HERTFORDSHIRE GARDENS TRUST

AUTUMN NEWSLETTER 2020

Contents

Cover illustration: Autumn in Brocket Park (image T.H. Moller)

Back cover: Overgrown statue of *Diana the huntress*, Brocket Park (T.H. Moller)

Introduction

Bella Stuart-Smith

Having postponed the 29th AGM due to be held in July when no doubt it was blazingly hot, the 3rd September dawned to a heavy warm mist, drizzle and torrential rain. We held our nerve and the AGM went ahead as planned in front of the folly at Benington Lordship thanks to the generosity of Susanna and Richard Bott. The church chimed our start at 6 pm. It didn't rain and those who came were treated to a dry evening ending with some lovely September evening sunshine. Attending was our president, the Countess of Verulam, the executive committee and a fair number of members who were happy to see each other, outdoors and with appropriate social distance measures in place.

The membership stood at 321 and we welcomed 5 new members in the year to March 2020. Our research volunteers, under Anne Rowe's capable leadership had lodged 10 completed reports in County Hall. The spin-off from this is that some researchers have continued to be involved in their subjects giving talks, raising the profile of the sites and any conservation issues there may be. The training sessions are very valuable to all.

Kate Harwood is remarkably involved in all levels of planning and has been as busy as ever, highlighting the historical significance of our most endangered landscapes and in particular the Gilston Garden Village scheme (North Harlow). It is a matter that concerns all of us and I hope that some of you will consider The Garden Trust training you will read about in this newsletter as a way to give support to HGT conservation.

Liz Carlin and her team of Alison Moller, Tina Rowland, Helen Leiper and Kate Harwood had done a marvellous job of producing interesting walks and talks. It is hoped that those that were cancelled because of Covid will go ahead next year and the Autumn programme will happen in some form or other. Likewise, the garden visits in Summer 2019 were stimulating and wonderful, highlighting different gardening styles and it is hoped that the Summer 2020 visits can be programmed for next year. We also hope to reinstate gardeners' question time. Charles Bridgeman is back on the agenda with a study day on 19th June 2021 at Tring Park.

The annual accounts were adopted and the Treasurer reported that the Gedye Fund now stands at £2,760, which is a huge tribute to all that Roger achieved in his chairmanship. The inaugural event will be announced once we are confident that we can safely go ahead.

The executive committee members were re-elected, but what I failed to note in the Annual Report, and for which I apologise, is that Sue Flood had been co-opted onto the executive committee and had attended her first meeting in February 2020. It comes as no surprise then to report that she was proposed as the new chair of Hertfordshire Gardens Trust and voted in unanimously.

I believe she is already known to many of you as the county archivist, a post she held from 2001 until she retired in 2013. Although a native of County Durham, she started her career in London at the Greater London Record Office but lucky for us she moved a little way north to Hertfordshire in 1978, joining what is now HALS. She has contributed to a number of publications and most notably for us, she coedited *Humphry Repton in Hertfordshire* in 2018 with Professor Tom Williamson. She is also General Editor of the Hertfordshire Record Society, treasurer of the East of England Regional Archive Council and sits on the St Albans Diocesan Advisory Committee. I am absolutely thrilled to hand over to her and wish her every success as she takes up the reins.

2020 AGM at Benington Lordship

New HGT Chairman

Sue Flood

It was a chilly and drizzly evening when we met at Benington Lordship for our AGM a few weeks ago. Thank you to all who attended. It was an honour and a real pleasure to be elected as your next chairman. There have been two lovely people previously in this role, Bella and Roger, who will be very hard acts to follow. Sadly I knew Roger for so short a time, but I sincerely hope that together we can build on his legacy. I have a lot to learn, and I am looking forward to increasing my knowledge of the Trust and its work and meeting many more members in the future. This year has been very strange for all of us – who knew what holding a meeting via Zoom meant before the summer? For me, and I suspect for you too, our gardens have been our life-line over these past months. As a committee, if circumstances allow, we hope to plan a complete programme of talks, visits and walks for us all to enjoy next year.

Take care and stay safe.

Sue Flood

Horticultural Ladies

Kate Harwood

Our spring garden history course, Horticultural Ladies (HL), had to be postponed, but here is a flavour of it from members of the group who were due to give presentations, the only rule being that they could choose anyone but Jekyll!

Liz Carlin: **Celia Fiennes** (1662-1742) kept a remarkable diary of her journeys around Britain, mostly on horseback, from 1685 to 1712. At Wilton in the 1690s, she described the 'very fine house', and its gardens 'with many gravel walks with grass squares set with fine brass and stone statues, with fish and basins with figures in the middle spouting out water, dwarf trees of all sorts and a fine flower garden, much wall fruit: the river runs through the garden that easily conveys by pipes water to all parts'. In May 1697 she was at Audley End, which, she writes, 'makes a noble appearance like a town, so many towers and buildings of stone within a park which is walled round, a good River runs through it; it is built round 3 courts, there are 30 great and little towers on top and a great Cupilow in the middle.… The canal in the middle of the parke look'd very fine.'

Tina Rowland: **Jane Loudon**, born Jane Webb in 1807, worked closely with her husband John on his *Gardener's Magazine*. Her beautifully illustrated books on gardening and plant identification, published in the 1840s, sold in their thousands and women were enthused enough by them to take up gardening as a hobby. Through her books, gardening came to be regarded as a recreational activity for everyone. Finally, she transformed herself into a self-taught, acclaimed botanical artist.

Another adventurous HL was **Marianne North**, whose gallery of flower portraits is in Kew Gardens. She travelled the world, painting plants in situ, a bonus for plant collectors who often received a newly discovered plant, but had no idea of the conditions it required or what it looked like at maturity. **Mary Delaney**, another HL, made collages that were so accurate they were sometimes used to identify plants.

V&A Museum Collection

Several HLs turned their talents to commercial work. *Judy Jowett*: **Anna Maria Garthwaite**, 18th century artist and fabric designer, was influential in the emergence of what became the Spitalfields silk trade. In a French-speaking, man's world, her talent and business acumen shines through. Over a period of nearly 50 years she gathered together designs of her own, as well as 'those of other hands', and her large collection shows how styles changed in the increasing light of botanical exploration and awareness, trade and London Society at the time.

