



Research Conserve Campaign



The Gardens Trust Impact Report 2023





This has been a year of some incredible achievements, from the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act offering the most significant change in historic designed landscape protection since 1983, to our blog celebrating its 500th post, to the opening of a new garden history course at the University of Buckingham in partnership with the Gardens Trust.

I hope that you are as proud as I am of all the important work we have been doing, examples of which you can see in the following pages.

But it has also been a year of difficult challenges, with endless threats to historic parks and gardens continuing to arise, against an exceptionally difficult economic backdrop.

At the Gardens Trust, we are extremely ambitious about conserving historic parks and gardens, and ensuring they can be enjoyed by everyone, not just in this year, but for future generations too.

This ambition is being delivered by a small but determined team of volunteers, staff and supporters, and we simply couldn't do it without our members. Thank you for your unstinting support.

Statutory consultee casework

Our statutory casework continued to be ever-challenging in 2023. Over the year, we received 1911 planning consultations. With volunteers from the 37 County and Country Gardens Trusts, we made 545 written responses.

Cases have included:

- › Ongoing issues at **Marston Park, Somerset**. Over several years and in various iterations there have been proposals and an application to put 20 holiday lodges and other associated buildings adjacent to the lake in the Grade II registered landscape. The proposed holiday village lies at the heart of the WS Gilpin picturesque landscape around the lake which acts as the eyecatcher from the

elevated location of the house. The position of the Somerset Garden Trust and the Gardens Trust, who have objected a number of times, remains that the development would bring about a permanent irreversible and detrimental change to this valuable picturesque landscape. The Gardens Trust submitted another objection to Mendip District Council opposing any facilities that would commercialise holiday activity or glamping at Marston – the current planning application was refused permission in February 2023.

During 2021 numerous tent-like structures appeared around the lake without a planning application or consultation and then the applicant applied instead for a Certificate of Lawful Use citing that the land had been used for fishing and shooting round the lake for many years and that this had necessitated various large structures beyond the temporary ones used by fishermen. The council turned down the Certificate of Lawful Use application in 2022, quoting the Gardens Trust's objections.

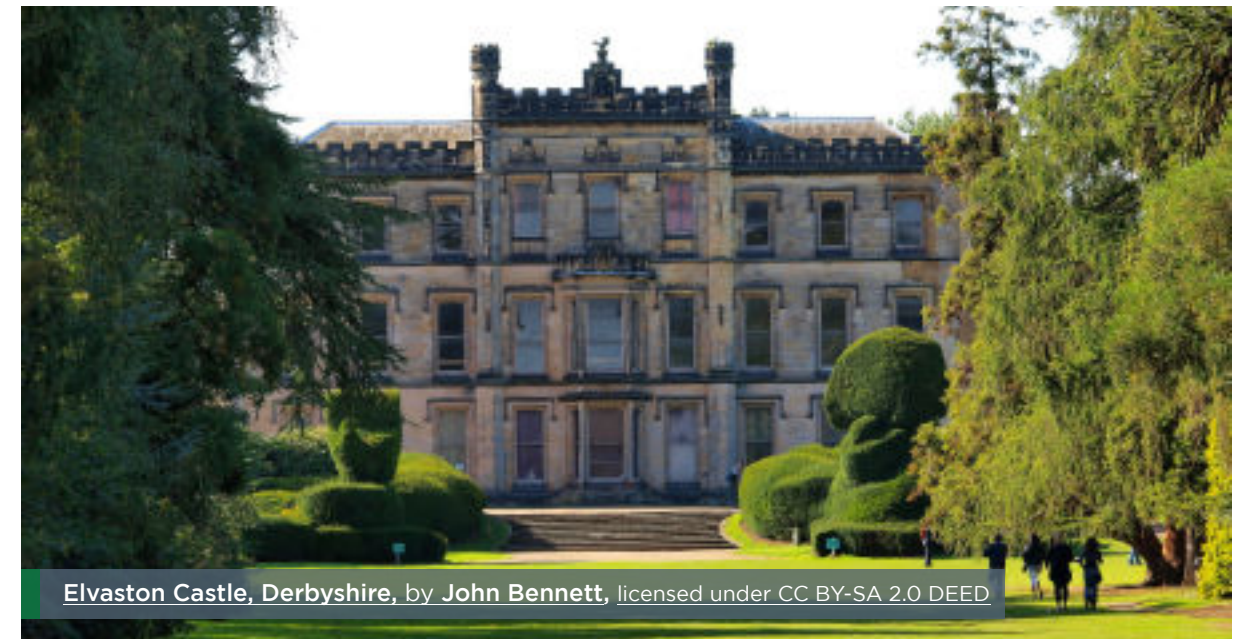
In 2023 we were consulted on a retrospective application for 'Futuro House', a striking building which had been erected without consent as part of the larger plans for leisure and recreation.

