



AVON
GARDENS
TRUST

NEWSLETTER
January 2024

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

It doesn't seem a minute since we embarked on a New Year and a new series of Events for 2023. For the first time in what feels like years there were no lockdown restrictions and gardens across Avon and beyond were open once more. We all felt a bit like Mole—'hang spring cleaning', lets get out into the garden. We began with a visit to the Rococo Garden and its snowdrops at Painswick, with a terrific guided tour led by our President, Tim Mowl. The all-day visit to two Avery Tipping gardens in Monmouth: High Glanau Manor and Wyndcliffe Court, with a delicious lunch between, was a huge success, as



were subsequent visits to Caisson House and Tyntesfield (p.4). Spurred on by this, we have organised another all-day trip, with lunch, to two wonderful gardens in Wells next summer. We have been thrilled to welcome members from Somerset, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire Garden Trusts to some of our events and we are proposing future collaborations with them for some of their events. Best of all, this year's events have resulted in a number of new members to the Trust. Following our new venture of having a stall at some NGS open gardens, we will be continuing during 2024. if anyone would like to help us man a stall, chat to fellow garden enthusiasts and spread the word about AGT, please do let us know. There is always time to wander around the gardens—and there are always wonderful cakes!

The 2023 Journal arrived in time for our AGM and I have to say, looks pretty good. I do hope you enjoy the four articles we have chosen for you. On display were the terrific new AGT banners organised by Selena Gray which will accompany us to future events, including NGS days. The AGM was followed by a fascinating talk by Trish Gibson on the landscape gardener Brenda Colvin, whose style of landscape design and planting, then innovative, looks astonishingly modern to our eyes, whilst her ideas now inform many of today's garden designers.

We are now taking a break until Saturday 27 January 2024 when we will return to BRLSI, Queen Square Bath for a Lecture by garden historian Dr Carole Fry, 'Spanning the Political Divide- Neo-Palladianism and the Eighteenth-Century Landscape'. I look forward to seeing you there and in the meantime wish you all a very Happy New Year.

Kay Ross

Changes to our Membership Charges

The new changes to the Membership fees were voted in unanimously at the AGM and we are therefore increasing the single membership to £20 and joint membership to £30 from July 2024.

News From the Committee

Goodbye to June and Peter Shannon

We were sorry to say goodbye to June and Peter Shannon, who have retired both as joint Membership Secretary and as Trustees of AGT. They have admirably overseen the membership over the last five years but feel the time is right to hand the baton on. They intend to remain as members and to hopefully join us on many more garden visits. They plan to travel to some more distant gardens, including the Yves St Laurent garden in Marrakesh, and we look forward to hearing all about it. Peter Hills will now be the new Membership Secretary at membership@avongardenstrust.org.uk

Urgent Appeal for new Trustees & Committee members

We are now urgently in need of new Trustees and members of the AGT Committee. We need both a Secretary to organise the admin and a Marketing person to help us with social media and advertising our events. Our Constitution states that we need to have five Trustees and we are in danger of falling below that number. We are a friendly group and have around 5-6 meetings a year, so please, if you feel you would like to become involved or would like to know more, contact us at chairman@avongardenstrust.org.uk. As an incentive, we are also planning one or two Committee special outings during 2024.

Avon Gardens Trust visit to Tyntesfield in September 2023

In September we visited Tyntesfield for a 'Behind the Ropes' tour led by Head Gardener Paul Evans. Despite the threat of rain, we had a substantial turn out. Paul promised us a look behind the scenes and mission accomplished on this interesting and informative visit! He gave us a brief introduction to the Gibbs family and how Tyntesfield was remodelled from a typical Georgian Country House into a Gothic revival building. He then described the National Trust's restoration since their acquisition in 2002.



Home Farm, Lower Chicken Shed - Sothebys Catalogue

We walked to the old dairy where he explained about the original state of art dairy parlour set up for milk and dairy products. One of the questions of the day commenced here – where was the Ice House at Tyntesfield? Paul gave us one possible location - but discounted it - before suggesting three other locations during the morning. Then onwards into the magnificent, recently restored Rose Garden to learn of its renovation and future plans and then into the education room where Paul laid out some garden notebooks (a rarity at Tyntesfield as the Gibbs family have possession of most garden-related documents).

