



Historical gardens and parks in the present culture of cities

Ian Kennaway, Chairman of the UKFriends of Czech Historic Buildings, Gardens and Parks

Introduction

Thank you very much for inviting Barbara Peacock and me to come to your Workshop. We are really delighted to be here and we are very grateful to the NPU for hosting our visit to your country. Suffice it to say that both of us are deeply committed czechophiles having visited your country many times since, in my case, 1991, having been shown around many of your wonderful historic buildings parks and gardens and having had the pleasure of meeting and befriending so many of your fellow country men and women both here and in the UK ever since then.

Barbara is going to talk to you about the UKCzech Friends and how and why we have got that up and running and I am going to talk to you mainly about the work of the London Historic Parks & Gardens Trust and I will finish up with some photos showing the broad range of activities, which take place in my local Park in London, Ravenscourt Park.

First of all a brief word of introduction about myself. I spent my main career with the National Trust, which works in England, Wales and Northern Ireland: there being a separate National Trust for Scotland. I worked for the Trust for 32 years, firstly as a manager of a portfolio of historic properties and beautiful countryside properties, then as the Regional Director of the Trust's North Wales region and finally, as the Director of the Regions, of which there were 16 at the time. The National Trust is a charity independent of government. It owns and cares for 254,000 hectares of land and more than 350 historic houses and gardens, ancient monuments, nature reserves and historic parks. It is the UK's largest private landowner and the third largest after the government and the Crown. It has 3.6 million members. It is thus the largest membership organisation after the Automobile Association. It has 14.8 million visitors to its properties and it has 55,000 volunteers working for it. It is Europe's largest conservation organisation.

I loved working for the Trust. It was hard work, but very rewarding in terms of job satisfaction. I always felt that I was doing something really worthwhile. One particular example of this was putting together through acquisition or protective covenants 18 unbroken kilometres of unspoilt coastline on the island of Anglesey for the benefit of the nation for ever or another was taking on a new historic property and opening it to the public, such as Plas Newydd in Anglesey, the home of the Marquess of Anglesey. What



was especially important is that all NT properties are protected by a special Act of Parliament, which means that they can never be sold or mortgaged against the Trust's will and that has only happened once since 1895 when it was founded.

Retirement (not a word I really know!)

When I retired from the Trust in 1998, I wanted something equally stimulating to do and, by great good fortune, my wife picked up a leaflet at our local Garden Centre about the London Historic Parks & Gardens Trust. They were looking for volunteers for a range of jobs, so I went along to see the chairman, at the time, and she asked me if I would like to help with fundraising, so I said " No", as I have never been very good at asking people for money. Then she asked if I would like to take the minutes of their meetings. This seemed to be a bit of a step backwards, but, nevertheless, it would give me an insight into the workings of the Trust, so I said I would. After a short time, I was asked to come on to the Executive Committee and on to the Council of Management and I am still on these, having been both vice-chairman and a vice-president for a time. I also set up a Planning and Conservation Sub-Group. This Sub-Group monitors planning applications, which are likely to affect historic parks and gardens detrimentally, for example, very tall buildings and buildings above the normal skyline, but there are 33 Boroughs in London and we are only a handful of volunteers trying to cope with deciding which ones to devote our slender resources to fighting.

However, we have been able to make a very big step forward with this work through the compilation of an Inventory by a Researcher, for whom we were able to raise funds to pay her through grants and gifts.

Background - The London Inventory of Historic Green Spaces

Soon after the London Parks & Gardens Trust (LPGT) was founded in 1994, it began to compile an inventory of public parks, gardens, squares, cemeteries, churchyards and other green spaces of local historic interest throughout London. Whereas the English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest is for parks and gardens of national standing, the LPGT register picks up the smaller landscapes that make a great contribution at a local level. The criteria used to establish whether a site should be included are that it should be at least 30 years old and have some element of formal layout or landscape design, or have important social history attached to it.

The initial survey in 1995 recorded some 1,250 sites. From 1999 the list was reviewed and considerably expanded and, in 2003, the London Inventory of Historic Green Spaces was launched, with records for over 2,000 sites. It took the form of an Access database, backed up by photographs and other material. Since then the Inventory has continued to



grow and information is constantly reviewed and updated. It is now the largest and most comprehensive survey of parks and gardens of local historic interest in the capital, and covers the 610 square miles that make up London. It provides information for LPGT's own work and to a wide variety of individuals and organisations, including local authority planning and parks departments. Until now, information has only been available through direct application to LPGT.