Richard and Shirley Haydon outline the extraordinary career of **Margaret Mee** (1909-1988), who lived in Codicote and worked at De Havilland's in the drawing office for a time. She moved to Sao Paulo, Brazil in 1951. In 1956 she made the first of 15 journeys to search for and paint the plants of the Amazon forests. Her final journey in 1988 took her to the Anavilanhas archipelago in search of the night-flowering "strophocactus" or "moonflower", which does not flower every year and then opens for just one night. She finally found some tightly folded buds and stayed until it got dark, when the flower burst in to life. Her book *Margaret Mee in Search of Flowers of the Amazon Forest* (1988) is based on her diaries, and her legacy includes 400 folios of gouache illustrations, 40 sketch books and 15 diaries, many of which are now archived at Kew. Several of the plants she discovered have been named after her.

Moonflower
Margaret Mee, 1988

Perhaps the most famous of the botanists is **Mary Duchess of Beaufort** (1630 -1715), daughter of Lord Arthur Capel of Hadham Hall. *Alison Moller:* In 1660 Mary and her husband took up residence at Badminton where she started a Physic garden and converted a greenhouse into the 'Matchless Stove of Badminton'. It was 110 feet long and 18 feet high with four subterranean stoves and here she raised and cared for all sorts of plants. At Beaufort House, their London home next to the Chelsea Physic Garden, Mary had 2000 exotics. She kept detailed records of her plants - identifying and cataloguing them and communicating her observations to other plant collectors, such as Sir Hans Sloane and Philip Miller. In an attempt to clarify the nomenclature, she produced a 12-volume *hortus siccus* of pressed plants. William Sherard described Mary's plants in the *Beaufort Florilegium*, illustrated by 'Adams the gardener' and Everhard Kick from 1703-5. In 1690 Mary spent £29,760 on garden-related activities!

A much less well-known HL was also researched by *Alison Moller*: **Maria Jacson** (1755-1829) engaged in botanical studies from an early age, but it was only in her 40s that she sought an income from writing. Her first three books established her as one of the first women science writers. Erasmus Darwin praised 'a new treatise introductory to botany called *Botanic Dialogues* for the use of schools, well adapted to this purpose, written by M. E. Jacson, a lady well skilled in botany.' However, her *Florist's Manual* published anonymously in 1816 was her most influential work. It is an early example of a book specifically for women in which her aim was to 'induce, even a few, of my sister florists to exercise their intellect, or relieve their ennui ...'. Jacson's advice on shaping flower beds pre-dates J.C. Loudon who promoted the 'gardenesque' and her ideas on colour mingling and seasonal flowering succession anticipated those of Gertrude Jekyll a century later.

We hope to run the course next spring with presentations on all these HLs, as well as the du Canes, Norah Geddes, a pioneer in garden design, the Arts & Crafts Ladies (Frances Jane Hope, Edna Walling and others), Elizabeth von Arnim, Elaine Dunbar, Andrea Wulf, the memsahibs and the Grand Tour Ladies.

Lord Burghley at Theobalds

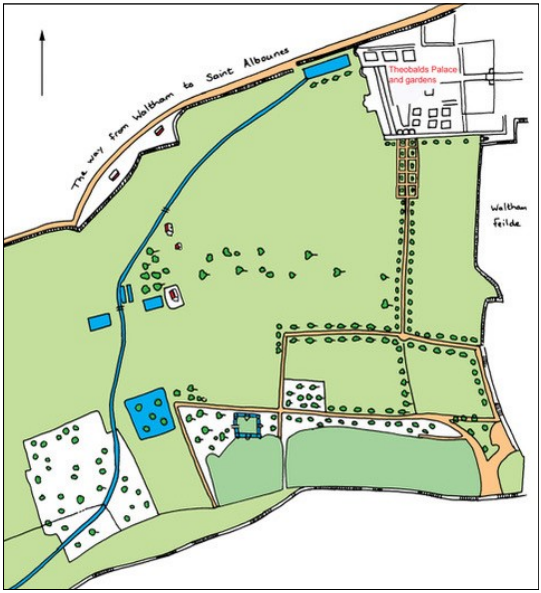
Anne Rowe

Sir William Cecil had been in the service of Princess Elizabeth for eight years, as her surveyor, when she became queen in November 1558. A 'personal relationship of confidence, trust, and mutual respect' had developed between them and, on the first day of her reign, Queen Elizabeth I appointed Cecil her secretary of state. He remained her most trusted advisor until he died in 1598. 2020 marks the 500th anniversary of the birth of this remarkable statesman .

In 1553 Cecil had inherited the family estate in Stamford and begun building Burghley House there, but now he needed a country estate closer to the royal court and parliament in London. Work at Burghley was paused for a decade from 1564 while he built another great prodigy house, Theobalds, at Waltham Cross in south-east Hertfordshire.

An old house must have been standing at Theobalds because work can barely have started on the new one when Queen Elizabeth made her first visit in 1564. Over the next 33 years Theobalds became the house she most often visited apart from the royal palaces: she came at least another 11 times, sometimes staying as long as two weeks.

Cecil had chosen his site well. A convenient 12 miles from Westminster, it also lay alongside the Old North Road – the main highway between the capital and all parts to the north and north-east. Consequently it made an ideal stepping-stone for many of the royal Progresses – the extended trips made by the Queen during the summer months to visit the favoured, display herself to the people and allow her London palaces to get a good airing. Cecil quite deliberately set out to make Theobalds one of the most splendid houses in the country with the intention that it would function as 'the Queen's occasional palace'. Built around two great courts, it was capable of accommodating the Queen and chosen courtiers as well as their 'support staff'. In 1572 Cecil (now Lord Burghley) drew up the guest list for an impending visit that included the queen and thirteen assorted lords, ladies and gentlemen of her court, together with the numerous gentlewomen, maids, grooms, squires, ushers and other servants needed to attend them.



Tracing of part of J. Thorpe's plan of Theobalds, 1611 [British Library]

Around the house Burghley designed a series of magnificent and extensive gardens which, as we know from the descriptions of eminent visitors, were 'encompassed with water large enough for one to have the pleasure of going in a boat and rowing between the shrubs'. The Great Garden covered seven acres and was divided into 9 square knots, each 70 foot square and in the centre of the garden was a white marble fountain. John Gerard, the herbalist, provided planting advice and 50 sorts of exotic seeds were imported from Florence.

Beyond the southern wall of the garden was a rabbit warren which Lord Burghley intended to expand around the west side as well – rabbits being high-status, carefully cossetted animals, valued for their meat and fur. But the rabbits were soon replaced by animals of even higher status as Burghley enclosed the adjacent farmland, clearing away hedgerows to make a deer park stocked with both red and fallow deer.