He showed us an original drawing of the proposed enlargement of the lake – drawn by Pulham



and Sons – that never transpired. A boat house in Pulhamite was the plan! We were also shown a 'cast' Lion that used to adorn the pillars of the now collapsed Conservatory – a huge structure that fell in the storms of 1916. Many of these artefacts are being conserved for future generations.

Our next stop was the Carriage House where Paul showed us the precious tree and plant labels that have been found around the estate over the years since NT



have managed the site. Some were magnificent, enamelled labels on cast iron, some plainer with



raised descriptions. And even some more recent 'plastic' labels. Through these labels, NT were able to establish the actual age of some of the trees planted by the Gibbs family over so many years.

Underneath the carriage house we saw the Kennels and both, another potential Ice House location. Our final destination was the extensive

Kitchen Garden and Orangery where Paul outlined the layout and plans of the working garden.

A fascinating and interesting look behind the scenes that was enjoyed by all. The rain held off to make it a memorable day. We were not able to pin down the location of the Ice House—but Paul has an idea. Watch this space!



Peter Hills

New Parterre de Broderie at Dyrham Park



The new *parterre de broderie* has been installed in the former Sphinx Court at Dyrham Park, using steel parterre frames.

A total of 56 tonnes of topsoil was used to fill the new parterre frames, then turf cut into complex shapes.



William Beckford's hidden Grotto Tunnel

IMAGE SOURCE: WESSEX ARCHAEOLOGY

Recent excavations have revealed that the grotto at Beckford's Tower, filled in after Beckford's death in 1844, is double the anticipated size. Lost for decades after the parts



of the ride passed into different ownership, experts and volunteers from Bath Preservation Trust (BPT) rediscovered the grotto tunnel, having narrowed down the potential location of the west entrances in the corner of the paddocks.

"... architect Clive England and structural engineer Ed Morton...were able to survey the grotto, and establish that for the most part, it was in very good condition. It was a wonderful moment, to finally be able to see the entrance to the very tunnel that allowed William Beckford to pass unseen under the lane, which is still to be found almost opposite current Granville Road." said BPT's Capital Works Director Simon Butler.

"The rock-cut steps that descend into the grotto wind steadily downwards, with the curving rock face hiding the entrance to the tunnel, heightening the sense of mystery for anyone visiting," said Marek Lewcun, archaeologist at Wessex Archaeology.

Alex Sherman, CEO of Bath Preservation Trust explained: *"Opening up the Grotto tunnel for visitors to enjoy is one of the key objectives for the 'Our Tower' project. While the east end of the tunnel has been blocked by development, our intention is to re-open this space, for the first time in perhaps 60 years, reinstating the steps from which one would have first caught sight of the tower."**

The grotto will be open to the public from March 2024. In the meantime, Wessex Archaeology have created a **3D model of the tunnel**.



Sketch by Willes Maddox 1844 of the grotto at Beckford's Tower

* www.bath-preservation-trust.org.uk/william-beckfords-long-lost-grotto-tunnel-is-found-bath-preservation-trust-now-plans-to-restore-historic-feature/

Prior Park Landscape Garden Award

Prior Park Landscape Garden has won two awards at the Institute for Civil Engineers South West Civil Engineering Awards 2023. It was awarded the trophy for the best re-engineered project under £8 million, as well as being the winner of the People's Choice Award, having received the most votes in a free online poll. The judges said the project was completed with “absolute consideration” for the history and landscape of the park.

They praised the re-use of the old stones in the dam as part of the new solution, preservation of the archaeology throughout the site, and effective collaboration between partners. They said the scheme sensitively preserved an important heritage site with clever engineering that is now largely hidden from view to the casual observer. The dam project restored the 18th century dam structures. It was a long and challenging project throughout the pandemic.

The eight-year scheme saw Nicholas Pearson Associates act as lead landscape consultant to the National Trust, working alongside engineering contractor Griffiths and water infrastructure specialist Binnies.