London Gardens Online

In 2008 LPGT began fund-raising for a 3-year project to make the Inventory available online as a dedicated website and, as part of the project, to undertake additional factual and picture research. Successful applications were made to two charitable trusts, a donation received from a third, and the balance of the budget finally raised in November 2008 when a Regional Capacity Building grant was awarded by English Heritage. As a result the project started a little later than anticipated (originally projected for summer 2008), but the projected completion date remains 2011.

It was agreed that the early version of the website should be based on selected, core material extracted from the full London Inventory of Historic Green Spaces database. This has the advantage of not only making some information publicly available and giving people a taster of what will be available on the full London Gardens Online website, but it also provides a means of attracting additional information through encouraging feedback from visitors to the website. This might come from a number of sources, including local authority officers, groups and individuals involved in local history / London's landscape, as well as interested members of the public. Feedback and comments will also inform the design and development of the full version of the website, and enable adjustments to be made.

May- June 2009

The work to fine-tune the database and establish the website design has been labour-intensive, but is of great importance for the success of the project. A considerable amount of effort has been made to ensure that it will achieve the desired purpose, including getting feedback from others on ease of use and accessibility of information. Since then work has continued apace to develop the website with this in mind, to produce text for web pages, about the project, the LPGT, the funders, etc., and to complete as many core site records as possible so that these can be uploaded on the website, now working on a borough by borough basis. There should be around 500 live records when the website is launched. This has taken longer than anticipated since we decided to include site photographs for at least the first few boroughs. It was agreed that the website should include an example of a full site record, complete with modern and historic images, and



this has been produced. Footmark, the contractors, has been finalising design of the website and developing its search facilities, testing these out and refining them as necessary. The website is now live: www.londongardensonline.org.uk.

During this period new sites have been added to the Inventory database, which now numbers over 2,435 sites. New research and site visits have largely been undertaken by the Researcher, but also the invaluable contribution of the LPGT Volunteer Research Project, continues to provide information on existing and new sites.

Value of the Inventory

A wonderful example of how valuable the Inventory is through the visits of the Researcher, the Chairman and Secretary of the LHPGT to each of the 33 London Borough Planning departments to meet the Planning Officer and/or the Conservation Officer (not every borough has these). There is then an exchange of information. Firstly, about the gardens and parks within the particular borough, which are on the English Heritage (viz NPU) register of historic parks and gardens and ,secondly, which historic parks and gardens of a lower standard that the EH registered gardens are on the relevant boroughs locals list. Often the borough has information about a park and garden, which the LPGT does not have on the Inventory and vice-versa. The EH has no legal force, but it is a case of planning authorities ignoring its contents at their peril, especially if applications go to Appeal. Local Lists do not have any statutory power either, but they provide an undertaking by the borough to take account of them when considering planning applications.

This exercise has taken sometime to complete: there are only 6 boroughs left to visit out of the 33. By meeting up with the relevant officers a rapport is established and an exchange of information will often result. Much depends on the time and availability of hard pressed planning/conservation officers, as well as their interest in this area. Also these days there are frequent changes in staff in boroughs, which makes it more difficult for us.

Other Work of the LGPGT

A programme of monthly talks during the winter months and a programme of walks from April to September, together with a Study Day on, for example, the history of Bushey Parks, one of the Royal Parks associated closely with Hampton Court.



Open Garden Squares Weekend

This is a major activity of the LHPGT and is consequently a major source of income for the Trust. Open Garden Squares Weekend in London began in 1998, after the founder, Caroline Aldiss, was sitting in her local communal garden square One sunny afternoon thinking how excellent it would be if members of the public could enjoy what she was enjoying, if only for a day or even an afternoon. She imagined a day, when many gardens, which are not normally open, could be opened to the public and when local communities could, perhaps, celebrate the day with fetes and fairs. Caroline approached the London Historic Parks and Gardens Trust and, after a huge effort, she managed, under its auspices, to persuade 43 garden squares to open their gates on a Sunday in June either for the whole day or part of it. With the help and encouragement of English Heritage, as well as a number of sponsors, the event has gone from strength to strength.

It is now held annually over the second weekend in June and, last year, 173 gardens took part. It has certainly become a permanent fixture in London's calendar of events.

The principal aim of OGSW is to raise awareness of the diversity and beauty of London's gardens and garden squares and to draw attention to the great environmental and horticultural

contribution, which the conservation of these and other green spaces make to the capital. It is

usually the only occasion when the public can explore and enjoy so many of London's normally closed communal, commercial or institutional gardens.

From the beginning, when only private communal garden squares were opened, the range of

gardens has extended considerably and now includes around 25 different categories including,

for example, gardens of hospitals, hospices, colleges, schools, prisons, museums, hotels, roof

gardens, churches, convents, allotments and business premises. Many of the open gardens

arrange fete and/or other activities and provide refreshments.

