

Sussex Gardens Trust

Encouraging the protection, conservation and evolution of the local garden heritage

Newsletter No. 80 Autumn 2021

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Summer planting in the Park House Sensory Garden at Horsham Park. Photo © Hannah Neale

From the Editor

After many months of sharing lockdown with Jekyll it comes as a refreshing alternative to be once again editing the autumn issue of the Newsletter.

It was a welcome change also to be resuming our garden visits and the August tour of Michelham Priory with head gardener, James Neal, is featured in this edition. Having met James through our virtual event back in the spring we could now enjoy hearing in real life, from such a knowledgeable guide, the history of this significant medieval garden. We have been so fortunate this year to have had good weather for all our visits – the final SGT visit at the very modernist Denmans garden in September began in drizzle but luckily afternoon sun made an appearance for us. These events are particularly enjoyed by our members and the Events Committee is to be commended for their planning and co-ordination. Organising the visits for 2022 is under way and we are keen to know of gardens that we may not have visited before. If you can recommend a garden in Sussex,

or close to the border, which you think would appeal to our members, perhaps because of its history or interesting planting, do please get in touch with us.

Events planning is only one part of the Trust's work. Another significant role of the Trust is to make available small grants which support projects in the designed landscape. SGT Council members were invited by the Friends of Horsham Park in August to visit the Sensory Garden which SGT is currently supporting with a grant for new planting and Sally Sanderson, their Chair, gave us a fascinating tour of the garden and of the park, explaining its history and the challenges that these green open spaces face. The garden celebrates its thirtieth anniversary this year and Sally describes its early days and the new developments in an article for this newsletter. The Council has been meeting virtually since the beginning of the lockdown, but this was the first time that we saw each other in person again. As there have been newcomers lately, we thought an introduction to the team might be timely, which you can see on page 3.

It is admirable just how much writing and research goes on among SGT members. Maggie Weir-Wilson is planning her third book, which will investigate the history of allotments in Horsham, and we are lucky to have an insight into her initial findings. Melissa Hay has been looking into the possibility of work by Humphry Repton at Knepp and her research features on page 9.

This will be the last edition of the SGT Newsletter but, although it is farewell to a tradition that started twenty-five years ago with very fine editors during that time, it is not the end of our writing and publishing. We are setting out on exciting new ventures: a more accessible website and, for the first time, a journal showcasing longer pieces of garden history research.

I would like to sincerely thank all of you who have contributed features over the last four years of my editorship. I have thoroughly enjoyed putting each issue together, but it would not have happened without you!

Sally Ingram

From the Chair

In these strange times it was with both pleasure and apprehension that I assumed the chair from Marcus Batty. SGT is greatly indebted to Marcus for taking the helm over the previous three years and for the splendid Coronavirus bulletins that kept us informed and entertained during the worst months of the Covid-19 pandemic. With the help of Jim Stockwell, I submitted SGT's nomination for the Gardens Trust Volunteer of the Year and what a great result when the award went to Marcus. This award not only gave recognition to all his work during the last year, but also raised the profile of our Trust.

I have attended a number of 'meet ups' for chairs of county gardens trusts arranged online by the Gardens Trust. The first was to find out how CGTs were coping with the constraints of the pandemic and I am pleased to report that we were the first Trust to organise its own online programme of lectures. Recently, I took part in a similar event online. Several CGTs had been more active, but we continue to match the best in what we offer to our members. Interestingly, a number of CGTs have a large pool of volunteers involved in research and recording, many of whom are not necessarily members. We have a comparable small, but stalwart, group, but I was impressed by how much more we might achieve if we had more volunteers; please consider getting involved with our research and recording group.

Excellent though the plethora of online lectures and courses are, it was a treat to be able to return to actual garden visits. We were able to welcome some new members and it provided a great opportunity for me to chat to members that I knew only by sight. This brings me to the editor's suggestion that members would be interested in the background of their new SGT chair. I had never before stopped to consider how skills developed during my working life have been helpful in voluntary roles in retirement. I qualified as a dentist and worked in NHS general practice for forty years. However, after the first ten years I divided my time between clinical practice and various other roles in dentistry. Becoming involved in national dental politics was an eye-opener but very rewarding. As a result of this I was recruited to

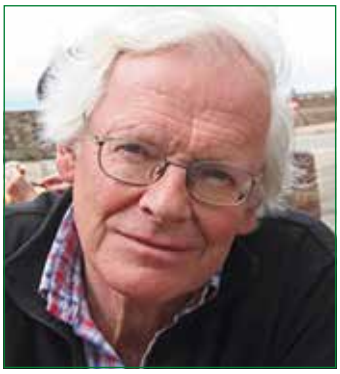
oversee the development and management of dental general practice postgraduate training in England and Wales. A perk of this position was the opportunity to visit 10 Downing Street and meet two of our previous Prime Ministers! When reorganisation brought my post to an end after seven years, I started work for one of the largest providers of indemnity to doctors and dentists, a job that I continued for some time after retiring from clinical practice. I suppose that dentistry is a somewhat niche pursuit and not appealing to most, but I thoroughly enjoyed my working life and am grateful now for all that experience in chairing meetings and managing people.

Exciting times are ahead for SGT as we start planning for a new website, a journal and other ways of engaging with existing members and attracting new ones. Thank you to all those members who have willingly offered their time in working behind the scenes to keep up the high standard of all SGT activities, and thank you all for the privilege of acting as your chair.

Penelope Vasey MBE

SGT Council Members: meet the team

Marcus Batty



Marcus spent his working life as a corporate tax specialist. Retiring early, he took a Master's degree in Landscape Archaeology at Bristol. Moving to Sussex in 2010, he was persuaded on to Council and became treasurer in 2012. Retiring from that post in 2017, he was elected chair in 2018, a role he filled until 2021. With a garden designer and historian for a wife, it was natural that he became interested in garden history. Initiating the South Coast project, he has been side-tracked over the last year and a half by the production of the Coronavirus Bulletin, now in its 20th edition.



Pat Dauncey

After training as an engineer and undertaking a doctorate in metallurgy at Sussex University, Pat had an extensive career in adult and further education working in a variety of settings. Her love of education and gardening led her to study horticulture with the RHS, followed by obtaining garden history qualifications from Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh and subsequently at the Institute of Historical Research, London. She joined SGT in 2013 and has been on Council since 2017, taking a variety of roles including treasurer, research and recording, events administration and communications/website development.

Virginia Hinze



Virginia Hinze is a landscape architect with a qualification in historic designed landscape conservation. Her work for East Sussex County Council included many designed landscape restoration projects. Then, as South-East regional landscape architect for English Heritage (now Historic England), she undertook planning casework and mentoring and monitoring Heritage Lottery Fund grants for public park restoration schemes. Subsequent work as a consultant included designing and delivering training courses to CGTs (through the former Association of Garden Trusts, now the Gardens Trust) including Sussex GT. A founder member of Sussex GT, she currently advises on research and recording practice and has just completed a six-year term as a Board member and co-chair of the events and education committee of the Gardens Trust.



Jenny Howard

Jenny joined Sussex Gardens Trust in the early summer of 2016 after a friend had invited her to an SGT meeting. Her love of gardens and gardening came from her mother who, as far back as she can remember, spent all her spare time in the garden or greenhouse. Jenny's current garden is the most challenging yet as she lives on Shoreham Beach and, after seven years, she still has not quite mastered the conditions. Jenny agreed to become treasurer early in 2020, but because of Covid lockdowns the formal handover had to be postponed. She formally took over the role in January of this year.

Sally Ingram



Following a long career in teaching and as a consultant for the local education authority, Sally moved to Sussex from Surrey, and followed up her love of gardens by studying for a Master's degree in Garden History at Birkbeck. Her special interest is in twentieth century garden design and she has researched and written about post-war memorial landscapes. Sally joined SGT in 2010, becoming a member of the research group and then soon afterwards joining the Council, where she has served as secretary and events co-ordinator. For the last four years she has been editor of the SGT newsletter and is a member of the communications planning group.