Avon Gardens Trust Planning News

Sulis Manor, South Stoke, Bath

Application Ref: 22/02169/EOUT

Proposal: Outline application for Phases 3 and 4 for up to 300 dwellings; Detailed application for the continuation of the spine road [from phase 1], to and through Sulis Manor and associated works comprising: the demolition of existing dilapidated buildings and tree removal; drainage; landscaping; lighting; and boundary treatment; to enable construction of the spine road



Anne Hills, our Planning Trustee, and our Chair, Kay Ross, objected to this planning application in the strongest of terms on 25 and 31 January, and on 1 September 2023. The Council met in November of last year to consider

the proposal and deferred taking a decision on it until this spring. As I was not conversant with the site and the possible impact upon it by the proposed development, particularly as regards Sulis Manor and its grounds, I made a thorough site investigation with members of the South of Bath Alliance (SOBA) on Saturday 25 November 2023. Not only did we walk the landscape, taking in the matchless views from the Plateau, but also gained access to the grounds of Sulis Manor so that we could assess their importance in heritage terms and analyse the effect upon them of the proposed spine road and the consequent loss of trees to the north and east.

My first task was to read Adrian Neilsen's report on the house in the Historic Environment Record, compiled by him as a response to the application for the demolition of Sulis Manor in 2017, which was withdrawn in August of that year. It was heartening to see that the Council's Conservation Officer deemed the house and grounds to be designated as a locally important heritage asset, even if it did not quite meet the necessary requirements to be included on the Historic England statutory list.

The historical information in the report has recently been augmented by SOBA and I have done my own research into Sulis Manor's designer, Samuel Sebastian Reay, who also appears to have designed the neighbouring Brantwood, just outside South Stoke, and, together with Thomas Ball Silcock, Ormidale in Southstoke Road, both of which I visited on 25 November. Ormidale was known to be a Silcock & Reay design, but Brantwood can be safely attributed to Reay on both stylistic grounds and the distinctive use of materials there, particularly the rubble-faced rangework.

Before its dissolution in 1913, the partnership was responsible for 108 Walcot Street in Bath, an Arts & Crafts shop for Hayward & Wooster, prominent Bath builders, once the showroom of Walcot Reclamation, and the charming Jacobean-style Sunday School for Widcombe Baptist Church by the Kennet & Avon Canal, with its sinuous Art Nouveau lettering. Of more relevance to historic gardens, they designed in 1908 the Churchill Cottage Homes near Langford in North Somerset; 'twelve comfortable homes for the deserving poor', as the *Architectural Review* described them in 1909. The Tudor-style cottages were built around three sides of a quadrangle with a communal garden in the centre and a raised promenade to the south overlooking twelve 'working gardens', one for each cottage. On the east and west flanks there were fruit gardens. Once they had gone their separate ways, Reay continued practising as an architect from his offices at 28 Milsom Street in Bath and Orchard Street in Bristol.

Reay's Sulis Manor is, therefore, one of a group of late Arts & Crafts houses built for Bath businessmen to the south of the city, instigated by Charles Annesley Voysey's Lodge Style on Shaft Road, designed in 1909 for the surveyor and engineer, Thomas Sturge Cotterell on the site of the former St Winifred's Quarry up on Combe Down. Brantwood was constructed for Alderman Bush of S W Bush, grocers of Kingsmead Square, while Sulis Manor was built for Isaac Carr of Twerton Mills. It was Reay's last house; he died in 1933 and is buried in St Mary's churchyard, Limpley Stoke.



My site investigation confirmed that the principal designed landscape of the Manor is to the south of the house, running down in an open lawn flanked by shelter belts to an irregular octagonal pond framed by low walls, with gate piers and wrought ironwork gates. What only a walk around the grounds confirms is how far back within the site the house is set. Its entrance front faces north, right at the rear of the plot, and is close to Burnt House Road. The north façade of Sulis Manor is effectively screened from this road by a deep protective border of trees. Apparently, 80 mature trees will need to be felled to accommodate the proposed new access road on this north side, which would be sited barely 30 metres or so from the existing Burnt House Road, between it and the Manor. The remark made in the Frampton Town Planning Statement that, *'the proposed extension of the spine road for Phase 1, across Sulis Manor grounds...will deliver a safe access with minimal impacts to the environment'* would seem to be disingenuous in the extreme.

There is no doubt that the proposal will cause severe harm to the setting of Sulis Manor and its grounds, rightly designated as a locally important heritage asset. This designation should be enough to protect it from such a rapacious proposal, if not the comprehensive Tree Preservation Order on its grounds. It is to be hoped that the Council will give due weight to both when the application is reconsidered in the spring.

