

NOTES & QUERIES

THE COUNTY GARDENS TRUSTS MOVEMENT

County gardens trusts are independent local charities with the aims of studying, recording, and conserving significant gardens and designed landscapes, and promoting wider interest and understanding about them. The first county gardens trust was launched in Hampshire in 1984. By 2008, there were thirty-six established throughout England; the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust was formed in 1989, and Scotland's Historic Garden and Landscape Heritage launched in 2015. This article traces the development of the gardens trust movement, its aims and activities from 1984 to the present.

PUBLIC INTEREST IN GARDEN CONSERVATION

The second half of the twentieth century saw a substantial growth of public interest in the conservation of historic gardens. The Garden History Society (GHS) was founded in 1965 to encourage and promote the study of garden history. From the beginning, it published newsletters and occasional papers and, from 1972, the academic journal *Garden History*. During the 1970s, the society became more widely known, particularly through the efforts of leading conservation campaigner Mavis Batey (1921–93) as honorary secretary (later GHS chairman and president), as it pursued an active conservation and campaigning role and was involved in some high-profile cases. A well-publicized, ground-breaking exhibition, 'The Garden: 1,000 Years of British Gardening', mounted in 1979 at the Victoria and Albert Museum, included a section on the need for conservation.¹ The National Heritage Act 1983 set up a government agency, later known as English Heritage, responsible for heritage conservation, including the establishment of a national Register of Historic Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest. From then on, local planning authorities were required to take account of the historic value of parks and gardens when deciding planning applications.

HAMPSHIRE GARDENS TRUST: THE FIRST COUNTY GARDENS TRUST

By the 1980s, there were many county-level organizations in England concerned with conservation of local heritage, wildlife and landscape. These included various county historic

buildings trusts, county wildlife trusts and county branches of the Campaign for the Preservation (later Protection) of Rural England and a historic gardens trust (Sussex) involved in restoration of local gardens.² In June 1982, a meeting at Avington Park, organized by Hampshire County Council, agreed to form a charitable trust to promote interest and concern for historic gardens in Hampshire, modelled on the existing and successful Hampshire Historic Buildings Trust. The new organization would be called a gardens trust, not a historic parks and gardens trust, so that it could be involved with the creation of gardens for educational purposes and gain the support of gardeners.³

In applying to the Charity Commission for charitable status, one issue was securing public benefit, in return for the Hampshire Gardens Trust (HGT) giving assistance to private owners. The Charity Commission suggested that such gardens should be open to the public for not less than three months a year. However, the HGT felt this might deter private owners from seeking assistance. Eventually, after much debate, the Charity Commission agreed public access could vary from a significant number of open days per year to 'by appointment only', depending on how much access could be afforded, without damaging the resource being conserved.⁴ Following its launch in June 1984, Hampshire County Council continued to assist the HGT with a grant, but also with administration and with survey and conservation projects.

GROWTH OF COUNTY GARDENS TRUSTS

Gilly Drummond, HGT chairman, was keen to publicize the trust both within the county and elsewhere. Wiltshire became the second county gardens trust (CGT) in July 1985, when the local group of the National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens (NCCPG – now Plant Heritage) decided to focus more of their effort on gardens. In Avon, a new county created in the 1974 local government reorganization, a group employed by Avon County Council through a Manpower Services Commission-funded scheme for the unemployed, set up a gardens trust which was launched in July 1987.

Partly due to Drummond's enthusiasm, interest in forming CGTs spread, particularly in the South-West. A meeting of those who were keen to form a trust, at Hestercombe in Somerset

in October 1986, was attended by representatives from Avon, Somerset, Devon, Cornwall and Hampshire, resulting in agreement to continue to meet regularly.⁵ In December 1987, they agreed to explore the possibility of forming an association of gardens trusts, in the belief that this would provide help for new trusts, facilitate the exchange of information and experience, and, significantly, give the Gardens Trust Movement a chance to speak with one voice.⁶ A national conference was organized in October 1988 at Weston Park, Staffordshire. Topics included the identification, evaluation and restoration of historic gardens, grants available, and the involvement of local authorities.

