

Birkbeck Garden History Group Newsletter



Spring 2016 No 42

Fourteenth Annual General Meeting

The BGHG Annual General Meeting was held on 24 February; about 60 members attended. The Annual Report had been circulated to all members before the meeting. Comments on the report noted the need to give very long notice of longer trips such as the proposed study tour in France last year. There were also requests for more half day visits like the King's Cross walk although it was pointed out that more help from members would be needed to organise additional events. On the question of new undertakings the possibility that BGHG support the training of lecturers to run introductory garden history courses was discussed and there was some interest shown in this suggestion. A two day visit to Wales on 20-21 September is being considered; members will be asked for expressions of interest in April before further planning is done. Another new initiative, launching a BGHG website, is discussed in a separate article below. The Treasurer reported that it had been a successful year; finances were strong and the committee is considering ways of spending more of our surplus.

Sheila Triggs, BGHG Chair for the last five years, has stepped down as Chair and from the committee. The other officers and committee members had been nominated to stand for election, as had one new member. All officers and committee members were elected by acclaim. Sheila was warmly thanked for her contribution both as a founding member of the group and as its Chair since 2011.

The BGHG committee for 2016 is Joan Pateman (Chair), Susan Jellis (Vice Chair), Barbara Deason (Secretary), Christine Cox (Treasurer), Diana Renard (Membership Secretary), Joan Pateman (Newsletter Editor), Elizabeth Allen, Lucy Baron, Ruth Brownlow, Sue Coulbeck, Francine Gee, Rita Goodwin and Margie Hoffnung. Before the AGM a slide show prepared by Barbara Deason was shown, with photos of all the gardens we plan to visit in 2016. The AGM was followed by a talk by Sarah Couch entitled *Researching the Landscape at Pitzhanger Manor*. Sarah Couch trained as an architect and has expertise in heritage landscape and horticulture; she has wide experience in conservation and design. Sarah is leading an LPGT visit to Pitzhanger Manor and Walpole Park on 14 September which is open to all.

Researching the Landscape at Pitzhanger Manor

Sarah Couch wrote the Conservation Management Plan for Walpole Park in Ealing and she told us about some of the more unusual areas of research and how these contributed to the conservation project. She also showed that if we want to understand what is rare or unique or influential about a place – that is, its significance – we need to understand the wider context of the site's history, rather than researching the site in isolation. Although the park has many important phases, this talk concentrated on the period associated with the architect Sir John Soane and his construction of Pitzhanger Manor in Ealing.

In 1800 John Soane was an established architect, famous for his work on the Bank of England. He was looking for a country home for his young family, a place to entertain and showcase his skills and inspire his sons to become architects. At the time he was living at No 12 Lincoln's Inn Fields, which had a courtyard but no garden. It was the ultimate failure of the Pitzhanger dream which led to the development of No 13 and the establishment of the Museum, much of whose collection began at Pitzhanger Manor.

Naturally a major source for this project was the Sir John Soane's Museum. It holds some 30,000 architectural drawings and, as this was Soane's own home, there were a great number of drawings, sketches and design ideas for the rebuilding of his villa and its landscape. I reviewed the many design drawings and other documents; one essential task was to unravel how much was a survey, how much was a design and how much was actually executed. I also reviewed the great number of other Soane villa designs to see if there were any similarities in the treatment of the landscape. While many of the Pitzhanger drawings showed the surrounding landscape, this was very rare for Soane's other designs. However Soane had several favourite techniques for bringing the garden into the house by the use of glass, light and decoration.



Bird's-Eye View: Pitzhanger Manor 1835
© Sir John Soane's Museum, London 2016

One drawing, part survey and part design, was labelled ‘Mr. H’s plan’ and with the help of the archivist, I followed the trail of this Mr. H, one John Haverfield, the son of John Haverfield the elder, head gardener to Princess Augusta at Kew. John Haverfield the younger was born in 1744 and in 1762, with his father, was jointly appointed head gardener at the royal garden of Richmond Lodge. They were a well-connected family. John Haverfield the younger went on to develop his own landscape design practice. Letters and notebooks at the Soane Museum revealed that Haverfield was a frequent companion on Soane’s site visits. Tyringham was their first collaboration and they visited together no less than 40 times between 1793 and 1798. This was a site previously associated with Repton, but it seemed Haverfield had a large role.

