

HERTFORDSHIRE GARDENS TRUST



ANNUAL REPORT
2020 - 2021

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Cover photo: The Walled Garden, Stanstead Bury, by Hannah Duffy

Welcome

The Hertfordshire Gardens Trust is a voluntary organisation that works to record, protect and enhance Hertfordshire's rich heritage of designed landscapes. We offer expert, free advice to raise awareness of the value of these special places.

Our research group investigates and records the history of individual parks, gardens and designed landscapes to identify their historic significance, build comprehensive records for use at county and national level, and inform their future conservation and development.

The conservation team scrutinises planning applications throughout Hertfordshire, engaging with the process and providing advice to help conserve and protect the county's parks and gardens.

We work with schools to develop and sustain their grounds, for enjoyment and as a resource for the curriculum.

Our annual programme of courses, walks, talks, members' events and garden visits provide opportunities to enjoy the beauty and character of parks and gardens, and to learn why they are of interest and value.

Registered Charity 1010093
www.hertsgardenstrust.org.uk

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The Lord Cobbold

Mr Philip Harkness

The Rt. Hon. Sir Murray Stuart-Smith

Mr Tom Stuart-Smith

The Trust's Supporters

Benington Lordship

The Gretna Trust

Hertfordshire Archives and
Local Studies (HALS)

The Knebworth Conservation
and Education Trust

David and Mary Laing

Joseph Rochford Nurseries

Strutt and Parker

The Worshipful Company of Gardeners

Chair's Report

Sue Flood

The year of 2020 was not a very auspicious one to be elected chair of the Hertfordshire Gardens Trust! In the midst of a national pandemic, we were all concerned for our own future wellbeing. When restrictions were temporarily lifted we held our AGM at Benington Lordship in September. Thank you to all who welcomed me as chair of the Trust – I am grateful to you all for helping me along the way.



The death of Roger Gedye in 2019 left a gap on the Executive Committee and for me such big footsteps to follow. A fund has been set up in Roger's name in order to support research and understanding of our historic parks and gardens. The first Gedye Fund event will be a lecture by Tom Stuart-Smith to be held at Knebworth House on 22 September.

All our walks and talks were cancelled due to the national pandemic, but we have learnt to do things in different ways – talks have been given via Zoom straight to our home computers. In the future I am sure that there will still be a place for this type of technology but it cannot entirely replace the conviviality of meeting in person. Our walks and visits will be re-arranged – watch the website for more details. We can all feel much more positive about the future as gradually more freedoms are returned to us.

Research, conservation and planning work continued as normal while working from home using computer technology. The reports below show just how important it is to continue this work. The Trust is 30 years old this year - a fabulous milestone in the life of any organisation. The Hertfordshire Garden Trust is financially secure and flourishing ready to take on the next 30 years – and beyond!

Hertfordshire Gardens Trust AGM 2021

This year's AGM will be held on Thursday July 8th 2021, in the garden of Stanstead Bury, nr Ware, Herts, SG12 8JZ, by kind permission of Gini and Jonathan Trower. Please bring chairs. Indoors if wet. Gardens open from 5pm, AGM 6pm, followed by picnics.

Agenda

1. Welcome
2. Apologies for absence
3. To approve the Minutes of the AGM of 3rd September 2020
4. Matters arising from the Minutes
5. The Chairman's Report
6. The Hon. Treasurer's Report and approval of the Annual Accounts for 2020/2021
7. Election of members of the Executive Committee
8. Any Other Business

Treasurer's Report *Sally Pool*

Regarding the HGT's finances, the pandemic, has of course, curtailed our activities over the last twelve months. Sadly there have been no garden visits, no walks and talks and no lectures and workshops. Nevertheless, we are so fortunate in that our membership has remained loyal, and so subscription income has been maintained and the Gedye Fund in memory of Roger Gedye now stands at £3,760. This means that our bank balances increase year on year. A copy of the examined accounts for the financial year ending on 31st March 2021 will be available to the membership on the HGT website before the AGM in the summer.

Research Report

Anne Rowe

Perhaps the most important skill many of us have acquired this year is how to use Zoom! But before the world changed, eight of us got together at HALS on 30 January 2020 for one of our regular meetings to discuss our research:

Tina Rowland was writing up her research on **Ware Rectory** manor house.

Alison Moller intended to select a site from the North Herts Project list for her next piece of research.

Bridget Howlett had been working on two Hitchin properties - **Rectory Manor** and **The Hermitage**.

Esme Marshall had visited the redeveloped site of **Welcombe**, Harpenden.

Liz Carlin had started writing up her research on **The Node** near Codicote.

Sarah Bott had completed her research on **Benington** for the Orchards East Project and hoped to team up with another volunteer to research her next historic garden.

