SUSSEX GARDENS TRUST

Highlights of our Activities in 2023

Following an appeal at our last AGM in April 2023 it is encouraging that more people came forward to assist in the Trust's activities. Many hands have lightened the burden on a very limited number of volunteers, particularly in the planning and organisation of garden visits, and in the work of the research group. We are indebted to everyone who has contributed their time and effort.



Riverhill Himalayan Gardens — visited by SGT in May 2023

We were delighted to welcome our new Membership Secretary, Katherine Meakin, and hope that she will find the post fulfilling. Jenny Howard has kept us on the straight and narrow financially and we thank her as her tenure as treasurer draws to a close.

Our connection with other County Gardens Trusts and the help provided by the Gardens Trust has enabled us to innovate and extend our reach beyond our own members in 2023, and we hope that this success continues.



Sedlescombe School Sensory Garden, designed by Kristina Clode and visited by SGT members in July 2023



Pleached limes at Parsonage Farm, visited in September 2023

Events and Garden Visits

Our winter lectures continued the theme from 2022 highlighting some of our Sussex gardens. Caroline Ikin spoke about Standen and Nymans: two of our most visited National Trust gardens. David Marsh entertained us with talks on painters and photographers of gardens.

We began the year of garden visits at the One Garden in Brighton, designed by Dominic Cole, and had a stimulating lecture from Brighton-based designer, Juliet Sargeant, who focused on the importance of engaging with the future generation of potential gardeners and horticulturists. Our next trip was to Riverhill Himalayan Garden just over the border in Kent. Head Gardener, Misako Kasahara, explained how the development of the garden had happened over successive generations of the same family. In June we were the first group of people to visit the Mill House at Balcombe and it was a joy to walk around the lake viewing the varied planting of perennials and grasses. Designer Kristina Clode opened her garden to us in July and also showed us the award-winning garden she had developed at a local school. Our final visits to Malthouse Farm and Parsonage Farm took us back to more formal layouts of garden rooms with beautiful colour-themed herbaceous borders, topiary, sculpture and fabulous views.

A thank-you to all of those who opened their gardens to us and shared their time and knowledge along with the warm welcomes we received.

You can find our latest programme on the SGT website **Events** page, with a range of visits across the county. Do join us for a friendly, enjoyable and informative garden visit in 2024.

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 2024 the SGT Conservation Committee responded to some fifteen planning applications. Our comments are submitted to Local Planning Authorities and can be seen via the SGT website **Planning** page.

Over the past two years we have objected to several applications at the Grade I listed Leonardslee Gardens concerning a very large extension to the car park. As a result, the LPA refused the original application and a revised application was submitted in January 2023. While this was an improvement, SGT again objected because there was no satisfactory Conservation Management Plan (CMP) nor detailed planting plan. The application was subsequently approved in July 2023 with numerous conditions, including a requirement to provide, within six months, a revised CMP along the lines suggested by the SGT.

In addition to commenting on planning applications, SGT is occasionally consulted by owners regarding conservation, restoration and maintenance issues. Last year we were pleased to help with the preparation a £4.4m bid to the National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF) for restoration of the Brighton Royal Pavilion Gardens. A planning application for the work has recently been submitted. However, here we raised a significant concern regarding the proposed night opening of the garden; an objection to this part of the application was lodged, since we believe overnight closure is required to secure and protect the garden from issues of vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

Research and Recording

The research group continued to meet to support members 'in person' in their work and to review progress. Most of the sites identified as of interest in our [Parks and Gardens of the Sussex Coast] project are now complete and the reports can be viewed on the website. A few sites in East Sussex remain outstanding, including Hampden Park (Eastbourne) and Manor Gardens (Bexhill), while sites in West Sussex, and Worthing in particular, are being finalised so look out for those in 2024.



Historical documents from the archive of Borde Hill
With permission from Borde Hill Garden and Julia Foster

Following a review of the research carried out from the Trust's early days (from 1995 onwards) we decided to create and add to our website an [Inventory of Sussex Parks and Gardens of Historic Interest], which lists the designed parks and gardens that we have identified as of potential interest. We aim to develop this in the future.

