

Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust

*To record and conserve the gardens and parks of historic Buckinghamshire
To aid in the creation and restoration of gardens, parks and
green spaces within the historic county*

Patron: David Gladstone, Wotton House, Wotton Underwood, Buckinghamshire

From the Chair

Greetings! In the last few weeks of February the gardens were fast forwarding to summer. It was a bit odd to see my sheets of snowdrops and hellebores on a day when the temperature hit 20 degrees. Many of you will have taken advantage of the warm weather to get in your gardens or to visit the many spring flowering gardens and parklands. To continue the theme of summer Rosemary Jury has produced a varied and interesting programme of excellent visits which we hope many of you will sign up to and of course we still have a talk on *Geoffrey Jellicoe* by Kate Harwood on Saturday 27th April at 2.30 in the County Museum, Aylesbury.

The number of BGT members is 191 and of these 30 have taken out Life Membership (30) perhaps because it is such good value at £150. Out of the 191 we have 65 joint members, 91 single members and 4 groups plus one Honorary Member. Most new members are introduced by present members or through History Fairs or talks by the committee. So if you have someone who is interested do bring them along for a “taster” event and perhaps they will sign up.

Sales of our first book: *Humphry Repton in Buckinghamshire and Beyond*, are buoyant with a large number (20) selling at the *Repton Revealed* conference at the Garden Museum, Lambeth in November. We printed 200 copies and have 100 left. If you do not have your personal copy then they are available from Rosemary Jury (£20 + £3 postage) or at the lecture in April. They make excellent presents for those interested in Bucks history.

The Research and Recording Group (R & R) besides focusing on individual sites of importance in historic Bucks is beginning to gather material on a new project to look at Artists’ Gardens and how they used them in their artworks and gardened them. We have identified a surprising number of artists and Bucks Museum staff have been extremely helpful in



Paul Nash *Barbara in the Garden* 1913/14

(Tate)

allowing access to a number of really special art works they have in their collection. Claire de Carle is organising an R & R introductory training event at St Katherine’s, Parmoor at the end of March and looking at further training days in the north of the county. The R & R has recently been awarded a grant of £1,500 by Buckinghamshire County Council who value the work undertaken and its use in assessing the effects of change proposed in planning applications.

With this newsletter is included booking forms for future events and the membership subscription form. We look forward to seeing you all at one or many of the events that have been organised for the spring and summer.

Dr Sarah Rutherford
Chair of Bucks GT

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Planning co-ordinator consultations

The challenge with planning applications that impact on BGT sites is that we have no idea what will come on the weekly lists. Thankfully, in some weeks, there is very little in our area but other weeks we receive a number of large and complicated applications to review. We have seen a number of these recently and these large-scale applications can seem very daunting.

Anyone who assesses planning applications would always prefer to see a 'masterplan' developed for any large site rather than piecemeal applications over time. A good masterplan should take a holistic approach by considering the impact of all the desired alterations and introductions on the entire site. However, even a well-developed masterplan may require substantial investment of our time to hunt out the relevant information we need to assess the impact on the registered park and garden.

Since the last newsletter, we have been consulted on extensive plans for the hotel and spa conversion of Langley Park near Iver Heath as well as ongoing developments at Wycombe Abbey School. I have been on a fascinating site visit to Fawley Court, near Henley in order to better understand the long-term plan for this significant and historic site. Also, in the last two months, over 14 separate applications have been made with regard to Silverstone Racing Circuit with possible impact on Stowe Landscape Gardens and now the Proposed Main Modifications to the Wycombe District Local Plan is in for review with 11 lengthy documents, the main document running to 167 pages.

We won't go short of bedtime reading and it goes without saying our time is offered voluntarily!

Joanne Mirzoeff

The Artists Gardens Project

This project was inspired by research previously undertaken by one of our volunteers into the gardens of Clare Leighton, the Wood Engraver and John Nash, the famous WWI artist, in Bucks. Given the proximity of Bucks to London, we realised that a number of gardens survive that are connected with other local artists many from the early to mid-C20. Over 20 artists in the historic county are associated with gardens here.