Julie O-Hara

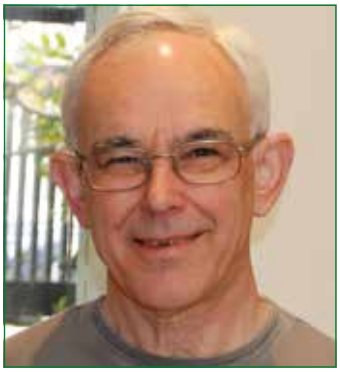
Julie joined SGT as long ago as 1997 and in 1999, having retired from a career in advisory work, she was elected to serve on Council, taking the role of secretary. As a long-term member of organisations such as The Folly Fellowship, a group founded to protect and conserve unusual structures such as follies, her main interest lies in garden buildings and grottoes. Julie is also a member of the SGT Conservation Group.

Jennie Starr



Jennie took a degree in Biological Sciences at the University of Sussex and was interested in a career in horticulture. However, her other passion was healthcare, particularly public health, and she worked for many years in the NHS as a dietitian, a manager and director in community services in East Sussex. On retiring she undertook horticultural training and had a complete change working as a gardener for a while. She is opening her garden with a neighbour for the National Garden Scheme in 2022. Jennie joined SGT about fifteen years ago whilst she was taking a diploma in garden history. She has held several positions on Council including secretary, events' organiser, vice-chair and chair and currently supports research work in the Trust.

Jim Stockwell



After studying Natural Sciences and Chemistry at Cambridge and UCL, Jim changed tack to pursue a career in finance and business consultancy. However, since childhood his great passion has been gardening and he opens his garden each year under the National Garden Scheme. In 2007, as he approached retirement, he joined SGT. Very soon he became a member of Council and has taken on numerous roles including events co-ordinator, e-mail updates, website development and management, vice-chair, and chair (2014-2018). Currently he is co-chair of our Conservation Committee.

SGT Visit to Michelham Priory, 12 August 2021

By Jennie Starr

This was the third of our actual visits this year and it gave us the opportunity to enjoy the landscape after the 'virtual tour' that had been organised in the spring. Once again we were in the capable hands of the head gardener, James Neal. The Priory dates back to 1229 when it was founded by Augustinian canons. It was seized in 1537 under Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries, initially passing to Thomas Cromwell prior to his demise in 1540, but over the following centuries it was either owned, or leased, as a farm and a private dwelling. The Priory was greatly restored in the twentieth century after a devastating fire in 1927. In the Second World War the house was used as a base for Canadian troops between 1941 and 1942 and then became the East Sussex headquarters of the Auxiliary Territorial Service. In 1958 Michelham Priory was bought by Mrs R.H. Hotblack in order to preserve it for posterity. Together with an endowment from Kenneth, Earl of Inchcape, as a memorial to his friend John Fletcher Boughey killed in World War II, Mrs Hotblack gave the property to the Sussex Archaeological Society in 1959.

Today the Priory is situated in an oasis of peace and calm in the Sussex countryside near the bustle of Polegate and Hailsham. The entire site is a thirteen acre Scheduled Ancient Monument and Site of Nature Conservation Interest. The Priory and gardens cover approximately seven acres and are surrounded by the longest continual medieval moat in England. The moat, fed by the river Cuckmere, was created in 1380 about the same time as the Gate House to help protect the Priory from French pirates. It was dug by hand originally to a depth of twelve feet. Today it is only about a foot deep and dries up in summer. Ultimately, in liaison with the Environmental Agency, the aim is to clear the vegetation and silt that has built up over time but this will be a very costly process.



A view across the medieval moat at Michelham Priory



A corner of the Cloister Garden

The gardens are managed by James Neal, and about twenty-five volunteers, to reflect the history of the site whilst integrating new ideas to benefit visitors to the garden and the environment.

Entering through the Gate House the vista opens to an extensive lawn with ancient trees including Monterey Pines, which are approximately one hundred and thirty years old.

The Cloister Garden adjacent to the north side of the Priory is recreated upon the foundation of the original garden and features elements of a medieval garden with raised beds planted for medicinal and edible produce, a vine covered walkway, a well and lawns planted with bulbs, aiming to reproduce a 'Floral Mede' such as those depicted in medieval manuscripts and tapestries. On our visit planting in the raised beds included tansy, which was used as an insecticide and a preservative for meat, calendula used as a medicine, rosemary and soapwort, *Saponaria officinalis*. We were told that conservators still use

soapwort mixed with water to make a mixture used for cleaning tapestries.

Leaving the Cloister Garden and walking to the orchard we could see the outline of the medieval church that had been on the Priory site, which had been excavated in the 1950s.

The orchard is planted in the medieval style with the fruit trees in lines. These are mostly apples, replanted after the storm of 1987. The varieties are largely unknown but the Priory has received a donation to fund their identification. Surrounding the fruit trees there is a mix of medlars, sweet chestnut, plum, mulberry and other specimen trees and shrubs. At the end of the orchard is a very elaborate 'bug hotel' built by the garden volunteers to encourage wildlife.

The current vegetable garden is 'walled' by yew hedges with ornamental borders around the outside of the vegetable beds. There are four geometric square beds to enable crop rotation and companion planting is used to help promote plant health. Seasonal produce is used in the café throughout the year. At the centre of this garden is a domed pergola covered in a Japanese variety of wisteria which has purple and white blooms. It is highly fragrant and thought to be sixty to eighty years old. On either side of the wisteria are espaliered apple trees. The southern hotter end of the garden includes crinum lilies, banana plants, a *Catalpa bignonioides*, *Sambucus racemosa* and a *Paulownia tomentosa* (foxglove tree) which is cut back annually.



The 'bug hotel' created by volunteers



The layered branches of the ancient yew tree

Outside of the vegetable garden one of the most stunning trees is an ancient yew which has layered its branches and carbon dating shows it to be at least a thousand years old which predates the building of the Priory.

The water garden was planted in 1959 by Wallace and Barr, now De Jager bulbs. Plants include Indian rhubarb, skunk cabbage, gunnera and giant buttleburr. De Jager have been supportive to the Priory and made a generous donation of bulbs now planted throughout the site.

Our final stop was the Physic Garden on the south lawn. This was created in 1981 by the forerunner of Sussex Gardens Trust and designed by Virginia Hinze. It reflects the monastic origins of the site using a range of heritage and heirloom varieties of herbs that would have been maintained by the infirmary.

We thanked James who was very generous with his time and gave us an entertaining and informative tour of this delightful garden.

