

# The Restoration and Maintenance of Historic Gardens

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National Trust/Ian Shaw Staff gardener Richard Bentley, clipping a box hedge at Westbury Court Garden

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# The Restoration and Maintenance of Historic Gardens

## Introduction

Historic gardens are defined as gardens that have material remains or associations linking them to the past. They may be of one or several periods, or display the work of well-known landscape architects or have associations with famous owners or visitors. They may exist in conjunction with domestic, public or institutional buildings, or as a public or private open space. Gardens have dynamic qualities, setting them apart from buildings; they can be altered more easily but, conversely, they can deteriorate more quickly.



Gardening staff in domestic garden (c. 1910)

The 'golden age' of the country house garden and landscape park from the point of view of upkeep was the nineteenth century. The agricultural depressions of the late nineteenth century and between the two world wars took their inevitable toll. Estates owned by the commercial and industrial 'new rich' or by old landed families who could draw on income from investments, from town properties or mines, could still be run on traditional lines with large numbers of staff employed in the gardens. The High Victorian 'display garden' in the great industrial towns required nearly as many staff as those of the country house.

Large private gardens, together with the now burgeoning municipal parks, were the principal training grounds for gardeners, with the emphasis on practical instruction and experience. Working under and alongside experienced gardeners, newcomers progressed up the career ladder from raw recruit to improver, journeyman and, eventually, master. The number of gardeners in domestic, public and institutional establishments reached a peak just before the First World War of around 120,000,

together with an unknown number of jobbing gardeners and labourers doing occasional work. Currently, the figure is 90,000.

Although it witnessed some exciting developments in garden design, and in 1927 saw the start of the National Gardens Scheme, the inter-war period was one of retrenchment and modernisation. Many gardens were neglected during the First World War, and were subsequently redesigned with a view to economy of maintenance, especially labour. Traditional elements such as greenhouses and kitchen gardens were abandoned on grounds of expense. Heather Clemenson cites the example, not untypical of the larger type of rural establishment, of a Suffolk estate where the garden staff numbered 52 in 1848, 25–30 in 1900 but had fallen to fewer than 5 by 1980 (*English Country Houses and Landed Estates*, 1982). A combination of economy and changing fashions had brought about dramatic changes in gardening as a creative activity and occupation. As economic pressures intensified, staffing levels were further reduced, and the standard of traditional skills and garden management deteriorated. This took place alongside a growing public interest in gardening as a hobby, historic gardens as places to visit, and garden restoration. By the 1980s visitors to gardens were growing more rapidly than those to historic houses and museums, and were part of the heritage industry. Garden restoration is now a major sphere of activity, generously supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and other funding bodies.

Garden managers, heritage administrators and garden architects and historians have been concerned about a 'skills crisis' affecting all levels of the industry. The collapse of the direct labour system from the mid-1990s resulting in the disbandment of the skilled workforces in the public sector and, crucially, their apprenticeship system, further exacerbated already severe difficulties of recruitment and training in this important branch of national heritage. 'Specialised skills associated with historic gardens' was recently identified by Lantra (the lead body responsible for

training in the land-based industries) as a sector expected to increase in importance, together with environmental conservation and management (*The Land-based Sector Workforce Development Plan 2001–2, Lantra, 2001*).

This chapter addresses these issues. It is organised in four sections: Introduction, Knowledge and Skills, Training, and Recommendations.

## Interest in historic gardens

The knowledgeable appreciation of historic gardens has lagged behind that of historic buildings, but the last twenty or so years of the twentieth century saw a rapidly growing interest at all levels – popular, professional and official. The seminal exhibition, 'The Garden', at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1979, aroused much interest and attracted a great number of visitors.

At the popular level, seven out of ten top National Trust visitor attractions are gardens, two of them historic landscapes, each attracting 200,000 visitors a year. For tourists, gardens were the fourth most popular venues after houses, churches and castles. In 2001 gardens attracted 8 million visits, of which 5 million were to rural gardens (English Tourism Council, Heritage Monitor, 2001).

At the professional level, between 1987 and 2001 there was a five-fold increase in the number of academic publications on historic gardens. Since the late 1980s a variety of academic courses on garden history and conservation have been launched at levels that range from certificate to higher degree. Prior to this there was no specialised professional training. Since the Second World War there has been a growing number of garden historians with backgrounds as architects, landscape architects, social and economic historians, botanists and planners.

At the official level, gardens of national significance have been 'listed' since the late 1980s. Although listing of gardens, unlike buildings, does not carry statutory protection, this has raised the level of awareness of the significance of historic landscapes amongst planners and local and national authorities. National expenditure on historic gardens has risen greatly since the mid-1990s with the establishment of the Heritage Lottery Fund, which has supported restoration projects with a total of £153 million of funding.



Visitor education, Hampton Court

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## Numbers of historic parks and gardens

Listing of historic gardens began in the 1970s, and in 1976 the UK International Council on Monuments and Sites, (ICOMOS) Historic Gardens Committee published a preliminary list of 'gardens and parks of outstanding historic interest'. The Garden History Society in conjunction with HBC (Historic Buildings Council) also undertook listing, as did the National Council for the Conservation of Parks and Gardens in the early 1980s.

The Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission, now English Heritage, started compiling a Register of historic parks and gardens as an outcome of the National Heritage Act of 1983. By 1988 the Register listed 1,085 sites in England and was published in 44 county volumes. Like buildings, sites were graded I, II\* and II. Criteria for inclusion were strict and only those judged outstanding and of national importance were included. The Register was subsequently updated: by June 1995 it contained 1,246 sites, 1,368 by May 2000, and 1,531 by 2002. A desktop review of all potential parks and gardens not registered produced a further 1,568 sites, and an additional 500 are thought to be of significance. Of the sites on the Register, 60% are privately owned gardens or parks (*English Heritage, State of the Historic Environment Report, 2002*). This compares with 400,000 listed buildings in 1996.

In terms of the geographical distribution of sites on the Register, London has the largest number (128), followed by Kent (58), Gloucestershire (52), Hampshire (52) and Oxfordshire (51). Regionally, the south-east has 338 and the south-west 268.

As to grading of sites, 9% are registered Grade I – that is, sites of international importance; 27% are Grade II\* – sites of exceptional historic interest; and 64% are Grade II – of national importance.

The English Heritage Register does not include sites deemed of regional and local importance. However, this responsibility has been assumed by the County Gardens Trusts, which were formed from 1983. Some gardens have also been listed by county council archaeology and landscape departments (for example, those of Shropshire and Leicestershire), some by Manpower Service

Commission Teams (Avon) and in the case of Norfolk and Suffolk, by the University of East Anglia's East Anglian Studies Centre.

A database of gardens listed at national and county level has been created by the Centre for the Conservation of Historic Parks and Gardens at the University of York. It currently contains 3,400 entries which is more than twice the number on the Register. The numbers on the county lists tend to outnumber considerably those on the Register. For example, in Avon 289 sites are listed by the Avon Gardens Trust compared to 30 on the Register, whilst in Herefordshire the respective totals are 305 and 23.

This implies a true figure of perhaps as many as 13,000 sites. English Heritage estimates the number of gardens of local importance making a substantial contribution to the historic landscape to be 6,000. A leading garden historian, David Jacques, estimates the number at 10,000 and a report by the Landscape Heritage Trust published in 1999 at 27,000.

## Statutory protection

Inclusion on the Register carries no statutory protection, though as a result of lobbying by the Garden History Society, local planning authorities have, since 1995, been obliged to notify English Heritage of any applications affecting grades I and II\* sites. As a result, a third of the sites on the Register are within English Heritage notification. The Garden History Society was consulted on 1,162 planning applications in 2001, which represents an average of 79 applications per 100 registered sites in a year (*English Heritage, State of the Historic Environment Report, 2002*). Also, since 1995 the Society has to be consulted with respect to any proposed development of sites of all three grades. Local authorities are required to make appropriate resource provision for, and take proper account of, comments in determining planning applications. However, very few local authorities employ parks and gardens specialists and most applications are dealt with by conservation or archaeology officers.



Irish yews at Montacute House, Somerset

## Organisations with responsibilities for historic gardens

**The National Trust: founded 1895; membership 1 million in 1981, 2.7 million in 2001; 11 million visitors annually.**

The National Trust (NT) acquired its first historic garden, Montacute, Somerset, in 1931. A joint committee of NT and Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) members was formed in the early 1940s to save historic gardens such as Hidcote, Gloucestershire (acquired in 1948). The NT Plant Conservation Programme was established in the mid-1980s at Knightsayes, Devon. The Trust currently owns 200 gardens and 69 landscape parks. Since their acquisition, at least half the Trust's gardens have undergone large-scale restoration. In 2001 the Trust spent in the region of £11 million in conserving its gardens; it receives some financial help with maintenance of its historic gardens from the National Gardens Scheme, which since the 1980s has been used for training gardeners.

**Royal Horticultural Society: founded 1804; membership c.330,000 in 2003**

As stated above, a joint RHS/NT committee was formed in the 1940s. The RHS owns three gardens and has its

headquarters in London, where the Lindley Library, renowned for its collection of garden books and archives, received a £1.8 million Heritage Lottery Fund Grant in 1998 for rebuilding. The RHS established its first examination for student gardeners in 1836.

**Hardy Plant Society: founded 1957**

This society conserves garden plants and rescues old endangered varieties.

**National Council for Conservation of Plants and Gardens: founded 1978; membership 3,000 in 1984, 39 county groups currently**

This organisation was founded following an RHS conference to consider 'The Practical Role of Gardens on the Conservation of Rare and Threatened Plants'. It is responsible for 630 national collections of individual genera in 450 public and private gardens.

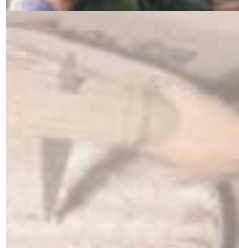
**Garden History Society (GHS): founded 1965; membership 34 in 1965, 760 in 1975, c.1,475 in 1993, c.1,800 in 2002**

The GHS was founded as a learned society for the study of historic gardens, gardeners and gardening. It publishes academic journals and organises conferences, visits and tours. From 1973, it has been concerned with conservation and a specialist committee was set up. In 1988 a



The Red Borders at Hidcote Manor Gardens, Gloucestershire

part-time conservation officer was appointed. There are now seven officers. Since 1995, the GHS has been recognised as an amenity society with statutory consultative powers (see opposite).