Well-known artists range from Rex Whistler in the north of the county at Whitchurch, to John Piper at Fawley Bottom. There are several artist colonies, Hillesden, Piggots End (Eric Gill) and Hawridge Windmill (Gilbert Cannan). Paul and John Nash both feature strongly as they grew up in Iver Heath, carried out their war commissions at Chalfont St Peter (see Claire de Carle's, publication on *Maud Grieve*) and later John lived at Meadle near Princes Risborough.



The gates of Four Hedge

photograph Gwen Miles

The abstract artist Ben Nicholson was born in Denham where his father William had a cottage. William was also a successful artist, inspired by his garden as he painted still lifes of flowers. The well-known botanical artist and explorer Margaret Mee grew up in Chesham. The American poster artist, McKnight Kauffer lived with his partner Marion Dorn, a textile artist in the South Bucks village of Turville; both working on commissions for London Underground inspired by the countryside. Many were polymaths lending their hand to different applied arts, including ceramics, textiles and book illustration.

Most of the gardens that belonged to these artists are small and some remain intact. BGT volunteers have started researching the sites and obtained access to gardens. The research will be written up as short site dossiers to provide the material for the next BGT book with illustrations of the artist's work and photographs of the gardens included. The book will conclude with the legacy of these artists. Are there still artists who are inspired by their gardens living in Bucks? The success of the annual Bucks Art Week suggests that there are.

Claire de Carle

A Cathedral for *The City of Trees*



Looking down the nave

Gill Grocott

There are only three Tree Cathedrals in Great Britain. One in Scotland at Glencruitten one at Whipsnade, Buckinghamshire and the third and most recent in Milton Keynes. The first two were planted by private individuals as a result of the effects of WW1. The last, Newlands, was created by Milton Keynes Development Corporation (MKDC) and the only municipal tree cathedral.

According to Neil Higson, Chief Landscape Architect for MKDC, the Tree Cathedral at Newlands was his response to the challenges faced by Milton Keynes in the 1980s as a new city with a repeated promise for it to be a 'City of Trees'. The idea came from a fingerpost sign to Whipsnade, 'To the Tree Cathedral.' Inspiration for the actual form came from his passion for woodlands and forests and his love of gothic churches and cathedrals. He studied several British cathedral plans but the clarity and proportions of Norwich seemed most readily to be capable of expression in trees and Norwich also had one of the finest collections of 'green man' carvings in the country.

The main entrance to Newlands Tree Cathedral is from the car park in Livingstone Drive, opposite Gulliver's Land where a path leads to the "west door". From the 'north aisle' another path leads to Cathedral Meadow with an area set aside for green burials and a short 'woodland walk'. There is a map at the entrance to the Tree Cathedral, which provides the layout, with details of the trees planted. Features such as 'the tower' marked by four Californian redwoods

and the 'west door' are evergreen. The effect varies depending on the time of year, but the scale and monumentality of the trees create a significant impact.

The first plantings used semi mature trees for key elements. The Parks Trust has managed tree growth, whilst keeping to the original concept, and copes with tree diseases and losses. Lime trees have replaced diseased horse chestnuts at the west entrance and about half of the hornbeams forming 'the nave' have been removed, with lower branches trimmed back to increase light. The pillars of 'the choir' are ash and again half of the original trees have been removed and there is the risk from ash die back disease, which is now in Milton Keynes

The architectural impact of the Tree Cathedral is re-inforced by stone paths which lead visitors from the west entrance down the 'nave' to the 'tower', along the 'transepts' and beyond to the 'cloister' with its four Glastonbury thorns and the 'chapter house mound'. This is a conical feature, surrounded by a laurel hedge which does not reflect the layout of Norwich Cathedral, but may correspond to its original Lady Chapel, or be a feature for its own sake in the landscape, perhaps in homage to pre-historic sources, influenced by the nearby ley line

The 'sanctuary' is marked by holme oak and two cypress spires flank the altar site in the open area beyond the sanctuary. Two circular chapels, north and south are approached from the corners of the choir area. These are defined by circles of lime trees with flowering cherries and apples as their feature trees.