The year 1988 saw a rapid growth of interest in CGTs: Devon launched in April and Norfolk followed in November. Momentum continued the following year with the launch of the Isle of Wight in March, Dorset and Cornwall in May, Derbyshire in June, the Welsh in September, and Kent in October. Part of the reason for this growth in interest was the increasing publicity gardens trusts were receiving. Francesca Greenoak's article in *The Garden* and Anna Pavord's in *Country Life* proved particularly important.⁷

FORMATION OF THE ASSOCIATION OF GARDENS TRUSTS

A particularly significant, joint meeting of CGT representatives was held over two days in October 1989 on the Isle of Wight and included a lecture and visits to gardens. This formula would be followed for the next twenty-five years. Such engaging annual conferences, with delegates from all over the country, allowed individual CGTs to share their county's notable historic park assets with a series of related, explanatory talks (Figure 1).⁸ That 1989 Isle of Wight meeting agreed to set up a steering committee to examine the feasibility of the formation of an association of gardens trusts.⁹ Representatives of fifteen trusts or steering groups attended the next joint meeting in March 1990, together with other organizations and Mavis Batey. They expressed a diversity of views on the proposal to establish a formal association. Kent Gardens Trust (GT) supported the suggestion for meetings to exchange views and information but was against any form of bureaucracy. Concerns were expressed about the cost of an association and the danger of losing the individuality of separate trusts. However, the meeting agreed draft objects of an association, and for a constitution to be drafted that might also embrace site-based trusts, such as Painshill Park.¹⁰ Later, in practice, such trusts became members of their local county or country gardens trusts.

At the next meeting, November 1990 in Hampshire, fifty-three attendees represented twenty trusts or steering groups and other organizations. The Welsh Historic Gardens Trust (WHGT) stressed the importance of recognizing regional differences. Trusts in Wales and Scotland had to deal separately with the

Welsh and Scottish Offices.¹¹ Although funding an overarching association remained a concern, with membership and administration still to be settled, delegates agreed that a constitution based on the HGT model should be submitted to the Charity Commission, with the agreed name: 'The Association of Gardens Trusts' (AGT).¹²

The Charity Commission required the AGT to confine itself to assisting those trusts that were charitable or seeking charitable status. This was eventually agreed. The Charity Commission was also concerned about the AGT's possible campaigning activities and pointed out that assisting a private landowner to fight a road scheme affecting his land would not be appropriate for a charity.¹³ Devon GT was helpful here by referencing certain examples of their approach to campaigning. The Charity Commission was persuaded that any campaigning by the AGT would operate through the democratic process and educate public and private attitudes.¹⁴ Finally, in March 1992, the AGT was registered as a charity. As a bonus the Charity Commission agreed that a model form of constitution could be established so that future proposed gardens trusts could be dealt with by the Charity Commission 'more expeditiously'.¹⁵

LAUNCH OF THE ASSOCIATION OF GARDENS TRUSTS

At the first official meeting of the AGT, July 1992 in London, Gilly Drummond was elected as chairman, Michael Norman (WHGT) vice-chairman and Richard Ingle (Surrey GT) secretary. They agreed the formal launch of the association would take place in March 1993 at the Museum of Garden History.¹⁶ However, due to limited progress on agreeing arrangements, the launch was postponed to October 1993.

Before this, the AGT met for its third annual conference in Aberystwyth where objectives were agreed for the period 1993–98. However, there had been considerable debate before this meeting. David Lambert, who had been appointed the first paid GHS conservation officer, made the point that, as drafted, one objective of the association, as a national body, potentially had considerable overlap with the role of the GHS. He suggested a distinction should be made, and that the GHS should be recognized as the voice for historic gardens in national planning terms, while the association's role was to represent and promote individual, local CGTs.¹⁷ In practice, this confusion of roles between the GHS and the AGT would only be resolved twenty-three years later with the merger between the two conservation and education charities to form The Gardens Trust.

The official launch of the AGT on 25 October 1993 was sponsored by the National Grid and the Countryside Commission. Speaking at the launch, Drummond announced that there were now nineteen full CGTs, including the affiliated WHGT, and that steering groups were being formed in a further twelve English



Figure 1. The Association of Gardens Trusts (AGT) annual conference delegates, Isle of Wight, 2010. John Harrison (front row centre), Isle of Wight GT chairman, also organized the first association conference at Osborne in 1989. Photo: Steffie Shields