Burghley's garden wall at Cedars Park

Burghley's park was innovative, designed to be an extension of the pleasure gardens around the house. From an arched gateway in the garden wall, he laid out a tree-lined walk heading south across the park for a third of a mile to a series of hedged lanes leading to the former fields and homestead moat of the manor of Cullings, all of which had been incorporated into Burghley's Theobalds estate. The homestead moat had become a moated garden and the hedged lanes were converted into a circuit of garden walks and allées extending for a further 1½ miles. No wonder a contemporary biographer wrote 'He greatly delighted in making gardens, fountains, and walks, which at Theobalds were perfected most costly, bewtifully and pleasauntly, where one might walk twoe myle in the walkes before he came to their ends.'

According to that same, unknown, biographer, Queen Elizabeth was entertained at Theobalds 'with rich shows, pleasant devices, and all manner of sports that co[u]ld be devised, to the greate delight of her Majesty, and her whole traine'. A popular spectator sport of the time was deer coursing and the Queen probably enjoyed this from the lodge Burghley built in the middle of his park overlooking 'The Course'.

There is no record of Queen Elizabeth actively hunting in Theobalds park, although she is likely to have done so. We do know that her favourite, Robert Dudley Earl of Leicester, hunted there as he wrote in 1584 to thank Lord Burghley for his hospitality:

> 'I have been bold to make some of your stags afraid but killed none; if I had your Lordship would have been presented with our good fortune, yet had I very good sport and killed a young hind.'

Lord Burghley's 'pleasure palace' continued to play a central role in the reign of the next monarch, James I, who is said to have spent nearly half his time at Theobalds after acquiring it from Lord Burghley's son Robert Cecil. It was his favourite residence and after he died there in 1625, his son was proclaimed King Charles I at the gates.

Excavated remains of Burghley's loggia, 2015

Sadly the fabulous house, gardens and park were dismantled in the mid-17th century, less than a century after their creation, casualties of the civil wars that ended Charles's reign, but a few upstanding remnants of Burghley's house and gardens can still be found in Cedars Park and traces of features in the former parkland survive in the fields west of the A10. Enfield Archaeological Society excavated the Cullings moat in 2008-9 and features in Cedars Park in 2014-16. Archaeologist Dr Martin Dearne had planned to describe their findings to HGT members in a visit to Cedars Park this summer, and we are hoping to reschedule this event for next year.

Principal sources:

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
Maps held in the Bodleian Library, the British Library and Hatfield House Archives.

Birkbeck study day : Grottoes

Sue Friend

At the end of February, just before the lockdown, I attended this study day in the Senate House, University of London. I had been attracted by the promise in the flyer of learning about 'the ever-intriguing subject of grottoes in garden history from classical times through the Italian Renaissance to their heyday in Britain of the 18th century' and I was not disappointed.

The first talk, by John Harrison from the Open University, was on ancient Roman grottoes and Nymphaea. I had no idea what nymphaea meant but it referred to Greek shrines dedicated to water nymphs. The Romans followed the Greek custom of adding statues to natural settings, often by springs or in caves. John used the Egeria Grotto in Rome as an example. Rich Romans began to construct grottoes at their country retreats using materials like pumice to make them look natural.

After a welcome break for coffee we learnt about the Italian Renaissance grottoes from Laura Karran of the University of Lincoln. During the Renaissance there was a great interest in science, classifying the natural world, and the ancient myths. It was an age of intellectual curiosity, a hunger to know, catalogue and experiment. This was alongside engineering advances that enabled the use of hydraulics to make water appear in edifices as if it was coming from a natural source.

Laura focused on the grottoes in three Florentine gardens built by the Medicis namely the Castello garden, the Boboli garden and the Pratolino garden. Having visited the Boboli Grottoes several years earlier (see photos) I was interested in Laura's description of the shells dripping with water on the walls and artificial stalactites along with frescoes on the ceiling in the Grotto Grande. All the creatures depicted were chosen with

Boboli Garden Grotto, Florence

care and had mythological meanings, for example the unicorn could purify water. When I visited, I had no idea what the mythological connections were, but I was awed by the ambiance of the grotto. She also described the three grottoes in the grounds of the villa Pratolino near Florence decorated with murals and containing automata designed to combine fear and fun for the visitors.

Next came the speaker I had been most interested in hearing, garden historian Michael Cousins, whose subject was the grotto builders of eighteenth-century England. He gave an extensive account of the people and places involved in the creation of diverse garden buildings, with the apogee for grottoes being 1760-80 when it was felt that every house should have one!

Experts like John Castles worked on decorating grottoes for wealthy patrons like Lady Walpole. He created patterns of shell designs and when he died his tombstone stated he had 'great ingenuity in shellwork'. Fashions changed over the century with patterns and symmetry being in vogue before 1750 and then a more naturalistic look becoming popular. Stones and minerals were used to replicate rock strata and passageways built to add to the feeling of entering natural features. Joseph Lane (1717-84) and his son Josiah Lane (1753-1833) were associated with several projects including Fonthill, Painshill and perhaps Stourhead. Waterfalls and basins were features of the more naturalistic grottoes.

John Scott's grotto in Ware was mentioned as being unusual in that it had six chambers linked by passages, it was built 1761-64 and can still be visited following a restoration in the early 1990s. At Stowe there was a free-standing grotto built by William Kent containing mirrors and statues with tunnels added later. Sadly many of these buildings have disappeared over time, but I was astonished at how common they seemed to be in the eighteenth century.

Scott's grotto, Ware

Finally, we had a fascinating presentation from Adrian Powell, a conservator, about the restoration of Painshill Park grotto. Some conservation work had been undertaken in 1994 by Diana Reydell and Roger Capps but the underlying structure had not been tackled. In 2012-13 remedial work was undertaken to make the structure safe and the interior walls were restored using lime mortar and 50,000 crystals. The last picture we were shown was taken shortly before the study day, showing the grotto flooded with a man standing in water nearly up to his waist - a gasp of horror went up. The same man was present in the room, and reassured us that they were working hard to clean up the grotto. Painshill is now on my list of places to visit when I can.

Getting involved

Online training from The Gardens Trust

Liz Carlin

In these strange and unsettling times, those of us engaged in researching historic parks and gardens may have been able to use the extra time at home to get on with that and if so, will be glad of the training packages that The Gardens Trust has been making available. They will also be of great interest to HGT members who may like to look more deeply into our endeavours and become more involved with different aspects of our work and interests.

The training packages cover all the Trust's areas of activity. Many of us have found particular help from the online communications package and the various social media platforms. For researchers, the exhaustive list of free online resources for researching parks and gardens is invaluable while it is hard if not impossible to visit the actual archives. Particularly useful is the advice on how to determine a site's historic significance and how to make that information available to those who need to know.