Soane relied on Haverfield for his understanding of garden history and called on his advice again when he later took on the post of Clerk of Works at Chelsea Hospital. At Pitzhanger, one of the first tasks was for Haverfield to supply a gardener, well before the Soanes were able to move in. Soane and Haverfield used to dine together and were friends until Haverfield died. Following my appeals in garden history newsletters, owners of rare surviving Haverfield landscapes and his descendants all helped the search. This revealed that Haverfield competed and was compared with much better known figures such as Repton and Loudon. From tracing Haverfield designs, it became clear that Pitzhanger was typical of his work and also that elements of his architectural and landscape design appeared to have been influenced by Soane or had close similarities with Soane’s work. His other designs followed the Pitzhanger model of lawns, informal flowering shrubberies, exotic trees, flower garden, kitchen garden, a serpentine lake with a bridge, set within a small park. Like Soane he incorporated a great number of classical fragments, as seen at Walsingham Abbey.

Soane’s meticulous diaries and notebooks showed that he had a very close practical relationship with the garden; he listed orders for plants and vegetable seeds and noted plants he admired. The Manor House had a side door and path leading directly to the kitchen garden. Pitzhanger was a place of entertainment and illustrated Soane’s relationship with food: growing fruit and vegetables, catching fish with his friend JMW Turner, dining and even advising on a cookery book, *The Cook’s Oracle* of 1817. Mrs Eliza Soane also noted a few illuminating details, such as spending the whole day outside bottling cherries.

Other strands of research included the Regency shrubbery, which took us to Brighton Pavilion and a whole range of contemporary texts and I also explored the context of the expansion of suburban villas and their gardens in the early 19th century.

These strands of research showed that the site had several unique aspects: that there is more information on this site than any other Soane garden; that this was probably the only surviving landscape closely associated with Soane; that it was a rare and relatively intact example of a small villa and its landscape; and that it was one of only two or three surviving landscapes by the younger John Haverfield – a designer of high standing at the time. Work on the Heritage Lottery Fund project was completed in 2015 and the conclusions from research were valuable in informing the conservation approach and bringing the place to life. The team were awarded the Landscape Institute’s conservation award for their efforts.

Sarah Couch

The Visionary Life of Joseph Paxton

Kate Colquhoun, author and biographer of Paxton, presented the BGHG Annual Lecture on Sir Joseph Paxton in November 2015. She outlined his career from garden boy to wealthy MP, focusing mainly on his horticultural achievements.

Sir Joseph Paxton (1803–1865) was a man of grand vision and a determined pragmatist. He was an ingenious engineer and architect but was first and foremost a gardener. In 1823 Paxton entered the Horticultural Society’s gardens at Chiswick as a labourer. At 23 years of age, he was appointed head gardener to the Duke of Devonshire at Chatsworth. Immediately his energy and inventiveness were apparent. He improved the glasshouses and built more, designing a ridge-and-furrow shaped roof to make best use of natural light. He preferred wood to iron, it being lighter and cheaper, and invented a grooved sash bar to hold the panes of glass without the need for putty. He added an arboretum, huge rockery and the Emperor Fountain with its 260-foot jet of water. The Great Stove, the glasshouse covering one acre, was roofed by the largest sheet glass panes ever made and was heated by seven miles of hot water pipes underground. Over the next 40 years, he was to transform Chatsworth into the greatest garden in England.

The glasshouses at Chatsworth were filled with tropical plants being brought back by plant hunters, including John Gibson, gardener at Chatsworth under Paxton. Chatsworth had a huge collection of orchids and famously the giant Amazon water lily, *Victoria regia*. Paxton nurtured the plant in its own lily house until, after many years, it flowered. The *Illustrated News* of 1849 printed an engraving of Paxton’s daughter standing on one of its leaves. Always keen to promote horticulture for the practical gardener, Paxton introduced two horticultural magazines in the 1830s, *The Horticultural Register and General Magazine* and the *Magazine of Botany and Register of Flowering Plants* which contained coloured engravings of the most prized new plants and was published until 1848.