In September the national Gardens Trust held its annual Volunteering Celebration to coincide with the 40th anniversary of the establishment of Historic England's National Register of Parks and Gardens. SGT member Maggie Hill contributed a superb presentation on her long-standing work assisting Borde Hill's archivist to catalogue the correspondence, nursery invoices and other documents relating to Borde Hill's highly significant plant collection. SGT Council congratulated Maggie on successfully demonstrating the difference CGT volunteers can make to the conservation and protection of historic parks and gardens.

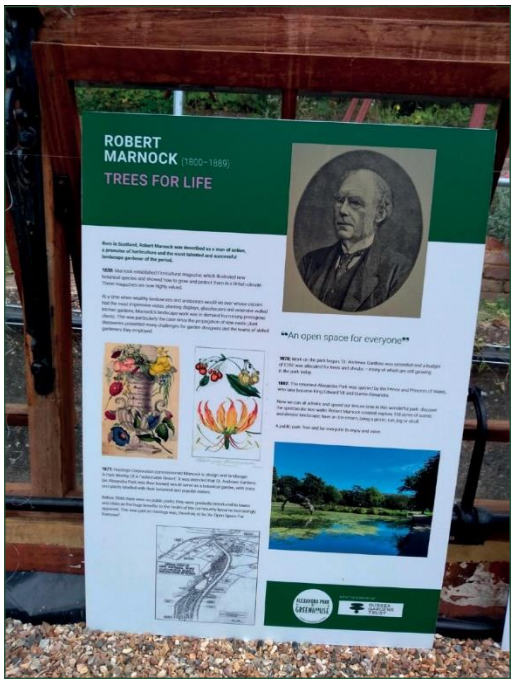
Small Grants Scheme

This year has been a mixture of positives and negatives for our grant scheme. On the positive side, we were able to pay the grant to the Friends of Meads Parks and Gardens for the climbing roses planted on the pergolas in the Italian Gardens – tough ground conditions proved a challenge. The Friends have expressed an interest in restoring the 1930s rock garden so we will look at possible funding with them for that later in 2024.


'Oli the Trolley' at Uckfield Millennium Green

We received two new, very different but interesting applications; one was for 'Oli the Trolley' from the Friends of Uckfield Millennium Green to help move and spread woodchips to keep the paths accessible. The Green, Trust-owned but managed by the Friends, occupies the site of former farmland and brickworks established in the 1920s. Our grant of £455.50 enabled the paths to be in good order for the summer.

The second application came from the 'Greenhouse Group' in Alexandra Park, Hastings, to fund a series of information boards to exhibit in their newly-restored greenhouse.



One of the new display boards for Alexandra Park Greenhouse

SGT was pleased to fund the graphic work for these, particularly as two boards highlighted Robert Marnock, the famous nineteenth century landscape gardener who laid out much of Alexandra Park and whose life and work our umbrella body, the Gardens Trust, was celebrating nationally throughout 2023.

On the negative side, three initial inquiries from community garden projects failed to follow up our invitation to complete an application form, despite further encouragement. Associated with this and the lack of take-up from local authorities for public parks and gardens over recent years, it may be time, in 2024, to consider widening our grant focus and perhaps also refreshing our application form. We will continue to promote the small grants scheme widely, including through our social media.

Details and criteria for applying for a grant can be seen on the **Small Grants Scheme** page of our website.

Communications

We have continued to share information about the Trust in many different ways, whether in-person at our events, through online lectures, or in print and social media. Members and friends receive a monthly email with topical news items, and lively garden-related articles, contributed by SGT members, feature regularly on the website. One of our projects in 2023 was to re-design the SGT brochure, with eye-catching images of Sussex gardens, to attract new members to join the Trust. The profile of the Trust is also reaching a wider and more diverse audience through social media, and we now have over 200 followers on Instagram.

The Journal

The second edition of the SGT Journal, edited by Dr Barbara Simms, was published in November and has proved just as successful as the first. Extensive Sussex-related research includes a focus on two professional gardener designers of the twentieth century: George Dillistone in Hastings and Captain Bertie Hubbard MacLaren in Brighton. Further scholarly in-depth articles portray Margaret Beale's diary of her gardening life at Standen, while another prolific writer, Augustus Hare, features in a study of his literary life and his gardens at Lime and Holmhurst. Coming up to date, a case study of the effects of climate change in relation to the Sussex Heather Collection at Nymans illustrates how garden history research can be significant for the topical issues of today.

The Journal Advisory group are already planning the 2024 edition, and they welcome suggestions for articles.