We are all aware of the threats posed to our historic sites by planning applications. Several packages give clear advice on how to respond effectively to these. With the weakening of planning laws being brought into effect by the present government we need to be even more vigilant, and Kate Harwood would welcome help from members in this invaluable work.

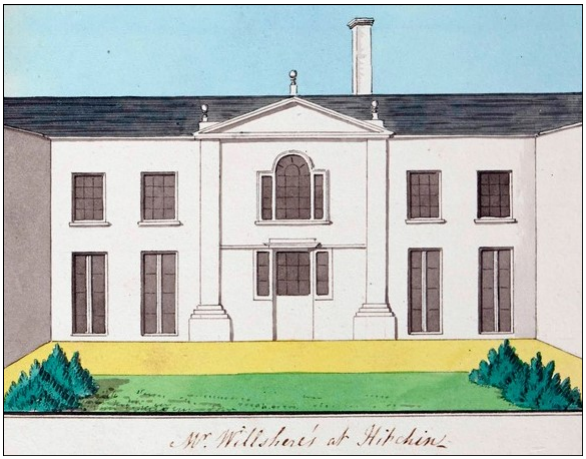
Not all these resources will be of equal interest to everyone, but do consider dipping into some of them to spark your interest and enthusiasm in our projects in these times when it is quite difficult to engage actively.

The materials are very accessible. They can be found on the Resource Hub of The Gardens Trust website at *http:/the gardenstrust.org/conservation/hlp-hub/training*

William Wilshire's tree nursery and plantations

Bridget Howlett

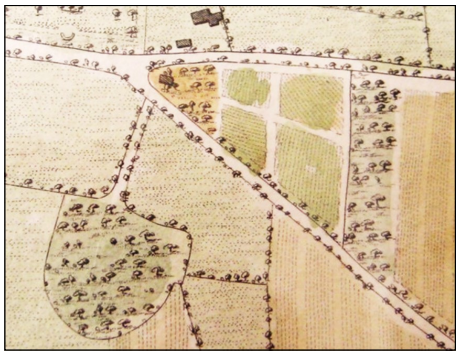
William Wilshere was a Hitchin attorney, articled in 1769 as a clerk aged 14 to Richard Tristram, a childless widower, whose home and legal practice he inherited in 1785. An active and enterprising professional, Wilshere gradually acquired over 160 acres of land in Hitchin as well as estates in nearby Walsworth, Pirton, and Shillington. He loaned large sums of money to Samuel Whitbread, and acquired a tenth share in the Whitbread brewery.



The garden front of William Wilshere's house, later known as The Hermitage, subsequently demolished to make way for Hermitage Road. (HALS Oldfield drawing DE/Of/4 p153)

Whilst researching the extensive gardens of Wilshere's home, *The Hermitage*, in the centre of Hitchin, I discovered the Farm and Garden Memoranda Books he kept from 1809 until his death in 1824, now in the Hertfordshire Archives. The gardening entries record visits to Lee and Kennedy's and Colville's nurseries near London in 1811, long lists of plants he wished to buy, tips on cultivation, his attempt to identify varieties of apples and pears in his fruit trees, and yields of fruit, including pineapples and grapes. He records the trees growing in his nursery, many of which were planted in the neighbouring parish of Great Wymondley.

By 1809, when William Wilshere began his Farm and Garden Memoranda Books, he had been called to the Bar, and been appointed a Justice of the Peace for Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire. He was also making a profit from his tree nursery. Many of his trees were sold to local landowners - always through intermediaries. Perhaps the personal commercial sale of trees and shrubs was incompatible with the status of a landed gentleman to which Wilshere aspired, or could he have been too busy with his legal life and this was one of many areas of routine management that he delegated?



Kitchen garden and tree nursery in triangle between Walsworth and Whinbush Roads. On the left is The Dell, a former sand pit, where Wilshere had planted trees. (Excerpt from plan of Hitchin printed in 1820)

A memorandum dated October 1809 noted his price of 65 to 70 shillings per hundred for larches. In 1809-1811 as well as 1000 larches, he sold 550 spruce firs, 1000 Scotch [firs], 70 limes and 10 planes, including 700 Scotch firs to the Reverend Lynch Burroughs of Offley Place, who had diverted the main Hitchin-Luton road in 1805 to enlarge his park. In 1812 he sold trees and shrubs to Lord Tavistock, eldest son of the Duke of Bedford, and to Mr Lee Antonie of Colworth, Bedfordshire.

For Colworth he supplied 4000 spruce firs, 1000 Scotch firs, 100 larch, 1000 laurels, 200 lilacs, syringa, and laurentinas, 80 limes, 20 planes, 4 large firs, 100 Chinese roses half in pots, 20 weeping beeches, 50 roses, 20 honeysuckles, 2 hickories, 20 rosemary, 22 box, 150 laburnums, 2 large cypress, 30 sugar maples, 100 hornbeams, 12 Persian lilacs, 12 large abele, and 20 large white poplars. Payment of £51 4s 10d was made to Henry Hodgson, a Hitchin nurseryman, the intermediary who was to supply the plants..

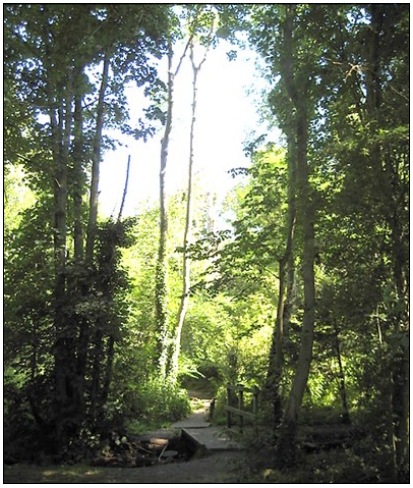
In the winter of 1814-1815 Wilshere sold shrubs to Lady Lucas and Baron Dimsdale through Thomas Brown, a Hitchin-based surveyor and agent to the Wrest Park estate. In November 1822 he supplied over 3000 trees, including 1000 oaks, to Mr Brown for Lady De Grey, presumably also for Wrest Park.