Sue Flood kindly attended to offer advice when needed.

On 3 March Professor Tom Williamson and I recorded more of the garden earthworks in **Gobions Wood** and checked the plan compiled by Tom over a number of previous surveys. His updated plan of the earthworks, together with some explanatory text and illustrations, was sent to the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust. An appreciative email was received from the Trust's Senior Reserves Officer who said he 'will be sure to use it for reference whenever planning our reserve work in the future'. We hope that is the case: many of the earthworks are very slight and could easily be obliterated during woodland management operations.

On 10 March Lottie Clarke and I made a site visit to **Stagenhoe** at the request of the historic landscape consultant commissioned by Fergus Bowes Lyon to prepare a Parkland Management Plan for the areas that now form part of the St Pauls Walden Bury estate. We spent an enjoyable few hours walking over the estate and sharing our knowledge of its history, for which the consultant was very grateful.

On 23 March we went into national lockdown due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Archives were closed and the annual Seminar & Soup gathering we had planned for 2 April was postponed. For those members of the Research Group who had completed the research phase of their individual projects, lockdown perhaps provided an opportunity to make progress with writing up their site reports. Three site reports have been completed this year:

- Bridget Howlett compiled a fascinating history of **Hitchin Parsonage House**, the gardens of which once occupied a large area beside the river Hiz just south of the church and east of the marketplace. It was owned by the wealthy Pulter family in Elizabethan times and although Bridget found little information about the gardens, there is a record of a 16th-century tennis court.
- Research on **Warren Wood** near Essendon was started by Barbara Kiln several years ago. Barbara's findings have been augmented, using online sources, and a site report has now been compiled and printed.
- Tina completed a detailed history of **Ware Rectory** (now **The Manor House**) including information gleaned from the archives of Trinity College, Cambridge. We hope to make a site visit and will contact the owners to request this once social distancing restrictions have been lifted.

The Research Group ventured into the world of Zoom meetings on 30 July when I was joined by Jenny Milledge, Alison Moller, Tina Rowland and Sue Friend. For the next meeting on 22 September Rachel James and Sue Flood were able to take part too – and how lovely it was to see each other and chat once again! Rachel, who has been unable to get to our meetings at HALS for a few years, was keen to find out whether she could add information on **Hixbury orchard** to the Orchards East Project. Deborah Kinloch reported good progress with writing up her research on **Gadebridge Park** and had found new information about its more recent history. She was pleased to report that restoration of the bridge in the park had started in the second week of September.

After a six-month closure, HALS re-opened to the public on 17 September with strict Covid security measures in place, including pre-booking a seat and requesting all documents in advance. Public access was suspended from 5 November to 9 December. Then HALS re-opened for another two weeks before having to close once again. Nevertheless, the periods when HALS was open enabled some of us to make progress with stalled research projects. Many valuable resources for research are now available online and I made use of temporary access to archives available via the University of East Anglia library to download most of the articles about properties in Hertfordshire published in *Country Life* since the late 19th century. Those articles are available from me on request.

The Zoom meeting on 18 November attracted more attendees (11) perhaps because of the stated intention to explore online newspaper archives, or perhaps because Tom Williamson was going to join us! Tina had embarked on researching **Hinxworth Place**, Liz was working on her first draft of **The Node**, Deborah told us about soldiers camping in **Gadebridge Park** in 1914 and how the mansion became a hospital for soldiers with VD. Deborah Spring told us about her research on Anne Bacon of **Gorhambury**. Jenny had learned more about George Mason who lived at **Porters** and Bridget was continuing to work on William Wilshire's archives. Tom highlighted recent publications: the article by Tosh (T.H. Moller) on 'Estimating the Age of Ancient Oaks' in *Landscapes* vol. 19, 2018, Issue 2; Heather Falvey's book on *Humphry Repton and his family: Correspondence, 1805–1816* (Norfolk Record Society, 2020); and his own newly-published book *Humphry Repton: Landscape Design in an Age of Revolution*. HGT Chairman Sue then asked for ideas about how to celebrate the Trust's 30th anniversary next year. By the end of our discussion, we had run out of stamina for exploring newspaper archives so six of us reconvened two days later when we were joined by Julia Merrick, Sarah Bott, Kate Harwood, Helen Leiper, Rachel James, Esme Marshall and Kate Banister. I attempted to demonstrate (using Screenshare) how to find the newspaper collections available via the county library service website and explored some of the useful tricks for 'searching' terms which initially throw up too many 'hits'.

While using Zoom does not suit all researchers, particularly those who do not have access to the necessary technology, it has proved to be a valuable way to keep in touch during 2020 and I suspect it will continue to play a role in the future.

