

Birkbeck Garden History Group Newsletter



Spring 2022 No 60

Twentieth Annual General Meeting

The BGHG Annual General Meeting was held on 24 February 2022 at the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies in London with 40 members in attendance. The annual report, financial report and annual accounts had been circulated to all members in advance of the meeting.

The Chair, Susan Jellis, presented the annual report and noted that the Committee was planning a full programme of events for 2022, a list of which was circulated at the AGM. Because of the pandemic, events had to be severely curtailed in 2021. However, the annual Study Day did go ahead as a series of four lectures online over Zoom on the theme of botanic gardens; this arrangement had resulted in a larger participation and the series had been well received. BGHG continued to support the Professional Gardeners' Trust and the Institute of Historical Research history of garden and landscape research seminars. The Committee was looking for other activities to support and members were invited to put forward suggestions that fit in with the aims of the group. Members were also asked to help with two other activities: the BGHG Newsletter and the content on the website, in particular the comprehensive lecture diary. Any members who could contribute some time to either of these projects would be most welcome. For more information about developments on the website, see the separate article in the News section below. A Study Tour of gardens in Cumbria in May 2023, led by Sandra Pullen, is also planned.

The financial report showed that the overall reserves had increased this year with income gained from membership renewals, the Study Lecture Series and the annual Winter Lecture. The Membership Secretary reported that there were 178 members and she thanked the membership for their loyalty in a year of such reduced activities. The annual membership fee remains at £10.

The Committee for 2022 was elected. Sandra Pullen was welcomed as a new member and the following were re-elected: Carmela Bromhead-Jones, Ruth Brownlow, Sue Coulbeck, Barbara Deason, Caroline Foley, Susan Jellis, Patricia Maitland, Joan Pateman, Margaret Scholes, Pippa Temple and Linda Wade. Margie Hoffnung has become a co-opted member and liaison with the Gardens Trust, and was warmly thanked for her considerable contribution to BGHG work to date.

Following the AGM there was an interesting lecture by Richard Capewell, now retired as chief executive of the charity Perennial, and current co-ordinator of the London Gardens Trust research group.

The AGM Lecture

For the People for Ever by Richard Capewell

Richard Capewell's lecture was based on his research for his dissertation which was part of the Institute of Historical Research MA course in garden and landscape history in 2019. It was entitled 'For the People for Ever' as this was the phrase used in the campaigning material when the Croham Hurst estate in South Croydon was 'saved' for local residents and others to use as a public park.

Richard's research concentrated on the two adjoining boroughs of what are now the London boroughs of Lambeth and Croydon which cut a cake-like slice from central London out to the suburbs. The subject matter was the acquisition of municipal green spaces in the first quarter of the 20th century, that is, soon after Queen Victoria's death and before and straight after the First World War, 23 spaces in all.

The land acquired by the local authorities became a mixture of public gardens, parks, recreation grounds and also memorial spaces following the end of the war. This was a time of transition in the acquisition of municipal open space. Furthermore, a new discipline of town planning was emerging and new opportunities arose for local authorities to acquire loans to spend on open spaces. There was also recognition of the need for sports facilities as well as spaces for rest and relaxation for the general public.



cc-by-sa/2.0 - by John Illingworth - geograph.org.uk/p/4481858
Archbishop's Park, Lambeth in 2015

Of the two boroughs chosen, Lambeth, an inner London borough, expanded southwards, whereas Croydon, having been a medieval market town, expanded sideways as well as southwards. Richard highlighted the tremendous fund-raising efforts of local people in acquiring land, sometimes with self-interests to the fore, with the individuals leading campaigns often living nearby.

Around 80% of the campaigns prior to the war prompted the local authority's subsequent involvement; few were instigated by the local authority itself. One example of the local council acting on its own was a large area of 7.3 hectares (18 acres), Ashburton Park, Addiscombe, purchased in 1924. In other cases, land was donated, or purchased and then given. Examples highlighted were a small area in Brixton donated by Lady Tate, now renamed Windrush Square, and Archbishop's Park adjoining the garden of Lambeth Palace given by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners in 1901.