Other trees were for Wilshere's own property. On his father's death in 1798 he had inherited a farm in Great Wymondley, and in 1806 he bought the Manor of Wymondley, though not the manor house. Great Wymondley was enclosed in 1811 giving Wilshere a compact block of land in the north of the parish bordering Hitchin, where he began planting trees. In February 1812 he planted on the former Litler Common 650 oaks, 300 ashes, 150 larches, 20 Spanish chestnuts, 50 birch, 40 horse chestnuts and 200 poplars. These were soon supplemented with 30 oaks, 30 willows and 3000 sallow cuttings from Shillington. So far, I have been unable to identify Litler Common; it is not named on a map showing the open fields of Great Wymondley before enclosure. A later note records the planting of 900 oak, ash and elm trees in the Hanging and Hill Plantations (now the Lower and Upper Plantations), 200 black poplars in the Willow Plantation, and 700 firs, spruce, and larch in other plantations. These are shown on a map of Wilshere property in Great Wymondley of 1868.

Part of Great Wymondley before the open fields were enclosed in 1803. The road from Hitchin to Willian is on the extreme left. The footpath running diagonally across the bottom half of the map is now part of the Garden City Greenway. In the centre can be seen the pond and stream.
(HALS Excerpt from 1803 map of Great Wymondley 44216)

Most of the Upper and Lower Plantations, together with the field in between, have recently been incorporated into Wymondley Wood by the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, which has provided a car park and picnic area as well as a network of footpaths and cycle ways through the neighbouring fields. During the last few months I have been able to explore the area more thoroughly and look for possible trees planted by William Wilshere.

The Willow Plantation, besides tall massive willows, contains hybrid black poplars. As well as many younger and probably self-seeded trees, the Upper Plantation includes mature oak, beech, lime, horse chestnut, and ash, while the Lower Plantation, where there are springs and a pond, has in addition willows and poplars. The trees in both plantations are today congested and have grown very tall in their search for light. Five of the larger oaks in the Upper Plantation have an average girth of just over 8 feet and one oak near the edge of the Lower Plantation measures 10 feet 6 inches. The beeches, ashes and horse chestnut are smaller. Many mature oak trees grow in the adjacent hedgerows: two measured were between 9 feet and 10 feet in girth.



Footbridge over the stream in the Lower Plantation. (Bridget Howlett, June 2020)

Willow Plantation. (Bridget Howlett, June 2020)

It is impossible to be certain that these surviving trees were planted by William Wilshere - or by his nephews who inherited the estate - but this enterprising Hitchin lawyer was responsible for creating an attractive wooded landscape in what was once a bare open field. Many of us who have enjoyed recent lockdown walks in the area have cause to be grateful to both William Wilshere and the plantations' current owners.

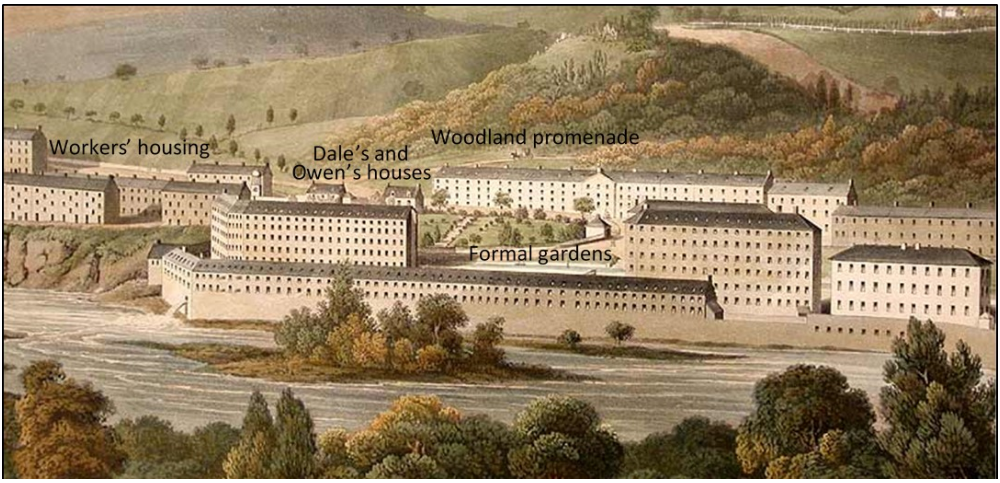
Sources:

William Wilshere's farm and garden memoranda books 1809-1824 HALS 61181-61182
Map of Great Wymondley before enclosure, 1803 HALS 44216
Plan of the Wilshere Estates 1868 HALS 61047 and book of reference HALS DE/Ws/A1

A community utopia

Alison Moller

In this centennial year of the founding of Welwyn Garden City, just days before the Lockdown prohibited travel, I fulfilled a long-held ambition to visit the Scottish site where the first tentative steps were taken towards creating a utopian community for factory workers, a century before the Garden City movement blossomed in Hertfordshire. New Lanark, south-east of Glasgow, is now a World Heritage Site, its Mill No.1 imaginatively converted into a hotel with rooms overlooking the spectacular River Clyde gorge.

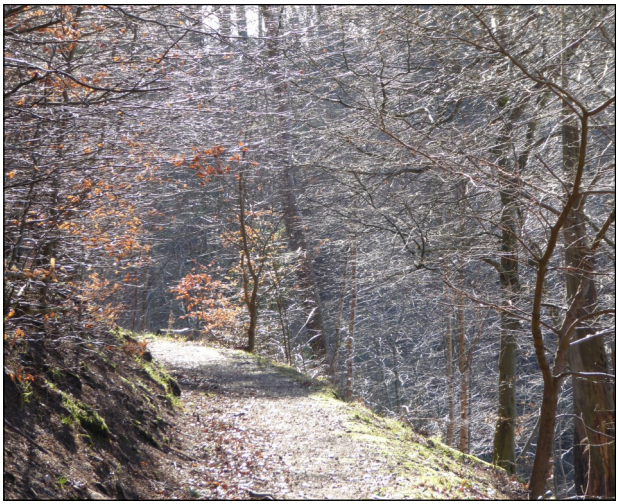


New Lanark viewed from the south, across the River Clyde. (John Clark, 1825)

In 1786 David Dale built New Lanark Mills, powered by the Clyde water and surrounded by a model village for the workers, including modest houses for Dale and the Mill manager. This experiment much later inspired other model villages based around a dominant industry, such as Saltaire, 1851 (woollen mills), Bournville, 1879 (chocolate), Port Sunlight, 1887 (soap) and Silver End, 1926 (metal window frames). However, it was the work of Dale's son-in-law, Robert Owen, that presaged the Garden City movement a century later.