The event would not be possible without the help of sponsors and an army of volunteers, who



help with the organisation, sell tickets and man the gates. The net proceeds are shared between LHPGT and eligible participating gardens i.e. any garden, which is not normally open to the public, and a garden, which puts on a special event over the weekend. The LHPGT uses its share to pursue its work of protecting and promoting London's green spaces.

Development of the Concept of OGSW

WORLDWIDE GARDENS WEEKEND or WWGW

WorldWide Gardens Weekend works to enlist towns and cities throughout the UK, Europe and the rest of the world, to organise Open Gardens and Parks Days/Weekends on the same weekend (or following one) each year. The event will be similar to the Heritage Open Days event, held for buildings in September throughout Europe, but opening gardens, when they are usually at their best. This concept has very successfully operated in London for 12 years and in 2009, 193 gardens opened over across 23 of London's Boroughs with 24 different categories of gardens taking part. Further information can be obtained from www.opensquares.org. or please contact ian@kennaway.net

Whilst the private communal garden squares of London are numerous and a well known feature of the capital, there are many other categories of gardens in London and nationwide, which are semi-private or owned by public authorities, companies, trusts, local residents etc. For example, some hospitals, hospices, fire stations, prisons, police and ambulance stations have gardens. There are a number of corporately owned roof gardens or gardens of gated development. There are gardens of the royal residences, law courts, churches, museums, universities, schools, libraries and wildlife gardens. These are not normally open to the public on a regular daily -basis. There are also gardens of hotels, pubs and clubs, which are generally only open if you are a client or member. Some allotments are included too.

In view of the continuing success of the London event (now in its twelfth year), I believe that the time is right to extend the concept to the rest of United Kingdom and beyond.

The objective could be to try and to ensure that a majority of citizens of the United Kingdom (and the world) are made aware that there are gardens near them, which are being 'unlocked' for a day or a weekend especially for them and, in which, there are all manner of 'happenings'.

The general benefits would be considerable. Amongst others, the event would raise the profile and value accorded to green spaces, it would encourage people to participate either by working in their local garden and/or arranging activities, it would encourage pride and, hopefully, more spending by the managers of the gardens and, above all, it



would provide a large measure of enjoyment for a great many people right across the spectrum.

The Cockburn Trust (the Edinburgh Civic Trust) arranged Parks and Gardens Open Days for several years until 2006, but then was unable to find sponsors for the last 3 years. See their website: www.cockburnassociation.org.uk. The National Trust of Slovakia arranged an Open Parks and Gardens Weekend in Bratislava in 2007 and 2008 on the same weekends as the London event and this was mirrored in the historic town of Nitra. This year, due to maternity leave, it was not possible to repeat the event, but the Mayor of Bratislava is very keen that it should be repeated in the future. Information can be obtained via: kubikova@nt.sk

Clearly, each location will have to adapt the event to suit local circumstances. A decision would have to be made as to the practicality or desirability of making a charge for admission like the London Parks and Gardens Trust does. Both Edinburgh and Bratislava made no charge and both have had a very high proportion of public parks in their events. Sponsorship, gifts, support from local authorities is thus of the highest importance for consideration. As is the availability of volunteers to deal with such matters as promotional literature packing and distribution and manning the gates of normally closed gardens.



NÁRODNÍ PAMATKOVÝ ÚSTAV
ÚZEMNÍ ODBORNÉ PRACOVIŠTĚ
V KROMĚŘÍŽI

Historické zahrady a parky jako součásti soudobé městské krajiny

Mezinárodní pracovní seminář 7. – 9. 10. 2009 v Kroměříži, www.konferencekm.cz

London Gardens Online - Mozilla Firefox
http://www.londongardensonline.org.uk/index.html

London Gardens Online

London Parks & Gardens Trust

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DISCOVER VISIT RESEARCH EXPLORE

The London Gardens Online Project aims to develop a dedicated web-based resource for information relating to London's historic parks, gardens and other green open spaces and to make this information freely available (see [about the project](#)).

In this first phase of the project, a limited set of information will be made available on this website. As the project develops, further information and facilities will be added. The project aims to be completed in 2011.

The underlying database contains an inventory of over 2,430 sites. These are in the process of being uploaded to this website.

Search by keyword:

Select by Borough

Select by type

Advanced search

There are currently 350 / 2430 records live on the website.

In this phase of the project, only a subset of each site's data is shown. [Click here to see an example of a full record](#)

We are looking to increase the extent of the historic images and information on this website. If you think you can help, we would love to hear from you.

For queries, more information, or if the site you are looking for is not yet on the website, please contact sally.williams@londongardensonline.org.uk

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