



Newsletter



Acer, Old Arboretum, Westonbirt

Avon Gardens Trust

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Message from the Chairman

Gardening is a labour full of tranquility and satisfaction: natural and instructive, and as such contributes to the most serious contemplation, experience, health and longevity. (John Evelyn, 1666)

Welcome to the Autumn Newsletter of Avon Gardens Trust. It has certainly been an extraordinary year for all of us and it is obvious that 'normality' is not going to happen as soon as we would all like. All we can do is hope that things improve. Access to a garden, park or open space has proved of paramount importance to all of us during Coronavirus, a privilege that is often denied to those who live in urban areas. It is ironic that the economic consequences of Covid continue to affect most aspects of the heritage sector exactly at a time evidence has shown how vital parks and gardens are for people's mental wellbeing. I felt the quote by John Evelyn was particularly appropriate for the current situation and was amazed when I discovered that he was born on 31 October 1620, exactly four hundred years to the day that I am writing this Message!


The Trust held its AGM on 30 September in accordance with special legislation relating to Annual General Meetings during the Coronavirus. This meant the AGM was run as a closed meeting and members were not permitted to attend but were encouraged to submit proxy voting forms. Thank you to those members who took the time to return these forms. I am delighted to announce that the Resolution that Avon Gardens Trust adopt the proposed constitution of the Charity Incorporated Organisation was unanimously passed.

In September 2009, I was elected Chairman, a position I have thoroughly enjoyed. By the time we have our next AGM in 2021 it means I will have been in the post for twelve years and I feel it is time for me to step down. Although my fellow Trustees are very able people and every one of them would do an excellent job as Chairman, they have all indicated they would like to continue with their current responsibilities for the Trust. This means that I really hope that one of our members would like to get involved and join the team as Chairman. I shall be relinquishing my position at the next AGM which will probably be held in May 2021. If any-one is interested or would like to know more, then please email me in the first instance on chairman@avongardenstrust.org.uk

Although we have all had to forego many opportunities to visit other people's gardens this year, we look forward to welcoming many of you back to one of our visits already scheduled for 2021. To whet your appetite, we have included a photographic competition asking you to identify six lodges in and around Avon.

Thank you to all of you for your support during this difficult year. If you are not already a member, please do join us, we would welcome your support.



Ros Delany



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Sign of the Times

The Trust is working closely with the Friends of Grove Park, Weston-super-Mare

The Weston-super-Mare Primary School Garden Project has moved forward with the delivery and installation on the signboard in Grove Park. This was completed in mid-September with the intention to start letting the school teams loose on the site the same month.

The Trust worked closely with the Friends of Grove Park and have agreed to fund the signboard and to donate £500 for the provision of paint, transport and other materials. The intention is to use the board to let each

school show their plans which can be viewed against progress on the ground. The paint and materials are to provide a colourful base, particularly at the start of the project and to seal the tyre surface.

All was set to roll with enthusiastic support from the schools when the realities of Covid kicked in. Deploying groups of primary school pupils and their teachers had needed much planning. Significantly and rightly, providing close and secure sanitary facilities for their use was essential.