We also strongly objected to a second contemporaneous application for change of use from parkland and agriculture to mixed parkland, agriculture, leisure and recreation, and continued use of the Marston parkland around the lake for a substantial holiday venue with associated structures, which would include 50 glamping pictures, 5 guest services and engineering works, food and drink, indoor sport/recreation, education such as a forest school, a community meeting place, outdoor recreation including live performance. We will continue to watch Marston closely.

› An objection to a planning application including a proposal for a new café building and a new access road at **Elvaston Castle, Derbyshire**. Elvaston is Registered Grade II* and centred on a Gothic castle with the surrounding 200 acres used as a public country park owned and managed by Derbyshire County Council. Various options for its future have been considered over the last few years, culminating in this application. Proposals for the restoration and conservation of the castle and the historic designed landscape are to be considered for a later phase.

The Gardens Trust objected to the application due to the apparent lack of appreciation for the impact the proposals will have on the Registered landscape and its setting. In particular, a large new car park and drive would cross the

Registered landscape in two areas, and the drive would also cross a large area of parkland known as Oak Flat whose significance as part of the ornamental grounds was unappreciated when Elvaston was originally Registered in 1984. In June 2023 South Derbyshire District Council Planning Committee refused the current planning application.



Elvaston Castle, Derbyshire, by John Bennett, licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0 DEED

› A frustrating update to our strong objection to unauthorised development of an intrusive and damaging two-lane access road, car park and café in the parkland of **Thornbridge Hall, in Derbyshire**. The case went to Public Inquiry after the Peak District National Park issued an Enforcement Notice and unfortunately in early 2023 the Appeal was upheld by the Planning Inspector on the grounds of “the increase in opportunities for the general public, the various community groups, schools and other organisations to experience the Hall and its grounds”. The case was lost essentially through a lack of appreciation that the historic landscape value is fundamentally derived from a holistic design composition that includes both hall and landscape. This disappointing case highlights that there is much more to be done in raising the understanding of the value and significance of designed landscapes amongst owners of private properties and even amongst some planning inspectors.

› An objection to a proposal to turn the **Norris Castle estate** on the Isle of Wight into a “heritage and natural environment led resort”, centred on a 74 bed hotel and spa with a range of 55 other market residences split into separate development packages across the estate, the Registered landscape, and shoreline. Norris Castle

is in private ownership and has been unoccupied since 2015. The surrounding estate and shoreline is Grade I on the Register and lies within the Isle of Wight Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Recent research has shown that Humphry Repton was involved in the design of the Norris Castle Estate. The site's significance is heightened by its group value of interrelated castle, model farm and designed landscape which together create an extremely fine example of the Picturesque landscape style which crucially has remained unchanged since c1799. Together Norris Castle Estate and the adjacent unregistered Springhill Estate (in which the majority of the housing would be) represent a substantial area of virtually untouched historic landscape, especially when viewed to and from the Solent and Spithead.

The Gardens Trust, Isle of Wight Gardens Trust, Georgian Group, SAVE and Historic England amongst others have all strongly objected to the scheme. The Gardens Trust considered that the proposals are an overdevelopment of the site and would have a substantial adverse impact on an extremely valuable heritage asset and irrevocably alter the character of the landscape and the existing spirit of place. The planning application remains undetermined at the time of writing.



› A plan from the All England Lawn Tennis Club to build new courts and a stadium at **Wimbledon Park, London**, a large metropolitan open space and public park Registered at Grade II*. Originally designed by Capability Brown, the historic character of the park is now somewhat degraded and is on the Historic England “At Risk” register. The original area of the historic park is also now fragmented into

different ownerships including primarily the London Borough of Merton, the Wimbledon Club, and the All England Lawn Tennis Club, who own land to the west of the lake and adjacent to their existing facilities. To extend this, the All England Lawn Tennis Club submitted a planning application in 2021 for the development of 38 additional grass tennis courts and an 8000 seater Parkland Stadium. The application also included the creation of a new 9.4 hectare public park along the west side of the lake (with permitted access for 10 months of the year) and a substantial historic landscape and lake restoration scheme.