# The Restoration and Maintenance of Historic Gardens



## **County Gardens Trusts**

The first was founded in 1983 in Sussex as a result of GHS's need for local help in listing historic gardens, and requests for assistance from local authorities in drawing up structure plans. By 1991 there were 12 county trusts, by 1994, 23 and by 2002, 32. They formed a National Association in 1994 and there are now only four English counties without a Gardens Trust. Membership ranges from 400 in Essex and Yorkshire to 150 in Northamptonshire.

## **Historic Houses Association: founded in 1973**

This is the professional association for the owners of nearly 300 private houses and gardens open to the public, and which together had 11 million visitors in 1998.

## **Financial Support for Garden Restoration and Examples of Notable Projects**

Funding for gardens restoration from government sources was not available before the mid-1970s, but has greatly expanded since 1995.

The Town and Country Amenity Act 1974 was the first mention in legislation of historic gardens. It empowered the Department of the Environment to make grants for garden restoration through the Historic Buildings Council, mainly for the restoration of garden buildings. Grants awarded included £16,935 for the Swiss Garden, Old Warden Park, Bedfordshire in 1977 and £18,000 for Wroxton Abbey's gardens (Oxfordshire) in the early 1980s. The successor body, now English Heritage, has funded the compiling of the Register and its subsequent updating, from 1983, and in 1993–4 introduced a permanent gardens grant scheme, making donations to seven sites in both 1998–9 and 1999–2000, of £75,390 and £83,856 respectively. Its support is restricted to Grades I and II\* sites, and much of the money goes to the carrying out of surveys of landscape development for preparing restoration strategies. The Department of the Environment made grants to the GHS to fund 50% of its conservation activities under its special grants programme from 1988.

The Countryside Commission added historic landscapes to its remit in the early 1980s. It grant-aids surveys of historic landscapes and monitors the implementation of restorations. Notable surveys include those carried out at Blenheim (near Oxford), Painshill (near Cobham, Surrey) and Mount Edgumbe, Cornwall, whose historic garden, part of a country park, is within its responsibility. Following the great storms of 1987 and 1990, the Commission gave grants for sites not on the Register but which were considered of local landscape value and public benefit. The Countryside Commission's Task Force Trees Programme of 1987–90 was extended until 1996 as the Historic Parks and Gardens Initiative. This was transferred in 1996 to MAFF, which is now part of Defra. The Countryside Commission also provided the initial funding to set up the University of York Centre for the Conservation of Historic Parks and Gardens.

The National Heritage Memorial Fund was created in 1980 as the successor to the War Memorial Land Fund of 1946 and has funded several garden restoration programmes, notably the Painshill restoration, which was one of the first programmes over a number of years to employ historic landscape consultants. It has also grant-aided the restoration of Biddulph Grange in Staffordshire, acquired by the National Trust in 1988.

With the formation of the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) in 1995, funding for garden restoration has been at an unprecedented level. By September 1997, HLF grants totalled £70 million for the restoration of public parks, and £800,000 for historic landscape surveys and restoration plans for 70 sites. By February 2000 the public parks funding had grown to £153 million for 258 projects. This made parks and gardens the third largest recipient of HLF funding, after £563 million for museums and galleries and £376 million for historic buildings. The HLF is now committed to encouraging training elements within applications including volunteer training and apprenticeship placement costs.

Occasionally, European funding is available. The Architectural Heritage Conservation Scheme part funded the restoration of the Barry parterre at Harewood, Yorkshire in 1993, whilst 50% of the cost of seven

projects in historic landscapes in Hereford and Worcester in 1994 were funded under the EU Community Structural Assistance SB funding scheme, for regions with living standards below the EU average.

Garden restorations have covered all periods from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries, and all sizes from town gardens to landscape parks. However, restoration of the former is exceptional. As one leading garden historian noted in 2001: 'garden history and conservation have been over-obsessed with the grand and the grandiose'; he urged that attention must be given to the 'most neglected part of our garden heritage, the urban garden'.

Examples of urban garden restorations include the garden of an eighteenth-century town house in Bath based on archaeological evidence and The Plantation, Norwich, which was laid out by a local businessman in the style of an Italian Renaissance garden in the mid-nineteenth century and was restored by a local preservation trust. The National Trust recently acquired a mid-nineteenth-century villa at Wellington, Sunnycroft, as a typical example of a suburban house and garden. In the countryside, a principal focus has been eighteenth-century landscape parks such as Croome Park (Worcestershire), Stourhead (Wiltshire), and Stowe

(Buckinghamshire). Stowe, with work by Bridgman, Kent, Vanbrugh and Brown, has 32 buildings and monuments dating from 1720 to 1800. Since the late 1960s repairs have been carried out with grants from the Historic Buildings Council, trusts and donations. In 1987 an independent Gardens Building Trust was set up, and in 1989 Stowe was acquired by the National Trust. To date, the Trust has spent £400,000 on survey work alone at Stowe.

One of most interesting of the National Trust's restorations was Westbury Court, Gloucestershire, a five-acre late seventeenth-century Dutch water garden, minus its mansion, restored since 1967. In this case, archaeological investigation did not precede restoration, but the practice is more widespread now. A case in point is the Historic Royal Palaces' restoration of the Privy Garden at Hampton Court, where £200,000 was spent on excavation alone.

