

# THE CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION OF HISTORIC GARDENS

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Historic parks and gardens are now, since the National Heritage Act 1983, a recognised and official part of our heritage. To many dedicated owners and guardians gardens such as Hampton Court, Levens, Melbourne, Studley Royal, Stourhead and Bodnant have for long been regarded as national assets of historic importance and have been preserved as such. Increasingly garden history is being included, not only in landscape architecture courses, but in local history, archaeology and landscape history studies and in university literature and art courses (perhaps the time is not too far off when it may claim the academic status afforded to the subject in Germany, where a Professor of Garden History has been appointed). There is now an increasing public awareness of the value and interest of historic parks and gardens reflected in the National Heritage Act, especially since there are now many good restorations to be seen and much more literature about the subject. A guide to an historic house which relegates the history and description of its grounds to a page at the end is no longer considered a satisfactory account of a heritage monument. The garden, once all too often regarded as an amenity area for those visiting a historic house, is now seen to be of interest in its own right and an enhancement of the historic building itself.

The concept of the historic garden, as opposed to land attached to an historic building, was first introduced into legislation in the Town and Country Amenities Act 1974. Although only grant-aid and not protection was covered, it was necessary to have a definition and inventory for what had now been deemed to be national assets. Criteria were agreed by ICOMOS, the Garden History Society and the Historic Buildings Council for England. The gardens recorded were to be strongly representative of a particular style of gardening, to have been the work of a well-known designer, provide a setting for an historic building, to be associated with a famous person or contain an important plant collection. County lists drawn up by the Garden History Society, the Landscape Institute, the Historic Houses Association and some local authorities were collated by the Historic Buildings Council for England Gardens Committee, chaired by Mrs. Jennifer Jenkins, in readiness to hand over to the new Commission. The National Heritage Act had given permissive powers for the registering of historic gardens (the term register was preferred to "list" in order to avoid confusion with the statutory listing of buildings); the official wording being: "The Commission and the appropriate Council may prepare lists and plans of gardens, parks and other lands which appear to

them to be of special historic interest and shall publish such lists and plans, with gradings, and may amend them from time to time for the purpose of identifying such gardens, parks and other lands for the guidance of local authorities and other persons or bodies and their protection from damage by development in them or their settings."

The newly-appointed Chairman of the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission, Lord Montagu of Beaulieu, is on record (Lords Debate, National Heritage Bill, 21st December, 1982) as being a strong advocate of historic gardens and Amendment No. 104C which set out the proposal to prepare lists of historic gardens. "It is very important to my mind, that historic gardens are listed. They were mostly all man-made and made with the same skill and love and design as some of our great houses. We take great pride in our gardens in this country, and they are known worldwide. They have been disappearing at an alarming rate. I think it is essential that we should know what we have and that they should be listed in some way."

The official register will be of heritage gardens, whose essential character, which qualified its registration, has remained and entry on the register would carry with it an assumption that the site should be given special protection. A more comprehensive inventory of parks and gardens is being set up at the Centre for the Conservation of Historic Parks and Gardens at the Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies, University of York. This inventory comprises a long term project, which will provide, on a gradually cumulative basis, a scholarly record of the historic parks and gardens of this country and the features within them. The historical inventory would be able to provide information about existing Tudor features in gardens, for instance, or assemble a list of the works of a specific designer and so build up the expertise for giving advice on restoration projects and educational research.

The York Centre for the Conservation of Historic Parks and Gardens has been funded, initially by the Countryside Commission, who in recent years have included a remit for historic landscape in their countryside policies. In their 1982 prospectus *Countryside Issues and Action* they adopted the theme "Conservation through cooperation", which is particularly relevant to historic parks and gardens. As it was recognised that listing consent for the alteration of an historic garden, similar to the statutory requirement for historic buildings, was unworkable, conservation is more likely to be achieved by incentive rather than by punitive legislation. When grant-aid was sought from the Countryside Commission for planting in an historic landscape a survey was commissioned to ensure historical accuracy and to provide guidelines for a future management policy. This has

recently been completed for Blenheim where, in order to make the estate viable, agriculture, forestry, sporting and recreational interests have to be catered for in a way which will not adversely affect Capability Brown's superb landscaped garden.