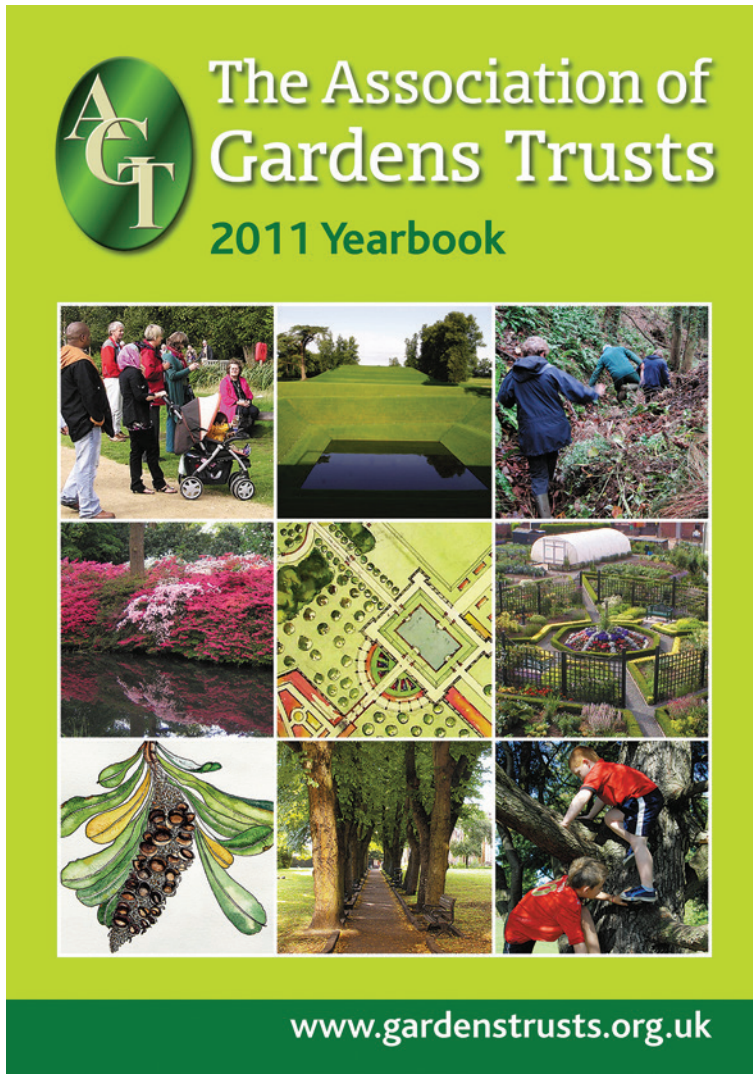


Figure 2. Front cover of the *AGT Yearbook 2011*. Cover montage: Jonathan Williams. Photo: Steffie Shields

counties.¹⁸ CGTs were rapidly becoming a national movement. By the 2008 foundation of Berkshire GT, thirty-six English CGTs had been established, covering the whole country.¹⁹

ACTIVITIES OF COUNTY GARDENS TRUSTS

From the beginning, the joint meetings of CGTs shared information on each trust's own activities. In 1996 this information was collated in a newsletter. From March 1999 this became a twice-yearly printed newsletter with information about the annual conference, workshops, study days and new publications, as well as other related organizations and topics. The newsletter editor from June 1999 was Sally Walker (Sussex GT) and, from January 2003, Linden Groves (London Parks & Gardens Trust – LPGT). In

December 2005 the newsletter was rechristened *AGT Eyecatcher*. Then the *AGT Yearbook* was published annually, one copy per CGT member, for five years, 2011–16, subsidised by advertising. This publicized significant highlights, with longer, illustrated articles about projects and activities of individual CGTs (Figure 2). All these publications give a good insight into the focus and progress of individual CGTs, and their different priorities depending on, and in response to, local needs and circumstances.

Research and recording

Archival research and site survey have been, and continue to be, central activities for all CGTs. Groups of volunteers have completed recording forms, compiled databases, submitted information

to English Heritage and local authorities, with material published in gazetteers, journals and books. Their research often started with notable, local gardens, including those omitted from English Heritage's Register of Parks and Gardens, or in response to a need for information to respond either to planning applications, or restoration or improvement schemes. In 1991, Harriet Jordan of English Heritage suggested that CGTs might help in revising the register.²⁰ Many CGTs have highlighted various local sites' archaeological, historic, architectural or aesthetic significance in proposed additions to the register, some of which have been accepted. Gardens and parks of less national significance have also been submitted to local authorities for local listing, and records added to the local Sites and Monuments Record or Heritage Environment Record. Frequently, a close working relationship has been formed with the county record office or local groups from other organizations such as The National Association of Decorative and Fine Arts Societies (NADFAS). Many CGTs have undertaken thematic surveys, such as walled kitchen gardens, First World War memorial gardens or gardens by notable designers such as Lancelot Brown, Humphry Repton or Gertrude Jekyll. Some CGTs have undertaken to bring together records for a borough or district, while others have published a gazetteer of significant gardens and designed landscapes for an entire county.