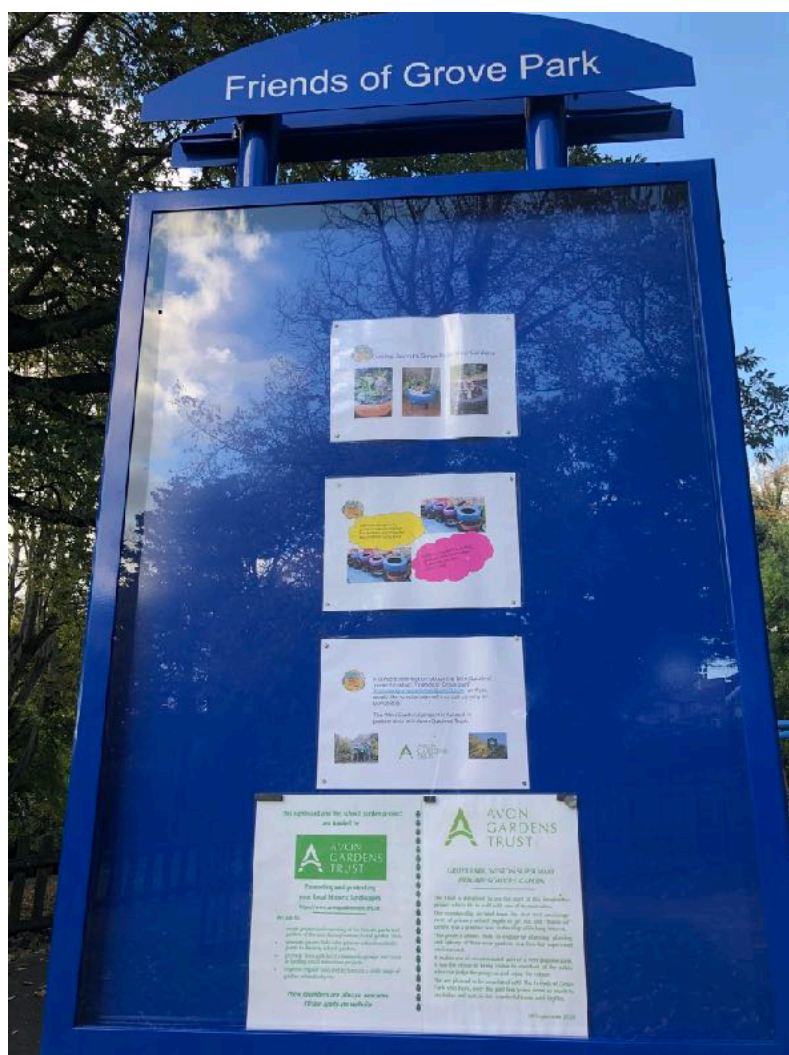
These had been identified and agreed with the building owners but the risk assessments relating to Covid 19 meant that access to the facilities, just could not be justified. The on-site project start has had to be put back until the Spring 2021.

The project will be set up in the upper, less formal, part of the park. This ground has been under-used for years and the work will begin a process of pulling the park together and injecting some life into the area. Three local primary schools will each be building colourful gardens in old truck tyres. This will involve

planting from seeds and plug plants as well as weeding and maintenance.

The Friends of Grove Park and the schools are disappointed with the delay. As the project will continue over several years, though, they remain committed to it.

Peter Shannon



The 2020 Heritage at Risk Register

‘straggling ruins have a bad effect, when the several parts are equally considerable’

(Thomas Whately, 1710)

In October, Historic England (HE) published their annual Heritage at Risk (HAR) Register which identified heritage sites most 'at risk' of being lost as a result of neglect, decay or inappropriate development. This year there are 5,097 entries on the HAR Register including 103 registered parks and gardens. This number represents 6.2% of the total number of 1,700 registered parks and gardens in England. The HAR Register includes all grades (Grades I, 2* and 2) of these historic parks and gardens as well as individual park and garden features which include listed features such as garden walls, lodges, follies and temples.

These designed landscapes are diverse and are the result of centuries of activity. Without doubt they make a special contribution to the historic environment of the countryside and towns but without proper care and investment these fragile landscapes can easily be damaged beyond repair or lost forever.

There are many issues and challenges facing historic parks and gardens; Historic England identified thirteen such factors. These can range from divided and fragmented ownership placing differing demands on parts of the landscape as is the case with Brislington House to an unsustainable growth in visitor numbers and events. Pressure on public finances presents further challenges for many public parks and cemeteries. Climate change is an increasing challenge through patterns of extreme weather, including flooding. The spread of new pests and diseases poses risks as does demand for land for development.

In the Avon area, four entries on the HAR have been selected for this Newsletter to illustrate the pressures and difficulties besetting such landscapes.

In Bath, both Lansdown Cemetery and Beckford's Tower are on the list, the latter first appearing on the Register in 2019. Built by William Beckford in 1826-27 as a retreat which functioned both as an observatory and as a treasure chest, Beckford's Tower is filled with his collections of art, furniture and books. It was connected with his home at 19 and 20 Lansdown Crescent by a mile-long garden known as Beckford's Ride, parts of which survive. There is currently water ingress within the lantern despite a programme of

significant structural repairs from 1997-2000. A Development Grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund was offered at the end of 2019

Lansdown Cemetery was consecrated in 1848, incorporating features of a former pleasure ground and ride created by Beckford and the architect, Henry Edmund Goodridge in c1825-27. Key design features have been neglected and are in declining condition including the Grotto Tunnel.

The landscape has become fragmented as a result of different ownership.