The National Trust pioneered the surveys for landscaped gardens, using new techniques of tree dating combined with ground and aerial surveys and documentary evidence to establish the various periods of the park's history. A survey of this kind is now considered to be the first step in the restoration or informed maintenance of an historic park and is being carried out on royal parks, Painshill, Rousham and Mount Edgcumbe as well as National Trust properties. Anyone researching historic gardens becomes aware of the lack of information on source material. Only recently have the Victoria County Histories begun to include references to landscaped parks and gardens or the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments to record garden earthworks. Ray Desmond's forthcoming index to Gardens will be invaluable as a reference book and at some future date we may look forward to a comprehensive Dictionary of Gardeners and a King's Works to bring gardening into line with architecture.

In terms of planning, gardens have fallen between the two stools of the built environment and the natural scenery protection policies. Many local authorities, taking a narrow view of the government guidelines, maintained that landscaped gardens could not be included in Conservation Areas, the provisions for which were only meant for the built environment, but on the other hand, as designed landscapes could not be designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which in any case were intended for much larger areas of land. However, those planning authorities who wished to include parkland settings in their Conservation Area designations found no difficulty in so doing by a fairly liberal interpretation of Clause 32 of Circular 23/77 on Policy and Procedure for Conservation Areas. Derbyshire and Staffordshire frequently designated the whole country house estate, including estate village, landscaped park and views outside the boundaries of the estate, as the unit of historic interest.

It is the views outside the boundaries of the landscaped garden, vital to the whole concept, which are increasingly at risk today. When William Kent "leapt the fence" and found all Nature a garden, he created considerable planning problems. Some form of landscape designation is urgently required for Rousham where he first performed this athletic feat. The house and immediate surroundings are under the planning authority of West Oxfordshire District Council, but Kent's designed views across the Cherwell are in the Cherwell District. Within the garden itself, the cold bath, cascades, statues, seats, urns, etc. are

individually listed and the connecting design of the garden is intact, having been sensitively maintained over the centuries. Outside the garden the Eyecatcher and the Gothicised mill are listed in their own right as historic buildings of interest and as "part of the landscaped garden scheme" according to the schedules, but unless the landscape around them is protected their listing as of historic importance is meaningless. Similarly, at Prior Park the Palladian bridge is listed, but there is no protection for the landscape which connects it to the house in a reciprocal vista.

If institutions and the public services are increasingly destined to take over the great houses then it is vital that they should be made aware of the importance of responsible maintenance of their surroundings. Too often the scale of the landscape setting is changed and only a small area in the immediate vicinity of the house maintained, or in educational establishments out-buildings and playing fields are sited with scant attention to the planned relationship of the house and its surroundings. In the case of Colleges of Education, the Department of Education and Science gives substantial grants for the upkeep of state rooms, if it takes over an historic house, but gives no extra grant to a college which is responsible for a famous landscaped garden; allocation for grounds maintenance being per head of student irrespective of whether the college has a few flower-beds to maintain or a Capability Brown landscape. At Stowe School an advisory committee of experts has been responsible for the overall policy on the maintenance of the famous landscape in their trust, ensuring a continuity of policy which is lacking in government establishments. Wroxton College, which is now owned by Fairleigh Dickinson University, won a Times Conservation Award in 1983 for the restoration of the Sanderson Miller landscape which includes his Grand Cascade; a daunting task even before financial cut-backs, but achieved with the help of an HBC grant, local support and ingenious fund-raising which included a "Rocks for Wroxton" scheme whereby visitors could buy a rock for the cascade. Their sense of achievement knew no bounds when, at a recent opening ceremony, the cascade was turned on and tumbled down into a serpentine stream, just as it had done in the 18th-century rococo scene.

Private responsible trusts are usually favoured by the grant-giving bodies and their self-help attitudes seem to accord very much with the new thinking outlined by the Commission. Following the acquisition of Painshill by Elmbridge Borough Council, a Painshill Park Trust has been set up, which with help from the Countryside Commission and the National Heritage Memorial Fund has made a survey of this once famous, but now

derelict, early 18th-century landscaped garden, with a view to restoration. It is particularly fitting that Painshill should have benefited from Hugh Dalton's imaginative former National Land Fund, intended as a war memorial "better than any work of art in stone or bronze", whereby "through this Fund we shall dedicate some of the loveliest parts of this land to the memory of those who died in order that we should have freedom". A Biddulph Grange Trust has also been set up to fund-raise for and to advise on the restoration of the unusual landscaped garden now in the ownership of an Area Health Authority.