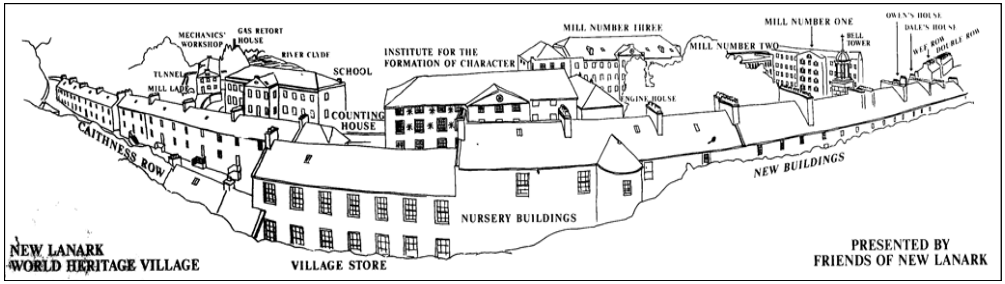
Robert Owen, born 1771 in Newtown, Powys, was largely self-educated with interests in engineering and the ideals of the Enlightenment. In 1794 he became a partner in the Chorlton Twist Company and during a business trip to Glasgow met Caroline Dale. Owen and his partners bought the New Lanark Mills in 1799. He and Caroline married, and set up home in New Lanark, living on site until their family outgrew the house. After his original partners lost faith in the scheme, Owen attracted new investors, including the famous Utilitarian, Jeremy Bentham. Investors took a modest 5 per cent return, with the remaining profit used to benefit the workers, and the Mill prospered.

In his enlightened management of the model village, Owen provided free medical care, as well as a subsidised Village Store and street cleaning. He paid as much attention to the outside environment as to working conditions in the Mill.



Woodland promenade

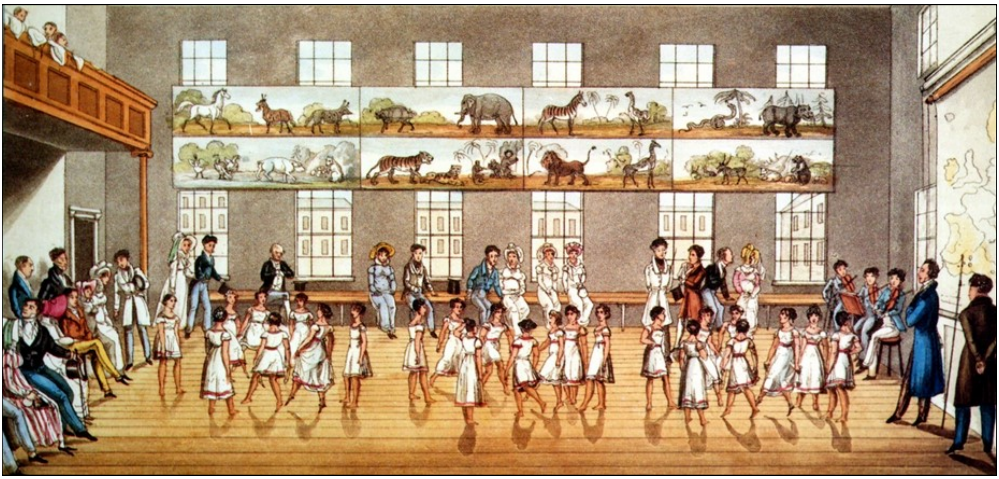
All the buildings were handsome, made of locally quarried sandstone. The village was 'surrounded by gardens and an abundance of space in all directions to keep the air healthy and pleasant: they will have walks and plantations before them, and well cultivated grounds, kept in good order as far as the eye can reach'. Each householder had a garden. The valley side above the village was laid out as the Woodland Promenade for all to enjoy, in a series of zigzag woodland footpaths with views across the gorge, and there was a landscaped garden in the centre of the village. Behind the owners' houses was a strip of more private herbaceous gardens, now restored by the New Lanark Village Group assisted by the Beechgrove team from BBC Scotland.



View from the woodland path leading down from the former allotments (present car park)

On the outskirts of the village, beyond the promenade ascending the valley, workers grew fruit and vegetables in the allotments. 'Spade cultivation' rather than the use of the plough for large areas of fields was another of Owen's ideas. This may have been partly a ploy to provide work for the glut of unemployed labourers following the Napoleonic wars, but Owen seems to have believed that double digging improved yields and crop health.

He believed education could free society from poverty and crime. 'Exchange their poverty for wealth', he wrote, 'their ignorance for knowledge, their anger for kindness, their divisions for union.' No child under 10 worked in the Mill, where previously children of six had worked a 13-hour day. Small children attended the Nursery while their mothers returned to work to supplement the family income. By 1817, children from three to six years old could attend the newly founded School for Children, and at seven they started formal education at the *Institute for the Formation of Character*. Dancing and physical exercise were encouraged, and they studied history, geography, nature, art and music in a light and spacious schoolroom.



Quadrille class in the Institute for the Formation of Character - engraved by G. Hunt

Robert Owen's connection with New Lanark ended in 1825 when he sold up and embarked on other social welfare enterprises. However, his utopian co-operative community idealism did not thrive when not supported by an industry - as the failed social experiments at New Harmony, Indiana, USA, Orbiston, Lanarkshire and Queenswood, Hampshire attest. Owen died in 1858 and a revaluation of his vision was provided in 1993 by Professor Gregory Claeys, who in the *Selected Works of Robert Owen* wrote: 'His ideas on co-operative ownership and profit-sharing are again increasingly popular in an era where over half the world's population strives to seek a middle way between chaotic and exploitative laissez-faire capitalism and inefficient centrally planned communism.'

In the next article, Kate Harwood explores a further link between the natural landscape of the River Clyde and the designed landscape of Hertfordshire.

The Linns of the Clyde and the Mimram

Kate Harwood

The polite tourist of the late eighteenth century, well-schooled by guidance from William Gilpin in his *Essay on the Picturesque* and Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), went searching for the Picturesque, Sublime, Aweful and exciting in 'wild' landscape. By the end of the 18th century the cult of Sensibility had taken hold, spurred on by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's writings and mocked by Jane Austen in *Sense and Sensibility*. This emphasised the importance of 'feeling' the landscape as an emotion.

Wars across Europe limited access to Italy and Switzerland where Cozens had painted the Alpine Landscape and Wordsworth had delighted in the solitude, untouched by Man. Goethe in his *Letters from Switzerland*[1] (1795) wrote of the Gotthard Pass that 'The passage through this defile raised in me a grand but calm emotion. The sublime produces a beautiful calmness'. Others however had worse experiences, encountering avalanches and wolves as they crossed the Alps.

