

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Newsletter



Aconites & snowdrops at Stowe... Photo by Sheila Meekum

Dear Members and friends,

Firstly great thanks must be extended to Dr Sarah Rutherford, our retiring Chair who, for twenty-two years, has been at the helm of the Bucks Garden Trust - firstly as Vice-chair from the Trust's inauguration in 1998 then, on the retirement of Charles Boot in 2016, Sarah accepted the role of Chair.

During this time the Trust has gone from strength to strength particularly with regard to the Research & Recording Project, now an exemplar for other Gardens Trust. Since the project's inception in 2013 stalwart Trust volunteers have researched and recorded 70+ vulnerable sites in Bucks, thus assisting in their protection. The project remains under Sarah's direction and is ably co-ordinated by Claire de Carle who, along with this and other responsibilities, has taken on the role of Vice-chair. Gwen Miles, quite apart from editing and compiling our newsletter, has agreed to become Membership Secretary. This is all wonderful and great thanks to everyone including Council members, Research & Recording volunteers

and Bucks Gardens Trust members, without whom the Trust wouldn't exist.

Some years ago, in 2006, the Trust was encouraged to revive its hitherto neglected Gardens for Schools Project, the aim being to help schools in the county create gardens or improve existing sites. Later the project fell into abeyance due principally to changes in school staffing ... but 33 schools had been helped, again by Trust volunteers. Recently a request was received from a Bucks school that has acquired an allotment and needed advice; one of our members has kindly agreed to help. As a file exists with details of the 33 schools originally visited and helped, I just wondered if one or two of our members might be happy to revisit these schools to see how their gardens or sites have progressed. If you feel that you might like to help, please do let me know:

rosemaryjury@wendoveremail.co.uk

Speaking of gardens, we have had some interesting visits during the 2019 Summer months including visits to: Red Kites, a beautiful garden at Bledlow Ridge, the Woburn Garden Show - excellent, the Cowper & Newton Museum and Orchard House, both in Olney, the Stanley Spencer Gallery in Cookham, our AGM at Wotton by kind permission of our Patron, David Gladstone and finally a visit to the Sandham Memorial Chapel at Burghclere in Hampshire. Information and a booking form for our Summer 2020 visits is included with this newsletter. We do hope that you will be able to join us for at least one or two.

One other excitement is our refreshed website which we trust will be up and running by the time you receive this, if not shortly after. It will hold all the information on our Research and Recording Project, news of our events and other events of interest, membership application forms and useful links to other sites. The website address will remain the same: www.bucksgardenstrust.org.uk and we do hope that you will find it interesting and easy to navigate.

All that remains for me to say is thank you for your support of the Bucks Gardens Trust.

Rosemary Jury Chair of Bucks GT

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Planning Co-ordinator Report

When the Gardens Trust in London sends the regional trusts their weekly planning list, they need us to be familiar with the planning system as well as having a good understanding of the principles of landscape, design and setting. In addition to this, in order to consider the planning application, we need to have information relating to the history, design and evolution of the site in question and we immediately consult Historic England's Register of Parks and Gardens. Well-known sites often have many volumes of research written about them and the work of the BGT's Research and Recording Group has also been extremely helpful to increase this knowledge. In fact, Wycombe District Council redrew the conservation area boundary of Alscot near Princes Risborough following the R&R group's report on Alscot Lodge in 2015 which 'resulted in a significantly enhanced understanding of the house and its parkland setting'. So, the Bucks Gardens Trust's work is helping the planning process in all sorts of ways.

Sometimes though, when assessing a specific planning application, difficulties arise when the proposals are either very detailed or where they relate to a large historic landscape such as an assortment of separate works across a big estate. In such instances we often request a site visit to assess the impact of the proposals 'on the ground'.

One recent application was Blackpit Farm which lies to the north of the National Trust-owned Stowe Landscape Gardens but is within the original historic Stowe estate and therefore includes many significant features which may be impacted by the planning application. The applicants were generously forthcoming with a site visit which really helped our representatives to assess the current condition of the historic landscape as well as to consider the impact of the proposals on the historic character – as a result, this visit has enabled a good dialogue going forward and the applicant now proposing to conduct some detailed historic research to inform their own understanding of their asset. We are also currently arranging a site visit to the Claydon Estate to

consider planning proposals there and, as the proposals for the redevelopment of RAF Halton progress, we have requested a site visit there.