The Gardens Trust liaised with London Parks & Gardens, Historic England, and Capability Brown experts, remaining concerned at the commercial nature of the Parkland Stadium in relation to which direct public benefit is open to question, whilst acknowledging that the new public park and historic landscape restoration will provide other significant public benefits. The Gardens Trust and London Parks & Gardens jointly came to the view that the likelihood of finding an alternative to fund the significant heritage improvements and subsequent long-term maintenance of the newly created parkland was unlikely, and therefore in principle with some reservations we supported the scheme.

There continues to be considerable and well-informed campaigning in opposition. The site lies across two local planning authorities, and in 2023 permission was allowed by Merton council, the major landowner, whilst Wandsworth council refused it. We wait to see what happens next.

› The ‘Studley Revealed’ project, which proposes the creation of new visitor facilities at the Canal Gate area of **Studley Royal Park and Water Gardens in Yorkshire**, which is a Grade I site on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest, and also inscribed as part of the Studley Royal Park and the Ruins of Fountains Abbey World Heritage Site.

The National Trust owns and manages most of the site and is proposing a new building to provide a more accessible café, reorganised admission point and toilets, as well as space to tell more expansively the story of the garden and the World Heritage Site. The project aims to deliver conservation benefits through improved interpretation and by restoring historical vistas that have been lost over time. The project was first presented in 2019 but paused during the Covid period before being lodged as a planning application in 2023.

As part of pre-application discussions in early 2023, the Gardens Trust and the Yorkshire Gardens Trust met with the National Trust and discussed issues including the desirable conservation outcomes, heritage assessment methodology, potential

impacts on the garden heritage assets and the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Site, the impact on visitor numbers and the need for and nature of interpretation facilities.

Having received the planning application in autumn 2023, the Gardens Trust considers that the proposals offer a reasonable and balanced solution to a multi-faceted challenge at the site as a whole and at the Canal Gates area in particular, demonstrating that the public benefit ultimately derived outweighs the harm which will result to the Grade I-listed Studley Royal Historic Designed Landscape. Accordingly, having balanced the competing considerations we do not oppose the application and consider that the level of impact on the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Site is acceptable. Yorkshire Gardens Trust has objected, giving a useful opportunity to ensure the Gardens Trust and CGTs are able to work together yet also maintain independent positions where appropriate.

› Threat to the setting of **Blenheim Palace and Park, Oxfordshire**, from the Botley West Solar Farm proposal. Again, Blenheim Park is listed as Grade I and is also inscribed as a World Heritage Site. The Blenheim Estate worked with a partnership of developers on an application to install and operate up to 840 MW of solar generated electricity on three zones totalling some 1400 hectares of agricultural land, making the biggest solar farm in Europe. Two of these zones are adjacent to Blenheim Park.

The project is classified as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project so is not subject to the usual local planning processes and policies, including consultation with the Gardens Trust, but will require a Development Consent Order from the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero before the project can proceed. There is a very large number of documents relating to the proposal which need consideration in balancing the obvious need for renewable energy with potential environmental and heritage impacts that may arise from the large scale of the project. The Preliminary Environment Information Report (PEIR) prepared by the developer was made available in November 2023 as part of the second stage statutory and community consultation held between November 2023 and February 2024. The PEIR sets out the anticipated impact of the project.

A more detailed Heritage Impact Assessment is expected shortly. Once both of these are fully reviewed, the Gardens Trust will prepare a statement to update our preliminary comments, submit this to the developer, and share it with the local authorities (West Oxfordshire, Cherwell and White Horse Districts) and other stakeholders. It is expected that the Development Consent Order for the project will be submitted to the Secretary of State in summer 2024.

‘The Gardens Trust continues to rise to the challenge of its ambitious role as a statutory consultee in the planning system, despite having limited resources to tackle an immense workload. We are all grateful for the teamwork of our part time conservation staff, Conservation Committee and volunteers from the County Gardens Trusts. Sadly, as the threats to historic parks and gardens increase our resources are stretched further and further. Do please consider making a donation to support this work ’

thegardenstrust.org/support-us/donate-online/

Chris Blandford, Chair of the Gardens Trust Conservation Committee

This year we have been grateful for the help of conservation volunteers, who after a couple of training sessions have set to work finding and recording the outcomes of the planning cases that the Gardens Trust has responded to. They’re currently looking at 2021-2022 cases, and the next step will be to look at the detail of whether our comments, or the impact upon historic designed landscapes, have been taken into account within the decision notice.