Conservation, planning, garden restoration and creation

Most CGTs have been actively involved in responding to planning applications affecting significant gardens or designed landscapes in their area. Often this work, sometimes responding where necessary to planning inquiries, has been undertaken by experienced individuals. In the case of large counties, such as Yorkshire or Greater London, or regions such as Wales, some of these activities, including those concerning local plans, have involved a more dispersed group of volunteers. Where planning work has had to be severely prioritized due to the large volume of applications, some CGTs have employed part-time staff to undertake planning responses. In addition, CGTs have offered advice and small grants to garden owners to assist and inform conservation or restoration schemes. In 1992, for example, Surrey GT, began a project surveying all one hundred and forty known Jekyll gardens in the county. The garden owners were contacted to increase their interest and knowledge, and to advise in their garden management.²¹ Many CGTs have been actively involved in assisting friends of gardens or public park forums and in the creation of new gardens.

Education and public awareness

As educational charities raising public awareness of historic parks and gardens, many CGTs have devoted considerable efforts to working with schools. HGT led the way by making available 'pump-priming' grants for improvements to

school grounds, and also supported Hampshire County Council in setting up Learning through Landscapes, which became a national campaign for environmental education.²² Many CGTs offer small grants or financial awards for school ground improvements including new planting, seating and play areas. Some offer advice to teachers, parents and governors. Others promote gardening in secondary schools, advise on links with the National Curriculum or, such as Somerset GT, award gardening bursaries to students. The LPGT received a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant to develop an educational website: the London Parks Discovery Project.²³ CGTs established annual regional meetings in both the South-West and South-East to encourage learning from each other. Activities for a wider public audience resulted in articles in the local press, the publication of pamphlets, books and videos, and countless guided walks, exhibitions and garden openings. CGTs have assisted the National Gardens Scheme and helped judge 'Best-kept Villages' or 'Britain in Bloom'. Some have introduced refugees to visits to historic parks and gardens, or organized their own open gardens festivals, most notably LPGT's popular annual 'Open Gardens Weekend'. Others have supported Heritage Open Days involving gardens and/or worked with the Gateway Gardens Trust to organize garden visits for the handicapped. Most CGTs participated in national celebrations by organizing special events, publications, exhibitions and visits to help raise the profile of the 'Capability' Brown Tercentenary Festival (2016) and the Humphry Repton Bicentenary (2018).

Membership and events

All CGTs have been anxious to promote and increase their membership, for sustainable income and partly to demonstrate public support. In the early years, some CGTs had difficulties in establishing a separate identity within their own county. Wiltshire GT grew from an NCCPG branch before developing as a separate entity. Cornwall GT was overshadowed at first by the Cornwall Garden Society. Essex GT was initially part of the all-encompassing Essex Heritage Trust. All CGTs have organized programmes of membership events, publicized through all manner of modern media, in addition to printed newsletters and journals with in-depth articles, often illustrated with historic surveys or plans about various layers of garden and landscape history concerning specific sites, and their creators, garden designers or landscape architects. Many trusts have organized membership drives and 'Friend get a Friend' schemes. However, since 2005, CGT membership has not grown significantly above eight thousand five hundred in England and Wales.²⁴

Organization, management, funding and fund-raising

CGTs are managed by councils or boards of trustees, elected by their membership, with

committees organizing day-to-day work. As registered charities, they may seek grants from charitable foundations and from other sources. Most CGTs have now become limited companies to limit the financial liability of their trustees. In the early years, many were supported by their local authorities with grants and staff time. Following reductions in local authority finance, this support decreased and ended. Although some trusts receive funding from grant-giving bodies to employ part-time staff, all CGTs rely on the efforts of volunteers. More often, a few individuals do most of the work. Much effort has been made, therefore, to train volunteers and to attract the involvement of those with specific skills. As a result, some CGTs have produced sophisticated management strategies, development plans or business plans.

INVOLVEMENT IN PLANNING

A collaboration between CGTs with The Georgian Group and the GHS had produced a 1988 report on golf courses, because some of the many then being proposed to be built were on historic parkland.²⁵ Meanwhile, much progress was made by 1992, both by individual trusts and on behalf of the fledgling AGT, resulting in more involvement in local planning. For many years concerned with the protection of historic gardens, the GHS was campaigning to become a statutory consultee in the planning process. This would mean local planning authorities would be required to consult

the GHS on planning applications affecting sites on the Register of Parks and Gardens. The society was also considering the feasibility of legislation to give historic gardens statutory protection.²⁶ Batey proposed that the GHS should liaise with CGTs on individual applications, a forerunner of the system now in use today.²⁷ The AGT began commenting on draft national planning policy documents, and together with the GHS became observers on the Joint Committee of the National Amenity Societies (the Committee of Statutory Consultees).