After the war the balance shifted from public campaigning to more direct local authority action. By now about 50% of the sites were purchased outright by the local authority and 50%, excluding gifts, as a result of local pressure. Local involvement was particularly apparent in those places involving war memorials. This was a distinct change in the way local authorities had worked previously, indicating a move towards the town planning model of the later 20th century.

In size the sites are diverse as is their use both then and now. Some were described as loved and well used whilst others now look a bit forlorn. The point was made that they all remain 'for the people forever' and many of them would not have been acquired but for the energy and commitment of local residents.

Ruth Todd

Winter Lecture

12 November 2021

The BGHG Winter Lecture was given live in person by Dr Brent Elliott, former Librarian then Historian of the Royal Horticultural Society. Dr Elliott has written extensively on the history of gardens, of botany and of botanical art, concentrating on the 19th century. He wrote 'Victorian Gardens' (1986) among many other books and had some influence himself on the return of Victorian garden design to respectability.

The Return of the Victorian Garden

One hundred or so years ago, Victorian gardens, and indeed Victorian art and culture in general, were seen to be the nadir of bad taste. The period, particularly the 1830s to 1890s, was derided as graceless, lacking in refinement and giving 'the jumbled impression of a Victorian what-not' (Clifford, 1962). Today, however, Victorian gardens and their stylistic features have returned to favour and in his lecture, Dr Elliott set out to demonstrate how this reversal of opinion came about.

He started by explaining how garden historians in the 20th century viewed the Victorian garden landscape, characterised by carpet bedding, dark shrubbery, ribbon borders, the ubiquitous monkey puzzle tree and a passion for rustic work everywhere. In some cases, the period was almost ignored or skipped over entirely. Other writers bemoaned the banishment of favoured older plants and hardy perennials to be replaced by the new colourful bedding plants. The prevalent attitude from the 1920s to 1950s was that in the Victorian period plants came first and the garden design was only a means to display them. Some of the views were quite critical. Humphry Repton was censured for his late designs for Ashridge where 'the galaxy of small gardens and concealed points of interest heralded the first step towards the ill-planned confusion of Victorian Gardens' (Dutton, 1937). Frank Clark commented in an article in *Garden History* (I:iii, 1973) that 'these bedding-out schemes did express the traditional floricultural interest of the artisan classes', faint praise indeed. Incidentally, Dr Elliott's extracts from the writings of these garden historians were illustrated by the covers of their books, which themselves were a delightful display of the book designs of the time.

By the late 1970s though, a slight breath of change could be detected. A more respectful approach to Victorian design was appearing in garden writing. An example of the reviving interest was seen at Kew in the planting of the beds in front of the Palm House with subtropical foliage planting fashionable a hundred years ago. Graham Stuart Thomas, garden adviser to the National Trust, was also influential. He recommended that Peckover House, Cambridgeshire, a Victorian property, be given a Victorian garden. In 1971 his assistant John Sales created a ribbon border there, the first neo-Victorian garden in the 20th century. The tide was turning and more examples followed. Significant was the big exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1979 on *The Garden*, a



Carpet Bedding, Waddesdon Manor 2012

Photo: Joan Pateman

celebration of 1000 years of British gardening. This had a section on Victorian gardening, both plants and garden design, the display of garden plans curated by Dr Elliott. By 1984 there was a Victorian-style garden at the Chelsea Flower Show to celebrate the centennial of the *Amateur Gardening* magazine. In 1986 Dr Elliott's book *Victorian Gardens* was published. Now there was more information available about the period and appreciation of Victorian garden designers was growing. Restorations of major Victorian gardens followed: Audley End in 1989, and Biddulph Grange and Waddesdon Manor in the 1990s. In 1987, following

the great storm, more funding became available for restorations, for example at Cliveden and Hughenden, Buckinghamshire; Trentham in Staffordshire and Cragside, Northumberland.

Most of the lecture centred on gardens of country houses but the same pattern applied to cemeteries and municipal parks: first criticism, then acceptance followed by restoration. By the end of the 20th century the stigma of Victorianism had passed away.