Influencing national policy

In October 2023 we were delighted that the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 received Royal Assent, as the biggest milestone in the conservation of historic parks and gardens since the power to create the Register was introduced in 1983.

The Gardens Trust has sought this sort of extra protection for some time, and is proud that this success reflects the high profile that we have maintained for parks and gardens.

Earlier in the process the Gardens Trust contributed comments on the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill. The Gardens Trust's response strongly supported the provision to extend the statutory duties with regard to Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas contained in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to historic parks and gardens, which are now subject to the duty to have 'special regard' to the desirability of preserving or enhancing designated heritage assets.

A second reform with particular relevance to historic parks and gardens is the statutory status for Historic Environment Records (HERs).

thegardenstrust.org/levelling-up-and-regeneration-act/



Levelling-up and
Regeneration Act 2023

CHAPTER 55



In December 2023 the Gardens Trust was pleased to join the other National Amenity Societies to talk about our work conserving historic parks and gardens with Lord Parkinson, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Arts and Heritage

The designation of historic designed landscapes

The designation of historic designed landscapes

In 2023 we marked the 40th Anniversary of the 1983 National Heritage Act and the statutory measure to set up a Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest, a world-first in recognising the cultural importance of garden and landscape design and the need to protect it. At the core of this was our Historic Landscape Designation conference in October, which was attended by 90 people in-person and another 30 online, including many previous Register Inspectors. As well as celebrating the Register's achievements, the conference also opened a discussion about what changes the sector should be seeking, in collaboration with owners and other organisations, in order to ensure the conservation of designed landscape heritage. Responding to the day's discussions, all agreed the value of being prepared to seize opportunities to enhance the conservation of historic parks and gardens as happened in the run up to the 1983 Act. There are protection measures to explore and discuss with Historic Houses, our partner national amenity societies, and others. An education strategy and more guidance on potential harm to sites is needed too. The Gardens Trust plans to explore the day's discussion further. Watch this space!

Suffolk's Unforgettable Garden Story research project



Our Suffolk's Unforgettable Garden Story project has recruited and trained new volunteers to research and record landscapes in the county, with the aspiration of adding some to the National Heritage List for England. A wealth of existing research was contributed to the project, by experienced local researchers and Suffolk Gardens Trust members. 20 volunteers submitted 17 applications to the National Heritage List, and an additional 4 research reports have been completed on historic parks and gardens of local importance. The project will continue to run until Spring 2024, allowing us to add the research to the Historic Environment Record, Local Lists, and SGT's website. We are excited to hear in early 2024 which of our sites will be added to the National Heritage List! We are grateful to Historic England for funding this project.

thegardenstrust.org/campaigns/suffolks-unforgettable-garden-story/

Research excellence

10 new papers have been published in our *Garden History* journal in 2023, covering topics including the New York Horticultural Society, John Ruskin gardening at Brantwood, Robert Marnock's Alexandra Park in Hastings, the Floral Legacy of a 17th century linen weaver and natural apple cultivars in Lithuania before the Second World War.

thegardenstrust.org/gardens-trust/resources/journal/

The 2023 New Research Symposium included fascinating international presentations on 'An exploration of the work of 'the first teacher of landscape architecture in China', Sun Xiaoxiang.' (Chi Jen Li, PhD, Department of Landscape Architecture, University of Sheffield); 'Bucolic imagery in Polish theatre design in the eighteenth century' (Agnieszka Whelan, Master Lecturer in Art History, Old Dominion University, Virginia); Luther Burbank and his Santa Rosa 'garden of invention' (Soumyajit Basu, UK Economic and Social Research Council- funded PhD candidate and associate lecturer in law at Birkbeck School of Law, University of London); and a 'Last stop on the Azalea Trail: The Mouton Ram in his lost City Beautiful' (Abigail Raynock Richard, Landscape Heritage Consultant, Lafayette. USA).

thegardenstrust.org/new-research-symposium/

Garden History at



THE UNIVERSITY OF
BUCKINGHAM

Since the Institute of Historical Research at London University closed its course in Garden and Landscape History, the Gardens Trust has been seeking a new home for a similar course. Our efforts have paid off and we are delighted that 2023 has seen the launch of new postgraduate degree courses at the University of Buckingham in partnership with the Gardens Trust.