Nonetheless, as the national Gardens Trust launches its 'Unforgettable Gardens' campaign focusing on the threats of destruction through neglect, development or mis-management which often result from funding and maintenance cuts as well as pressures on land for housing increase, the work of the regional trusts becomes all the more significant. We need to be aware of potential threats, to be able to understand and recognise the historic significance and to have the capacity and access to respond promptly. This county faces additional huge pressures from HS2 as well as the proposed expressway and new train line between Oxford-Cambridge. In short, our planning volunteers will be busy for the foreseeable!

Joanne Mirzoeff and Dr Sarah Rutherford

Gardens through the Letterbox

Post card 7th May 2016

Giverny, France



Dear Bucks GT,

A long queue waiting to get into Monet's house at Giverny, so I decided to give it a miss and spend more time in the gardens taking lots of photos of the planting. The forget-me-nots and early tulips were nearly over but as you can see, there were plenty of irises, wallflowers and late tulips in full bloom along with apple blossom in the orchard. Over the road, the waterlily pond was busy with bullfrogs and the wisteria was just coming into flower on the newly restored Japanese bridge. Regards, Julia

The Artists' Gardens Project
***The Vale of Aylesbury* Rex Whistler**



The Vale of Aylesbury Rex Whistler

Shell Poster 1933

The Vale of Aylesbury is the title of a poster issued by Shell in the 1930s as part of their *Everywhere You Go You Can Be Sure of Shell* - poster series. The original oil painting now hangs in Upton House in Warwickshire and its creation, in Whitchurch, is commemorated by one of the houses in the village called *Whistler's View*.

Reginald John Whistler (Rex) was born in Britain on 24 June 1905, at Eltham, Greater London. The family moved to Farnham Common in Buckinghamshire in the 1920s just before Rex Whistler was accepted at the Royal Academy. He disliked the regime there and was 'sacked for incompetence' and then studied at the Slade School of Art. Upon leaving the Slade he became a professional artist. His most noted early work was for the café at the Tate Gallery completed in 1927 which includes impressions of the Corinthian Arch and Boycott Pavilions at Stowe.

In 1933 Rex moved, with his younger brother Laurence and his parents, to Bolebec House, Whitchurch. They stayed there until 1937 when they moved to Wiltshire. According to Laurence Whistler, the family wanted a country home 'with some charm' although he describes the charm as 'nondescript'.



Aerial photo Bolebec House, Whitchurch

Fine & Country 2018

In the new garden Rex and Laurence made what Rex called 'the improvements', a short avenue of limes crossed by one of flowering cherries. They also built a raked wall of turfs designed to make a terrace of a sloping field, however, within a few weeks part of it collapsed and had to be rebuilt at a less ambitious angle. By 1985 the cherries and ramparts had apparently gone, but some of the limes remained. Laurence Whistler goes on to say that 'The garden ended in a crest of rook-racked elms, overlooking two fields of ours and beyond them the wide Vale of Aylesbury, enclosed by the Chilterns. This was what Rex painted to celebrate arrival in real country, when Shell asked him for a poster, and in it, seated under a beech he painted me'.

Laurence Whistler describes the painting as 'A perfunctory landscape' but says it has 'a certain historical interest'. However, it is said that a copy of the poster, hung up in the Piccadilly Hotel where the Commission met when considering proposals to build the Third London Airport at Cublington in the 1970s, was influential in defeating the idea.

Naturally, changes have taken place. Part of the garden where the picture was painted no longer belongs to Bolebec House, two new houses have been built therein, and the view that Rex Whistler painted is not quite the same, a large wind turbine now forms part of it. I am not sure whether the large tree under which Laurence sat is still there, but hope it might be.



The Vale of Aylesbury: possible site for Shell poster Gill Grocott

Whilst living in Whitchurch Rex also created designs for Wedgwood china based on drawings he made of the Devon village of Clovelly and designed the scenery and costumes for Ninette de Valois and Gavin Gordon's Hogarth-inspired 1935 ballet *The Rake's Progress* as well as producing some exquisite book illustrations, the highlight perhaps being those for *Andersen's Fairy Tales*. Rex also produced mural and trompe-l'oeil painting at Plas Newydd. Whistler and Lady Caroline Paget are known to have become very close friends and he painted numerous portraits of her, including a startling nude.