Joan Pateman

Dalston Eastern Curve Garden

Have you heard of the Dalston Eastern Curve Garden? It sits across the road from Dalston Junction London Overground station, next to Ray Walker's Hackney Carnival Peace Mural. Maybe Christian Nagel's foam mushroom above the entrance is inviting you to follow the bark chip path, past the colourful Rainbow House glasshouse, through the silver birches, cherry, hazel and hawthorn, past the drinkers and diners, the flower beds, children's play area and stage, to the area currently being transformed into a new kitchen garden at the far end. There, very soon, will be espalier fruit trees, food-growing beds, outdoor classroom and children's learning hub with nature library. Next to the entrance Pavilion stands 'The Pineapple House' greenhouse, the name inspired by Hackney's Loddiges Botanic Nursery, which was internationally renowned in the 18th and 19th centuries for the 'largest hothouse in the world.'

The garden is built on a railway line that closed in 1944. The tracks were taken up in 1965 and a shopping centre was built on the redundant coal depot which had become a scrap yard. A paved, shop-lined boulevard had been suggested by Hackney council as part of its retail-led regeneration, but instead a linear park was designed by J&L Gibbons and the company Muf architecture/art and opened in 2010. The garden's progress has been far from linear, but is now back on an even keel.



Photo: Sally Williams

In 2017, after this 0.2-hectare (0.5 acre) patch of derelict land had been transformed into a green oasis, in an area better known for its nightclubs and Turkish restaurants, Hackney Council threatened to revert to the original 'paved boulevard' plan. A public campaign and thousands of individual emails saved the garden then. When the pandemic lockdown led to loss of income, a crowdfunding appeal was launched to save the garden for a second time, raising £25,000 on the first day, and reaching the £100,000 target in 2021, echoing the local residents' commitment to campaigns for their parks in the early 20th century noted in the article on the BGHG AGM lecture (page 1).

Dalston Eastern Curve Garden emerged from community demand for green space in an area where few people have gardens. It has been managed as a social enterprise since 2012 by local residents Marie Murray and Brian Cumming, who were part of the original team. There are year-round free community events, an educational programme for local primary schools and a successful gardening volunteering programme.

The garden is a popular meeting place, but most of all the Dalston Eastern Curve Garden is a beautiful, unexpected inner-city paradise.

Mary Sewell

Biodiversity Heritage Library: a wonderful resource for garden historians

Lack of access to the many books and journals on natural history and biodiversity, old and new, that are scattered across the libraries of the world represents a serious obstacle to efficient research. In 2003, discussions started with a view to bringing this global collective knowledge together and making it more freely available. The outcome was the foundation in 2006 of the Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL), whose aim is to encourage national and relevant specialist libraries to digitise their valuable collections and contribute them to a collaborative online platform. BHL is based in Washington DC, USA and works with numerous affiliates and partners worldwide including the Natural History Museum in London and the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew.

BHL launched its website (www.biodiversitylibrary.org) in 2007 with just 300 titles. It is now the largest library of its kind and currently stores thousands of volumes – with a staggering 60 million pages – dating from the 15th to the 21st centuries. It has started adding field notes, notebooks and correspondence to its collection and also has a parallel site (www.flickr.com/photos/61021753@N02/) offering access to more than 300,000 photographs. Many of the publications that are out of copyright are available to download easily without charge (public domain content) for personal use, research or teaching.

Here are just a few examples of the many treasures you can find on the site.

- Gerard's famous *Herball* from 1597, www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/178339#page/11/mode/1up
- A 1728 book titled *New Principles of Gardening* by Batty Langley, an early English garden designer from Twickenham, www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/113617#page/1/mode/1up
- Mark Catesby's 1729 *Natural History of California* with beautiful drawings of the flora and fauna he found there, www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/297810#page/11/mode/1up. A 1771 printing of this beautiful book is at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/218060#page/1/mode/1up>
- Humphry Repton's 1806 book on his designs for the Brighton Pavilion gardens which never saw the light of day because John Nash won the contract, <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/188278#page/9/mode/1up>
- Volumes of *Gardener's Chronicle*, including the very first volume, the British horticultural weekly founded by Paxton, Wentworth Dilke and Lindley in 1841 and still going strong as part of *Horticultural Week*, <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/95187#page/1/mode/1up>