This offers the opportunity to pursue research at Master's level in any one of a wide range of garden and landscape-related topics: explorations of individual sites; designers, gardeners and owners; studies of the social and political use of gardens; aspects of conservation, botany, ecology, horticulture, archaeology, buildings – and much else besides. The course is run by Dr David Marsh, previously a Gardens Trust Trustee, and this year has 11 Master's students and 3 PhD candidates.

Mavis Batey Essay Prize

The Mavis Batey Essay Prize was won by Abigail Carr, for "A park in which beauty and pure air could be united": South Shields' Marine Park and the Nineteenth-Century Conception of Health and Wellness.' Abigail is now about to enter into a PhD and internship with Newcastle University.

thegardenstrust.org/gardens-trust/what-we-do/prize/



"I am very honoured to have won the prize and I hope that the essay contributes to our understanding of the rich history of the North-East"

Abigail Carr, Mavis Batey Essay Prize winner 2023

Reaching Communities

Community Champions

In 2023 we were delighted to welcome 8 Community Champions to the Gardens Trust, helping us to share garden history with local groups across the country. Our Champions have come from active groups at Winterbourne House & Garden in Birmingham, the Historic Coventry Trust, Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust, Coin Street Gardens in London, the National Trust in Cheshire, Yorkshire Gardens Trust and Worcestershire Environmental Group. Together they have taken our Garden History Lucky Dip activity to a full summer of events, talking all kinds of garden history – from Wardian Cases to lawn tennis to Capability Brown – with people from 8 year olds to 70 year olds.

thegardenstrust.org/volunteer-as-a-gt-community-champion/



Community Champions from Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust meeting with the Young Archaeologists.

'We have used the Lucky Dip as an introduction to the Gardens Trust and in particular to promote the Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust and the work it does. It really is not a charity that people have heard of but by using the Lucky Dip at Heritage Fairs and Open Days with display boards of our recent research work and projects it certainly has helped spread the word.

Next year we have invites to rare plant fairs and open days. The Lucky Dip is a very good start-up for a wide range of activities which our latest venture into a workshop for YAC's (Young Archaeologists' Club) shows. We are taking it to our Christmas Lunch to see what the members make of it!

Gardens Trust Community Grant

In November we awarded Gardens Trust Community Grants to:

- Dawber Garden Community Trust, Lincoln, for a project around the restoration, ongoing maintenance, and significant improvement of the garden to ensure long term survival (£1000);
- Friends of Brunswick Square and Terrace, Hove, East Sussex, to help restore the garden not only for the mental, physical and social benefits of the volunteers who come every Saturday, but for the many local residents and tourists that appreciate the Square too. (£2500).

We look forward to seeing their work progress!

During 2023, we saw great results from the first Gardens Trust Community grants, given in 2022 to volunteers at the walled garden at historic Bradgate Park in Leicestershire for new tools and equipment, and Northamptonshire Gardens Trust to support setting up a new Friends group for Billing Road Cemetery, designed by Robert Marnock.



'It has been a joy working on the Billing Road Cemetery community project, having the opportunity to meet new people and help make a difference. Northamptonshire Gardens Trust volunteers pulled out all the stops to ensure the future of Northampton's deteriorating 147-year-old landmark Billing Road Cemetery is not so grave anymore. And it is all thanks to a special community grant from the Gardens Trust and enthusiastic public support which helped form The Friends of Billing Road Cemetery. We are delighted that the newly formed Friends group will be working collaboratively to conserve and enhance the historic landscape of Billing Road Cemetery to create an enjoyable, and sustainable place for the benefit of all.'