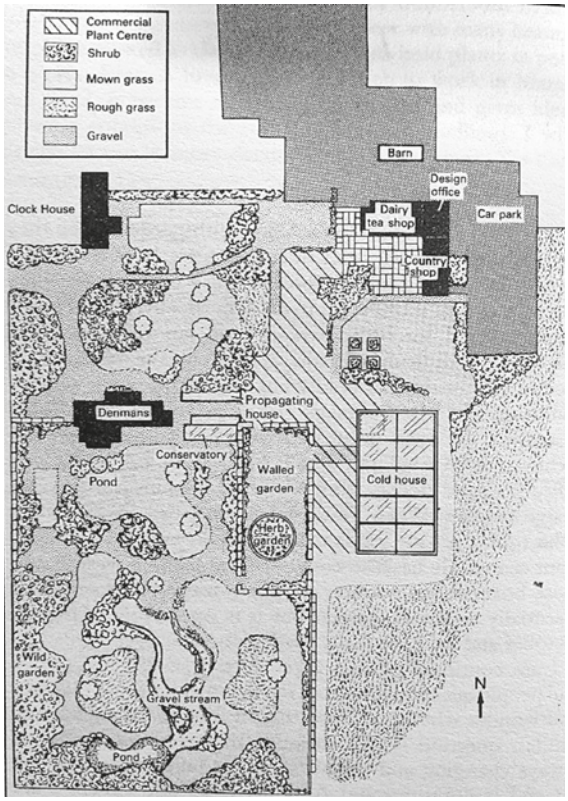
All photos © Sally Ingram

SGT Visit to Denmans Garden, John Brookes' home and studio, 14 September 2021

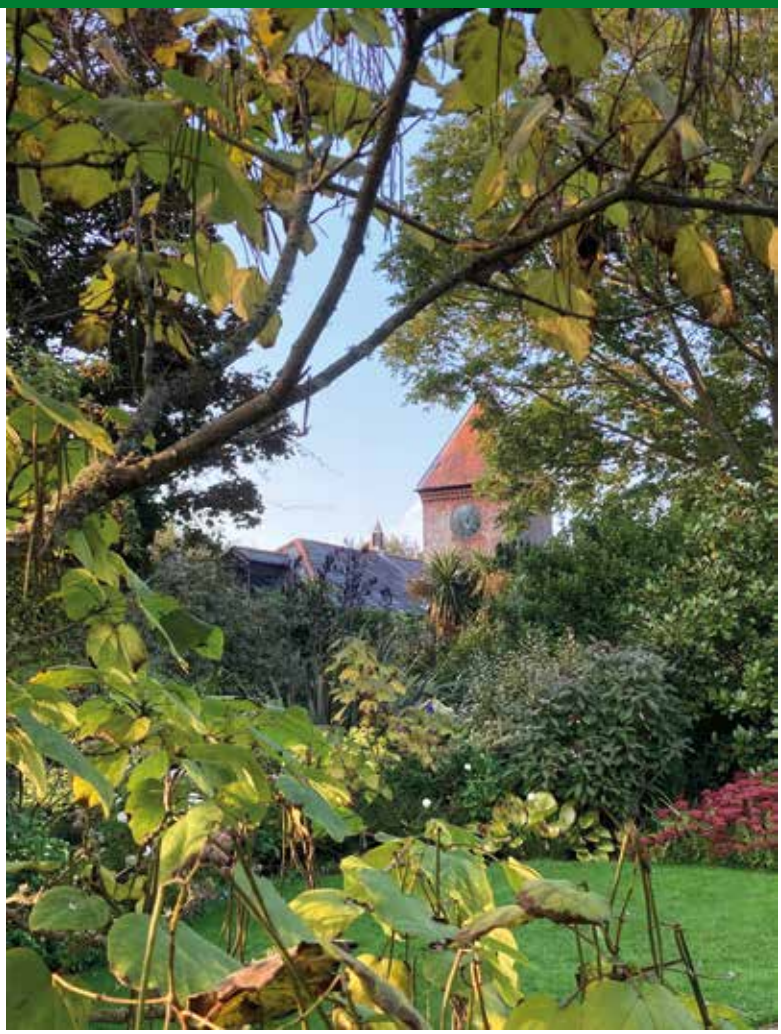
By Susi Batty

Well, it happened! A very early SGT visit to Denmans, John Brookes' famous home and design studio, was scuppered by the financial and management crisis several years ago when the garden closed. Horrified garden organisations campaigned to save this 'Modernist' garden and Gwendolyn van Paasschen, a designer who had worked with John, emerged as the passionate driving force behind the rescue of the garden and the creation of the John Brookes-Denmans Foundation. Gwendolyn is resident at Denmans now and in her hands the future of the garden seems assured.

Our more recent plans to visit the garden began back in January, 2020, but this time we were sabotaged by COVID-19, and so we were all very excited when a date in September 2021 was confirmed, albeit with a smaller numbers cap and restricted catering. The Denmans team worked very hard to make our afternoon successful and we began with a relaxed talk from Gwendolyn, who explained the background to the garden.



Plan of Denmans Garden, from 'Glorious Disarray', drawn by Ann Swarbrick



The clock tower at Denmans. Photo © Sally Ingram

Market gardeners Joyce and Hugh Robinson bought the dilapidated Westergate Estate near Arundel in 1946, but kept only part of the land, moving into the former gardener's cottage in the centre of the garden and renaming it 'Denmans' after the Honourable Richard Denman who owned the estate in the late nineteenth century. Joyce was an extremely knowledgeable horticulturist and Gwendolyn emphasised just how pioneering her work was. Inspired by her Mediterranean travels, she created a garden that was ahead of its time: 'Glorious Disarray' (the title of Joyce's book). Post-war gravel gardens? '70s native planting and dry river beds? Beth Chatto eat your heart out. It was not until 1979 that John Brookes came to Denmans. He converted the Clock House, lived and worked alongside Joyce in the garden, and set up his design school. Gradually 'the man who made the modern garden' began to take a more pro-active role there, using the space almost as a sketch book to test his ideas on planting and design.

Fully briefed by Gwendolyn and armed with a plan (although surprisingly, given that Denmans was his home





Denmans Garden. Photos above © Susi Batty. Photo below © Sally Ingram

for almost 40 years, John never actually drew a detailed plan of the garden), we set off to explore.

And what a delight awaited us. Overgrown plants have been cut back, beds and paths re-shaped and even – sacrilege – new plants introduced. Gwendolyn and her dedicated team strive to listen first to 'Mrs JR' and then, of course, to John, who revised Joyce's description of the garden to 'controlled disarray'. This is a garden that requires investigation on foot and the curved paths and shaped beds invited us to wander. Successive spaces revealed more and more interesting ideas: amoeba beds curled in the grass and the planting was vibrant. Over-sized box balls and terracotta urns were cleverly placed to create punctuation points. The walled garden felt intense and hot, but the pool, with its pensive statue, created a moment of reflection and the restored glasshouse provided a soporific, secret hideaway.

This is a plantsman's garden but beneath the flora there is a thoughtful layout of curving paths, so subtle that you are almost unaware of them. They suggest but do not dictate, something that arguably makes the garden even more interesting in winter. John Brookes was well-known for his design principles based on the 'grid system' and no doubt he used that here but what registers is curves, not squares. It is a masterpiece and the fact that Denmans is now listed as grade II is a reflection of its quality. SGT supported that recent application and we should be proud that Denmans is one of very few registered post-war gardens.

Inspired by our visit, some of us attended a discussion at Denmans on 9 October to launch a new book on John's work, *How to Design a Garden* (Pimpernel Press, £20). This fascinating collection of hitherto unpublished writing was edited by Gwendolyn who sifted through John's notes, essays and lectures to create it. The discussion between three eminent garden designers, Annie Guilfoyle, Andrew Duff and Cleve West, was chaired by Gwendolyn and listening to them confirmed – if that was necessary – just how influential John Brookes was in twentieth century garden design.



The Case for Knepp Castle: examining the possible involvement of Humphry Repton in the landscape of Knepp Castle

By Melissa Hay

'Knepp Castle has early-19th-century pleasure grounds and park of 144 hectares ... the pleasure grounds, which were possibly designed by Humphry Repton sit within a larger 1400 hectare agricultural landscape formerly a medieval park'. This description, introducing the entry on the Parks & Gardens UK website, was written in June 2000, but by whom? And the suggestion of 'possibly' – what did the writer mean and how was that conclusion reached?

There are not many places where nature has, almost unaided, created a landscape so perfect as that of Knepp Castle. It resembles an idealised page from one of Repton's Red Books with the lawns sweeping down to the lake, the framing trees, the distant view of an ancient ruin, the herd of grazing deer. Surely on visual evidence such as this there must be a case for Repton's involvement, but what is there that might substantiate Repton's hand?

All archival records pertaining to Knepp were lost in a disastrous fire that gutted the house in 1904 and therefore Repton's connection remains entirely speculative, but the object of this essay is to explore that possibility.

Sir Charles Merrick Burrell had inherited the Knepp estate on the death of his father in 1796. The house was designed by the architect John Nash (1752-1835) in the Gothic style between 1806 and 1813,[1] dates which presumably cover concept to completion. With Nash as architect perhaps it was assumed that Repton had a part in the landscape design, but the partnership between Repton and Nash, commenced in 1795, was over by 1800 and, particularly since their parting was said to be acrimonious, it seems unlikely that Nash would have suggested involving Repton in the Knepp estate. However, this may not have been an obstacle to Burrell contacting Repton directly. Certainly, many of the Sussex gentry were consulting Repton during the period that the new house of Knepp was under discussion and built, and it is reasonable to assume that many of them would have been known to the Burrell family.

Sir Charles Merrick Burrell's father, Sir William Burrell, a keen local historian, was the rector of Brightling and it is likely that he knew of Jack Fuller (1757-1834) who was the MP for Sussex from 1801 until 1812 when he gave up politics and his seat was taken by Walter Burrell, the younger brother of Sir Charles Burrell. Jack Fuller employed Repton to make proposals for his Rose Hill estate.[2] Sir William Burrell and Jack Fuller were active patrons of the arts and they each commissioned Hieronymus Grimm to make drawings of their estates.