Not all historic gardens are in need of restoration. Sissinghurst, Kent, the jewel in the crown of the National Trust, was handed over in a good state, but its very popularity has dictated changes. When private, it had 100 visitors a year; now 175,000.

As well as restorations there are interesting examples of 'creations' of historic gardens where there is no archaeological or documentary evidence of what once existed. Examples include enclosed gardens at two Tudor manor houses owned by the National Trust – Little Moreton Hall, Cheshire and Moseley Old Hall, Staffordshire – whilst a 'medieval garden' at Winchester Cathedral was designed by Sylvia Landsbury.



*The parterre at Westbury Court Gardens*

## Knowledge and Skills

### 'Historic' and conventional gardens: distinguishing features

Historic gardens have requirements that distinguish them from conventional gardens because their *raison d'être* is the past not the present, so they are seldom part of a dynamic process of change and continuing development. However, whilst conventional gardens require design and landscaping skills to lay them out, together with horticultural skills to maintain them, historic gardens demand a much wider range of skills.

#### Restoration

Restoration requires detailed designs and implementation by landscape architects specialising in historic landscapes and informed by the research of several specialists, particularly garden historians, but also archaeologists, conservation architects, conservation builders and, in the larger and more complex gardens that include landscape parks, hydrologists, ecologists and dendrologists. Landscape contractors work under the supervision of historic landscape architects to restore the landscape

#### Maintenance

There is a need for gardeners trained in traditional techniques, who can grow and maintain a range of historic plant material, and to manage elements not found in modern gardens, such as complex water features, bedding-out schemes, herbaceous borders, rock gardens, topiary, walled fruit and vegetable gardens, historic glasshouses, pinetums and arboretums. Such gardeners also require knowledge of conservation techniques or access to conservationists for care of antique garden ornaments. Parkland landscapes make further demands with the need to manage drainage, woodlands and herds of deer. Some knowledge of the main trends in Garden history is required to understand the origin and development of the features of the garden in their care.

Maintenance is now carried out in the context of substantially reduced staffing levels compared to the period prior to the Second World War. For example, the pleasure grounds at Petworth, Sussex had 30 gardeners in 1878 and 3 in 2001. This is in part compensated for by

the higher degree of mechanisation now available. However, this is not always applicable in the context of historic gardens. In certain cases other sources of labour are available. For example, the National Trust, which employs 450 gardeners, including 80 head gardeners, has 3,000 volunteers, although their effective deployment is another skill required of the head gardener.

### Garden history surveys

A potentially wide range of archival and other historical source materials survive which, studied in combination with an analysis of surviving features on the ground, can provide detailed information of the configuration and development of the historic landscape. Family papers might contain estate maps, landscape architect's plans, architect's plans, correspondence and bills, letters, account books, estate ledgers, personal diaries, inventories, nurserymen's and other related bills, tree books, garden notebooks, leases, sales catalogues, drawings, paintings and photographs. Ordnance Survey, enclosure and tithe maps and schedules are essential sources. Published sources might include descriptions in travelogues, specialist horticultural journals, magazines and newspapers and engravings. Interviews with owners, gardens staff and others connected with the site can provide unique insights. In addition, there exists a growing secondary literature of historical studies of gardens and estates and landscape styles.



*The gardening staff at Petworth (c. 1890)*

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## Historic garden design

The drawing-up of a design for the restoration of a historic garden should be preceded by a historic landscape survey carried out by a garden historian which describes the historical development of the site and highlights the main periods of landscaping that survive and the work of individual designers. This will inform the historic landscape appraisal which includes the analysis of features on the ground and which will also be informed by reports from architects, arboriculturalists, dendrologists and hydrologists. Detailed proposals for restoration or improvement are then prepared by a historic landscape architect.

## Historic garden plants

From the sixteenth century onwards plant introductions have greatly increased the range of temperate plants in cultivation in Britain, while the development of glasshouses from the eighteenth century facilitated the introduction of many tropical plants. However, the vogue for 'novelties' meant that plant stock was continually superseded by new introductions from abroad and the new cultivars brought in by plant breeders, so that only a small number of the total plant introductions are still in

cultivation. The value of old introductions has only recently been recognised and even large seed firms are producing packets of 'heritage' seeds, though most are of late nineteenth-century origin. Organisations such as the Henry Doubleday Association have sought out old vegetable and fruit varieties and reintroduced them to cultivation. The problems of nomenclature can cause confusion, as one plant may have several popular names and, equally, various Latin names due to reclassification by plant taxonomists.

Until recently historic landscape restorations have not aimed at total authenticity, particularly as regards the planting, which has been carried out 'in the spirit of' a particular date. This is because of the difficulty in obtaining correct plants and the greater amount of time spent in sourcing, planting and maintaining historically accurate schemes. Garden historians have done an increasing amount of research to determine what plants were used in each particular period, and the correct planting layouts.