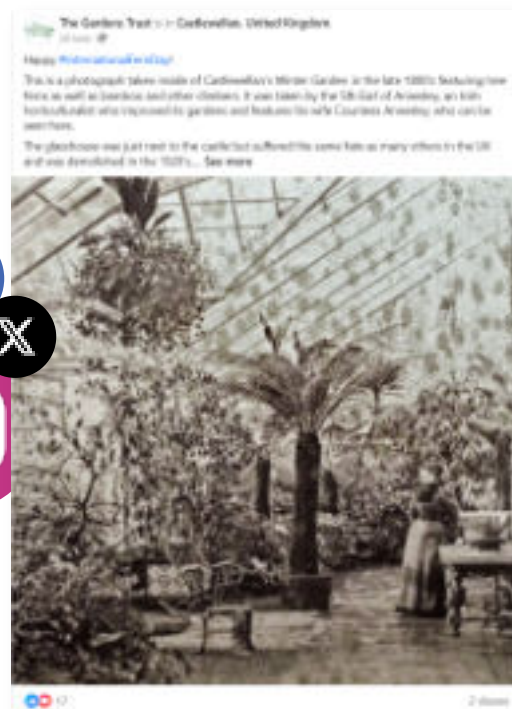
Elaine Johnson, Northamptonshire Gardens Trust

'NGT's leadership with setting-up a Friends Group for historic Billing Road Cemetery has brought real new hope to the local community and other supporters who cherish a brighter future for this too long neglected Northampton green gem.'

Graham and Maire, Local residents

Engaging with our Future

In Spring 2023 we completed our Lottery-funded Engaging with our Future project. Over the course of two years this enabled us to carry out a governance review, and complete strategies for audience development and fundraising, whilst learning more about our potential membership and building a better relationship with the members we already have. It also helped us to significantly improve our ability to reach wider audiences, including via social media.



Spreading the word

In August our weekly **blog** written by David Marsh celebrated its 500th post and its 10th birthday! The first ever post was on New Year's Eve 2013, and the 499th looked at burial grounds. In 2023 the blog had 224,851 views from over 146,980 visitors, telling stories from the Angel of the North, to unicorns in medieval gardens, to golden apples, to Coronation Gardens. Most posts continue to get readers years after they are first published, with most popular one so far being about Electroculture, standing currently at over 60,000 views.

thegardenstrust.blog

We are proud to also have a much-appreciated monthly **eBulletin** covering sector highlights, edited by volunteer Charlotte Casella, and a packed **GT News magazine** for members.

We've also made improvements to our **website**, resulting in a wider variety of pages being viewed, over 20,000 more 'new' visitors to our site and a 50,000 increase in total page views compared to 2022. A simplified menu makes it easier to navigate now, and it is more visually appealing thanks to having more images and condensed text.

thegardenstrust.org

Social media stats

X (previously Twitter)

More than 200+ new followers in 2023, bringing our total to over 3000
Our posts viewed over 206,000 times



Facebook

122 new followers
Our posts have reached over 33,600 users
(up over 55% on last year)



Instagram

599 more Followers (+31% increase)
Monthly reach increased by 700



LinkedIn

New LinkedIn Gardens Trust page set up from Summer 2023
172 followers and growing
Posts so far have been viewed 4700 times



TikTok

Continued recruitment of volunteers to help create content
We've posted 15 videos with over 10,000 views this year



World-leading events

Our online programme has offered 92 events welcoming over 11,000 attendees from Australia to Canada and Hong Kong to South Africa. Topics have ranged from botanical art, plant hunting and archaeology to cemeteries, wildernesses and World Heritage landscapes, with speakers including architectural historian Otto Saumarez Smith, Gardeners World presenter Frances Tophill and maze expert Adrian Fisher. We've refined the programme so that it now runs twice a week, with a continued focus on high-calibre speakers exploring a broad range of topics.

This year we've been dipping our toe back into the in-person water too, welcoming over 200 people to talks, visits, a weekend in Wales, and a Designation conference.

Feedback is consistently positive, for example, on our World Heritage series:

'I learnt so much. The talks were all fascinating and well presented and enormously enriched my understanding of the places covered'



Additionally, we have been pleased to partner with other organisations, such as the Garden Museum, and Oxford University.

In 2023 we welcomed 49 delegates to our annual study weekend arranged in partnership with Oxford University, this year with the theme Women and Gardens.

thegardenstrust.org/events/

'Your online offerings are consistently excellent - you offer a wider range of well thought through lecture series than do other cultural organisations... Long may it continue.'



The Gardens Trust and Essex Gardens Trust had stalls at the Gardeners World Live event at Audley End, where we talked to hundreds of people about the conservation of historic parks and gardens.

We have been getting out and about, sharing our work with over 900 people at public events such as Gardeners World Live at Audley End with Essex Gardens Trust, the Festival of Archaeology at Powis Castle with the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust, a Heritage Open Day at Queens Park in Crewe with Cheshire Gardens Trust, and the Historic Buildings, Parks and Gardens Event with London Parks & Gardens and Historic Houses in London.