Among Repton's many clients in Sussex was Charles Abbot of Kidbrooke Park, the Speaker of the House of Commons from 1802 until 1817, and it is possible that he was acquainted with Sir Charles Burrell, who served as MP for New Shoreham from 1806 until his death in 1862. Burrell married Frances Wyndham, the daughter of George O'Brien Wyndham, 3rd Earl of Egremont of Petworth House, and all his female cousins married into the aristocracy. There is no doubt as to the family connections within Sussex society and with its landscaping ambitions which frequently involved Humphry Repton.

But what else? The publication of Repton's *Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* in 1803 and his contributions to the annual *Peacock's Polite Repository* between 1790 and 1811 meant that his concepts were reaching an ever-wider audience. No land-owning gentleman can have been unaware of Repton's ideas and subsequently have been uninfluenced by them.

Was that all it took? At the time Knepp was under construction, Repton's son, George Stanley, was working in Nash's office, preparing drawings for a new house at West Grinstead Park, owned by Sir Charles Burrell's brother, Walter. The two estates of Knepp and West Grinstead were adjacent, only separated by the London to Worthing road. During this period Repton frequently worked closely with both his sons, John Adey and George Stanley, notably on the drawings for the nearby Brighton Pavilion.[3] Walter chose to build his house with stone but Charles Burrell, more frugally, used bricks that could be made on site and timber from his estate. Does this show a difference in attitude to money? Perhaps it was deemed unnecessary to go to the expense of employing Repton to make a Red Book.

Knepp was fortunate in having the existing expansive Knepp Mill Pond within the estate which had been dug in the sixteenth century by the Duke of Norfolk to form a hammer pond, providing water-power for the local iron industry. As a result, there was no need for the expensive and time-consuming work of earth removal and the dam was already in place. There was also the Norman ruin of Old Knepp Castle to serve as a suitable eye-catcher within the estate. Positioning the house with a view over this body of water and towards the ruin was an obvious choice. Indeed, the advantages of the site had been specifically noted in the sale particulars of the estate of 1787 which stated:

> At a proper distance from the Turnpike Road, is an ELEVATED AND BEAUTIFUL SPOT, to build a house upon, and which would command uninterrupted Views over the whole Estate, and the adjacent country [*sic*] of the SOUTH DOWNS.

The estate was bought at auction by Sir Charles Raymond, possibly with the intention of leaving it to his daughter, Sophia Burrell, and her husband, William Burrell. The potential had certainly been recognised by William Burrell, who had commissioned a drawing by Hieronymus Grimm from this vantage point in 1784, showing the view of West Grinstead Church and the picturesque ruin of the old Norman Castle from the position on which the new house was ultimately built. In 1788 Sir Charles Raymond died and the Knepp estate, together with the baronetcy, passed into the Burrell family.

It seems clear, therefore, that the aesthetics of the landscape at Knepp were clearly understood by the family and quite possibly there was already an intention to build a house there. It also provided plenty of opportunity for Repton, or his sons, to have visited the Knepp site should it have been requested.

But there is one factor which might have influenced Charles Burrell against involving Repton. His uncle, Peter Burrell, who lived at Langley Park in Kent, had commissioned Repton in 1790 to make a Red Book for his park and a prospective new house. Could something have happened that soured relationships between Repton and the Burrell family or did they simply decide that they had no need of Repton? Is it possible that Nash advised on the landscape? Certainly, someone made decisions that completely altered the appearance of the Knepp estate in the early years of the nineteenth century.

Prior to the Burrells' ownership of the land, in 1754 a detailed survey had been made by James Crow. This map (Figure 1) shows that the estate was purely agricultural, divided into fields with hedgerow boundaries, and it is reasonable to assume that it had continued as such. But in 1806, right at the point that the site for the new house had been decided and building was due to begin, the Ordnance Surveyor's Draft was made and clearly shows that the field boundaries have been removed on the east side of Knepp Mill Pond, leaving only the standard hedgerow trees (Figure 2).



Figure 1. 1754 Crow survey showing agricultural landscape (section re-drawn from original)



Figure 2. 1806 Ordnance Survey Draft showing hedgerows cleared (section re-drawn from original) leaving only standard trees to provide parkland landscape

The area is surrounded by judicious belts of planting, screening the road and adjacent farms from view. This can only have been undertaken to create a parkland setting for the new house and take best advantage of its picturesque qualities. By the time the house was completed, the same process of hedgerow clearance had taken place on the west side of the pond and a ha-ha had been built, separating the 'dressed ground' around the house from the sward of grassland towards the lake. This area is shown, animated with sheep, in Lady Burrell's watercolour of 1830 (Figure 3).



Figure 3. A view of Knepp Castle, with the lake to the east. A watercolour by Lady Burrell, c.1830. (By kind permission of the Knepp estate)

Perhaps the pleasure ground was also made at this time. The First Edition OS map of 1875 shows informal paths laid out through woodland to the north of the house. Close by, the walled kitchen garden had been built and could have provided a sheltered walk. As Repton wrote, in 1806:

> There are many days in winter, when a warm, dry, but secluded walk, under the shelter of a south wall, would be preferred to the most beautiful but exposed landscape; and in the spring, when on the south border of a walled garden some early flowers and vegetables may cheer the sight, although every plant is elsewhere pinched with the north east winds peculiar to our climate in the months of March and April.[4]

Did the Burrell family follow this suggestion? It is also interesting to speculate as to when Ladies Walk, which takes a path to view the ruin of old Knepp Castle, was made. Although the name does not appear on any extant plans until the OS map of 1875, well after Charles Burrell had died in 1862, it seems most likely that it belongs to the early phase of landscape improvements made to the estate.

However, the map also shows a new plantation of trees on the far side of Castle Lane which, as they grew, would have blocked the view of the ruin from the house. By 1875 neither of Charles Burrell's sons were living at Knepp Castle. Landscape fashions had changed and this indicates that perhaps the estate was now being managed for profit rather than aesthetics.

On balance, although there is nothing to substantiate Repton's direct involvement with the creation of the landscape at Knepp Castle, it remains a vibrant testament to his ideas and influence. With the re-wilding process, begun in 2010 by the current Charles Burrell, the landscape of his forebears has been unexpectedly revived. To visit Knepp Castle today is to visit a magnificent landscape that is as much of the twenty-first century as it is of the Georgian period.

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1 Historic England. https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1000519.

2 Rose Hill Red Book 1806-1807. For further details about Jack Fuller and the commission at Rose Hill see 'Rose Hill: the mansion of a British senator' by Alan and Jennie Starr in *Humphry Repton in Sussex*, SGT publication, 2018.

3 Brighton Pavilion Drawings 1805-1806.

4 Repton, Humphry, *An Enquiry into the Changes in Taste in Landscape Gardening* (London, 1806).

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1806 Ordnance Surveyor's Draft.

1825 Greenwood 'Map of the County of Sussex'.

1875 OS 6-inch map.

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With thanks to Colson Stone for material from their report *Colson & Stone Management Plan for the Park Restoration* (2000).

Allotments in Horsham: my new research project

By Maggie Weir-Wilson

By spring of this year, I had finished my landscape history book on St Leonard's Forest, held the book launch, and was keen to take on my next local history project. I had become aware, whilst researching aspects of Horsham town, that there was very little written about our ten town allotments. It is a generous number for the market town, although all of varying size. For example, Chesworth Allotments is quite large with about 130 full sized plots, one of which is mine, whilst Birds Farm is small with about twenty-five plots, many half size. However, I realised that I knew very little about when exactly the allotments were established, and why they were sited where they were.

By mid-summer I had definitely decided that my next book would be about the town allotments, with lots of pictures, history, stories, and maybe the odd recipe or gardening tip. I wanted this book to be a light read, more a celebration of our allotments with just some basic historical information. I checked to see if there were any similar books from other parts of Sussex and found *Diggers All, a History of Allotments in Worthing* (2019) by Paul Erskine. This is an extremely comprehensive and hugely detailed account of Worthing allotments, full of maps, minutes, histories and a really scholarly work. I was very impressed but felt my book should be simpler, less reliant on detailed records, more on people's experiences.

My priority was to visit as many of the allotments as I could over the summer; research waiting until the winter. Initially, I emailed all the secretaries of the allotment societies asking for stories and memories. There was not a big response. One came back to me with an article on their allotment from a local journal. Social media likewise got one response. I contacted Lynda Cheeseman, the person who had managed the allotments when they were under the control of Horsham District Council. Still working part-time, she was very helpful, inviting me to visit her own allotment site at Birds Farm, off Rushams Road, and arranging a meeting with an older plot holder. This was my first visit. I took notes and several photos. I felt my project had really begun.