## Growing of plant material

Very few nurseries specialise in the growing of plant material for traditional and historic gardens, though perhaps half a dozen nurseries now do so, either exclusively or as a specialised part of their business. They may also publish plant catalogues with dates of introductions. Other firms have older varieties within their stock (see above); some are specialist bulb firms. Historic plants can be raised from seed and four or five firms are currently operating in this field. Some gardens raise the stock themselves or obtain it from organisations such as the Hardy Plant Society and the National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens. The National Trust has a Plant Conservation Programme to maintain historic plants in their care.

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Using Laptop computers to record plant stocks

# The Restoration and Maintenance of Historic Gardens

© National Trust/ Stephen Robson



Stock for budding and grafting. NT Plant Conservation Unit

## Restoration of a historic landscape

The implementation of a restoration or recreation of a historic landscape funded by heritage organisations, would be carried out by a historic landscape architect supervising a firm of landscape contractors or garden staff, and liaising closely with the site manager directing the operational workforce. The work would be monitored by specialists in garden conservation. However in certain cases restorations are designed by the head gardener and carried out by the workforce under his direct supervision using private funding.

## Maintenance of a historic landscape

Ideally, the maintenance of a large historic garden should be carried out by a staff of professional gardeners organised on a traditional hierarchical basis, ranged from unskilled to craft gardener to head gardener/garden manager, who would be responsible for training.

## The supply of skills

Structured interviews were conducted with a number of acknowledged experts to canvass their views as to the supply and professional competence of garden historians, historic landscape architects and heritage gardeners. Informants included Peter Goodchild, formerly lecturer at the University of York Centre for Garden Conservation, now a consultant; Richard Bisgrove, lecturer in the Department of Horticulture and Landscape, University of Reading, and an expert on Gertrude Jekyll; Dr David Jacques, visiting professor in the Department of Landscape, University of Sheffield and course coordinator of the Architectural Association's course on the

Conservation of Historic Gardens, Parks and Landscapes; Dr Hazel Fryer, Director of Parklands Consortium, a firm of historic landscape consultants; Rachel Smith, tutor in horticulture and garden history, Department of Continuing Studies, University of Birmingham; Paul Farnell, deputy head of gardens, Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire; Sam Youd, head of gardens, Tatton Park, Cheshire; and Philip Aubury, director of Birmingham Botanical Gardens and Glasshouses.

## Garden historians

Goodchild believed there was a shortage of suitably qualified and experienced garden historians where this applied to garden restorations, and that many displayed a lack of depth in the understanding of the issues. Most of the training he felt to be too academic and theoretical, and insufficiently concerned with 'reading' the landscape. Some gardens trusts, however, among them Warwickshire and York, had done good work in training members to record and research historic landscapes in their counties.

Jacques, too, was critical of the quality of work carried out on historic landscape restorations, and considered that some of the garden historians employed to carry out historical appraisals had not been sufficiently vetted for their historical expertise when being commissioned. There was a scarcity too of monitors for the projects. Jacques was critical of the administrators in the main funding body for historic garden restoration, English Heritage, most of whom lacked a proper understanding of garden work, did not exercise sufficient quality control and were very transient, soon transferring to other civil service posts.



Preparing a seed bed

© English Heritage/James O. Davies

With regard to garden history research, Jacques considered that four universities, and individual specialists within them, were good: East Anglia, the University of Sheffield department of Landscape Architecture, the University of Bristol and the Courtauld Institute of Fine Art

### Historic landscape architects

In his recent book, *The Practice of Garden Theory*, John Dixon Hunt, editor of *The Journal of Garden History* and a professor of landscape architecture, remarked that the absence of any serious or sustained interest in garden history by professionals and academics in landscape architecture was regrettable. Peter Goodchild doubts whether there are sufficient landscape architects 'of the right calibre', and believes that English Heritage should be taking this problem more seriously. As chairman of European Council for Landscape Architect Schools (ECLAS), he concludes that in Europe the training is superior to that in Britain, where the emphasis is too much on paper plans and not enough on the relationship between the plan and the site or the management of the site. This is particularly relevant in the context of historic landscape restorations.

Dr Fryer pointed to the relative lack of training provision or validation for landscape architects wishing to specialise in historic landscapes. There is no Institute of Historic Landscape Architects that would validate landscape architects working in this field. Of the four universities that provide specialist courses for landscape historians, one in particular had no permanent specialist staff to teach the course.

Among other practitioners consulted, Richard Bisgrove did not consider there was a problem in finding suitable historic landscape consultants, and cited four firms of which he approved. The need for this area of expertise was, he believed, 'very spasmodic' and 'people pop up here and there'. The historical part, he felt, was but a small aspect of landscaping.

### Gardeners

Mike Calnan, Head of Gardens for the National Trust, stressed the importance of continuing traditional skills among garden staff in the heritage sector on which the success of conservation depends. (See *Rooted in History - Studies in Garden Conservation*. NT, 2001). The role of the master gardener is as relevant today as it was two centuries ago, and as much an integral part of conservation as the



Trimming seventeenth-century style yew hedge

retention of traditional buildings skills is to the preservation of historic buildings.

However, there is clearly a significant feeling in the heritage and botanical sector that the numbers of suitably trained staff are inadequate, and that current training methods in the horticultural sector are not producing staff trained in the right skills. There is a perception that the current college courses do not lay sufficient emphasis on the teaching of practical skills.