Conservation and Planning Report

Kate Harwood

Due to Covid restrictions and staff (both parks and gardens and council) being furloughed or working from home, there have been very few site visits or site meetings during 2020. However, there have been a number of meetings via Zoom with Heritage England (HE), Gardens Trust Conservation (GT) and some owners and Friends groups.

Planning applications have not dropped, with over 500 planning applications received. All of them have been assessed and comments made on them. We have discussed certain applications with GT and HE as appropriate.

Many of the issues from last year are still live as progress has been slow.

We have objected to a new application for Gilston Garden Village, to applications affecting Gobions, Marden Hill, Northaw Place, Napsbury Hospital, Pendley Manor, Hexton Manor and Westbrook Hey. We remain very much concerned about the number of applications for felling trees within certain areas of Welwyn Garden City as well as the new car park proposals for Campus West and Campus East, together with high-rise development in the former industrial park on Broadwater Road.

Recent matters are:

- an outline application for a 130 hectare solar farm in Aldenham which would be in use for 35 years, and would stretch from Haberdashers' Aske's School to Hilfield Castle. Both HGT/GT and HE have expressed serious concerns over the adverse effect on the setting of the Registered Park and Garden at Haberdashers, and the relic historic landscape (over which Repton was consulted) at Hilfield Castle.
- Several planning applications for housing and barns at Goldings which has already been overdeveloped
- An application for a wildlife pond at Napsbury in an area where no design features remain and which, after some amendments, we are satisfied that no irreversible harm would be done to the layout and character of the area.

- HGT comments on Climate Change Mitigation Strategies being put forward by the councils, which are often without due consideration of the effect of climate change, or mitigation measures, on our historic parks.
- HGT comments on councils' other Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) such as Sustainability, Parking, etc.

Gilston Garden Village proposals and the proposed Briggens quarry continue to be of great concern, as these affect so many of our historic parks and gardens. Birchall Garden Suburb similarly will affect the setting of many heritage assets, including Hatfield Park.

Local Plans

- Dacorum Local Plan is now out for consultation and we are concerned with a number of aspects, including development of Bank Court which is a key part of the Jellicoe Water Gardens. We have been working with Dacorum Borough Council to update their Local List with the inclusion of the Ashridge 'extension' to the Registered Park and Garden, i.e. the area around the Bridgewater Monument which recent research shows to have been very carefully designed with the earthworks for terracing etc. still remaining.
- Welwyn Hatfield Plan is now at Stage 9 of the Examination in Public Hearings and we have been commenting on documents as they appear, both as HGT and as part of the Central Herts Green Corridor Group.
- North Herts Local Plan Examination is still ongoing with hearings recently held on various matters.
- St Albans Local Plan has been withdrawn and a new Plan is to be prepared.

Heritage Open Days went ahead nationally this year, but those mooted for Amersfort, Jellicoe Water Gardens and Haileybury were cancelled due to difficulties with social distancing. At Panshanger Anne Rowe and I ran a day of walks only, with talks being replaced with extra walks due to the small size of the indoor accommodation for talks.

Schools Report

Bella Stuart-Smith

As children have been absent from their schools for a large part of the year it is not surprising that there have been virtually no enquiries about school gardens. Our work with schools is often driven by being proactive and contacting them. This is not the year to do this as staff have many more pressing issues to worry about. Work has been on hold and I hope it can pick up once circumstances allow.

Membership update

John Craggs

For those who pay their HGT subscription by cheque, the due date for renewal is 1 April 2021. Subscriptions are £30 for joint membership and £20 for an individual, payable to Hertfordshire Gardens Trust. Please send your cheque to the Membership Secretary, Mead House, Bromley Lane, Wellpond Green, Ware SG11 1NW. It will reduce our administrative costs if members who pay by cheque could consider setting up payment by standing order. We would be grateful if you could complete a standing order form, which can be downloaded from the HGT website or requested from the Membership Secretary, and forward it to your bank.

During 2020, some 20 members resigned, moved away or died. Perhaps surprisingly, given our lower than normal level of activity, we gained nine new members during the year. We are pleased to say that we currently have 306 members, which compares well with other County Gardens Trusts. We would like to welcome all those who joined HGT during the past year.

We are actively seeking to recruit additional members. If you have friends or relatives who are garden lovers or local historians, who might be interested in joining the HGT, please direct them to the website. They can find full details of the benefits of membership, together with membership application and standing order forms at www.hertsgardenstrust.org.uk, or by email: membership@hertsgardenstrust.org.uk. Alternatively, let the Membership Secretary have their name and address and we will send them a membership brochure.

Please notify address changes to : membership@hertsgardenstrust.org.uk We are very keen to increase the number of members we can contact by email. If you have not yet let us have your email address, do please send it.