I have since made more contacts and booked up additional visits so that currently I am on track to have visited all the sites before autumn really kicks in. At this point I feel unsure as to how much actual documentation for the early years has survived. Much was given over to each of the Allotment Societies although some information will be at the Records Office in Chichester, and of course there are always newspaper archives for those plant shows and best allotment awards.

I think this will be an enjoyable project, although it will take time. Being an allotment holder myself, it is certainly fun looking at all the different sites and plots. I can look at what people are growing, how they manage their plots, and of course I can meet and talk to other growers. Whether I can find all the relevant records is another matter, and a task for winter.



Birds Farm Allotments, my first allotment visit. Photo © Maggie Weir-Wilson

Park House Sensory Garden, Horsham Park
The garden with a visionary story

Within the grounds of Horsham Park is a small sensory garden created thirty years ago. The backdrop is the Georgian Grade II* Park House and adjacent historical buildings. It is a very popular garden, providing an oasis of calm and beauty in the heart of the town.

To celebrate the garden's 30th anniversary the Friends of Horsham Park sought a grant of £1,500 to repair the damaged sundial, a central feature. The renovation grew into a much larger project called 'Sense the Change' which Sussex Gardens Trust is supporting through their small grants fund. In August this year SGT council members enjoyed a tour of the garden with **Sally Sanderson, Chair of the Friends**, and in this article Sally explains how the restoration is developing the inspiration of the original garden.



Panoramic view of the garden in 2021

In 1990-91 a former rose garden, which had been vandalised, was transformed into a new garden. As the brochure for the formal opening explained:

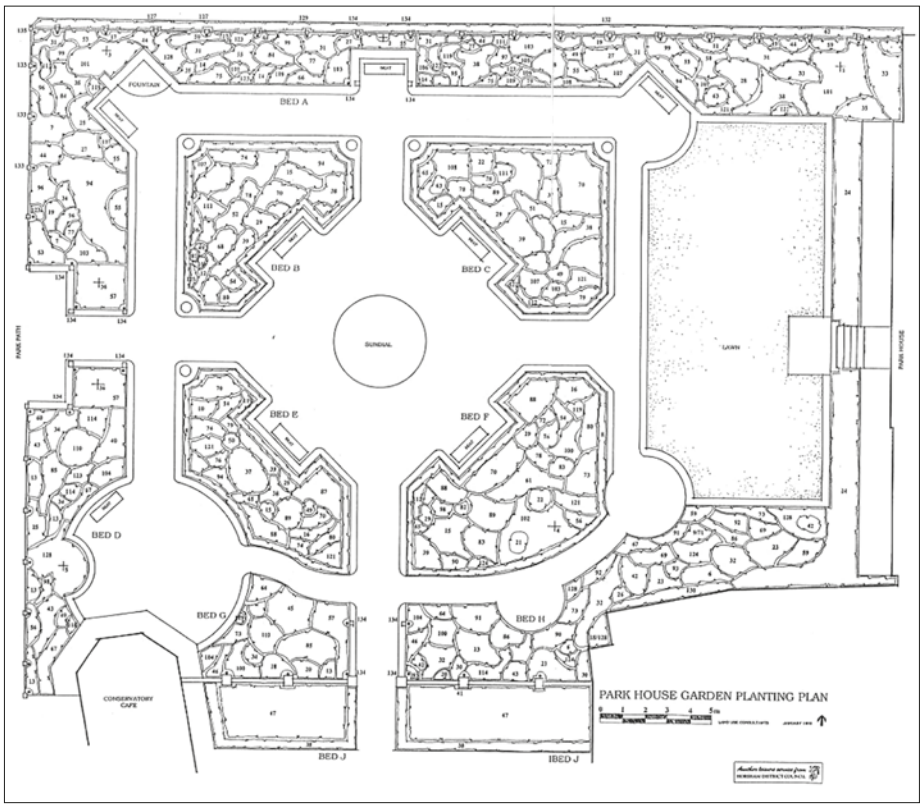
> The objective of the garden is to provide a feature of excellence which can be enjoyed by the less able bodied as well as the general public and complement the adjacent historic buildings.



The replaced rose garden

Although the language does not sit well with modern sensibilities, at the time this was quite visionary. The garden was opened by Lord Snowdon, a vigorous campaigner for the rights of those with disabilities, who said that it was an example to other local authorities and organisations. He recounted his difficulties in persuading the Chelsea Flower Show to change their rules and allow the use of wheelchairs and guide dogs in the grounds of the show.

We have Sun Alliance (now RSA), who had been a major employer in the town for the past twenty-five years, to thank for making this garden accessible to those with additional needs. They agreed to pay more than two thirds of the £92,000 cost if the Council's garden project was changed to take into account the needs of people with physical disabilities. It became a community project with many local businesses donating time, expertise and materials.



Plan of the garden

The 1991 garden design

A formal layout was selected to 'complement' the Georgian house, although by then grander and more fashionable houses of the time would have been creating informal, romantic-styled gardens.



The Sungod by John Skelton

The design committee included the Horsham Access Committee whose involvement resulted in the incorporation into the formal layout of many features designed to ensure accessibility and enjoyment for visitors with additional needs:

- The centrepiece of the garden, a sundial called 'The Sungod', was designed by renowned local artist, John Skelton, so that the visually impaired could use the shadow cast on carved numerals to tell the time.
- There are entrances/exits on only two sides to help those with visual impairment get their bearings. Disabled parking bays are close to the main entrance.
- No ramps/steps were used and the axial paths are wide enough to allow two wheelchairs to pass.
- Paths were made of sealed non-slip gravel, so easier for wheelchairs and the partially sighted.
- Paths were edged with tiles to provide tapping strips for those using long tapping canes and short Aberdeen granite columns mark right angle turns.
- Benches have wheelchair bays next to them allowing users to sit alongside friends.
- Along the northern side is a raised bed enabling people in wheelchairs to lean over and smell and touch the plants. This used stone from the nearby St Mark's Church which had recently been demolished.

Planting focused on creating sensory interest and included two scented beds. Over 130 species of evergreen and deciduous trees, shrubs, herbaceous perennials and bulbs were designed to give striking foliage, flowers, fruits and scents all year round. Many of the original plants have been replaced over the years, but the scheme was arranged in distinct colour themes with blues, reds and purples to the sunny north, greys and pinks in the centre, yellows, greys and whites in the shadier south.



Lawn for events

The garden in 2021

After thirty years there are many signs of wear and tear as the garden has not always enjoyed the funds necessary to maintain it to a high standard. The hedging had become so overgrown that the garden was largely hidden from view and most of the peripheral beds included ivy and brambles between shrubs that were past their best. This contrasted with the central beds, which over the past two years had been improved by Mark Baldwin, a horticultural expert, employed two days a month by Horsham District Council.



Damaged sundial – the golden eye lost and the top half of the gnomon broken off

It was clear to the Friends that much more was needed to restore the garden to its former glory and we are now working in partnership with the Council to achieve this. The overall aim is to ensure that the garden remains both inclusive for those with additional needs and a sensory delight.

While the Council repaired the stone wall and lowered the yew hedge and bay trees at the entrance to open up the garden, we started by raising funds for the damaged central sundial. We consulted with Helen Mary Skelton, the sculptor's daughter, and, although it proved impossible to fully restore the broken gnomon, she proposed reshaping the head and refreshing the carved and painted numerals and motto. The Friends applied to RSA for a £1,500 donation for this and were delighted when they gave us £5,000 which we have used to start our 'Sense the Change' project.



Refurbished sundial – the head reshaped, a new eye carved, motto and numerals cleaned and repainted



The bed between fountain and entrance, November 2020

We consulted widely on what people would like, including local groups who have additional needs not considered at the time the garden was created such as dementia. Common requests were for more colour, more winter interest, seating in the shade with armrests and backs, and the sound of running water as the fountain has not been working for many years. We realised that the project will take us beyond the anniversary year and that more funding would be needed.