As his reputation grew, Paxton was commissioned to design a public park in Liverpool called Prince’s Park, his first but by no means his last venture into municipal design. This led to his creating Birkenhead Park, the first public park run by municipal authorities in the world. Birkenhead Park incorporated similar design features to Prince’s Park: the separation of carriage from pedestrian traffic, the mixture of open and intimate

spaces, wide views and winding paths, groups of large trees, the use of water and of architectural features. Birkenhead Park was later to influence the design of Central Park in New York.

The Great Stove at Chatsworth was the first experiment in prefabricated glass and iron structural techniques, which Paxton pioneered and would use again in creating the Crystal Palace for the Great Exhibition



The Crystal Palace from the northeast. Dickinson Brothers 1852

of 1851. It was an extraordinary triumph of engineering and took 2,000 men eight months to build. Meanwhile Paxton was designing Mentmore Towers for Baron Mayer de Rothschild. This was shortly to be followed by the even larger Château de Ferrières near Paris for Baron James de Rothschild.

In 1854 Paxton was elected MP for Coventry and retained his seat until his death. In 1855 Paxton presented the most radical and ingenious of his plans to a parliamentary select committee. His Great Victorian Way, a multi-storeyed arcade of glass and iron 72 feet wide, was to run in a ten mile loop around London both north and south of the river connecting all the railway termini. The proposal was approved, amazingly,

but the funds to build this revolutionary, but practical, glass-covered way never materialised.

Sir Joseph Paxton died in 1865. The *Times* obituary called him 'the greatest gardener of all time, the founder of a new style of architecture and a man of genius'.

Joan Pateman

Painting the Modern Garden

BGHG Visit 9 March

I have been lucky enough to visit this huge exhibition with over 250 exhibits at the Royal Academy in London twice and each time there was much debate about gardening and painting techniques. And, while visitor opinion varied about the use of display lanterns and cold frames, which sadly did not contain real plants, there were also wonderful examples of contemporary horticultural literature and different garden settings to see.

Our group agreed that it was a very interesting collection of paintings, many of which were new to us. As a self-confessed Singer Sargent groupie, Lin Sherwood-Page's favourite included his painting of the two Vickers children with a watering can. I too loved this very simply composed picture, beautifully executed with wonderful creamy whites predominating. Ruth Brownlow was delighted to find paintings by Max Liebermann, whose garden she visited on the shores of Lake Wannsee near Berlin on her very first garden history tour in about 2001. Sally Miller particularly enjoyed the Klee, Klimt and Kandinsky and, like me, was stunned by Santiago Rusiñol's gardens which conveyed a wonderfully evocative atmosphere through colours possibly influenced by the effects of distantly exploding shells rather than a mere sunset. For Maggie Hoffnung, the more delicate Scandinavian palette appealed most. The exhibits included garden settings from patios to public parks and reflected the Impressionist and other painting styles, as well as the trend to travel to experience different light and gardening climates or locations.

As well as delightful paintings including the painters' families, letters exchanged between painters testify that there seem to have been a lot of friendships, competition, one-upmanship and different preferences and 'showing off' between artists, those who had the latest plants or styles and the subjects or garden owners themselves. For example, Pissarro, the 'cabbage painter' asked Monet his advice about planting. One of Monet's garden paintings with profusely coloured dahlias make his garden seem rural but its urban setting is emphasised by Renoir, while Pissarro's spring plum tree display is trumped by Monet, who painted a small orchard of them! Caillebotte's brand new huge oval-roofed greenhouse dominates one of his garden paintings and Sorolla's richly coloured painting shows his client, Louis Comfort Tiffany, in his Long Island garden. Monet gardened enthusiastically at rented properties before settling at Giverny, where he eventually managed to extend the garden by buying up an old railway line and getting permission to divert and enlarge the river running through the land beyond. Finally, while Monet's fascination with light and texture on his lily pond is well known, he also painted chrysanthemums and lilies, illustrating the latest varieties he had acquired.

With thanks to Susan Jellis for booking tickets on behalf of the group

Fiona Hope

Tour of Normandy Gardens

In September 2015 Robert Peel organised a trip to Normandy, covering 16 gardens near Caen, Rouen and Dieppe. Many were typical old French château gardens – formal, with topiary along paths, four squares of lawn, long hedges, water, tree avenues, *bosquets*, potagers and flower sections. Some were surprisingly floriferous and informal.