Christopher Lloyd, garden writer, in an article in the *Guardian Weekend* (8 March 1997), said that amateurs had more practical gardening skills than the professionals because the professionals 'have nowhere (or almost nowhere) to go to learn the practicalities that gardening demands. Horticultural colleges, most of which now offer degrees, are sniffy about this sort of thing. They teach endless theory and get their students out to visit gardens and horticultural institutions such as those at Wisley, Kew and Edinburgh, but as for the practice of horticulture, oh dear me no!' The root of the problem was that few private gardens had a work team under a knowledgeable head gardener from whom they could learn. He asked: 'And who will these head gardeners or superintendents of the future be? Currently we still have a legacy of leaders who were brought up and trained under the old system, in which teams did exist. But in the future, there will be few who are, in the practical dimension at least, equipped to direct others.'

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# The Restoration and Maintenance of Historic Gardens

The Professional Gardeners' Guild (PGG), the association of head gardeners and garden managers in the private garden and heritage sector, has devised its own training scheme based on the old apprenticeship style of training, which is highly practical, and this follows on from the scheme devised by John Sales, Gardens Adviser to the National Trust.

Practical training is also provided by the Women Returners to Amenity Gardening Scheme (WRAGS), which organises placements for women contemplating a switch of career to horticulture. This is particularly important in view of the large number of second careerists attracted to horticulture. Richard Preest, head gardener at Badminton, Gloucestershire, in an article in *The Times* on 13 January 2001 said: 'We are delighted with our WRAGS trainees. They are passionate about gardening, which you don't always get with a 17-year-old boy straight from college. Often our women trainees have done other jobs and been keen gardeners at home, and they have a real vision of what they want.'

In 2002 PlantNet, the Plant Collections Network of Great Britain and Ireland, comprising 69 botanical gardens, had as the theme of its annual conference 'Training in Heritage and Botanical Horticulture', as a result of which it was decided to conduct a survey of skills and employment, in order to determine:

- the range of roles, responsibilities and skills across the sector (to demonstrate the variety of activities, degrees of challenge, responsibility and interaction with other professionals or general public);
- how many are employed and at what level, including an analysis of employment 'packages';
- the current needs of the sector and any current or potential future skill gaps, identifying the extent and range of the gap.

In April 2003 it was reported that an initial scoping exercise is being carried out to develop and refine the parameters of the study before carrying out the full assessment.

In an article in *The Garden* (the RHS journal) in October 2003, Catherine Fitzgerald, a trainee gardener at the Society's garden at Wisley, posed the question: 'Why choose horticulture as a career?' and after reviewing the courses available turned to the question of how much

practical experience is offered. One criticism recurs time and again in the horticultural press: the lack of systematic, practical training opportunities. It is true that the number of hours devoted to developing practical skills in some colleges has been reduced. In the past, students studying for a national diploma required a year's practical experience before starting, and had to take a 'sandwich year' of practical experience. These are no longer obligatory. Lindsay Thomas, RHS Head of Education, regretted 'that training is increasingly academic, as horticulture is a practical subject where the development of techniques and skills is paramount'. The Curator of RHS Garden at Wisley, Jim Gardiner, is concerned about the increased emphasis on theory: 'A solid grounding in the basic skills is needed before a student can progress up the career ladder. Too few opportunities exist for the systematic teaching and testing of students on a wide range of solid, practical skills to a recognised standard that is recognised by employers.' The Kew and Wisley diplomas seemed to offer the right mix of theory and practice, but it has to be emphasised that Wisley takes only 14 students a year.

Further comments came from a variety of sources. Rachel Smith (University of Birmingham) commented that 'the practical side of horticulture is a mess'. Although she considered the practically oriented training courses run by the National Trust and the Professional Gardeners' Guild to be ideal, the numbers of qualified staff they produced were 'drops in the ocean'. Richard Bisgrove (University of Reading) considers that the major



Mowing at Sheffield Park Garden

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horticultural colleges have tried to be like universities, with a consequent lack of emphasis on practical skills. He thought the HND in Horticulture, which has now disappeared, was an excellent training with the right amount of practical experience prior to, and during, the course. He approved of the approach of the National Trust Careership, which produced well-trained people.

Paul Farnell, Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire, a garden participating in the PGG training scheme, reported that there are 'lots of people applying to us from college but with no practical training'. He believed that 'training on the job fizzled out because of lack of affordable accommodation'.

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*Richard Bentley, Westbury Court Garden*

Sam Youd, Tatton Park, Cheshire, was highly critical of the NVQ qualifications, contending that the range from Level One to Level Three was too steep, with Level One far too simplistic. He had one student training at Tatton as part of the National Trust Careership, but found the need for the student to attend a two-week residential course at Bicton College in Devon difficult from the point of view of maintaining work schedules. Why, he asked, could not other colleges than Bicton provide the training? He favoured full-time practical training as an apprentice commencing from leaving school with horticultural theory studied at evening classes – in fact the training that he himself had received more than 30 years ago. For the exceptional candidate, he considered there was no better training than following this route, leading to the RHS Diploma in Practical Horticulture.