This is when we applied to Sussex Gardens Trust for a small grant to help us. In early April Virginia Hinze visited and generously shared her expertise with the Friends and Mark Baldwin. The conversation was inspiring. Mark then put together ideas which Hannah Neale, the new Landscape and Horticultural Officer at Horsham District Council, turned into planting plans for two neglected beds. For both beds the planting scheme has sensory interest but is also pollinator-friendly and sustainable. The beds will be maintained by the Friends' Wednesday morning volunteer gardening group.



Virginia Hinze and Mark Baldwin discussing plans to improve the raised bed



Cleared ready for re-planting

The Sussex Gardens Trust grant

The raised bed will showcase drought-resistant planting (it is one of the few places in the park which does not get waterlogged) and will be funded by a climate change grant from Horsham District Council. The second bed, between the fountain and the entrance, is where we will be using the Sussex Gardens Trust small grant for planting. It is more usual for the Trust to provide funds for hard landscaping but, to assist the overall restoration of the garden (and to encourage the Friends), it supported this part of the project.



Summer display and repaired wall

This neglected bed is important as it is now visible from the busy path outside the garden and needs to be inviting to encourage visitors into the garden to enjoy its delights. It will feature plants for sensory interest in the winter to meet needs identified in our public consultation. At the end of the bed is the corner fountain which has not worked for several years. We are currently investigating options to turn this into a sustainable water feature but this will be for the next phase of the project.

The planting list includes the following:

Bergenia 'Bressingham White'
Brunnera 'Jack Frost'
Buddleia davidii 'Cotswold Blue'
Camellia japonica 'Volunteer'
Choisya 'Aztec Pearl'
Cistus x purpureus 'Alan Fradd'
Daphne bhloua 'Jacqueline Postill'
Daphne odora 'Aureomarginata'
Galanthus nivalis (200)
Geranium 'Orion'
Helleborus argutifolius
Helleborus orientalis
Lavandula x intermedia 'Grosso'
Liriope muscari
Lonicera x purpurea 'Winter Beauty'
Miscanthus 'Morning Light'
Pittosporum 'Golf Ball'
Prunus incisa 'Kojo-no-mai'
Rosmarinus officinalis 'Majorca Pink'
Sarcococca hookeriana var. humilis
Symphiotrichum novae-angliae
Tulipa sylvestris
Tulipa turkestanica
Valeriana officinalis
Verbena bonariensis

The summer display was enjoyed by SGT Council members when they came for a tour of Horsham Park in August. The visit has helped to build on our new relationship with the Trust and we valued their insights and advice. We toured key parts of the 60-acre site which they thought has huge potential. This has resulted in many ideas for the Friends including writing up the history of the park so that it can be included in the Historic Environment Record which will help to protect it for future generations to enjoy.

Sally Sanderson and Alison Farrell, Friends of Horsham Park



Planting for winter interest by volunteers 2021



For information and pictures, thanks to Horsham District Council, the Horsham Society, Horsham Museum and Art Gallery and to Ian Nicol for recent photos.

The brochure for the opening, including the original planting scheme, can be accessed from the Friends website on the Sense the Change page: www.friendsofhorshampark.co.uk. This page also provides updates on the project. To date the Friends have raised £12,000 in grant funding to restore the garden.

SGT Communications – turning over a new leaf

By Sally Ingram



Autumn colour at Denmans Garden, October 2021. Photo © Sally Ingram

Since the pandemic we have all been reminded just how important green open spaces are to our mental and emotional resilience as much as to our physical health. A recent report, commissioned by the National Trust, suggests that people are finding pleasure in autumn colour, noticing the changing leaves and feeling a connection with nature more than they did at the start of the lockdown, perhaps even more than looking forward to Christmas.[1] If there is an increasing awareness of the wellbeing that comes from nature then, hopefully, it will mean that people are more likely to care about their green spaces and the natural world. But sustaining and enhancing our parks and gardens for the future will come down to how much a community gathers its enthusiasm and commitment and turns it into action, particularly with increasing pressures on financial demands. It is voluntary groups like CGTs who will have such a key part to play, whether in protecting formal designed landscapes that are risk or making sure that an urban pocket park is cared for.

Reviewing *Gertrude Jekyll in Sussex*, Steven Desmond commented that Sussex Gardens Trust was 'one of those British institutions born of our national desire to volunteer'. But voluntary groups need help to survive. Encouraging people to become involved in groups like CGTs is important to ensure that the organisation can pursue its aims into the future with the fresh thinking of new members, who will volunteer and contribute their time, in however small a way.

We know that conveying our message more widely is key to developing greater participation in the Trust. The last issue of the Newsletter outlined how SGT was considering changes to the way in which we communicate with members as well as reaching out to a wider audience. A group of Council members has met to take these ideas further, considering what we do well and how we might share our research, garden history, and news of events in different ways that would reach a more diverse group of people. There is much to be proud of in SGT. We have an assured reputation for the quality of our academic research, and we have in recent years published

1 'People are saying they are closer to nature than they were before the pandemic' Celia Richardson NT. *The Guardian*, 1 October, 2021.

three significant studies of key figures in garden history. The Jekyll publication has sold over a hundred copies to date and is on sale in two local independent bookshops. The e-Bulletin, started by Marcus Batty during lockdown, has been extremely successful, and is read by 70% of members. Our lectures, events and visits are enjoyed by members and their guests. We have an important conservation role advising on the implications of local planning developments in the county and our small grants scheme responds to a number of requests for help with community projects.

But all of this work is managed by a relatively small group in SGT and we are eager to increase the range of people who could volunteer and bring new skills and ideas to support the Trust.

Making our presence felt on a larger scale is a way to begin and a communications planning group is currently reviewing how we can make ourselves known and attract new members, by improving our website, developing social media and making some changes in the ways we keep everyone informed of what is happening.

Earlier in the year we set up Twitter to publicise SGT more widely. There is scope to build on our social media role, for example, so that news of an event or a garden visit can be posted and then shared with other organisations, such as the Gardens Trust, giving us greater presence among other CGTs and attracting a more diverse audience.

The SGT Newsletter is well-received but it reaches only a small audience and cannot promote our activities as immediately or as widely as we can through social media or online. With an enhanced website that acts as an 'open door' to all our activities we can share up-to-date news and information with members, post topical features with links to further reading and make our extensive archive research easily available to members and other organisations.

The study of garden history is of enormous importance in raising awareness of our parks and gardens and we are excited by the start of a new venture: a yearly journal, which would include more in-depth research particular to Sussex. We were thrilled when Dr Barbara Simms, who edits *Garden History*, the journal for the Gardens Trust, offered to take on the role of editor of an SGT journal. There are keen researchers and writers within the Trust and we shall be inviting members who would like to join a writing group to help us take this major project forward.

It is important for us to hear your opinions about these changes. We know that not everyone will want to follow us on social media and that you may have a preference for print over digital communication. But we hope that you can appreciate that we need to embrace wider opportunities, as many of the CGTs have done, to attract and engage new people and ensure the sustainability of our Trust.



Dr Barbara Simms

We are delighted to welcome the editor of our new SGT Journal, to be published yearly, with the first edition planned for the summer of 2022.

Barbara is a garden and landscape historian, who has been Course Director of the MA in Garden and Landscape History at the Institute of Historical Research since its inception in 2014. She was chair of London Parks & Gardens Trust (2002-8), a trustee of The Garden Museum (2002-14), and chair of Parks & Gardens UK (2012-18). She has been editor of *Garden History*, the academic journal of The Gardens Trust since 2004. Barbara's interest in the history, conservation and interpretation of gardens of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has led to the completion of research commissions on post-war landscapes, journal articles and the publication of two books, *Eric Lyons and Span* (2006) and *John Brookes, Garden and Landscape Designer* (2007).

Winter Lectures: where the wildness pleases: the English garden celebrated

Sussex Gardens Trust is very pleased to be introducing a series of four lectures by Caroline Holmes, the writer, broadcaster and lecturer, featuring some of the treasured designed landscapes and gardens of the High Weald in Sussex. The online lectures began on 22 October, but there is still time to book the remaining three talks.

Beauty and utility – art, craft and recycling

Friday 19 November 2021



Beauty and utility were the watchwords of the Arts and Crafts Movement, as seemingly is the name William: William Morris tireless designer, poet and craftsman and William Robinson indefatigable writer and gardener. The two finest exemplars in the High Weald are Standen and Gravetye Manor. Ellen Terry's Smallhythe Place and two Priest Houses fulfil the principle of growing from their own sites.

