SUSSEX GARDENS TRUST

Highlights of our Activities in 2022

The last year has seen our volunteer groups working successfully behind the scenes to achieve the aims of Sussex Gardens Trust. Our garden visits continue to be enjoyed and appreciated, especially for the chance to have tours with owners or head gardeners, and to meet with other members. A particular highlight of the year was a visit to Sedgwick Park, where SGT member Clare Davison welcomed us for an afternoon tea and tour of the historic garden. The special occasion was to celebrate the visit in August 1928 of the Bicycle Boys, two young students from the United States, and we were pleased to be part of this nation-wide project organised by the RHS Lindley Library. We have strengthened our links with several other organisations, including the national Gardens Trust, and with groups across Sussex, particularly in the area of research and recording, and through applications to our Small Grants Fund.

We are pleased that membership of SGT has increased this year, perhaps in response to a growing awareness of the value of historic gardens and green open spaces for our sense of well-being. We look forward to another successful year for the Trust, and thank all our members for their continued support for our many different activities.



June: a visit to the small enclosed spaces in the garden at Twyford House, featured in Caroline Holmes' online lecture and in her book 'Where the Wildness Pleases'



July at The Priest House. Gardens of the High Weald were a focus of our summer visits



Late September and afternoon tea at Sedgwick Park, view from the Bell Tower



The Gothick Seat, c.1760 at Uppark, September

Events and Garden Visits

At the start of the year SGT presented a series of online lectures highlighting remarkable gardens in Sussex, exploring their history, the owners and the plant collections. Members then had a wonderful opportunity to visit several of the gardens featured, including in the spring the outstanding tree collection at Borde Hill and the unusual chalk garden at Highdown Gardens. During the early summer we enjoyed visits to two very diverse gardens which had been the focus of online talks by Caroline Holmes, and later in the year to some notable gardens in the High Weald. In late September we travelled further west, to a delightful private garden 'Sennicotts' and then to the majestic Uppark House, where we discovered Humphry Repton's influence on the eighteenth-century garden, with a guided tour from one of our own members. Accounts of all the gardens visited in 2022 can be found on the Past Events page on our website.

Many of the gardens we visit are not normally open to the public, and we arrange talks or guided tours from the garden owners, head gardeners, or researchers. You can find our latest programme on the SGT website Events page with a range of exciting garden visits planned across the county. Do join us for a friendly, enjoyable and informative garden visit in 2023.

Conservation

A key role of SGT is to review the planning applications affecting historic parks and gardens included on the register maintained by Historic England. During 2022 the SGT Conservation Committee responded to some fourteen planning applications. Our comments are submitted to Local Planning Authorities and can also be seen via the SGT website Planning page.

One particular case considered last year was an application submitted by the owners of Borde Hill Gardens who were planning to submit a grant application to the National Heritage Lottery fund for financial support for 'engaging a wider audience with nature' and contributing to Borde Hill's long-term sustainability'. The proposal was shared with SGT and the Trust was pleased to support the application and assist with development and refinement of the plans.

Research and Recording



Postcard c.1906 Gensing Gardens, St Leonards.

Ornamental gardens laid out c.1870 to designs by Hastings Corporation's Borough Surveyor on Eversfield estate land, on which so much of late C19 Hastings was built

Our volunteer researchers are currently engaged in a project researching and recording the fascinating history of parks and gardens along the Sussex coastline. The story of these local parks can often be taken for granted, but with a renewed interest in the designed landscapes of the twentieth century by the Gardens Trust and Historic England their importance is being recognised. The SGT website Research page includes a list of the parks researched; completed reports will soon be available in the same place, giving an up-to-date overview of their current state as well as many wonderful illustrations.

The research group has recently been joined by new members and is reviewing potential options for study, which might include examples of gardens with literary and artistic associations, or perhaps a new historical period.