When war broke out, although he was 35, Whistler was eager to join the army and in 1939 his parents returned to live with relatives at Bierton and Rex stayed with them whilst on leave. Whilst staying at Bierton he produced three pictures of the Church and Vicarage at Bierton, which are now owned by the Buckinghamshire County Museum.

In the Army Rex Whistler's artistic talent was greatly appreciated and he was able to find time to continue some of his work, including a notable self-portrait in uniform now in the National Army Museum. His unit was sent to France at the end of June 1944, shortly after the D-Day landings. He was killed on 18 July 1944 and his body now lies in Banneville-La-Campagne War Cemetery.

Reportedly, The Times newspaper received more letters about Whistler's death than for any other war victim. A memorial glass engraving by Laurence Whistler *The Rex Prism* is to be found in the Morning Chapel at Salisbury Cathedral. Laurence also wrote a biography of his brother *The Laughter and the Urn* (1985).

Gill Grocott

Dorton Spa



1890 photograph CBS D215-1-3 spa

As a member of the Trust's Research and Recording team, I was asked to research Dorton Spa to prepare the required dossier on its characteristics and significance. The following history is a summary from the ensuing dossier. The full document is available on the Trust's website.

Dorton lies in a pleasant valley east of Brill. The iron-bearing ('chalybeate') spring was known in medieval times. In the early C19 Charles Spencer Ricketts became the owner of the nearby Dorton House (now Ashfold School and the subject of another published Trust dossier) by marriage to Elizabeth Sophia, the heiress to the Aubrey estates at Chilton. Around 1820, Charles Ricketts determined to improve public access to the spring and promote it as a financial venture. He borrowed £3,900 (nearly £408,000 at today's prices) in two tranches in the

1830's 'to improve a certain landed estate'. Thomas Knight published *The History of Dorton Chalybeate* in 1833 with stories of cures, illustrated with a plan and elevation of an extensive building in Greek Classical style, 'erecting from the design of Mr James Hakewill'. The Spa opened with a classical Spa building along with 12 acres of gardens with evergreen and deciduous shrubs and a serpentine lake, also designed by Hakewill. The chalybeate spring itself was not in the Spa building but outside at a short distance to the south west.

The Bucks Gazette in June 1844 reported that the pleasure grounds and boating lake were enlarged with steps created to descend to the boats. The building as illustrated by Knight was never fully realised, the Ballroom, Reading and Billiard Rooms on either side being omitted along with their colonnaded exteriors. A contemporary article showed the truncated building in August 1839. There was a grand fete at the Spa, and another in 1837 at the coronation of Queen Victoria. Without these extra rooms the building's half round columned portico led to a truncated pump room and through further columns only to suites of bath rooms and accommodation for attendants.

The Brill Spa Hotel was built in Brill to designs by Charles Brown 'architect and builder' to supplement the accommodation available at the adjacent Sun Inn in Brill. Its foundation stone was laid by Mrs Ricketts in November 1842. The newspaper report noted the tortuous ride needed to visit the Spa from Brill. The Ordnance Survey First Edition of c.1878 shows the Spa building with a lake to the south and south east, accessed from the north by a track from Brill. The northern part of the grounds at this date consisted of defined clumps of mixed deciduous and evergreen trees framing a path leading northwards from the centrally located Spa building past a circular fountain to a refreshment house. An aviary is noted a short distance to the north east from this building. The lake was large enough to accommodate three islands and took up much of the south eastern part of the wood which was surveyed as more consistently treed for the First Edition.

The 'tortuous' route between Brill and the Spa was matched by the relative difficulty in reaching Brill itself from other locations in the country. A nearby railways did not arrive until after 1900. Hopes that Queen Victoria would visit and give the Spa and the nearby village a considerable boost were dashed when she snubbed the Spa and visited other more fashionable locations in preference. Brill and Dorton Spa in any event could never have provided the range of amenities sought by fashionable society, adequately catered for and entertained as it was at the other popular English watering places.