Featured landscapes and gardens: Colwood House, Gravetye Manor, Hole Park, Luctons, Merriments, Smallhythe Place, Standen, 'The Priests House' at Smallhythe and West Hoathly.



Shaking off the historical shackles – make or break

Friday 21st January 2022

The wealth and patronage of the nineteenth century provided a rich horticultural canvas that was undermined by the wars and then weather catastrophes such as the 1987 great storm. However, rather than look back here we rejoice in seven that display a contemporary verve that sets the scene for the future. The most colourful and yet contrasting are Great Dixter and the newly restored Leonardslee, both hugely popular inspirational sites. Often inspiration flourishes in the hands of keen private gardeners as can be admired at Fairlight End on the maritime edges of the High Weald, and, tucked in across this unique region, Falconhurst, Goddards Green, Upper Pryors and Wych Warren await discovery.

Featured landscapes and gardens: Fairlight End, Falconhurst, Goddards Green, Great Dixter, Leonardslee, Upper Pryors, Wych Warren



Shear genius and ripping yarns

Friday 25th February 2022

This mini-series closes in a brisk trot with a horticultural mind reviewing seven contrasting gardens, great and small, linked by clipped masterpieces and fascinating narratives. The colourful highlights in these plots stem from across the globe, engaging in eighteenth century symbolism

and operatic references whilst delving amongst religious roots and into royal romps. Kipling's Batemans and the family creativity at Nymans add further dimensions. Topiary is viewed as quintessentially English, to be admired, smiled at, and an essential device for bringing wildness into focus. Balmoral Cottage and Penshurst are linked by the same glorious Scissorhands genius, the latter with ancient lineage. Hever has developed a Disney factor whilst the rhythm of Twyford exudes a private passion for operatic music.

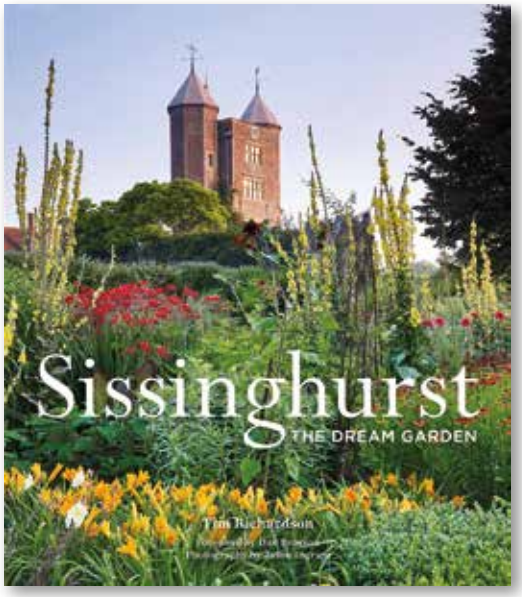
Featured landscapes and gardens: Balmoral Cottage, Batemans, Hammerwood Park, Hever Castle, Nymans, Penshurst, Twyford

To book tickets use this link:
https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/where-the-wildness-pleases-tickets-169774003615

SGT Christmas 2021 Event
Sissinghurst: The Dream Garden

Wednesday 8th December, 2-5 pm
The White Hart Hotel Lewes

Join us at the White Hart Hotel in the centre of Lewes for a fascinating lecture by Tim Richardson, historian and writer, followed by a traditional English afternoon tea.



We are thrilled that the renowned garden historian, Tim Richardson, will be giving a talk about one of Britain's most unforgettable gardens: Sissinghurst, the home of Vita Sackville West and Harold Nicholson. Tim's new book, *Sissinghurst, The Dream Garden*, tells the story of this romantic garden, from its beginning when Vita had been exiled from her family home at Knole, until it passed to the National Trust. His talk will explore how Vita's informal approach to gardening was then briefly abandoned in favour of a more controlled style, and Tim will consider the fine line between the public and the private in the garden at Sissinghurst.

Tim Richardson is a regular contributor to the *Daily Telegraph* and other magazines. He is Founder and Director of the Chelsea Fringe, and as a historian and critic he specialises in landscape, gardens and art. He is a lecturer at the Institute of Historical Research and advisor to the National Trust on gardens. His latest book is *Sissinghurst, The Dream Garden* (Frances Lincoln, 2020), and his other publications include *Cambridge College Gardens* (Frances Lincoln, 2018); *Landscape and Garden Design Sketchbooks* (Thames & Hudson, 2015); *Oxford College Gardens* (Frances Lincoln, 2015); and *The New English Garden* (Frances Lincoln, 2013).

Tickets per person £30.00 includes lecture and afternoon tea.
Guests are welcome at the same price of £30.00

Closing date for booking: 30 November 2021

Why not combine our winter celebratory event with some Christmas shopping in Lewes's many tempting individual shops or lunch in its cornucopia of restaurants, pubs and cafés?

The White Hart Hotel is an historic coaching Inn with Tudor origins situated opposite the Law Courts and about five minutes' walk (up Station Street) from Lewes railway station. Buses from Brighton stop outside the Law Courts.

The Hotel can offer us parking on site for our event. If spaces are full, additional reasonably-priced parking (for three hours +) can be found in North Street behind the police station (BN7 2PA) or further down off Spring Gardens and Brook Street (BN7 2PT).

Our lecture and tea will take place in the cosy Sherriff room on the 1st floor.

CGT News from Elsewhere: Oxfordshire Gardens Trust online event

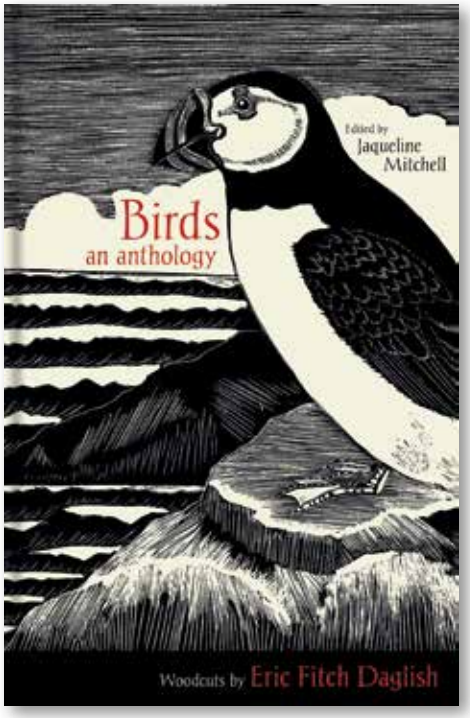
Oxfordshire GT is holding an evening of poetry and prose on birds in our gardens and landscape.

Thursday 2 December, 6 pm

Over the past two years, during lockdown, birds became for many of us a much more noticed part of our natural landscape, and an integral part of our lives. In this talk, Jaqueline Mitchell, compiler of *Birds: An Anthology* (Bodleian Library, 2020), takes us on a romp through the literature of birds in our gardens and landscapes, from season to season, and from Roman times to the present day.

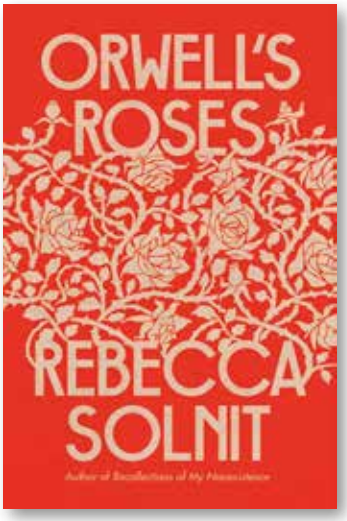
Jaqueline Mitchell is a writer and compiler of anthologies, specialising in social and cultural history. Her most recent title was *Birds: An Anthology*, published by the Bodleian Library in 2020. She is also an editor of non-fiction. She has been commissioning the African Studies list for academic publisher James Currey for nearly 10 years, and prior to that worked for a number of history publishers. She is a long-time member of the OGT, has served on its committee, for some time edited the Newsletter, and is now part of the Events sub-committee. Her sister, Caroline Scaramanga, is a member of the Sussex Gardens Trust.

