



HERTFORDSHIRE GARDENS TRUST

AUTUMN
NEWSLETTER
2012

The Chairman's Report—Christopher Melliush



This year's Annual General Meeting was held at West Lodge Park where we were entertained and educated magnificently by Andrew Beale whose grandfather established the arboretum shortly after World War II.

Twenty six members walked the course in the constant rain so typical of our 2012 summer. Never have I seen such happy faces under so many umbrellas! We learnt a great deal and noted the three national collections. I hope that we can organise another visit there in the autumn. About sixty members attended the AGM, which followed the tour.

The second Hertfordshire Gardens Book is being launched from several venues, including Waterstones in St. Albans and the Dutch Nursery, and is attracting significant interest : I applaud most strongly all the effort which has gone into this second publication. Who knows what is now brewing as countless organisations throughout the country plan to celebrate three hundred years of Lancelot "Capability" Brown in 2016?

Various members of the Trust have written to their MPs, representing the Hertfordshire constituencies, asking them to vote in Early Day Motion 219 against the proposed reduction by local authorities in their funding of urban parks. This could well harm parts of our county and we wish to see that it doesn't happen

Then I wish to remind members that about two years ago we planted a black mulberry, *Morus nigra*, at Temple Dinsley (Princess Helena College) at Preston, near Hitchin in memory of a founder member of HGT, Barbara Oakley. This happy event coincided with the 5 year plan for the restoration of the original orchard, a plan drawn up meticulously by Maydencroft Land Advisory; the planting of local varieties of apples, pears and plums, complementing the earlier advice of Miss Jekyll in the mid 1920s, will begin shortly.

At the beginning of September we held a marvellous flower event in the marquee put up by our vice-chairman, Bella Stuart-Smith, as part of her year as High Sheriff of the County. This was a truly generous loan. Sonja Fillingham and Mo Gedye entertained and instructed in an enchanting way. Funds were raised and the sun shone all day.

You can see from what I've written above and from what other members are writing in the autumn newsletter that the Hertfordshire Gardens Trust continues to flourish on many fronts.

News from the HGT year—2012

A Flower Demonstration and Workshop was held in a marquee at the home of Bella Stuart-Smith on Friday 7th September. Sonja Fillingham and Mo Gedye from the flower arranging group at St Albans Abbey came and shared their ideas with a group of approximately 40 guests. They were very entertaining as they worked on various beautiful displays, giving advice and anecdotes and answering a host of questions. We were fortunate to have a blazing hot day and there was then an opportunity to wander around Bella's beautiful and extensive gardens, featuring a magnificent vegetable garden and a dry garden amongst other areas. A sit-down lunch

was provided in the marquee and in the afternoon those that wished joined the workshop where Sonja and Mo advised on various shapes, flowers and suitability for vases which had been brought by guests. The whole day proved very relaxing and enjoyable.



The HGT visit to Wrest Park in July, to tour the splendidly restored 18th century park and gardens, is likely to become the first of a series. The demand for places to join Kate Harwood, one of HGT's expert garden historians, was such that the visit had to be repeated. With its emphasis on garden history and design, the 'Wrest Park formula' can be applied equally well to a number of other significant sites, and it is hoped that Tring Park, with its Rothschild associa-

tion, may be the venue for a similar visit, to be led by Anne Rowe, in 2013.



Cover: HGT visit to 'Mariners', Berkshire, July 2012.

Back cover: HGT garden visits during 2012.

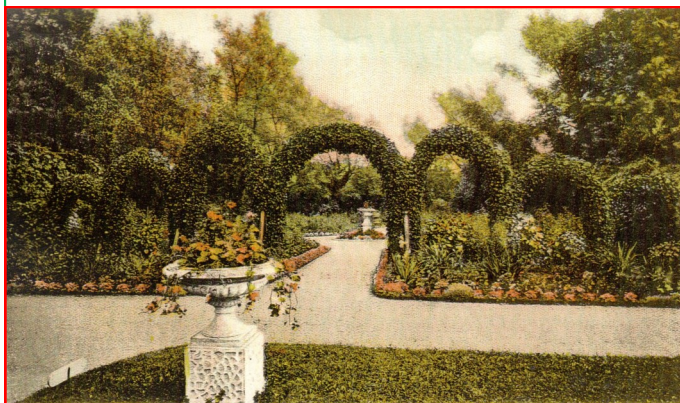
The Crown Hotel Gardens, Broxbourne—Catherine Bannister

“Broxbourne Gardens, on the banks of the River Lea, is a favourite resort of Londoners and a place of highly respectable character.”

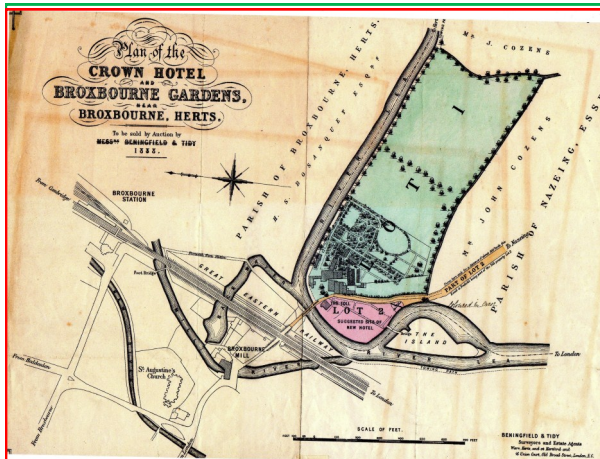
The Times c.1890

There has been an inn on the site of the Crown at least since the 17c., patronised by anglers and bargees. The present building, however, only dates from the 1930s. The area is surrounded by water - the River Lea Navigation, the New River (constructed in the 17c to take fresh drinking water from springs near Ware to London) and a stream diverted to power the mill which once stood on the banks. Strictly speaking, as the river is the county boundary, the Crown is in the parish of Nazeing and therefore the county of Essex. Much was made of its easy accessibility – sixteen miles from London on the road to Ware and Hertford, a ten minute walk from the village and very close to the GER station at Broxbourne.