It appears that the spa closed in 1864-5 when it disappears from the records of the Parish highway rate book. Charles Ricketts died in 1868. His wife apparently continued to use the building as the venue for tea parties. The Spa building survived in increasing dereliction until probably circa 1910 when it was demolished. It had disappeared by the time of the OS Edition of 1920. The same plan demonstrates that the ornamental grounds with clumps of mature planting in the northern portion were increasingly overtaken by woodland (now named as 'Spa Wood'). The base of the fountain still survived to be recorded on this map, as did the 'lodge' and the gates. The lake and its islands are shown as marshy ground. Little can be seen above ground today, apart from two columns salvaged from the portico and placed next to the main track in the wood.



Remains of a portico column: Geoff Huntingford

The refreshment room is in ruins close to the same track. Only foundations survive of the Spa Building and of the decorative gate piers originally standing in front of it. The boating pond can still be easily be distinguished. The spring is in a circular brick enclosure with a conical roof installed by the Chilton Estate. Thanks are due to the landowners facilitating access for me to visit the Spa remains and complete the dossier and to Peter Gulland for helpful information from his own research.

Geoff Huntingford

Buckinghamshire Garden Trust Membership

Please encourage your friends and neighbours to become members of the Buckinghamshire GT. Membership is £15 a year. Bring a friend along to a talk or event. Details on the website or contact Gwen Miles, Membership Secretary c/o enquiries@bucksgardenstrust.org.uk

Enriching the National Heritage List

The Bucks Gardens Trust's Research and Recording project got underway in 2013, with a target of over 500 historic gardens in Bucks to be investigated. Our first 'site dossiers', for the two sites that we used for training in research and recording, were published at the end of that year and three years later nearly 50 had been completed. It was decided to join in Historic England's 'Enrich the List' initiative, whereby anyone can add their contributions to existing National Heritage List entries, by linking our dossiers to the List entry for every listed structure mentioned in those reports – 122 of them at the time of writing.

Only quite short entries are possible, so to encapsulate our project our wording is:

The designed landscape to which this listed structure is related is [dossier name]. The Bucks Gardens Trust has produced a site dossier for this place as part of our Research and Recording Project for designed landscapes in historic Bucks. The dossier sets the listed structure in its designed context. Our volunteers researched the site and recorded the surviving elements as far as possible in text and photographs, and produced a historic site boundary map for the surviving area, and a statement of significance. Please use the link below to access the site dossier – select [dossier name].
<http://www.bucksgardenstrust.org.uk/locally-important-sites/>