DEVELOPMENT OF THE ASSOCIATION OF GARDENS TRUSTS, 1994–2001

At the 1994 annual conference in Warwickshire, it was agreed that in 1995 Hazel Fryer (Warwickshire GT) would become AGT chairman and Gilly Drummond would become president. Thereafter a further six AGT chairmen followed, but there was only one president (Figure 3).²⁸ From 1995 the AGT became progressively more organized, and more involved in national issues and projects. Workshops to train CGT volunteers were started that year: one on responding to planning applications and one on recording sites. The pattern of two or more workshops, initially held in London, would now continue each year. Later workshop/study day venues were spread around England, including at historically important sites. Linda Cheeseman, a trained solicitor, became AGT secretary. She did much



Figure 3. The AGT vice-presidents (and previous AGT chairmen) Val Hepworth (left) and Sally Walker (middle), with AGT president Gilly Drummond, Gresgarth Hall, 2013.
Photo: Steffie Shields

to create an orderly administration and address the AGT's legal liabilities. A London office was opened in Cowcross Street, EC1, which also provided meeting space, including for the AGT Council Annual General Meeting. Subcommittees were established, initially covering research and recording, education and training, projects and funding, and publicity.

A survey was initiated into the funding of the management of CGTs. Up to this point many CGTs had relied on assistance from paid staff of local authorities and local authority grants. However, local authorities were increasingly being restricted in their ability to help voluntary and charitable bodies. CGTs had to find other ways of managing and resourcing their activities. In 1996, English Heritage and the GHS were made statutory consultees in the planning process. Contacts in each CGT were established so that the GHS could consult them on planning applications in their area. That same year, the HLF, on starting its Urban Parks Programme to provide grants towards the restoration of historic parks, wished to consult CGTs about parks in their area. As a result, the AGT increased its training and support both for individuals and CGTs involved in planning and conservation.

From 1997 an AGT committee of management, with members elected annually at its annual general meeting (AGM), met quarterly to bring together chairmen of committees responsible for events, conservation, education and publicity, with the AGT officers. In addition, since its inception the AGT Council held formal business meetings twice a year bringing together representatives of each of its constituent CGTs to enable and encourage their participation in discussion and agreement for policy, programmes and budget. The Countryside Commission gave the AGT a three-year grant towards office equipment and running costs. Funding was also received from national grant-giving charities. However, recognizing the need to find permanent ways of funding its activities, the AGT began discussion about asking CGTs for a capitation fee.²⁹ The Business Plan 1997-99 focused on four main objectives: a major growth in the capabilities and involvement at CGT level; the provision of a conservation advisory and management service nationwide; the achievement of seventy per cent core self-sufficiency; and a nationwide coverage and improved communications.³⁰

The AGT's budget grew: annual income for 1995 stood at £1774 and expenditure £1435, while by the end of 1997 income was £17,349 and expenditure £14,184. The association had been established as an unincorporated charity, in which financial risks were assumed by certain individuals – its trustees. In view of increased budgets, the AGT agreed in 1997 to seek incorporation, whereby financial risks to individuals involved in decision-making would then be limited to £1. This took some years of discussion with the Charity Commission before they finally re-registered the AGT in 2001.

Meanwhile, an insurance scheme developed for the AGT's public liability and employer's liability was also offered to CGTs; twenty CGTs agreed to join in 1998.³¹ That same year, the principle of CGTs paying an association subscription was agreed. Richard Gilbertson (AGT treasurer) wrote to convince CGTs, setting out all the AGT's important functions, in addition to its insurance scheme: interacting with government and the voluntary sector, running workshops and seminars, publishing a newsletter twice a year, maintaining a website, encouraging new CGTs, and organizing an annual conference.³² The first AGT newsletter was produced in 1999, while the AGT website was up and running in 2000. Following devolution in Wales and Scotland, the WHGT withdrew from full membership of the AGT, becoming 'associated' and later 'affiliated'.³³ From 2000 onwards, with the financial year running from April to March, the AGM was held in September, on the same date as a business meeting, with a further business meeting in March.

