase and the likely loss of habitat and the resulting decrease in the to gene pool available from wild plants to combat as yet unknown diseases. The largest number of species come from the semitropical regions and seed collections, always requested, are being added at the rate of eight per day. There is not always co-operation as some countries are worried about the possible use of the seeds to the detriment of their agriculture. This then becomes a political problem.

It was explained that the Seed Bank is also a research centre. The optimum conditions for the long term storage of different seeds have to be assessed, seed viability after different lengths of storage need to be checked so sampling can be at the appropriate intervals. Even the storage containers have to be considered, manufacturers are not normally interested in their containers having a life span of five hundred years!

The party was then divided into two groups for a tour of the building, which had been designed so the public can see the white coated scientists through the large windows. The right side is the Research Area, here we were shown the work stations and the range of adapted refrigerators, with different controlled day lengths, lighting & temperature, for germination. The left side of the building is for the reception of the seeds, these are bar coded for computer records, details of their habitats, country of origin, climatic conditions on collection etc are added. The seeds are kept at controlled humidity and temperature until processed. Cleaning, checking for infection and insect infestation is carried out. A sample is tested by X

ray for viability. Herbarium specimens of the plants are also collected which can be crossed referenced with the seeds if needed. How do you dry an Agave leaf?

The seeds are then taken to the preparation room in the basement. This is built into the hillside and protected as far as possible from attack or mishap. This room is accessed through an air lock, kept at a controlled temperature and low humidity. Here the seeds are packed either in several small containers placed together in large kilner type jars or directly in the larger jars. Leading off this room are four (three in use and one spare) vaults kept at minus 40 degrees centigrade. Library type rolling shelves house the jars. Access is only allowed for 20 minutes at a time wearing suitable clothing. There is ample room for further vaults as the Bank expands.

The groups overran their time, so many questions were asked. Everyone was interested in the finance. A Lottery grant with help from the Wellcome Foundation paid for the initial building and funding via an annuity for running costs for ten years. This is now running out. We all felt finance will have to be found somehow for such a vital resource. The number of staff employed is about 50, the specialists tend to have a Biological Science or Biochemistry degree.

Training is given to foreign staff to set up the facilities in their own countries. This has been financed by the Seed Bank, but those countries with a high standard of living will now be asked to pay their own expenses. Were we too generous in the first instance? Further details from www.kew.org/msbp/samara.

This was the most thought provoking visit that the Kent Gardens Trust has arranged and was thoroughly enjoyed by all. The party were then able to explore the gardens at Wakehurst Place at their leisure in the afternoon



The Seed Bank building at Wakehurst Place
Kent Gardens Trust

FINCHCOCKS GARDEN FAIR & MUSIC FESTIVAL

The Trust had a stand at the Garden Fair in May. This was a delightful event with music and many garden related stands.

We are so grateful to those members who looked after the stand for us and met and talked to interested members of the public



Past Chairman Gill Yerburgh and her husband John on our stand at the Festival

TRUST EVENTS 2009

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 Humphry Repton and the Art of Landscape. Lunch is included and a tour of the house and we also hope to visit the newly restored Mausoleum.

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*

WANTED A NEW TREASURER

Roly Franks has been the Trust's honorary Treasurer now for ten years and his help in keeping the charity's finances in order has been invaluable and very much appreciated by successive chairmen and the Secretary. Alas, he says that he would like to retire and we shall have to begin the difficult task of finding a replacement. Roly has kindly said that he is willing to stay on to hand over to someone else and his successor will find all the financial records in apple pie order.

If anyone with some financial expertise is willing to volunteer his or her services we would be most grateful. Roly will be happy to explain what the post involves.

If you can help please contact Elizabeth Cairns on 01622 850240



*One of the many impressive statues at
Godinton House*



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