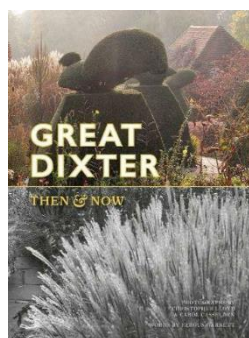
It can take a while to work out how best to navigate the collection. So a good place to start is the FAQ section which provides guidance on how to search for and download material. It's certainly worth the effort to be able to read these fascinating publications page by original page in the comfort of your own home!

Sheila Poole

Book Review

GREAT DIXTER – then & now by Fergus Garrett

Photographs by Christopher Lloyd and Carol Casselden, Pimpernel Press 2021



For those who expressed surprise at the changes they noticed at Great Dixter, East Sussex during last year's BGHG visit, here is the book that provides the answers. It lays out the history, area by area, of the garden, recording a steady evolution from its inception by Sir Edwin Lutyens in 1910 with his fine Arts and Crafts framework. More structure was added by Christopher Lloyd's father, Nathaniel, who planted the great yew hedges as well as the Topiary Garden – still an instantly recognisable feature. It was Daisy, Christopher Lloyd's mother, who collected wild orchids from Dixter Woods, inspiring her youngest son to create together with her the enchanting Front Meadow, and who softened the architectural lines of the garden with her flowing planting.

The result was a gift setting for Christopher Lloyd (1921–2006), famously allowing him to make his mark as both icon and iconoclast in the late 20th century. Already universally renowned for scorning perceived 'good taste' in his column in *Country Life*, probably his most remembered shock planting at Great Dixter was the uprooting of the Rose Garden and the planting out of banana trees with cannas and dahlias in scorching tropical colours.

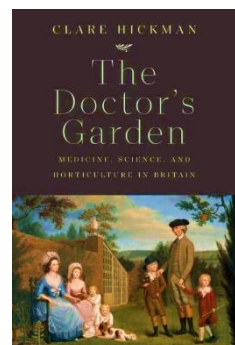
The spur to compose the book in 2021 was the completion of the digitalisation of some 4000 transparencies of the gardens left by Christopher Lloyd. The book is mostly comprised of his pictures (many not seen before) combined with early family photos and photos of the gardens today by the award-winning photographer Carol Casselden. The accompanying text by Fergus Garrett, former head gardener and now Chief Executive of the Great Dixter Charitable Trust, is illuminating. Percolating through all his facts and figures is his clear commitment to Christopher Lloyd's textbook excellence in garden maintenance and to his uncompromising legacy as a plantsman.

Great Dixter remains a dynamic place of learning with a fearless and highly educated approach to planting. An example is the Solar Garden by the front door, where the bedding is changed three times a year from plants grown from seed or cuttings propagated on site, with the added challenge that this must be done without repetition.

Caroline Foley

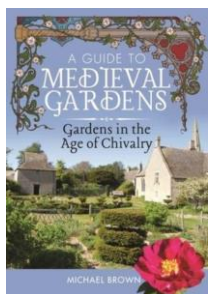
New Books

The Doctor's Garden: Medicine, Science and Horticulture in Britain by Clare Hickman, Yale University Press 2022



This is a richly illustrated exploration of how late Georgian gardens associated with medical practitioners advanced science, education and agricultural experimentation. As Britain grew into an ever-expanding empire during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, new and exotic botanical specimens began to arrive within the nation's public and private spaces. Gardens became sites not just of leisure, sport and aesthetic enjoyment, but also of scientific inquiry and knowledge dissemination. Medical practitioners used their botanical training to capitalise on the growing fashion for botanical collecting and agricultural experimentation in institutional, semi-public and private gardens across Britain. This book highlights the role of these medical practitioners in the changing use of gardens in the late Georgian period.