One of the most exciting developments in the movement of historic preservation was the formation of the Sussex Historic Gardens Restoration Society in 1980. The Society is privately sponsored but followed the East Sussex County Council's initiative in setting up a scheme for grant-aid and advice on historic gardens. As early as 1976 its Planning Department had sent out a questionnaire to help in their survey of historic gardens in the county. When this was completed a booklet *Exploring Parks and Gardens in East Sussex*, selling at the modest price of 40p, was published showing the wide range of horticultural interest ranging from the monastic to the Edwardian country house. A direct grant was offered to owners under its powers vested in the Town and Country Amenities Act, 1974 (Section 12), conditional upon the owner contributing an equal amount of money and also undertaking positive steps to increase public access for an agreed period of each year. Unfortunately, good intentions in the grant-aid for restoration programme were overtaken by local government cutback. However, the project had attracted the attention of John G. McCarthy, the retired United States NATO representative who had come to live in Sussex, and through his generosity a private fund was set up to prime restoration schemes put forward to the County Council. Work has been carried out at Michelham Priory, Kidbrooke, Newick Park, Brightling, Brickwall and is now in progress at Brighton Pavilion. Full use was made of the Youth Opportunity Programme and other voluntary labour forces; one of the most enterprising of the latter being an invitation to the Caravan Club to use the park at Kidbrooke for a weekend rally on condition that members cleared out the ha-ha.

Hampshire County Council has also given an imaginative lead in the conservation of historic gardens. It has for many years been working towards a Countryside Heritage policy and has produced excellent booklets on its ancient woodlands, chalk grassland, coast and ancient tracks and lanes. The fifth of the series, published in 1983, was *Historic Parks and Gardens* by Krystyna Bilikowski. It is largely based on a survey of historic parks and gardens in Hampshire which was sponsored by the

Manpower Services Commission and this provisional list forms the appendix of the booklet. The book itself reads as a chronological garden history of a county, beginning with its deer parks and ending with modern plantsmen's gardens. It highlights the regional interest of garden history. Hampshire's booklet is national garden history to which are added the specialities of a county with a temperate climate, variety of soils, the New Forest, its importance in the royal and ecclesiastical life of the middle ages and its attractiveness for the building of great houses, hunting lodges and cottages ornés near famous fishing rivers, forests and watering-places. The investigation stimulated much interest by landowners and the public, and a Conference on the county's garden heritage was held at Avington Park in 1982. As a result the Hampshire Gardens Trust was formed which followed the pattern of the East Sussex venture in that it was initially backed by the County Council with some funding before it could find its feet as a private charitable trust. Already restoration projects are under way. The Southampton Tudor garden is well established and a great attraction, a mediaeval garden is planned for Winchester, the restoration of the Brown park surrounding the Solent Cadland Cottage, the rehabilitation of a Lutyens-Jekyll garden and a station garden; all of which add greatly to the increasing interest in historic gardens.

Now that so much work is being done by the Department of the Environment, the National Trust, private trusts and individual owners, it is necessary to examine what we mean by garden restoration. The accepted idea of the restoration of a building, furniture or a painting, as the rehabilitation of an object already in existence, albeit in imperfect form, cannot be applied to gardens which are by their nature organic. They have allotted life spans and have been dug up and refashioned over the centuries. In gardens the word restoration certainly applies when a garden building is restored such as the Rousham Palladian door or the Lutyens pergola at Hestercombe or Sanderson Miller's cascade at Wroxton. At Ham House the National Trust has been able to restore the garden of the great Lauderdale house from original plans, so that the design of the parterres and formal wilderness seen today is much as Evelyn described it when he visited in 1678. At Westbury Court in Gloucestershire the National Trust has restored a Dutch style water garden from engravings, existing evidence and plant lists which have enabled them to use contemporary plants including old cultivars of Turkish irises, apples and pears and old tulips. A current true restoration is being undertaken at Nuneham Courtenay, Oxfordshire, where the poet William Mason's famous flower beds, painted by Paul Sandby in 1777, are being reinstated with authentic planting. Scholarly research is also being carried out

into the Regency planting now planned for the grounds of the Brighton Pavilion. Pitmedden, Wrest Park, the Claremont amphitheatre, the Swiss garden at Old Warden, the Chinese garden at Biddulph Grange and Hamilton's derelict landscape at Painshill are now, or will be, as nearly as possible replicas of the original garden design, even though many of the features had totally disappeared. The ultimate in scholarly garden reconstruction is the Roman garden at Fishbourne Palace executed through excavation and pollen analysis.