Small Grants Scheme

SGT continues to promote its grant scheme as widely as we can, to raise awareness that the Trust can help financially (in a small way) a site or organisation that might be eligible for grant in any part of Sussex. Details and criteria for applying are on the Small Grants Scheme page of our website.

As in the previous year, applications and expressions of interest are tending to come primarily from Friends groups in the county. One of the main recipients in 2022 were the Friends of the Meads Parks and Gardens who have been extremely active in rejuvenating the Italian Gardens, Eastbourne. The Friends group persuaded Eastbourne Borough Council to undertake repairs on the pavilion and pergolas and then approached SGT for help with the cost of replanting the climbing roses. The Small Grant Scheme was able to offer funding for twenty-four new rose plants and the work will begin in spring this year.



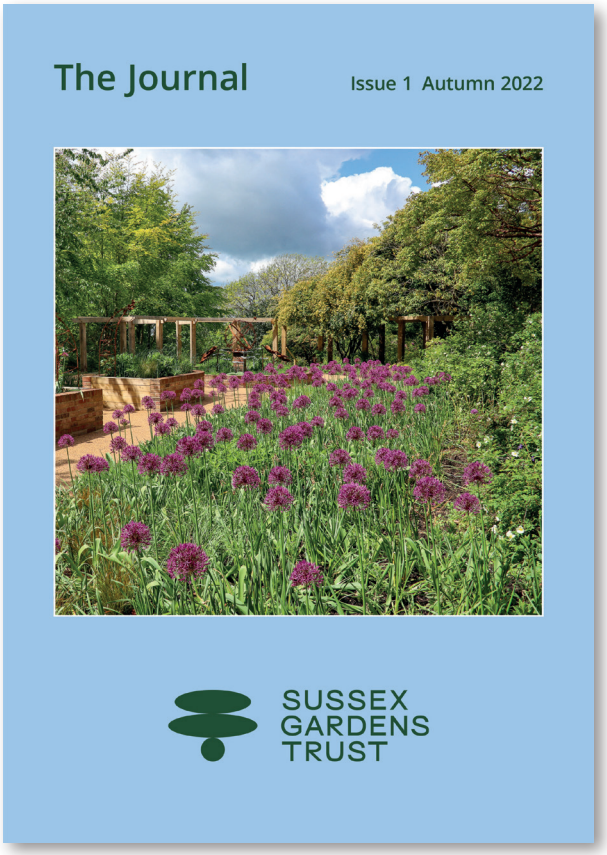
Postcard c.1930s showing the original rose pergola at the Italian Gardens, Eastbourne

The Friends of Preston Park group is also in discussion with SGT for a grant to support the replanting of an extensive rose garden at the south end of the park, originally laid out by Bertie Hubbard MacLaren, the Superintendent of Parks in 1928. The SGS is supportive, although there are issues to resolve such as overcoming rose disease in the soil, but discussions will continue in 2023. You can read more about the Italian Gardens on our website (see the Coastal Gardens page under Parks & Gardens).



Communications

In 2022 we gave our website a complete makeover! Our aim is always to have a wide range of communications that are accessible and welcoming for members and to raise awareness of the work of the Trust with a wider audience, attracting potential new members and volunteers. The updated website has many new features, including an interactive county map highlighting notable gardens in Sussex. Items of news and all the details of our events are posted regularly, and a Notebook section has a collection of varied articles contributed by SGT members and guest writers. As well as updating the website we are increasing our presence on social media, with more people following SGT on Twitter and now on Instagram, where we can feature inspiring photos of our garden visits and encourage potential new members to join us.



The Journal

We have a high reputation for the academic strength of our publications (all of which can be purchased on our website) and in November the first edition of the SGT Journal was published, bringing together new research and Sussex-related topics relevant to gardens and the designed landscape. This was a new venture for SGT, and the Journal, edited by Dr Barbara Simms, has been an outstanding success.

The full Annual Report can be seen on the SGT website (under Resources/SGT documents)