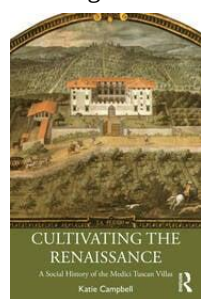
A Guide to Medieval Gardens: Gardens in the Age of Chivalry by Michael Brown, White Owl



2022

Medieval gardens usually rate very few pages in the garden history books. The general perception is still of small gardens in the corner of a castle. Recent research has shown that the gardens were larger than we previously believed. This book contains information and pictures that have not been generally available before, including the theory and practice of medieval horticulture. It will be of interest to those who know little about medieval gardens and to those with more knowledge. It also includes some of the vast amount of research that the author carried out to create the medieval gardens at Prebendal Manor, Nassington, Northamptonshire.

Cultivating the Renaissance: A Social History of the Medici Tuscan Villas by Katie Campbell, Routledge 2022



By exploring the evolution of the Medici family's villas this book charts the shifting politics, philosophy and aesthetics of the age and chronicles the rise of an extraordinary family from obscure farmers to European royalty. From the 14th to the 18th century, the Medici family dominated European life. While promoting both arts and sciences, the Medici helped create a new style of architecture, present a new idea of villa life and promote the novel idea of living in harmony with nature. Used variously for pleasure and sports, scholarly and amorous liaisons, commercial enterprise and botanical experimentation, their villas both expressed and influenced contemporary ideas on politics, philosophy, art and design. Through a chronological approach this book reveals how the villas were used, their reception by contemporary commentators and their current state five centuries after they were first built.

In Memory

We are sad to announce the death of two members in the past year, namely Enid Cassin and Christopher Howard, both long-standing supporters of BGHG.

News

BGHG Website

Members will already know about the new BGHG website, <https://birkbeckgardenhistory.org.uk>, which was demonstrated at the November lecture. One of its new features is better support for members, with their own area for news and events and the ability to update their information and renew membership. This feature went live in January 2022 although not quite as smoothly as planned for which we apologise. Unfortunately, members received two messages about their membership without prior warning and the messages themselves were not well worded. In spite of the initial hitches, several members found they were able to log on and renew their membership, paying by credit card. We are grateful to members for their support and understanding about any difficulties they encountered.

Work is continuing on the development of the website and, in particular, on streamlining the way the members' area works. In due course it is planned that members will be able to book places on trips using the website and Eventbrite. The website already contains much additional content, such as copies of the newsletter and annual reports. If you have any questions or comments about the website, please email bghginfo@gmail.com or use the Contact Us form on the website if possible.

BGHG Anniversary Party

This year BGHG celebrates its twentieth year and we are planning a birthday party to mark the event. Celebrations will take place in the early evening on Thursday 23 June 2022 at the British Medical Association in Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9JP – an opportunity to gather with BGHG friends and enjoy the BMA's delightful courtyard garden. An announcement will be sent to all members in due course; do put the date in your diary now.

RHS Lindley Library New Archive

The Library has purchased and made available a new archive containing material about Robert Asher (1865-1958), gardener and florist. The papers track Asher's career from journeyman in 1883 to foreman in 1890 and head gardener in 1895, and provide evidence of how employment was sought and obtained in the gardening profession at the time. One of Asher's journals for January to April 1897 is included which describes the work undertaken in the garden at Collett House, Ware. Some letters give information about other gardens including Brougham Hall, Penrith, Cumbria and Quendon Hall, Newport, Essex. By 1911 Asher had returned to Bradford on Avon, and thereafter his occupation is described as jobbing gardener, florist, nurseryman, seedsman, and in 1939, master florist. There is a full description of the archive and the individual papers on the Archive Hub; see <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/4553224e-701f-3755-9354-1888abf05239>. The papers can be consulted at the Lindley Library.

Events

BGHG Programme 2022

24 February	AGM and Lecture
19 April	Spring Lecture online
22 April	Restoration House and the gardens of Rochester, Kent
10 May	Westonbirt Arboretum and Westonbirt Gardens, Glos.
14 June	Penshurst Place and Broadview Gardens, Kent
23 June	20th Anniversary Party
20 July	Sussex Prairie Garden and Borde Hill Garden, West Sussex
August	Denmans and West Dean Gardens, West Sussex
6 September	Wimpole Hall Study Visit, Cambridgeshire
October	Aga Khan Centre and Jellicoe Gardens, Kings Cross and SOAS Japanese Garden, London
November	Winter Lecture

16–18 May 2023 Gardens in Cumbria Study Tour

Surrey Gardens Trust Lectures

Thursday 7 April, 6.00 pm online *Water Features in Parks and Gardens and the Impact of Climate Change*, Jo Barnes.