It was safer to go to The Lakes, the (Derbyshire) Peaks or even Wales and Scotland, though they were rather primitive – many exclaimed at the lack of stockings and shoes on the part of the younger women – and it rained considerably. The added inducement of a Scottish Tour was the link with Ossian, famous as the primitive British Bard at a time when the focus had turned to the British native heritage rather than the Ancients. A trip to Ossian's Cell at Dunkeld was thus a must. An added attraction was the Falls on the river Bran. A small hermitage, supposedly Ossian's, overlooked the Falls and gave the requisite 'picturesque' composition for amateur artists. No-one yet knew that Ossian was a fiction and his verses, supposedly translated by James MacPherson in 1760, were written by MacPherson himself.

Even better Falls were to be found on the river Clyde near Lanark, where the three major Falls, Bonnington, Cora and Stonebyres Linns were visited by tourists from the early 18th century. At Bonnington House, a walk to the Cora Linn with a small prospect room angled to give the best view of the Falls was built in 1708; the prospect room, now in ruins, remains. To enhance the experience a mirror at the back of the room gave an extra dimension to the thrill of danger so close - but not too close. The spectacular Bonnington Linn fell in a number of channels over a semi-circular cliff to a basin 30 feet below but the Cora Linn, half a mile downstream, came down 90 feet as a series of stepped cascades. This was not only visually spectacular (as it still is) but also the 'sullen noise' of the water

Cora Linn on the River Clyde

'rushing with horrid fury . . . unnerves and overcomes the heart'. This made it 'one of Britain's most Sublime experiences'[2] The river then turned the corner, fell over the modest Dundaff Linn and powered the utopian mills of Robert Owen's New Lanark, which as we have seen, was in itself a visitor attraction by 1795.[3]

Tourism continued through the 19th century, fuelled by Queen Victoria's love of Scotland, and the fashion grew for all things 'Scotch'. There is some evidence that planting of Scots Pines in 19th century landscapes was due to this fashion.

Tewin Water Linns in the 1920s and now (photograph, Kate Harwood)

The Scottish influence reached Hertfordshire with the construction of the Tewin Water Linns. *Gardening World* of July 29 1899 waxed lyrical about the garden laid out for H. Tower Esq. by his gardener Mr Thomson from early 1898. This included a bog garden by the 'Maran'[Mimram] and 'Several linns or small water falls' which were put in 'to check the rapid course of the stream' – alas no longer as rapid. However, one effect, also noted by those at the Clyde Linns was that the 'sound of the waterfall was most refreshing'.

The bog garden had been formed with two islands of piled-up mud and contained variegated Negundo (*Acer negundo*, ash-leaved maple), *Prunus pissardi* (with dark purple leaves on blackish stems), red and yellow barked willows, flowering currants, laburnums Shirley Poppies, aquilegia, delphiniums, Castor Oil plants, *Physalis franchetti*, Palms, Musas (bananas), *Alocasia* (elephant ear plants), *Eulalia* and many other plants. In the water *Hedychium coronarium* (white ginger lily) grew happily.

A footpath ran alongside, and a rustic bridge crossed the river at this spot so you could see the linns, which were possibly formed of Pulhamite. There is still a footpath with a bridge just upstream of the long-gone rustic one.

The Mimram Linns are all that remains of this magical garden with its modest tribute to the majestic Linns of the Clyde.

Sources:

[1] https://www.tandfonline.com/action/showCitFormats?doi=10.1080%2F14766820508668
[2] Andrews, Malcolm The Search for the Picturesque (1989, Stanford University Press)
[3] Donnachie, Ian Historic Tourism to New Lanark and the Falls of Clyde 1795-1830.

Coton Manor - A Grand Day Out

Tosh Moller

Coton Manor is a fine example of how excellent amateur garden design can be. A modest farmhouse with cattle grazing right up to the front door has been transformed in less than 100 years into an attractive manor house surrounded by a series of linked gardens, each with its own character. The visitor is gently guided round the circuit by glimpses of the garden yet to come into view and accompanied by the sight and sound of water. It is fair to say that flowing water is the key ingredient creating the appeal and calmness of this garden.

The site has many advantages - the manor sits on the edge of a valley above south/southwest facing slopes and graced with abundant natural streams. This has allowed the creation of a variety of habitats – there is a Bog Garden and Water Garden as well as several other designed water features. The improved mildly acid clay soil supports a Mediterranean Bank, a Gravel Garden, areas of dry shade, wildflower meadow and woodland.

Three generations of the same family have designed and added to the garden, starting in 1923 when Harold and Elizabeth Bryant transformed the farmhouse and laid out 6 acres of terraces, rose garden and tree-dotted lawns. After the privations of WWII, their daughter Haroldine, described as 'an inspired and natural gardener' together with her husband Henry Pasley-Tyler, a notable water engineer, extended the Water Gardens and restored the rest. In 1990, Coton Manor passed to the current owners Susie and Ian, and it is Susie who is the plantswoman composing the spectacular borders each year.

The original terraces are overflowing with scented plants, but many roses perished with Rose Replant Disease and although the formal structure remains, the planting is of hardy, drought-resistant species. The lawns have been punctuated by colour-themed borders very much in the style of Gertrude Jekyll.

Coton is a garden for all seasons and although not open regularly until after April 1st, there is a two-week period in February/March when it is opened to show the Woodland garden carpeted with snowdrops, aconites, and Hellebores in abundance in the shaded beds. Successions of primroses, wood anemones and bluebells make for a spectacular display. There is also a 5-acre beech wood awash with bluebells in March/April.

In early summer visitors can enjoy walking through that most challenging aspiration of many an amateur gardener: a species-rich wildflower meadow. Children will find the assortment of animals appealing. A variety of hens, ducks and flamingos are very much at home and go about their business around the gardens unfazed by the visitors. Some very well-bred pigs parade their magnificent portliness in an adjacent enclosure.

Coton Manor ticks many boxes. A fabulously varied and intimate garden is teamed with a well-stocked nursery and an excellent little café in the stable yard that may even sell a nice bit of Wensleydale. And at the time of writing you can just turn up on the day; long may it last.

Coton Manor Garden, Coton, Northamptonshire NN6 8RQ *www.cotonmanor.co.uk*

Lockdown landscape walks

Deborah Spring

It was the middle of April before I went further than my front gate in Radlett and walked up the silent and empty road to our local patch of oak wood. By then there were bluebells and cow parsley in the woods, and cherry blossom up high, all the glories of spring unfolding in beautiful weather.

Once we were allowed to travel for exercise, we turned to the HGT walks leaflets, and in mid-May headed for Kimpton Hoo. The walk starts in the middle of Kimpton and takes in a four and a half-mile circuit across unspoilt countryside. With the leaflet to hand, we had a clear description of the walk and a simple map, as well as a series of facts and pictures drawing our attention to details of the lost Brownian landscape.