To book go to the Oxfordshire Gardens Trust website: ogt.org.uk



Book Reviews

Orwell's Roses
Rebecca Solnit
Granta 2021
ISBN
978-1-78378-545-2
£16.99



Rebecca Solnit has written more than twenty books on subjects as diverse as a history of walking, a guide to getting lost and, more recently, *Recollections of My Non-Existence*, a memoir of how she found her voice as a writer, feminist and activist in 1980s San Francisco.

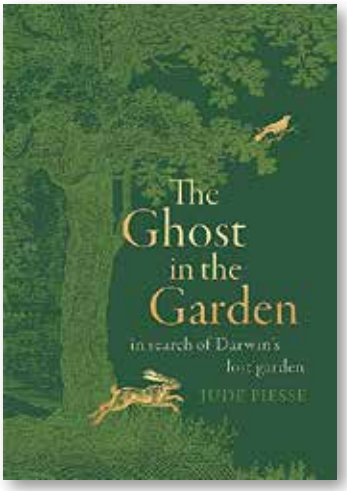
An influence on her path to becoming an essayist was George Orwell and in her latest book, *Orwell's Roses*, she examines his fondness for plants and flowers, particularly roses, and how his love of nature underpinned his political beliefs and writings.

'In the spring of 1936 a writer planted roses' is the first sentence of this collection of essays which consider how a fighter of fascism loved to grow things. Between reporting on the coal mines in the north of England and travelling to the Spanish Civil War Orwell rented a cottage in Wallington, Hertfordshire, planted vegetables and roses, raised chickens and diligently tended an allotment. Solnit was inspired by the discovery of this garden and two rose trees, still alive, but rather than a straightforward biography she takes a fresh look at Orwell, usually renowned for what he wrote against, to find his love of nature and of gardening as much a part of his life as his scrutiny of totalitarian governments.

It is also a book about roses. In a surprising series of forays, Solnit reveals the origin of the political slogan 'bread and roses', and considers the popularity of chintz rose fabrics in the 1980s. She discovers Tina Modotti, who photographed roses, and reflects on how works of art can fortify us and serve as a refuge. Like Orwell she becomes an investigator, when she visits the Columbian flower factories, with brutal working conditions, producing 90% of the roses sold in the US.

In 1940 Orwell wrote: 'Outside of my work the thing I care most about is gardening' and in *Orwell's Roses* we encounter a writer who found pleasure in the life span of his garden: the smell of earth, digging up potatoes, knowing the habits of birds, collecting eggs from chickens. In this thoughtful and thought-provoking book Solnit shows how these simple moments of joy became an integral part of his radicalism, an act of resistance against political challenges, against the ever-present danger of not caring about the difference between truth and lies.

The Ghost in the Garden: in search of Darwin's lost garden
Jude Piesse
Scribe Publications, London 2021
ISBN 978-1-913348-05-2. £20



When in 2015 the writer Jude Piesse moved to Shrewsbury, taking up a post at the new university, the discovery of Darwin's childhood garden on her doorstep came as a surprise. Fifteen months later she would leave Shropshire, with a two-year old daughter, a new baby and the emerging idea for a manuscript, started while walking past the fences and steps of the overgrown garden at the end of her road and followed by days examining maps and letters, photographs and old books in university reading rooms. Writing to his sister Caroline from the *Beagle* in 1833, Darwin remembered his first garden at The Mount in Shrewsbury as a paradise, a place he would visit like a ghost, a home he left for long voyages at sea but that shaped his work and remained always in his thoughts. It is this interconnection with the history of the garden, the people who lived and worked there, and the experiences that helped foster Darwin's research and theories that Piesse explores in this intriguing book, which blends nature writing, biography and memoir.

In the 1800s the garden at The Mount was a seven-acre site where Darwin enjoyed climbing trees, collecting insects and stones, giving different parts of the garden secret names. Peas and cabbages were studied in the kitchen garden. The gardener, John Abberley, gave practical help, charting the behaviour of bees. When travelling on the *Beagle* Darwin remained connected to the garden by letters from his sisters, one letter per month Piesse tells us, linking him to the life left behind, with descriptions of the spring flowers or progress with a new hothouse, as well as reports of weddings, births and illnesses or the flooding of the Severn in the winter of 1833-34. Piesse reveals how the garden became an influence on his work and considers how imagery of the garden permeates *The Origin of the Species* and his journal *The Voyage of the Beagle*, where gardens are frequently described as something familiar and evoking nostalgia in strange new landscapes.

The work of the gardeners at The Mount has been researched before by Susan Campbell, but Piesse reflects on the lives of the gardeners and the servants, carrying out demanding jobs yet remaining secret, always behind the scenes. The fruits of their labour might have been on display, the showy peaches, oranges and pineapples, but the staff were supposed to be out of sight. The lesser-known people inhabit this book for, as the author says, she is 'writing a book from round the back, a book about overlooked places, perspectives and people'. The formative role of the two sisters, Caroline and Susan, is explored, particularly through their care of the garden when Darwin was absent. Aware of the importance of learning, they established a school in the 1820s for ninety-six young children, based on a liberal approach and influenced by educationalists such as Pestalozzi who promoted learning through nature and lessons in the outdoors.

The school and its philosophy would have been innovative in Darwin's childhood town where, in the 1800s, children as young as seven were working long hours in the flax mills and subjected to harsh treatment. Darwin's father, Robert, was a successful landlord and financier who had lent money to the owner of the flax mill in Shrewsbury. Piesse comments that, although Robert Darwin may not have known about the working practices, it was this economic advantage that allowed the young Charles 'his right to roam'. Darwin liked his solitary walks in the Shropshire landscape where the land could be enjoyed for its own sake rather than for the money it represented. We are reminded that while he watered the plants in his own garden another young boy would be standing for long hours at the machine in the factory, combing flax. The Quarry Pond in Shrewsbury was where Darwin fished for newts but was once common land, used for grazing animals, drying laundry, and skinny-dipping. When The Quarry

ceased to be a common and became a public park in 1865 the poor were discouraged and their rights to this piece of land disappeared.

These alternative narratives to the writing of garden history might result in a tangle of distraction – even the theories of Karl Marx and Michel Foucault make an appearance – but Piesse thoughtfully combines the ghosts of the garden: Darwin, his sisters, the servants, with skilful research that brings these connections together.

The Ghost in the Garden is eloquently written, and much of the pleasure of reading comes from the evocative images of the research journey. Balancing employment, childcare and writing, Piesse finds herself wondering 'what makes a mother of two travel sixty miles to poke around at the bottom of somebody else's garden' just to discover the origin of a portrait of Darwin and his sister, yet there is a peculiar delight in curiosity, or 'common nerdery', which will be recognised by all who set out on such a detective trail. Opening boxes of letters, the writing faded and stained, in rooms where 'the librarians are very much in charge', discovering seals from the *Beagle* correspondence, 'getting distracted by loose threads that turn out to be nothing' or discovering an old book of Darwin's observations on worms with 'a lovely dark green jacket, the colour of a plump mallard', the surprising pleasures of intense research are imaginatively drawn.

Today only two acres of the garden remain, owned by the Shropshire Wildlife Trust, and the book is not just a memoir but a lament for changes to this garden and its surroundings as new pressures are forced onto the landscape. In the final chapter Piesse alludes to a far bigger story unfolding: the creatures of Darwin's childhood are disappearing, it is the hottest summer on record in 2016, and then in February 2020 storms destroy much of the garden, as if repeating Darwin's theory that the slightest change in climate can act on all species directly. The threat of impending disaster to our world can feel overwhelming, but this is an intelligent and hopeful book, with a straightforward message that the garden is a good place to start realising the interconnection of the natural world.

Sally Ingram



IN BOX



The **SGT spring lectures** are always a welcome start to the year with a chance to meet each other and learn more about different aspects of garden history. In 2021 we had to forsake the tea and cake but nevertheless enjoyed online talks by SGT members about their current research projects. In January and February of next year Caroline Holmes will be giving two online lectures on the subject of the designed landscapes and gardens of the High Weald in Sussex (see page 20 of the Newsletter) but we are delighted to say that garden history talks in person are resuming. We are only too aware of how much our members have missed the social contact this affords and the dialogue that the speakers encourage!

Following Tim Richardson's lecture, for our Christmas event in Lewes, the events committee hope to offer two more talks in March and April 2022, to be held at Haywards Heath – more information will follow in the new year.

Sussex Gardens Trust

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