## Head gardeners' survey and questionnaire

A further range of opinions on the market for professional gardeners in the heritage and private gardens was obtained by means of a questionnaire addressed to head gardeners and garden managers. (A copy of the questionnaire is included on the website: [www.craftsintheenglishcountryside.org.uk](http://www.craftsintheenglishcountryside.org.uk))

The questionnaire was sent to 140 head gardeners/garden managers through the auspices of the Professional Gardeners' Guild (PGG) of which the recipients were members. An extremely good response of 73 replies was received – a 52% return. The replies were anonymous and the individual gardens not named. Not all respondents answered all questions.

Two aspects of the composition of the workforce are noteworthy. First, 40% of respondents were female and this has implications in terms of career breaks for family commitments and the need for retraining on returning to work. A second significant feature was the high proportion for whom gardening was a second career: a third of the total workforce. The reasons why were not addressed, but this has implications for the type of training they should receive, funding and particularly its duration. Several respondents commented on the public perception of gardening as 'a fashionable career change that anyone can make with a short period of training', and also that many did not appreciate how much training was necessary.

In some establishments extensive use has been made of a category of new labour, especially in the heritage sector, namely volunteers, for whom this type of work is very attractive. Out of 73 respondents, 19 had such additional help. Only 5 out of the 47 private gardens used volunteers, and then never more than one or two people at a time, whereas 12 out of the 20 heritage gardens had them. Of these latter, the numbers are significant and



# The Restoration and Maintenance of Historic Gardens

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*Dead-heading in a border, Tintinhull*

they were rarely less than 2 – and were up to 25 in one case. Nor was this necessarily something for the retired, as a third of this unpaid labour force were under the age of 60. One head gardener, when asked if he had volunteers, answered: 'we wish!'

In the section covering skills, the replies indicate that, overall, head gardeners reckon that there is an insufficient supply of skilled gardeners: 68% agreed with the statement that skill standards in professional gardening were declining nationally. A greater number, 79%, agreed with the statement that the numbers of skilled gardeners were declining nationally. Those who had agreed with both statements were asked why this might be so. The most cited reason was 'poor pay not attracting suitable staff', followed by 'craft gardening perceived as poor status' and 'craft gardening not perceived as a highly skilled occupation'. The fourth most cited reason was 'the reduction in use of direct labour by public bodies and increasing dependence on contractors', closely followed by 'too little emphasis on practical skills in college courses'.

When it came to their own gardens, 29% thought the supply was deteriorating, 56% thought it was the same and only 14% thought it was improving. When asked whether the position was better or worse than ten years ago, a clear decline could be discerned: 56% thought it was worse, 17% thought it the same and 27% thought it better. However, when asked whether they had had to effect major changes in the layout and work programmes due to a shortage of skilled staff, only 38% said they had made changes.



# Training

## The requirements

### Garden historians

Garden historians require training in the use and interpretation of historical records across the range of sources, including estate records, maps, surveys, accounts and photographs. They also require a knowledge of the history of garden design and architecture, historic plants and operational methods. They need to be able to determine the historical significance of specialist reports such as those prepared by archaeologists, arboriculturists and environmentalists. The garden historian should be trained to deduce from historical evidence the chronology of the layout and management of parks and gardens within the context of the surviving designed landscape and built environment, and to produce a historic appraisal of a site.

### Historic landscape architects

Historic landscape architects need to be able to interpret historical appraisals of the site prepared by the garden historian, and produce designs restoring the landscape to one period of time or incorporating elements of a multilayered landscape. They need knowledge of garden styles, historic plants, historic building materials and traditional methods. They have to brief architects and contractors. They have to oversee and direct implementation of restorations, including costings, appoint specialist contractors and source appropriate plants and materials for hard and soft landscaping.

### Gardeners

The horticultural industry broadly divides into commercial and amenity horticulture. Commercial deals with the growing and selling of food crops and ornamental plants, while amenity is concerned with the design and maintenance of public and private gardens and open spaces, including sports facilities. This branch of horticulture currently employs 90,000 people. Within this 6,000 are employed in botanical gardens, and on heritage and private estates.

Gardeners concerned with historic landscapes come into a specialised branch of amenity horticulture, and need to possess a wide range of skills that should include an informed appreciation of the elements of the historic landscape they are maintaining, and the ability to manage a considerable number of complex elements

ranging from historic glasshouses to walled kitchen gardens and including a number of labour-intensive features such as parterres, rock gardens and water features. They must possess a knowledge of traditional plants and planting methods and layouts. In addition to the traditional skills, they increasingly need IT skills, and be able to manage budgets and fundraise for new projects. They have to engage, direct, train and inspire their workforce and volunteers.



*Thinning espalier pears*

Responses to the questionnaire indicate that the majority of gardens had staff who have received some college-based training. In two-thirds of gardens, more than 50% of staff had had a college-based training; in a quarter of gardens all staff had been college trained. One-eighth of the gardens had staff with no college training. By contrast, only exceptionally (6 cases only) did gardens offer apprenticeship-type training. One stated that they had given up taking trainees on the Modern Apprenticeship Scheme, as 'they cannot fulfil our standards to learn and become good'.

Supervised work experience was offered by 33 out of 73 gardens, and 29 gardens offered on-the-job training. At 24 out of 73 gardens none of these three types of training was on offer. Where reasons were given, 12 said it was too expensive in terms of staff supervisory time, 5 because of

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the time lost going to college, but only three because of a lack of aptitude or interest on the part of the students.