We followed a well-marked footpath, crossed fields, skirted a wood, and turned onto a wide drive beneath a sheltering avenue of ancient trees. To our right was Round Wood, formerly called Lady Wood, a part of the pleasure grounds of the mansion. At the top of the hill, looking left we saw a great Cedar of Lebanon standing alone, a vast and ancient parkland tree. We stopped to eat our sandwiches in the sunshine, with the tower of St Paul's Walden church in the distance and sweeping perspectives east and north towards King's Walden. It was very quiet – the single plane we saw overhead climbing out of Luton outnumbered by red kites.

We paused to admire the irregular avenue of four-hundred-year-old, gnarled sweet chestnut trees that was once the grand formal approach to the mansion. From the illustration of the house in 1700, we could see that gated developments are not new to Hertfordshire. The eighteenth-century owners valued their status and exclusivity, with large gate piers and high iron gates enclosing the entrance to their property. Today's locked gates between their stone piers look very similar.

Heading downhill, we passed a white lodge house and turned along a quiet road, beside the remains of the flint and brick boundary walls of the Hoo. Half a mile further, we headed uphill after crossing the river Mimram and an ornamental bridge that once marked the edge of a lake, part of the work done by Brown, at a cost of £150, in the 1760s. Now it has gone, just a marshy area of ground betraying its former existence as an elegant feature of the park. After the mansion was demolished, much of the estate was returned to agricultural use, but the walk still includes wide drives, and well managed patches of woodland carpeted with bluebells.

On a cloudy June day with a chilly breeze blowing, we parked at the deserted Crooked Chimney pub and crossed the road to follow a footpath towards Brocket Hall. We reached the Palladian bridge across the Broadwater, looked over the parapet at the cascade, then continued uphill, with glimpses of the Hall to our left. The path led us to the woods, and to the Flint Bridge which crosses the River Lea before it widens into the Broadwater. Opposite was a flint structure known as the Fishing Alcove – the leaflet told us that it would have offered a good view of the lake and bridge, an early photograph of the Alcove shows turrets as well as a roof, and the banks of the Broadwater were filled with ornamental shrubs, roses, herbaceous plants and statuary in the 18th century. We strolled through the woods and decided to detour away from the leaflet route to avoid the main road. As we followed a path across a field of ripening crops, the serious rain and wind began. Pulling on our rain jackets we soldiered on, rewarded by an excellent distant view of the Hall along an avenue, before arriving back, drenched, to our (leaky) flask of coffee in the car. No pub lunches for us, everywhere was still very much closed and social distancing was being carefully observed. Nearby, two cars were parked beside each other, their windows open, as an elderly couple in one car chatted to their family in the other.

To download the walks leaflets, follow the *Walks in Hertfordshire* link on the HGT website.

HGT Winter talks 2020/21

Liz Carlin

We are not able to run our winter talks in Woolmer Green Village Hall due to the pandemic restrictions. We are therefore presenting the five talks listed below on Zoom, on Monday afternoons each month, starting at 2.30pm. There will be no charge.

If you would like to take part, please email: *hertstalks@gmail.com* A link will be sent to you before each meeting. All talks will start at 2.30 but do join a little before that time.

A number of 20th century gardens have been added to the register this year: we will be discussing two of them, and another that should have been included. We also have a talk on the great Cornish gardens laid out by the Fox family at Glendurgan, Trebah, Penjerrick and Rosehill.

Programme

16 November 2020
The Beth Chatto Gardens
Alison Moller

Two sites in Essex were recently added to the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens – Harlow Town Park and Beth Chatto's garden in the far east of the county near Elmstead Market. It is the latter upon which the talk will focus, briefly considering Beth's life (1923-2018) and the influences on her gardening ideas. On the basis of an interview with David Ward, the General Manager and Beth's right-hand man, the reasons for the garden's registration will be examined and insights shared as to its future development.

7 December 2020
Percy Cane in Hertfordshire
Kate Harwood

Percy Cane was one of the important designers of the early 20th century, having been inspired by Harold Peto's Easton Lodge garden. Like Peto, he mingled with clients on the French Riviera, where he met Lady Yule, widow of the richest man in England. She commissioned him to design the garden at Hanstead House in Bricket Wood, currently undergoing restoration.

25 January 2021
The Garden of Cosmic Speculation
Alison Moller

Maggie Keswick's name is familiar to many people because of the 17 Maggie Cancer Care Centres around the UK and in Hong Kong which are named after her. To garden historians she is also famous for the Garden of Cosmic Speculation which she and her husband Charles Jencks designed in Dumfriesshire. The talk will chart the development of the garden and examine some of the influences behind this stunning 20th century garden.

22 February 2021
Four Cornish Gardens: Glendurgan, Trebah, Penjerrick and Rosehill
Sarah Bott

A short history of four gardens in Cornwall and the members of the Fox family who designed and planted them from their beginnings in the early nineteenth century until today, presented by a direct descendant of the family.

22 March 2021
The Improvement Garden of Ian Hamilton Finlay at Luton
Kate Harwood

In 1984 Luton Council commissioned Ian Hamilton Finlay of Little Sparta to design a garden at Stockwood Park. Finlay came up with six sculptural features set in a glade with strong links to Ovid, Greek Mythology and the English Landscape Garden. Talks are now underway to revitalise this.

Membership update

John Craggs

We are pleased to say that we have 320 members, which compares very well with other County Gardens Trusts. We would be happy to recruit additional members. If you have friends or relatives who are garden lovers or local historians who might be interested in receiving information about the HGT, please let the Membership Secretary have their name and address and we will send them a membership brochure, mentioning your name as a further source of information.

Full details of the benefits of membership, together with a membership application form, may be obtained from the HGT website: *www.hertsgardenstrust.org.uk*

Or contact:

HGT Membership Secretary, Mead House, Bromley Lane

Wellpond Green, Ware, SG11 1NW

Email: *membership@hertsgardenstrust.org.uk*

The Gedye Fund

Members have sent contributions to the fund set up in memory of our Chairman, Roger Gedye, which has now reached a total of £2,760. The Committee has had to postpone an inaugural event in the current circumstances, but will continue to make plans for using the fund to support our research, conservation and education activity. Further donations are very welcome. Please send cheques payable to Hertfordshire Gardens Trust, to the Hon Treasurer, White House, Dane End, Ware SG12 0LP.

www.hertsgardenstrust.org.uk
Registered charity no. 1010093