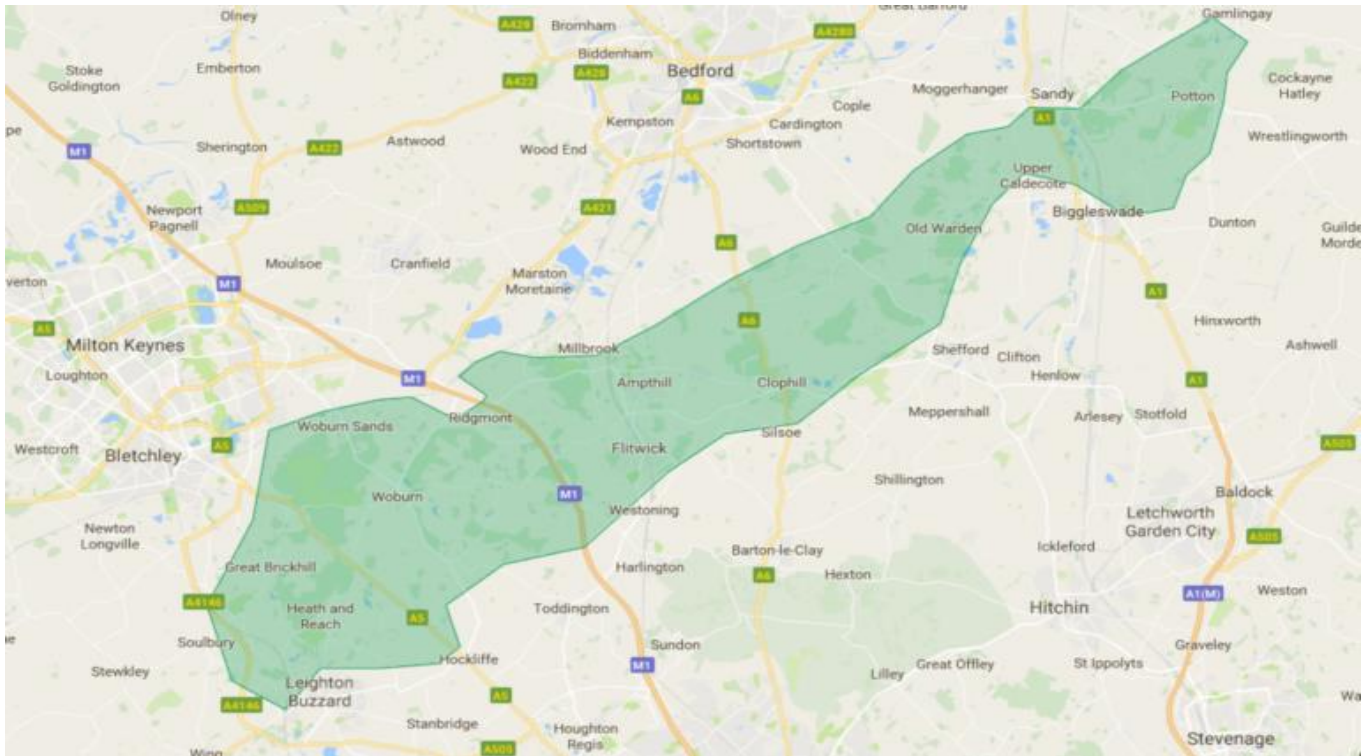
This was not a difficult exercise, although for various reasons identifying the correct List entry was not always entirely straightforward! We hope that it helps to enhance the List and spread knowledge and awareness of our often vulnerable designed landscapes.

Clare Butler

Number 1 on Historic England List

'Hardy Plants and Planting for Repton and Late Georgian Gardens (1780-1820)', lists and case studies compiled by Dr Sarah Rutherford, went straight in at No.1 on the Historic England Archaeology Research Report List with 2,400 downloads from their web site in 2019'.

Download at <http://ow.ly/mE4i50yafsD>



Website Map showing area covered by Greensand Country Partnership

The Greensand Country Landscape Partnership

The Greensand Country Landscape Partnership is part of a recent initiative which combines the ethos of conservation with public involvement and is a national programme supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The programme aims to encourage the creation of landscape partnerships throughout the United Kingdom 'to better protect and conserve specific areas of countryside'.

This initiative is a bold attempt to extend the level of recognition for valued and distinctive parts of the landscape beyond the iconic National Parks. It is hoped that these partnerships will promote public access without compromising the existing sustainable uses of the land for agriculture or forestry.

The word partnership is important as it aspires to be as diverse as possible and to include rural business representatives, farming and wildlife organisations, local conservation groups, recreational countryside users such as cyclists, ramblers and horse riders and local government from parish level upwards.

In January 2017 the Bedfordshire Landscape Partnership was awarded a Heritage Lottery Funded Programme for the area along the Greensand Ridge (see map above) through their bid describing the area and identifying the characteristics which make it completely unique. The programme initially extends to June 2021 and covers 40 ongoing projects which require a large number of volunteers and organisation.

Known as the *Greensand Country*, the Partnership Area covers 40 miles of scenic landscape defined by the Greensand Ridge which reaches three counties, Cambridgeshire in the East, across to Bedfordshire and to Buckinghamshire in the West. So it extends from the hilly heathlands and woods around Linslade, Leighton Buzzard and the three Brickhills in the south-west from where it goes north-eastwards through Bedfordshire via Woburn and Woburn Sands; past Ampthill, Flitwick, Sandy and Potton and on to Gillingham in Cambridgeshire.

Dominated by the steep northeast facing slopes of the Cretaceous sandstone escarpment, the varied scenery of the *Greensand Country* is contained in a very compact area. There are dramatic views of meandering river valleys and clay vales; ancient woodlands and plantations of exotic trees. The Greensand Country contains a cluster of historic landscapes from The Swiss Garden to Wrest Park and from Moggerhanger to Ickwell Bury and Southill. This area is the site of royal hunting grounds, a mistreated queen and has the sad remains of medieval monasteries and abbeys. There are many historic churches built from the rusty coloured sandstone and there is even an award-winning vineyard sited on a south-facing slope near Old Warden.