In 2001 the AGT began organizing national conferences in collaboration with English Heritage and other organizations. High-profile speakers attracted large audiences, including many local authority conservation officers.³⁴ In addition, English Heritage offered the AGT a three-year grant for a part-time post: to facilitate formation of new CGTs; to increase the number of workshops for CGTs by providing training in conservation, research and recording, and education; to monitor and organize responses to government, statutory and voluntary organizations regarding historic parks and gardens; to disseminate information by newsletters and website; and to increase liaison and advice to CGTs.³⁵ Sally Walker, the AGT's administrator, working one day per week, was now also appointed liaison and development officer for a further day per week.³⁶ The combined post subsequently became known as AGT coordinator, a role undertaken by Teresa Forey-Harrison since 2011.

PARKS & GARDENS UK

In 1991, Peter Goodchild, of York University, proposed a national survey and database inventory of historic gardens, which could be compiled by volunteers from CGTs. Finally, in 1997, discussions between the AGT, GHS and Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies at York University, in addition to English Heritage and the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments of England (RCHME), resulted in agreement to support the development of a national inventory of historic parks and gardens. English Heritage and RCHME agreed to fund production of a project brief. The project working group agreed the AGT would be the applicant for a grant from HLF.³⁷ This would become the single biggest commitment in the AGT's twenty-five-year history.

A major bid was submitted in 2001 to HLF for funding for the development of an online

digital resource and database: the UK Parks and Gardens Record (the Inventory). Peter Lindesay (Gloucestershire GT), who had followed Jenny Burt (Northamptonshire GT) as AGT chairman, also became chairman of the Inventory project working group. The project initially launched in 2002 in Oxford. Following much discussion, the HLF finally offered the AGT a grant of £999,500 in December 2004 to cover 76% of total project costs. Volunteer time would make up much of the balance.³⁸ A project-specific limited company was formed to employ a project manager, communications coordinator, web manager, data manager and four volunteer coordinators.³⁹ The proposed outcomes of this three-year project included the production of six thousand basic records and five hundred more detailed records for England and Wales, and one thousand records for Scotland and Northern Ireland.⁴⁰ Despite the GHS withdrawing in 2004, partly due to having to focus, as a statutory consultee, on their increasing planning case-work, the Inventory project finally started in August 2005, having evolved into a partnership between the AGT and the Department of Archaeology, York University (which had merged with the Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies).

In May 2008, the public launch of the UK Park and Gardens Record took place at Kensington Roof Gardens. The website followed in 2009, by which time, thanks to twenty data entry training days attended by CGT volunteers, the targets for basic and detailed records of gardens were achieved, and in addition two thousand biographies, two thousand digital images and twenty educational resources uploaded to the database.⁴¹ When the project finished in July 2009, all staff stood down, except Rachael Stamper, project manager, who continued to manage the database. Later, Parks & Gardens UK (PGUK) became a separate charity, independent of the AGT.

AGT AND GHS: CLOSER WORKING

Representatives of the AGT and GHS met in 2002, and again in 2008, to discuss cooperation and closer working. With statutory consultations running at over one thousand each year, the GHS appointed four part-time conservation officers to cover England, Wales and Scotland, responsible for providing a weekly casework log to the AGT, and thus to CGT's conservation committees. With the additional employment of a casework manager, this practice continues to this day. CGTs became much more involved in conservation casework. Essex GT produced a gardens conservation manual: *Historic Designed Landscapes: Planning and Conservation Guidance*.⁴² Yorkshire GT piloted an English Heritage scheme to highlight gardens at risk.

In March 2009, the AGT met with English Heritage and Natural England and agreed to share funding for a new three-year post: historic landscape project officer (HLPO). Verena McCaig became the first appointed HLPO in

April 2010 responsible for advice on historic landscapes and the promotion of Natural England's Higher Level Stewardship projects in the South-East. However, in June 2011, Natural England decided not to fund the third year of this project. English Heritage and the AGT agreed to continue, choosing to reorient the project towards providing training for CGT volunteers in planning and conservation.⁴³ The logic behind this decision was that if CGTs became more involved in local conservation casework, this would allow the GHS to concentrate on a smaller number of higher profile, more complex, cases.⁴⁴ McCaig and subsequent HLPOs organized training courses for CGT volunteers, produced written guidance, and made available useful resource material on the AGT website (Figure 4).