My favourite formal garden was Château de Canon, unchanged since the 18th century. It has two outstanding features. First, a rectangular lake is set at the end of a long *tapis vert* at the rear of the house positioned to reflect the house when one stands at the end of the lake (as pictured). Second, its *venise verte*, a grid of canals, contains an atmospheric wilderness and follies such as a Chinese pavilion and semi-circular dovecote.



To my astonishment two new formal gardens have been created in the last 25 years. At Château de Brécý, from a parterre at the rear of the house, the Wirths constructed three Italianate lawn terraces mounting a hill, each bordered by evergreen topiary, one with two ponds, another with classic columns. Not content with these, the hilltop beyond the terraces has been built up so that its *tapis vert*, between two angled hornbeam hedges, seems to rise forever, almost into the sky. This slope was also functional – engineered to hide the road traffic beyond the terraces.

Château du Champ de Bataille, designed by Jacques Garcia as a formal Le Nôtre garden, is a stunning Versailles pastiche. The central plantation has parterres, a spout, a large cascade fountain and a long canal. This central section is bordered by tall hedges and to the side of each hedge there are a series of different garden sections. Although the green architecture, such as the fantastic *théâtre du verdure*, is impressive, I thought the ambitious planting designs of the side gardens needed more skilled gardeners to fulfil their potential. Instead, funds are allocated to new curiosities such as a Thai temple garden.

Instead of being overwhelmed by this bling, my heart was captured by four stylistically idiosyncratic informal gardens which were created on greenfield sites in the last three decades by people who are passionate about plants.

Jardin de Plantbessin, the Sainte-Beuves' nursery's garden, was planted at the rate of one hedged room per year. Their first set of rooms echoes English 1920s informal styles: wide herbaceous perennial borders along a grassy path or around a pond or around serpentine lawn, plus small square garden rooms, themed by colour or a motif – e.g. Japanese. The more recent garden is designed as a series of descending rectangular rooms. Each is filled with perennials and shrubs, some of which are topiary. The paved central path through the rooms includes stepping stones over a pond. It terminates in a whimsical garden of curved hedges and a maze.

Jardin Plume, the Quibels' nursery garden, is stylistically contemporary. There are three gardens around the house with densely planted wide beds of herbaceous perennials. Each garden focuses on a season – spring, summer, which still had brilliant colour, and autumn. As we edged along the narrow grid of paths in the autumn garden, we were immersed in shoulder high flowering plants, including scented *Acteas*. Further away from the house, there are lovely specialist garden rooms, one with modern grasses, one full of tall prairie style perennials, one with pond plants. A startling square mirror pond reflects the sky.

The other two wonderful informal gardens have been developed almost single-handedly, their owners spending every day gardening for the sake of beauty. Jardins d'Angélique contain several sections in under two acres. The *Jardin Remarquable* is the informal section planted in the 1990s in a large rectangular field as a memorial to the Lebellegards' deceased daughter. The garden feels peaceful, with areas of sun and shade. The trees are sensitively sited so as not to dominate the huge variety of roses, interesting cultivars of shrubs and an instinctive selection of pastel colours for the seasonal perennials. These are crammed into beds along three curvilinear narrow grass paths. Seats or delicate water features mark intersections with short cross paths or bridges, and a narrow stream gently trickles diagonally through the garden to a pond with a reflecting mirror.

Le Vasterival made the late Princess Greta Sturdza famous for her vistas and planting. She cleared the undulating site, installed windbreaks, then planted an acre a year for 30 years. As we turned into each wide curvaceous grass path, there was a breathtaking vista of informally shaped deep borders. Each has been planted to provide some colour and scent in every month of the year and each has its own four layers – trees, shrubs (hydrangeas and rhododendrons), perennials, then bulbs and ground cover (hellebores). She experimented with plants suitable for acid-clay and particular microclimates but was ruthless in keeping cultivars which were aesthetically pleasing. The experts in our group praised her bark mulches, mound tree planting and rills for drainage.

In contrast to this serious gardening, Château de Vendevre provided us with laughs. The artist in the family has installed a dozen water surprises to spray the unwary in the park-style garden and also wood animal sculptures to startle people exploring his wilderness.

We met many owners, most providing a welcome Calvados or cider – a wonderful five days.