On the eastern side of Bristol, an iconic sight overlooking the M32 is the crenellated Dower House in Stoke Park. Laid out c1750 the park is embellished by monuments and eye-catchers. Due to many diverse pressures including being bisected by the motorway, dense surrounding residential



development and pressure from heavy (and occasionally) anti-social use, particularly affecting park structures, the park continues to be on the HAR Register. In 2012, the majority of the site was transferred to Bristol City Council who received a grant from HE in 2015-16 towards a Conservation Management Plan that is now being implemented under Natural England Stewardship.



In Nailsea, North Somerset, the site known as The Elms (or Middle Engine Pit) is one of the most complete examples of an early C19 colliery in England. In the Edwardian period, the site underwent a dramatic change of use from a heavy industrial site to a house and garden. Although many of the colliery buildings were demolished at this time, some of them were incorporated into the garden. The winding engine house was repurposed as the water tank for the house, the Check House was converted into an outbuilding and the west horse gin was reused as a garden feature. There are a wide range of features still in existence from the Edwardian garden including ponds, walls and flowerbeds. The site is overgrown and fenced off, but the owners, North Somerset Council, are hoping to restore the site for local people to enjoy. Avon Gardens Trust

The Elms (since demolished)

has been liaising with the Heritage team at the Council about the restoration of the Edwardian features of the site along with the creation of an Edwardian style planting for the grounds. The Council will be applying for HLF Funding in early 2021.



Winding Engine House



Large Edwardian Pond



Check House

Ros Delany

Photographic Competition

We are pleased to offer the chance of winning a £20 book token with our new competition. Below are photographs of entrances to six estates in Avon and its vicinity. All you have to do is identify each one!

(hint - they are all included in the list of Registered Parks and Gardens included on our website <https://www.avongardenstrust.org.uk/> then click Parks and Gardens tab and then Historic England Registered Parks and Gardens).

Please send your entry to alan@john-lewis.com by 30 November 2020. The first correct entry drawn will win a £20 book token. The Editor's decision is final. Good luck.

Alan Kempton



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Membership News

Update on the Sponsored Swim by Christopher Woodward to save the Garden Museum

In the Summer Newsletter, we wrote about the sponsored swim by Christopher Woodward, Director of the Garden Museum, to raise £100,000 towards the £270,000 shortfall of funds needed to save the Museum. Avon Gardens Trust donated £500 towards the fund as it is such a fantastic museum and one that is close to the hearts of all garden historians.

Conditions have been terrible for Christopher although he managed to complete part of the journey. Any further swimming had to be temporarily postponed due to the storms in late October resulting in strong surges and high wave swells in the Atlantic. Wednesday 4 November was Day Four of Christopher's sponsored swim. It was a sunny day and he managed to complete six miles of swimming which meant he had made it one-mile past Wolf Rock Lighthouse, which is the half way point to the first of the Isles of Scilly. He now has 33 miles to go.

However, lockdown has stopped play as Newlyn harbour is now restricted to essential shipping activities. Christopher will be back in the water in December, if lockdown ends and the weather is good enough, or as soon as he can in the spring.



Programme

Online Winter Lecture Series 2020-21 organised jointly by the Gardens Trust and London Gardens Trust

30 November: *Pulhamite in London, 1820-2020* with Valerie Christman, direct descendant of the Pulham family and the Pulham Legacy

14 December: *Wentworth Castle and Wentworth Woodhouse: Georgian rivals* with Patrick Eyres

2021

11 January: *Biodiversity and the Wild West End Project: Encouraging Birds, Bees & Bats into the Heart of London* with Tom Gray

25 January: *The Integration of Derek Jarman's Garden* with Michael Charlesworth

8 February: *Too Young to be Loved? Post-war designed landscapes of London and environs* with Karen Fitzsimon

22 February: *Transatlantic slavery's long reach: The impacts of direct and indirect slavery connections on C18 estate gardens and parks* with Susanne Seymour

8 March: *Dinosaurs, Italian Terraces and Future Sustainability: Crystal Palace Park* with Kathryn Whitmore

22 March: *What is Wild?* with Kim Wilkie

All lectures and booking online. Tickets for individual lectures: £4 for Gardens Trust/all County Gardens Trusts members, £6 for non-members. For further information visit <http://thegardenstrust.org/events-archive/>

The lectures will be live online on the day but will be available as a recording afterwards. All ticket holders will be sent a link to the recording the day after the lecture. The recording will be available for one week.