By 2009, increasingly concerned about the longer term financial status of two organizations with similar objectives and duplicate overhead costs, English Heritage warned that, from 2012, there would be a drop in English Heritage grant aid due to reductions in their own budget.⁴⁵ That July, the AGT and GHS representatives met to discuss a paper by Dominic Cole, GHS chairman. Although both charities already worked well together, it was acknowledged that some members perceived a doubling up of effort, clashing activities and competition for 'audience'.⁴⁶ However, they agreed to produce a paper: 'Opportunities and Issues for Closer Working between AGT and GHS', which led to a proposal for a feasibility study to explore closer working together.⁴⁷ English Heritage agreed to funding, but proposed that this study be extended to also include Parks & Gardens UK and the Garden Museum (previously the Museum of Garden History).⁴⁸ Several meetings, and much discussion, ensued until 'Working Together', a draft report drawn up by March 2011, concluded with the following recommendations: the AGT and GHS should actively pursue a merger; Parks & Gardens UK and the Garden Museum should remain independent; the AGT, CGTs and GHS should plan new arrangements for future statutory casework; all four organizations should coordinate events, promotion and membership activities.⁴⁹ The AGT circulated a note to CGTs outlining the direction of travel.

AGT AND GHS: WORKING TOGETHER

Despite having withdrawn from the Inventory project, the GHS continued working closer together with the AGT, with AGT representatives invited to attend GHS planning and conservation, events and education and publication committees. There followed an agreement for a joint advisory conservation committee to include four representatives from the AGT and four from the GHS, and for the chair to rotate between them on an annual basis.⁵⁰ Its terms of reference included advising on improving arrangements for CGT volunteers to work with GHS conservation staff, and the role which the HLPO could play in providing their training. This joint GHS/AGT



Figure 4. Linden Groves (left) and Verena McCaig, the AGT's historic landscape project officers, Lowther Castle, 2012. Photo: Steffie Shields

conservation committee began work in May 2013.

Meanwhile, Steffie Shields, AGT chairman from 2012, proposed that the association should establish an annual AGT volunteer of the year award to recognize and publicize remarkable, often long-standing, volunteer work. The donated award was first presented to Janice Bennett (Hampshire GT) at the 2014 AGM, during the annual weekend conference hosted by Cheshire GT, and has continued annually (now the Gardens Trust Volunteer of the Year Award).

The years 2013 and 2014 were particularly difficult while the complex AGT/GHS merger was debated and then CGTs invited to give their views. In January 2013 representatives of the AGT and GHS met with English Heritage to discuss 'Working Together' and grant aid for the following two years. The GHS was offered continuation funding for their statutory casework, while the AGT were offered grants for the continuation of funding for the administrator and HLPO posts.⁵¹ English Heritage indicated in principle support for both charities to work towards a merger and, indeed, subsequently contributed towards costs. In March 2013, the AGT and GHS agreed that Mike Dawson, AGT vice-chairman, and Jeremy Garnett, GHS secretary, would together lead work towards a possible merger.⁵² Their terms of reference included advising on improving arrangements for CGT volunteers to work with

GHS conservation staff, and the role which the HLPO could play in providing training for CGT volunteers. Their report 'Working in Partnership: Towards a Merger' was discussed by the AGT committee of management and the GHS council.⁵³ Both committees agreed to set up a merger project board, with three representatives from each charity.⁵⁴ Then, PGUK requested an invitation to be an equal partner in the merger project board.⁵⁵ Having considered this, the AGT and GHS decided, for the time being, to continue to investigate amalgamation between themselves and return to a possible merger with PGUK at a later stage.⁵⁶ Subsequently, the PGUK database was transferred in 2016 to Hestercombe Gardens Trust.

When consulted at the AGT business meeting in September 2013 about the proposal to work towards a merger, representatives of twenty-three CGTs agreed to the setting up of a merger project board, two voted against and one abstained.⁵⁷ Subsequently, CGTs sent written responses to the consultation report: twelve CGTs were in favour of a merger, seven undecided and one against.⁵⁸ The merger project board proceeded and in March 2014 produced an interim report which was discussed both by the GHS council and at the AGT business meeting. This proposed that work towards a merger should proceed, that an 'in principle' decision should be made in September 2014, with a final decision then voted

on at separate GHS and AGT AGMs convened during a joint conference in September 2015 (subsequently brought forward to July 2015). It was also proposed that, in principle, as the least costly and quickest option, the AGT should be dissolved, and its assets transferred to the GHS. Nevertheless, the merged body would be a new organization.⁵⁹