Supporting volunteers

In 2023 our Historic England-funded **Volunteers Save Space!** project has been working on 3 pilot projects designed to find ways to engage new people with historic park and garden volunteering.

The first pilot was a digital engagement activity in which volunteers from Norfolk, Northamptonshire and Sussex Gardens Trusts learnt how to create compelling content on Instagram to attract new audiences to support their conservation work.

Next we helped Cheshire Gardens Trust deliver a Heritage Open Day event in Queen's Park, Crewe. Over 100 visitors came to our range of displays and activities, including collecting parks memories; the Garden History Lucky Dip; a parks quiz with Cheshire Gardens Trust; and Tudor posy making with Cheshire Archives. We shared the learning from this experience with other County Gardens Trusts, organisations and individuals, to encourage even more participation in inclusive community events in coming years.



The 3rd pilot is still ongoing - Nottinghamshire's Garden Story is a joint project with Nottinghamshire Gardens Trust to uncover the history and memories associated with some of the county's parks, gardens and other designed landscapes. 16 of the 37 people who came to our introductory webinar would like to either take part in the project or follow progress, with a view to trying something similar in their own area. In Nottinghamshire, 9 new volunteers, most of whom do not have any experience of garden history, will be learning how to research and record landscapes via online and archival materials, and also by surveying trees, collecting oral histories and photographing sites.

As part of Volunteers Save Space!, our Volunteer Support team have run 19 training and networking events, both online and in-person, to almost 300 people.

There were 1260 uses of the online Resource Hub of support materials, at:

thegardenstrust.org/conservation/vs-hub/



Celebrating Volunteering

In September, nearly 60 historic landscape volunteers and professionals, from the Gardens Trust, County Gardens Trusts, Historic England and beyond, saw presentations highlighting the astonishing contribution made by volunteers' research and conservation work to the designation and protection of historic parks and gardens.

We were delighted to also recognise 17 brilliant volunteers nominated for our relaunched **Volunteer Award**, which was ultimately won by Roger Last of Norfolk Gardens Trust for his work on the book *Enticing Paths: A Treasury of Norfolk Gardens and Gardening*.

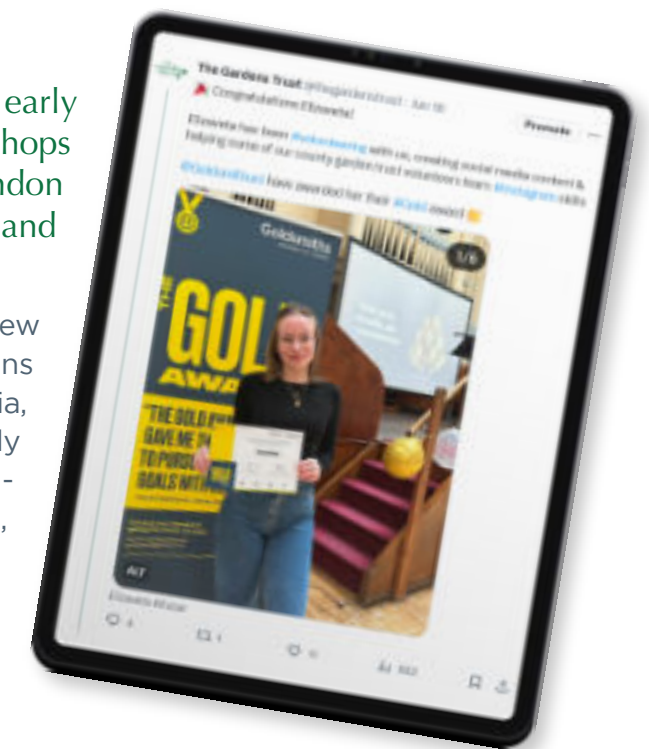
thegardenstrust.org/gardens-trust/what-we-do/volunteer-award/

Pictured above: **Roger Last** from Norfolk Gardens Trust, winner of the Gardens Trust Volunteer Award 2023



We are proud to be investing in support for early career volunteers, including running workshops with 22 students at University College London where they helped us with our marketing and website.

Initiatives like this have helped us draw in 12 new volunteers who are now working at the Gardens Trust in roles including conservation, social media, fundraising and marketing. We are also incredibly fortunate to have a flourishing team of long-standing volunteers doing all kinds of things, including making our events programme possible!