Professor Timothy Mowl



Churchill Cottage Homes central garden

Update on the Hanging Gardens of Crews Hole and Associated Bath House

Recently, Blackswarth Road Wood, the woodland in front of the Bath House, including the garden, was put up for auction on 13 September. We featured it in the last newsletter (The Hanging Gardens of Crews Hole and Associated Bath House, Sept-Oct 2023) We're sorry to say, despite the community pledging an incredible £87,000 plus an estimated £11,000 in gift aid and additional emergency funding, sadly it wasn't enough to compete against the final single competing bid of £245,000. This was an astonishing amount of money for five acres of woodland that cannot be developed., As we said in the article, It would be a tragedy if public access to the unique hanging gardens via these woods was lost, and AGT will be watching the site with interest in the future.

Garden History MA

MA & PhD in Garden History

In collaboration with the Gardens Trust, the University of Buckingham will be offering an [MA course in Garden History](#) from October 2023. It will be a research rather than a taught degree, and is organised around a series of case study seminars looking at significant sites, which will be led by owners and professionals.

Buckingham also offer opportunities to study for [a PhD in Garden History](#), on a full-time or part-time basis, taking three or six years respectively. This is an advanced research degree awarded for a thesis based on a substantial piece of independent and original research.

Learning with Experts

The Gardens Trust has recently begun working with Learning with Experts and supporting a new online course on the Conservation of Historic Gardens, directed by Dr Audrey Gerber, a Research Associate at the University of Sheffield. Audrey specialised in the flowering and growth physiology of ornamental woody perennials.

For more information about all these courses, visit the Gardens Trust website

<https://thegardenstrust.org/gardens-trust/resources/learning/garden-history-courses-and-lectures/>

News from around Avon

NGS News

NGS County Organiser For Bristol and S. Glos

The current County Organiser Su Mills will be stepping down this year so there will be a long period of handover for someone interested in leading the Bristol team. Please contact Su Mills if you would like an informal chat about the role at su.mills@ngs.org.uk or 01454 615438.

Gardens Trust News

The Gardens Trust welcomes the new Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, the biggest milestone in the conservation of historic parks and gardens since the power to create the Register was introduced in 1983. The Act, which received Royal Assent on 26th October, introduces a number of planning reforms with two key areas of particular relevance to historic parks and gardens, namely the duty to have 'special regard' to the desirability of preserving or enhancing designated heritage assets and the statutory status for Historic Environment Records (HERs).

The Friends of Sydney Gardens

Wednesday, 17 January 2024 at Sydney Gardens Community Pavilion, 7 pm

The Pleasure Gardens of Bath

A fascinating and informative presentation by specialist and expert Professor Marion Harney.

Bath Preservation Trust

Tuesday, 30 January 2024 17:30-20:00 at the Museum of Bath Architecture, The Paragon, Bath

Resilient Landscapes - Dan Pearson OBE

Dan's talk will reflect on public projects and reveal their sensitive, robust, and responsive approaches to landscaping urban environments and the impact of planting on places, people and planet. With insight on how landscapes and gardens can be planted to become more nurturing and sustainable within a changing climate and through changing seasons.



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Upcoming AGT Events— Spring 2024

All lectures at Bath Royal Scientific and Literary Institution, Queen Square, Bath. Pre-booking via <https://www.avongardenstrust.org.uk/events/> (if non-internet pay on the day). All Lectures start at 2.30 pm

Saturday 27 January 2024 Lecture 'Spanning the Political Divide - Neo-Palladianism and the Eighteenth-Century Landscape' with Dr Carole Fry

Saturday 24 February 2024 Lecture 'The architect and landscape designer Thomas Archer' with Dr Helen Lawrence-Beaton

Saturday 23 March 2024 Lecture 'The Edwardian architect and garden designer Harry Inigo Triggs' with Dr Wendy Bishop

Tuesday 9 April 2024 – a private visit for spring planting to the gardens at **South Kelding**, Upton Cheyney 2-4 pm



Saturday 27 April 2024 Lecture 'The Legacy of Spa Gardens – Bath Spa Gardens' with Christopher Pound