Diana Renard

News

BGHG Web Site

The BGHG is becoming more widely known in the community through our Introduction to Garden History days and other public events. There also appears to be a growing interest in the subject of garden history. Therefore it seems timely for the group to have a presence on the web telling people more about us, our activities and how to join.

With the help of David Marsh, we have designed a simple web site using Wordpress. The first page contains news items and the other pages hold information about the BGHG and about other activities held in association with us, such as the new six week Introduction to Garden History courses. These pages will not change much although we plan to post regular news items such as outside events of interest to BGHG members. We plan to continue to email members notice of these events as we do now.

The web site is mainly intended for people wanting to know more about the BGHG. It can be seen at <https://birkbeckgardenhistorygroup.wordpress.com>. As this site is a new venture, we welcome comments on any aspect of the site, including layout, content, number of pages, links etc. Please send any comments to susan.jellis@outlook.com or joan.pateman@zen.co.uk.

RHS Lindley Library London Reopens

The Lindley Library in Vincent Square, London has now reopened following its redevelopment this winter. The Upper Reading Room has been modified to make room for an exhibition space. The first exhibition is on Japanese nursery catalogues from 1890 to 1939 and includes some exquisite illustrations of irises, lilies and peonies. The Research Room downstairs and the storage areas have been refurbished to provide better accommodation for the heritage collection. You need to make an appointment to work in the Research Room; see the calendar on the RHS web site or telephone the library. The library is planning a series of exhibitions during the year; see the Events page below.

Garden History Courses

The BGHG repeated its introductory study day for people new to garden history in January 2016. As last year, the course was fully booked and seemed well received. A new initiative, supported by the BGHG, was the six week Introduction to Garden History courses developed by David Marsh, Letta Jones and Stephen Smith. The first course began in February and was repeated starting in early April. Both courses were fully booked and student feedback has been very positive.

There are plans to run the course again in September and in January 2017 at the Institute of Historical Research, London. Additionally a series of longer, more advanced specialist courses will be introduced, also at the IHR. The first, starting in September, will be a 12 week course on the history of botanic gardens. Details will be available on the new BGHG web site under Garden History Courses.

New Books

The Secret Life of the Georgian Garden: Beautiful Objects and Agreeable Retreats by Kate Felus, I. B. Tauris, due out April 2016.

The Historic Gardens of England: Hampshire by Timothy Mowl and Jane Whitaker, due out April 2016.

Place-Making: The Art of Capability Brown, 1716-1783 by John Phibbs, Historic England, due out October 2016.

Capability Brown and his Landscape Gardens by Sarah Rutherford, National Trust Books, due out April 2016.

Moving Heaven & Earth – Capability Brown's gift of landscape by Steffie Shields, Unicorn Press, due out June 2016.

The English Landscape Garden in Europe by Michael Symes, Historic England, due out April 2016.

In the Gardens of Impressionism by Clare AP Willsdon, Reprint edition, Thames & Hudson, January 2016.

A Victorian Head Gardener

Thomas Ruddy (1842–1912) was the head gardener at Palé Hall near Bala in mid Wales for 37 years. He left a fascinating collection of journals, covering most of his life, and other family papers which have come into the hands of Wendy Carey. In January this year she decided to share his story via a blog at www.thomasruddy.co.uk in which she details the life, work and times of this Victorian head gardener. Ruddy's journals describe more about his interests and those of the period than about his daily life in the garden. He was a passionate amateur naturalist, interested in local history and a self-taught prize-winning geologist, as well as a head gardener who taught himself French and studied in France for some time.

Events

BGHG Programme 2016

12 March	Study Day – <i>Sanderson Miller and the Amateur Designers</i>
26 April	Study Visit – Celebration of Brown at Wotton, Buckinghamshire
7 May	Bloomsbury Squares Study Day with the Association of Bloomsbury Squares and Gardens
25 May	Houghton Lodge and Longstock Water Gardens, Hampshire
13 June	Woburn Abbey, Bedfordshire
18 July	Stancombe Park and Westonbirt, Gloucestershire
10 August	Ashridge, Hertfordshire and Ascott, Buckinghamshire
8 September	Gardens of Hastings, East Sussex
4 October	London: Winfield House, Regent's Park (half day)
October (TBC)	London: the Strand and Embankment Landscapes
November	Annual Lecture

Capability Brown Festival 2016

The large number of events, lectures, study days, conferences and exhibitions are listed on the Festival web pages www.capabilitybrown.org under Events.