The extraction of sands, clays and gravels has left a mosaic of lakes and marshland which is now home to a diverse range of wildlife such as rare plants, noisy waterfowl, unusual reptiles and amphibians and delicate damselflies and dragonflies. The remains of

steep quarry faces provide nest sites for sand martins: such a welcome sight when they return in spring.

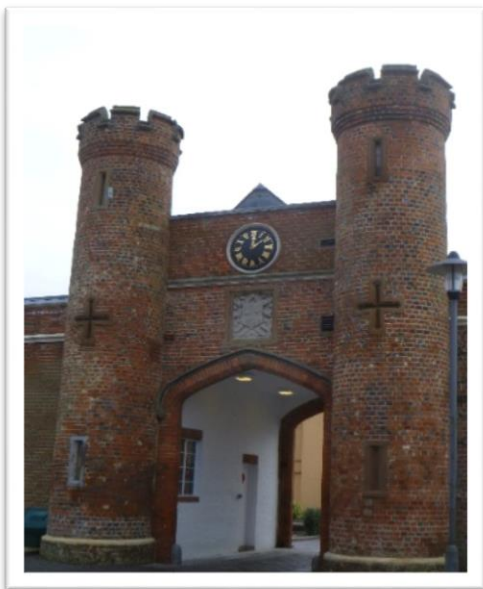
Famous people have left their mark on the GLCP area: Lancelot (Capability) Brown worked at Amptill Park and Humphry Repton at Woburn and Moggerhanger. John Bunyan used features of this landscape such as Houghton House in his *Pilgrim's Progress*. Kit Williams buried his beautiful Golden Hare treasure in Amptill Park and readers of his lovely *Masquerade* book solved hidden clues in their attempts to find it 40 years ago.

The *Greensand Country* Festival in May has a programme of 200 events to raise the public's awareness of the area and to promote local businesses. For the future the Partnership has identified nine less well known historic landscapes for special treatment and subject to a condition survey they may apply for funds to support a project to improve a particular feature. Two new walks are being developed which will lead from the existing Greensand Ridge walk and go via less well known paths. For more details the *Greensand Country* Landscape Partnership website has an excellent website: <https://www.greensandtrust.org>

This article is adapted from the book, *A Certain Degree of Magnificence* by Brian Kerr.

Sheila Meekums

Mystery Building in Buckinghamshire



If you know the name, purpose and whereabouts of this building email gwenmiles@thebadgers.co.uk. The winning names will be put into a draw at the end of April. Two names will be drawn and they will win a bottle of wine each. Bucks GT Council will not be eligible! See new website for winners and the details of the Autumn 2019 Mystery Building.

Gardens through the Letterbox

Postcard 9th May 2016

Normandy, France



Dear Bucks GT,

The view of the front of the Lutyens' house and pergola from Gertrude Jekyll's sun-dial garden at Parc du Bois des Moutiers. Designed for Guillaume Mallet in 1898, the Mallet family still live and garden here. We were shown around the gardens by one of Guillaume's daughters and his grandson. There was much activity with scaffolding and lighting rigs being dismantled as Wim Wenders had just finished filming 'The Beautiful Days of Aranjuez'. The formal gardens at the front of the house include a pedestrian gate and entrance forecourt, a white garden, the pergola walk and sun-dial garden leading to a less formal topiary garden, former walled kitchen garden and orchard at the side of house, and a wide terrace at the rear of the house overlooking the landscaped parkland leading down to the sea. The park is mainly informal woodland with rhododendrons and azaleas. The far side of the house has the service yard with stables and garages and is now the main entrance. The family are keen to retain much of Jekyll's planting scheme but have replaced the kitchen garden with roses. Regards, Julia.

Gardens through the Letterbox

Julia Wise is the Historic Environment Record Officer for Buckinghamshire County Council and is a most valued member of the Research and Record Team. Julia has written a number of 'postcards' of her travels, some of which we have now published. If you have a 'postcard' you would like to share please send them to the Editor.