The railway came to Broxbourne in 1840 and four years later the Railway Act ensured that at least one train a day stopped at every station and that had to include third class passengers. The gardens at the Crown, and at Rye House nearby, became a popular destination for day trippers using the new railway. James Thorne, writing in 1876, comments on the many hundreds and occasionally thousands of visitors who assembled at Rye House on a summer holiday. (Bank Holidays were introduced in 1871.) He describes the gardens at Rye House as “pretty, but not equal to those of the Crown Inn at Broxbourne. “These”, he says “are crowded with the most brilliant flowers and are the finest example of flower gardening in the kingdom. The hollyhocks are in their season a sight to see.”



There is no surviving record of who planned the gardens or precisely when, but the accompanying plan (dated 1888) and coloured postcard (undated) show the style.



Against a backdrop of mature trees there were long, straight walks, round flowerbeds edged with box or bedding plants, sundials, urns filled with geraniums, a rose garden and rose-clad arches framing views. Everything was formal, fragrant and highly colourful ('no bareness to offend the eye'). It was very much in

the style of some London parks of the late 19c – perfect for promenading. It is tempting to surmise that the urns were made at the nearby Pulham factory in Broxbourne and that many of the plants, roses and hollyhocks particularly, were supplied by Paul's, who had nurseries nearby, but the evidence is hard to find.

The proprietors from the 1860s were various members of the Beningfield family. In 1892 M. Beningfield (Mary) produced a broadsheet in which she makes quite clear the sort of customer who would be welcome. No schools or van parties were received, and the illustration shows well-dressed visitors riding, fishing and boating. A Masonic temple was added and in the open areas archery, cricket and croquet were on offer. In the large timber and glazed dining hall behind the hotel, complete with billiard rooms, trade dinners were held; there were avenues of lime, nut walks, vegetable gardens, a vinery, green-houses and stabling for many horses. The emphasis was on a highly respectable clientele. There was also a cottage for the head gardener.

In 1888 there would seem to have been a plan to sell the site in two lots and build a new hotel but it is not clear what happened. In January 1909 a new bridge was opened spanning both the railway and linking up with a new road to Nazeing. In 1911 the Crown Hotel with cottage, Pleasure Grounds and Meadow Land (an area of around fourteen acres) was put up for sale. The ominous words "ripe for immediate development for building" appear in the description. In 1912 Pioneer Catering are listed as the owners. Probably the First World War caused the end both of the gardens and the trippers. Certainly much of the area near the river is now overgrown and an estate of houses has been built behind the inn.

Book Review—'The Pulham Legacy'

'Rock Landscapes: the Pulham Legacy'

by Claude Hitching with photographs

by Jenny Lilly (published by ACC).

Isbn: 978-1-87067-376-1



HGT member Ellie Johnson thoroughly recommends *'Rock Landscapes: The Pulham Legacy'* as a fascinating read for those interested in garden history: gardens, parks and their creators and designers. The book is the story of the Pulham family and the evolution of their business, illustrated with a wonderful selection of photographs of some of the gardens they created.

The Pulhams were garden craftsmen, specialists in the design and construction of rock and water gardens, rose gardens, Italianate and Japanese gardens. The firm, founded in 1820 in London, with its manufactory in Hertfordshire, created the artificial stone product 'Pulhamite' with which they supplemented natural rock in their garden designs.

Pulham gardens were noted for their moods. Rocky streams plunging over waterfalls, bouldered cliffs concealing, mysterious, sunken grottos, contrasted with peaceful formal gardens: balustraded terraces leading down to lily ponds with fountains, and scented rose-gardens with pergolas and sundials.

'Pulhamite' and the terracotta ornaments which adorned their gardens were manufactured at Broxbourne; the plant collections of acers, alpine plants and ferns to stock their Japanese and formal gardens, and to meet the demand of the fern-collecting craze, were supplied from their nursery at Bishops Stortford. The author, Claude Hitching, was inspired to write the book after discovering that no fewer than five of his ancestors had worked as rock builders for James Pulham and Son.

Update on the 'Serpent' - Deborah Kinloch

Since Kate Harwood's report in the Spring Newsletter a great deal has happened.

In early May Dacorum Borough Council held two exhibitions on town centre regeneration proposals at which HGT members helped to explain the council's plans with regard to restoration of the Water Gardens. There was a lot of interest from members of the public of all ages and it was particularly interesting to hear the reminiscences of older town residents. A 1960's living room was staged where residents were filmed recalling their memories of the Water Gardens and giving their views on improvements. Both Kate and Rachel James did film interviews, Rachael talking about the subconscious in the garden and Kate about mainstream European movements, Paul Klee and Bauhaus. The 'Save Our Serpent' campaign was

launched and more Water Gardens Friends signed up.

At the end of August DBC submitted their HLF bid for funding for restoration. Consultants HTA Landscape Design were commissioned to produce the bid submission which included some of the film interviews and evidence of local support from the Friends group and HGT; the outcome is expected in December. Meanwhile the Environmental Agency has refused Dacorum Borough Council's request for exemption of the Water Gardens under EU Water Directive 7 and are insisting that the Water Gardens are restored as a chalk stream. HGT, the Garden History Society and others are fighting this.

Hemel Water Gardens today.