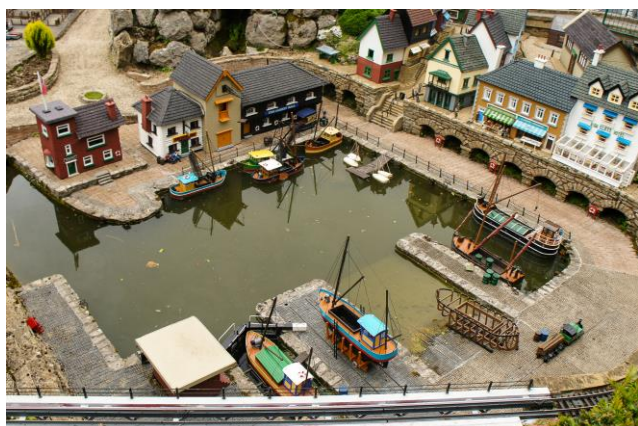
Daffodils just inside the west door

Gill Grocott

In recent years the Parks Trust has planted daffodils and other bulbs, as trees have been thinned and more light has been available. The colours mimic the idea of stained glass windows. It is a wonderful public space, easily accessible from nearby Willen Lakes and well worth a visit at any time of the year.

Gill Grocott

Bekonscot – a country in miniature



Southpool Fishing Village

photograph Wallace Wormley

We are very lucky in Buckinghamshire – to have the world's oldest surviving model village right in our midst. Yes, it's Bekonscot, where time stands still in the 1930s.

Many people will remember the site from their childhood where we walked as giants in a kingdom of tiny people, animals, vehicles and buildings. Others will be nostalgic for a bygone time when steam trains, horse drawn milk carts, fishing villages and collieries were such important parts of the economy.

The site has architectural artistic and historic interest, as well of being of an attraction for garden enthusiasts who appreciate the carefully designed and immaculately tended landscape. The number, design and variety of model buildings constructed over the years is impressive and of high significance. The buildings have been constructed to a high standard of modelling, with many based on real structures.

Bekonscot, first opened in 1929 and has inspired many other model villages and miniature parks in the UK and around the world, including Burton-on-the-Water in 1937, Madurodam in the Netherlands in 1952 and Legoland in Denmark in 1968.

The original landscape concept of Roland Callingham survives intact and in very good condition. The site is of the highest significance for its vision in dealing with such a large-scale civic scheme. This successfully unites with so many individual settlements and buildings modelled on typical English schemes. The landscaping and choice of planting is integral to the original design and its success. The model railway is an inspired addition which

united the layout alongside the path system. The first locomotive in the village was built in 1929 for Bekonscot by the world renowned Bassett-Lowke Model Railway Company.

The horticulture is of the highest quality. It uses a palette of relatively common plants which softens and clothes the layout. Some of the woody specimens are of considerable age, with some trees and shrubs over 50 years old. The landscape remains constant, with its ponds, lakes waterways & rockeries creating the topography.

The landscape of Bekonscot is a 'green and pleasant land' for the residents of the seven towns and villages here. Careful attention to the many shrubs and trees helps to bring them into scale with the models. These are not bonsai trees but are regular garden plants that are skilfully trimmed and shaped to match their miniature environment. Among the most striking are Japanese maples, miniature willows, cypress, Japanese elms, lilacs and ficus. Summer colour is provided by thousands of bedding and herbaceous plants.



Overview of the Lake at Splashyng, including Alexandra Bridge

However, this labour of love was never meant to be taken too seriously. It was always meant to be eccentric and full of character. Bekonscot is of great fun and enjoyment for children and grown-ups alike.

Wallace Wormley

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Our website: www.bucksgardenstrust.org.uk
The Newsletter is edited by **Gwen Miles**