Elsewhere gardens have been created to provide authentic historical settings and associations, and it is difficult here to use the term restoration in the same sense, since the garden is not in itself historic. The first project undertaken by the Sussex Historic Gardens Restoration Society was the making of a physic garden at Michelham Priory. Although this has been referred to in the press as a restored monastic garden, it had never been claimed that this was authentic either in its actual situation or layout, nor that it was a restoration in the sense of putting back something that once existed. Michelham Priory although dissolved was incorporated into a lived-in domestic house, which would have been gardened and so it is particularly appropriate in this case to include a small garden recalling its monastic origins. Historic gardens around ruins, be they castle or monastery, are never convincing and merely offend the romantic sense in most of us. At ruined Edzell Castle the DOE has laid out a lovely emblematic knot garden pleasance, but it is difficult to reconcile a ruined castle and garden immaculately kept up in the middle of nowhere. The historic sense is surely meant to focus on the troubled times of warfare reflected in the ruin and not the peaceful pursuit of gardening. No such thoughts need trouble us at Michelham and the physic garden enhances the historic feeling of the continuity of priory into house. It is laid out with plants listed by John Gerard in his 16th-century *Herball* and planted in beds according to their various medicinal use. It evokes the memory of a priory infirmary garden but is not a restoration. A garden of "Mary" flowers, named in honour of the Virgin Mary, planted in the cloister garth at Lincoln Cathedral, is historical but is not a restoration.

A garden has now been created at the Tudor House Museum, Southampton, which is also of great historical interest. Although the house can be given a specific early 16th-century date, the garden, like the house decoration, saw many changes during the long Tudor reign. The new Tudor garden is a collection of features of ornamental gardens recreated from 16th-century texts and illustrations and the plants are a selection of those grown at the time. A strong historical link is that the design of the garden knot also appears on original carving within the

house, as it is known that designs for glaziers, carvers, embroiderers and gardeners came from common Renaissance books. At Lambeth the Tradescant Trust has created a garden of plants introduced by the Tradescants, in St. Mary's churchyard, where they lie buried. It is fitting that the knot garden, in their honour, has been designed by Lady Salisbury, since John Tradescant was gardener at Hatfield and it was for Lord Salisbury that he set out to collect plant rarities from foreign lands, some of which are now grown at Lambeth. The Tudor garden at Hampton Court is not planted with authentic period flowers and relies on design for effect, and of the flowers growing in Shakespeare's garden at New Place, Stratford, the Bard could have only known perhaps two. One did not realise just how much of the true historical sense was missing when modern plants are used in Tudor gardens, until a real Tudor garden was created by Dr. Sylvia Landsberg at Southampton. The overwhelming feeling is of the herbal fragrance and featheriness in the texture of the plants and the exquisite sensual enjoyment of the small garden, truly a pleasaunce in the midst of Southampton's busy streets.

Gardens can enhance our sense of history even though the word restoration must sometimes be used in a new sense. At present two projects are being undertaken by the Sussex Historic Gardens Restoration Society, one as enhancement and the other for historical interest; a garden to complement the 18th-century town house in Chichester called Pallant House with features and plants of the period, and a topiary game of chess for Brickwall. Although the actual chess set is a new idea, Brickwall had traditionally been famous for topiary, and so in that sense the reintroduction of topiary constitutes a restoration. At Cogges Manor Farm in Oxfordshire a turn-of-the century farm museum has now been given a period cottage garden which greatly enhances the building, and at Singleton Open Air Museum a toll house of the 1820s looks less stranded now that it has a contemporary garden round it. Gradually, it is being accepted that the garden surroundings of a building play an important role in enhancing the sense of history. Some years ago Keats House at Hampstead was restored to the last detail of accuracy with wallpapers, furniture and carpets all of authentic period designs to provide the right background to the rooms in which the poet worked. As has frequently happened, however, the gardens had been laid out as a small amenity area for visitors on the lines of any municipal garden. It was pointed out by the Garden History Society that it must surely be of equal importance that the garden in which Keats composed his *Ode to the Nightingale* should be recreated in the style of the period with the flowers and trees which inspired so much of the poet's imagery; improvements are now being made.



For many years it has been suggested that there should be a register of threatened garden plants, which are mainly early varieties which became unfashionable and are in danger of extinction. Recently, the National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens has been formed; it was set up in 1978 as an independent coordinating body following a Conference sponsored by the Royal Horticultural Society and is based at Wisley. Local groups have been formed throughout the country with links with local Gardening Clubs and a National Reference Collection of garden plants is being collated, which will be of great assistance to garden restorers searching for authentic plants to use in historic gardens.