In May 2014, the merger project board produced their final report which proposed merger aims, a series of transitional steps, a timetable and the setting up of a transitional committee.⁶⁰ This report generated considerable, further debate among CGTs, both before and at the AGT AGM/annual weekend conference in September 2014 in Chester. The hosts, Cheshire GT, put forward a motion: 'that the decision on merging be postponed until adequate financial and business planning is available'. With in-absentia votes added thirteen CGTs voted for this motion, fifteen voted against and three abstained. However, the committee of management resolution: 'AGT in principle to merge with the GHS on terms and date to be agreed by the trustees', was agreed, including in-absentia votes, by nineteen CGTs, nine were against and two abstained.⁶¹

SCOTLAND

The Garden History Society in Scotland (GHSS) was a subcommittee of the GHS. The GHS employed a conservation officer in Scotland until 2013. Following the AGT and GHS decision to merge in early autumn 2014, members of the GHSS agreed to establish a separate charitable membership body for Scotland (like the WHGT).⁶² Scotland's Historic Garden and Landscape Heritage was launched in May 2015.

AGT AND GHS: MERGER

The GHS/AGT transitional committee started work in October 2014, with four representatives each from the AGT and from the GHS. The committee drafted a constitution for the merged body. Elizabeth Cairns, for many years GHS secretary, suggested that all CGT members should be members of the new organization with the same voting rights as GHS members.⁶³ The AGT committee of management and GHS council agreed with the transitional committee, that this was an idea for the future, in part because each CGT is an independent charity and maintains its own membership database, so there would be data protection issues. The AGT committee and GHS council agreed the proposed new charitable objects and definitions and that these should be sent to the Charity Commission for approval.⁶⁴ The AGT business meeting in March 2015 addressed the controversial subject of the proposed name of the merged body, finally agreeing 'The Gardens Trust'.⁶⁵ Following comment from CGTs the GHS/AGT transitional committee finalized a business plan for the new charity.⁶⁶ In June 2015 the AGT committee of management agreed to recommend the merger



Figure 5. Narcissus 'Gilly Drummond' presented to Gilly in 2015 as the AGT was merged with the GHS to become The Gardens Trust. Photo: Steffie Shields

to the AGT AGM and to nominate six members from CGTs to sit on The Gardens Trust board, on which there would also be six GHS members. Wales and Scotland would both have one observer each on the board.⁶⁷ On 24 July 2015, the AGT and the GHS met at separate AGMs in Newcastle. At the AGT AGM twenty-four CGTs voted in favour of merger, seven voted against and one CGT abstained. The GHS AGM also agreed to the merger: a hundred and thirty-one votes in favour, seven against and no abstentions. At the combined AGM which followed, membership of the new board was agreed, with James Bartos as chairman and Dominic Cole becoming president, and The Gardens Trust was born (Figure 5).⁶⁸

COUNTY GARDEN TRUSTS SINCE THE MERGER

Since 2015, CGTs and their members have played an increasingly important part in the newly merged national organization. Material from individual CGTs has featured in *GT News*. Staff support for CGT volunteers remains an important role of The Gardens Trust, which continues to employ HLPOs. A history-making partnership had been set up across heritage-sector organizations including the Historic Houses Association, National Trust, Natural England, English Heritage, The Landscape Institute and The Gardens Trust to spearhead countrywide celebrations for the three hundredth anniversary of the birth of the celebrated landscape architect

Lancelot Brown (1716–83) throughout 2016. This ‘Capability’ Brown Tercentenary Festival was awarded an HLF grant of £911,100. Thirty-four CGTs played a part, undertaking research, special events, exhibitions, publications and other projects in Brown landscapes.⁶⁹ Similarly in 2018, the bicentenary celebration of Humphry Repton (1752–1818), followed in 2020 by the theme ‘Unforgettable Gardens’, have likewise provided a focus for considerable CGT volunteer effort.

ARCHIVES OF THE AGT

Much of the information in this article is drawn from the AGT archives, which, together with the GHS archives, are now part of the collection of records and other material held by The Gardens Trust. Enquiries about the AGT archives may be directed to the author of this article.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Several people have provided material and comments in the preparation of this article, including Kristina Campbell, Merrick Denton-Thompson, Gilly Drummond, Hazel Fryer, Linden Groves, Virginia Hinze, David Lambert, Lorna McRobie, Sally Walker and Jenifer White. I am particularly grateful to Teresa Forey-Harrison for help in assembling the AGT archives, and to Steffie Shields for prompting the writing of the article and for providing photographs.

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