Thursday 5 May, 7.00 pm *Borde Hill – a plant hunter's paradise*, Vanessa Berridge. Ashted Peace Memorial Hall, Ashted, Kent KT21 2BE, surreygardenstrust.org.uk/events-overview

RHS Exhibition

9–29 April *Botanical Art and Photography Show* <https://saatchigallery.com/exhibition/rhs2022>

Garden Museum Lecture

Tuesday 12 April, 7.00 pm *Parallel Lives: exploring the garden designs of John Codrington and Humphrey Waterfield*, Jean Cornell. 5 Lambeth Palace Road, London SE1 7LB, Tel: 020 7401 8865, Email: info@gardenmuseum.org.uk, www.gardenmuseum.org.uk/events

Oxfordshire Gardens Trust Lecture online

Thursday 21 April, 6.00 pm *From Planting Plans to Power Stations: The Landscape Institute Archive*, Annabel Downs. Email: events@ogt.org.uk, <https://ogtevents.eventcube.io/>

Manchester Continuing Education Network MANCENT Day School online

Saturday 23 April, 11.00 am–4.00 pm *Dessau: The Garden Principality*, Birgitta Hoffmann. Email: latinteacher@btinternet.com, https://mancent.org.uk/?page_id=4382

Warwickshire Gardens Trust Lecture online Wednesday 27 April, 5.00 pm

John C. Loudon and his wife Jane Webb, an amazing Victorian double act, Simon Gulliver. Email: info@warwickshiregardenstrust.org.uk, <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/190284856127>

Wanstead Park in context collection online

Thursday 28 April 7.30–9.00 pm, *Wanstead Park: three centuries of archaeological exploration*, <https://eventbrite.co.uk/cc/wanstead-park-in-context-87089>

Cambridge University Botanic Garden Lecture Thursday 28 April, 6.30 pm online

Humphry Repton & the Regency garden, Laura Mayer. Email: education@botanic.cam.ac.uk, <https://www.botanic.cam.ac.uk/education-learning/courses>

Chelsea Physic Garden Talk

Friday 13 May 2.00–4.30 pm *Objects and Stories of Significance to the Garden*, Letta Jones. 66 Royal Hospital Road, London SW3 4HS. Email: enquiries@chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk, Tel: 020 7352 5646, <https://www.chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk/visit/whats-on/#events>

Hertfordshire Gardens Trust Course online

Thursdays 10.00 am 19 and 26 May, 9 and 16 June, *Mid century modern gardens and sites*, Kate Harwood and Alison Moller. Email: info@hertsgardenstrust.org.uk, <https://hertsgardenstrust.org.uk/events/>

Georgian Group Lecture online

Tuesday 24 May, 6.30 pm *The Doctor's Garden*, Clare Hickman. Email: office@georgiangroup.org.uk, <https://georgiangroup.org.uk/events-2/>

Institute of Historical Research Seminars

Thursdays 6.00 pm online Summer Term 2022
Theme: New Research - works in progress and a Study Visit. Dates: 5 and 19 May, 16 and 30 June. Enquiries: gardenhistory.ihr@gmail.com
The programme will be available on www.history.ac.uk/seminars/history-gardens-and-landscapes

City Lit Courses

Saturday 18 June and Sunday 26 June 10.30 am–4.30 pm, *Great London Gardens*, Letta Jones.
Saturday 23 July 10.30 am–4.30 pm, *City of London Gardens*, Letta Jones. 10 Keeley Street, London WC2B 4BA, Tel: 020 7831 7831, Email: humanities@citylit.ac.uk, www.citylit.ac.uk

Editor: Joan Pateman,

Email: joan.pateman@zen.co.uk;

Assistant Editors: Sheila Poole, Caroline Foley