Garden Museum Exhibition

19 March – 3 September *How does your garden grow?* Hall Place, Bourne Road, Bexley, Kent DA5 1PQ, Tel: 01322 621238, www.bexleyheritagetrust.org.uk.

Fulham Palace Lecture

Monday 11 April 2 – 3.15 pm Lucy Hart *The Reawakening of Fulham Palace Garden*. Jessie Mylne Education Centre, Bishop's Avenue, London SW6 6EA, Tel: 020 7610 7162, Email: functions@fulhampalace.org, www.fulhampalace.org. Book online via Eventbrite.

South London Botanical Institute Lectures

Saturday 9 April 1.30 – 4.30 pm Letta Jones *Life and Times of John Gerard*.

Wednesday 11 May 1.30 – 4.30 pm Letta Jones *Life and Times of John Ray*.

Tuesday 2 August 1.30 – 4.30 pm Letta Jones *Life and Times of Joseph Paxton*. 323 Norwood Road, London SE24 9AQ, Tel: 020 8674 5787, Email: info@slbi.org.uk, www.slbi.org.uk.

Painshill Park Trust Morning Lecture Series

Thursday 19 May 11.00 am – 12.30 pm Marie-Elaine Houghton *Celia Fiennes – a 17th century traveller*. Portsmouth Road, Cobham, Surrey KT11 1JE, Tel: 01932 868113, www.painshill.co.uk.

Sotheby's Institute of Art Course

Tuesdays 3 May – 14 June Barbara Simms *Garden Design: Architecture, History and Beauty, 1600 – 2015*. 30 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3EE, Tel: 020 7462 3249, www.sothebysinstitute.com, Email: m.williams@sothebysinstitute.com.

Cambridge Botanic Garden Lectures

Friday 13 May 10.00 am – 1.00 pm Twigs Way *Exploration and the History of Plants and Gardens*.

Friday 10 June 10.00 am – 1.00 pm Twigs Way *Art and the History of Plants and Gardens*. 1 Brookside, Cambridge CB2 1JE, Tel: 01223 331875, www.botanic.cam.ac.uk.

Hampshire Garden Trust Lecture

Thursday 19 May 6.30 – 8.00 pm Timothy Mowl *'From Grene Mede to Dream Meadow' Discoveries in the Hampshire Landscape*. Guildhall, The Broadway, Winchester, Hampshire SO23 9GH, Tel: 01794 367752, Email: admin@hgt.org.uk, www.hgt.org.uk.

The Gardens Trust Visits

14 – 20 May Study Tour of South-West Scotland. Open to TGT and County Garden Trust members. There are limited places remaining. Email: wowkristina@hotmail.com.

Wednesday 8 June 10.45 am – 4.00 pm Dropmore and Cliveden, Buckinghamshire. See www.gardenhistorysociety.org/events for further details of both trips.

Chelsea Physic Garden Tour

Thursday 2 June 11.30 am – 1.00 pm *Behind the Scenes at the Chelsea Physic Garden*. 66 Hospital Road, London SW3 4HS, Tel: 020 7352 5646, Email: enquiries@chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk, www.chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk.

Oxford University Department for Continuing Education Courses

3 – 5 June Study Weekend in association with The Gardens Trust *The Suburban Garden*. Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JA, Tel: 01865 270380, Email: ppdayweek@conted.ox.ac.uk, www.conted.ox.ac.uk.

Cambridge University I. of Continuing Education

8 – 10 July Caroline Holmes *The Renaissance garden in Britain*. Madingley Hall, Madingley, Cambridge CB23 8AQ, Tel: 01223 746262, Email: ice.admissions@ice.cam.ac.uk, www.ice.cam.ac.uk.

RHS Lindley Library London Exhibitions

7 July – 12 August *A Garden Behind Barbed Wire – Ruhleben Horticultural Society*. This is one of a series of exhibitions during 2016. 80 Vincent Square, London SW1P 2PE, Tel: 020 7821 3050, Email: library.london@rhs.org.uk, www.rhs.org.uk/libraries.

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