Claire de Carle BA MA

Vice Chair Bucks GT



Claire is an art and history graduate with a passion for gardens. In 2014 she was awarded a MA in Garden History from the University of Buckingham. Her first degree was in Fashion and Textiles, she also has an RHS Level 2 in Horticulture.

She joined the Bucks GT in 2012 and has been involved in their project to Research and Record historic gardens in the county from its inception in 2013. In 2016 she concentrated her research on the lesser known gardens of Capability Brown as part of the CB300 celebrations and in 2017 researched the Humphry Repton sites in the county for inclusion in Bucks Gardens Trust's publication (2018). She is currently researching Artists' Gardens in the county for a future publication.

In 2019 she became Vice Chair of Bucks GT. She also serves on the national, Gardens Trust Education and Events committee, for which she organises study days and visits to gardens across the country.

Claire enjoys writing and giving talks about gardens in Bucks and her dissertation subject, the herbalist, Maude Grieve (1856-1941), who lived in Chalfont St Peter; she published a book about Maud in 2017. She lives in the small village of Oakley on the Bucks/Oxon border with her husband, Charles and their two cats.

Special Offer

A set of five beautiful hand finished photograph cards with envelopes by Jug Parmar will be included with orders for the Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust publication *Humphry Repton in Buckinghamshire and Beyond*
Order from Rosemary Jury (£20+£3 post.)
rosemaryjury@wendovermail.co.uk

Dates for Your Diary

List of Bucks Gardens Trust Events 2020

Saturday 28 March: *Woburn Abbey in 2021* Victoria Poulton/Matthew Hirst 2.30 Aylesbury Museum

Thursday 14 May: Visit *Horatio's Garden* Stoke Mandeville Hospital

Saturday 23 May: Book launch *Mavis Batey: Bletchley Codebreaker, Writer and Garden Historian*. 2.30 Museum

Tuesday 9 June: Visit to *Peterley Corner Cottage Garden*, Great Missenden

Wednesday 1 July: Visit to *Aston Pottery & Garden*, Aston

Tuesday 14th July: Evening guided walk at Stowe to see recently replaced statues. 6.30 Head Gardner.

Sunday 2 August: *Rousham* – Social event with Oxford GT 12 noon. Please bring your own picnic

Tuesday 22 Sept: Visit to *Warden Abbey Vineyard*
October: AGM - *Wotton House* Date to be advised

Non BGT Events

March 28-Oct 25 : *Roses from my Garden*, Nick Knight Waddesdon Manor, Bucks. British fashion photographer Nick Knight's series of still-life roses

Open to 5th April: *Sanctuary: Artist- Gardeners 1919-1939* Garden Museum exhibition

Open to 19th April: *British Baroque: Power and Illusion*. Many exhibits will illuminate the garden and landscape designs of the period. Tate Britain

Open to 19th April: *Forgotten Masters: Indian Painting for the East India Company*, by unsung Indian artists. Wallace Collection, London W1.

April 24: *Gertrude Jekyll in Bedfordshire* Luton Hoo 10-12noon. Bedfordshire GT

May 6: Talk on *Glorious Greens and Gardens at Amptill* Greensands Partnership/Beds GT

14 May: *Hands on with Historic Maps* 11-12noon. Centre for Bucks Studies, Aylesbury. Bk

archives@buckscc.gov.uk

May 20: Talk on *Beds Garden History at Amptill* Greensands Partnership/Beds GT

24 April-12 July: *My Garden's Boundaries are the Horizon* Derek Jarman exhibition. Garden Museum

Summer 2020 Opening: *Gardens through Time*. Designed by landscape architect Dominic Cole. Museum of the Home (former Geffrye Museum) Shoreditch

Saturday 25 July: *Welwyn Garden City Day* (100 years old) 10- 4.30. The event will show how city gardens have evolved. Organised by Gardens Trust. Bucks GT members Dr Sarah Rutherford & Claire de Carle speakers at event. Contact Gardens Trust to book tickets.

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust is a Registered Charity number: 1099674 and a member of The Gardens Trust. It is a Company Limited by Guarantee registered in England and Wales: 4828124. Registered Office: c/o Vine Cottage, Thame Road, Longwick, princes Risborough. Bucks HP27 9TA
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