Support for County Gardens Trusts

The 37 County and Country Gardens Trusts and their volunteers are incredibly important to our work. In 2023 our Volunteer Support team were able to give 1:1 support to 23 CGTs, helping them to continue their vital local work.

We recently conducted a survey of County Gardens Trusts, and this showed that 94% are concerned about the future. They are determined though, and eager for GT support and training to help address issues such as the engagement of active volunteers.

In October we welcomed Chairs from 16 County Gardens Trusts to a Chairs Meet Up at the Garden Museum in London. Topics discussed ranged from the practicalities of running a charity, to how to recruit new active volunteers, to the CGTs' role in planning consultations.

Survey of Friends groups

We surveyed the Friends groups who so importantly care for individual parks and gardens. 116 members of Friends of Green Spaces completed our survey on their work to support parks and gardens, and how we can collaborate.

51% thought that having more knowledge of garden history could help Friends to protect the sites, with 79% interested in exchanging knowledge and ideas with the Gardens Trust.

The responses to this survey showed just how important it is that the Gardens Trust is able to keep the profile of historic parks and gardens high, whilst supporting local volunteers:

‘Our local council has a complete indifference to its heritage, sadly. They have no money and no interest in promoting their heritage, expecting the various volunteers of Friends groups to maintain their sites for them.’

1850 lithograph of Robert Marnock's Sheffield Botanical Gardens
From a private collection.



Celebrating Marnock

We partnered with Sheffield Botanical Gardens for a summer celebration of Scottish landscape gardener, horticulturalist and writer Robert Marnock (1800 - 1889), who created the Botanical Gardens and was their first curator.

Around three dozen events took place at sites around the country with links to Marnock, including guided walks, talks, exhibitions and open days. There was a related article in our *Garden History* journal, some street art in Tunbridge Wells and even a conversation about Marnock on the BBC's Bargain Hunt!

The project also created a permanent online exhibition, including an interactive map of Marnock sites. The online exhibition was viewed over 5,500 times during the celebrations. See it here:

www.sbg.org.uk/celebrating-marnock

Serious about fundraising

The financial threats facing the Gardens Trust have become extremely serious. The modest grant that we receive via Historic England to support our statutory casework has not increased since 2008, and only meets a third of the costs of our statutory consultee work.

Meanwhile, Historic England has closed the grant programme which has supported our capacity building work with the County Gardens Trusts for the past decade. In 2023 we decided to meet these financial threats head-on and so have used our reserves to appoint the Gardens Trust's first Fundraising Development Officer. We hope this will enable us to build broader and more secure financial foundations for the future.

Already, we have benefitted from a £2000 grant from the Bedford Road Charitable Trust and £10,000 grant from the Swires Charitable Trust.

Encouraged by the warm reception of last year's appeal for funds to support the 50th anniversary of the *Garden History* journal, we have in 2023 launched an Annual Appeal scheme. This year the theme has been our outreach work to share garden history with new people, and we have been incredibly grateful to receive £5,958 in donations from members and others. Thank you!

Growing our membership is key to the Gardens Trust, not only in terms of impact but also to help financially support our charitable work. In 2023 our membership has grown from 1,215 to 1,258 members!

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Key stats from the Gardens Trust's year:

637 Written responses to planning applications affecting historic designed landscapes

Registered parks and gardens we had planning consultations for 777

37 County Gardens Trusts we supported & worked with

Volunteers trained 660

12,000 attendees to our online and in-person lectures, visits and conferences

224,851 views from over 146,980 visitors to our weekly blog

Amount of new papers published in 3 issues of the Garden History Journal 10

1,258 members, grown from 1,215 in 2022

£19,185 Received in donations and legacies



“Everything that we are achieving together is a remarkable team effort in which members, Trustees, volunteers, staff, supporters and County Gardens Trusts have pulled together to make a real difference to the historic designed landscape sector.

It’s not all good news though, so please forgive me for ending on a low note. These times are extremely challenging – the impact of the pandemic on human networks is still unfolding, the Cost of Living crisis is affecting everything from membership to volunteering to the cost of producing publications and running events, and global uncertainty makes our funding future riddled with worry.”

Linden Groves, Head of Operations and Strategy

Please join or donate!

Our work relies on the generosity of our members and supporters. Please consider joining, donating, or volunteering via:

thegardenstrust.org/support-us



enquiries@thegardenstrust.org
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