When head gardeners were asked what would be their ideal training programme, their replies were significantly at variance with the experiences of their staff or what the gardens were currently offering by way of training. The replies focused strongly on the need for sufficient practical training: 3 head gardeners suggested a period of practical training before attending college, varying from two months to two years; 5 said simply that the training should be highly practical; 15 suggested practical training on the job with a day per week at college. Another 24 suggested an apprenticeship-type training, which would in effect be the same as the last suggestion, while 3 preferred a mixture of work and college in blocks of 1–3 weeks' work alternating with college in any one month. Finally, 9 suggested a mixture of college and practical, the latter to consist of a sandwich year of work-place experience.

## The current provision

### Garden historians

There is no recognised qualification to become a garden historian, but the taught courses on offer range from certificates and diplomas of higher education to postgraduate qualifications at diploma, master's and doctoral level. The certificate of higher education is generally open access, and is a necessary qualification for entry to the diploma course. The programmes of study are part-time courses, and include lectures and garden visits, with students submitting short essays and, at diploma level, a dissertation. Rudimentary use of historical source material is taught at certificate level and developed further for the diploma by the writing of a dissertation.

It is not possible to take a first degree in garden history. Garden history postgraduate qualifications require a first degree or equivalent qualification in a related subject. Diplomas and taught masters would require the student to prepare a dissertation. The MPhil and PhD are entirely research degrees gained by writing a thesis.

Courses in garden history did not start until the late 1980s, but have grown significantly in number and accelerated since the late 1990s. Included here are courses in the conservation of historic parks and gardens that have large garden history components. In addition some County Garden Trusts run training courses in research methods in garden history and study days on specific gardens or designers in that county. The Association of Garden Trusts organises study days and conferences on garden history themes that are not county-specific – as, for example, does the Garden History Society, which initiated such courses and also organises foreign study tours.

Certificates of Higher Education in Garden History are offered by four universities: Birmingham (1998), Surrey (1998), Birkbeck (2000) and Cambridge (2001). Diplomas of Higher Education in Garden History are offered by two universities: Birkbeck and Kent (1989); Birmingham is planning to offer this course in the near future. Postgraduate Diplomas in Garden History are offered by three institutions: York (1972), Architectural Association of London (1986) and Kent (1989); Birmingham is planning to offer this course in the near future. Master's in Garden History are offered by York (1987), Birkbeck, Bristol (2000) and Kent (1995). An MPhil and PhD in Garden History is offered at York (1987), Kent (1995), Bristol and East Anglia.

### Historic landscape architects

There is no recognised qualification to become a historic landscape architect but some first-degree courses, which form part of the training for landscape architecture, have garden history elements – for example, the Landscape Management degree course at Reading and Restoration and Management of Historic Gardens Course at Writtle, Essex. Qualified landscape architects might take the Architectural Association's Diploma in the Conservation of Historic Gardens, which started in 1986.

Reading now offers a taught Master's in Conservation, as does De Montfort University. Also available for people with a first degree in landscape architecture and estate management is a Master's in Landscape Management at the University of Manchester. These are in addition to the range of courses now available in garden history from certificate to doctorates.



Chatsworth, Derbyshire

## Gardeners

General horticultural training can be undertaken at various entry points, and levels of education and practical experience, from school leavers aged 16 and with no practical experience, to school leavers at 18 with 5 GCSEs and 2 A levels and a year's practical experience. The various qualifications that can be studied include NVQs, certificates, diplomas, BTECs and degrees.

Horticultural courses are offered by 51 specialist agricultural and horticultural HE and FE colleges (including universities) in the UK, 190 general FE colleges in England and one horticultural correspondence college. Few horticultural courses contain elements relating to historic gardens, with the exception of the following: Reading University and Writtle College BSc courses (referred to above), Duchy (Cornwall) and Cannington (Somerset) Colleges' Higher National Diploma, Cannington College's National Diploma and Advanced National Certificate, Otley College's (Suffolk) National Certificate, Duchy College's City & Guilds Certificate in Gardening.

Qualifications available to horticulturalists are:

- National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in horticulture are available from Levels 1 to 4; Level 5 is in the planning stage and will be degree equivalent. NVQs can be obtained through training and assessment at work.
- BTECs in horticulture can be taken at First Diploma, National Diploma and Higher National Diploma and Higher National Certificate Levels.
- BTEC First Diploma entry requirement: 1 GCSE at Grade C or practical experience. One-year full-time college course. Qualification equivalent to 4 GCSEs at Grade C.
- BTEC National Diploma (NDHort) entry requirement: BTEC First Diploma or National Certificate in Horticulture. College course 2–3 years full time, including work experience.
- BTEC Higher National Diploma (HND) entry requirement: 1 A level or work experience at appropriate level or BTEC National Diploma. College course 2–3 years full-time.
- BTEC Higher National Certificate (HNC) entry requirement: as above, 2–3 years part-time course.
- City & Guilds National Certificate in Horticulture (NCH) entry requirements: fewer than 5 GCSEs and preferably one year's practical experience in horticulture. A one-year full-time college course with strong emphasis on practical skills.
- City and Guilds Advanced National Certificate (ANCH) entry requirement: National Certificate in Horticulture. One-year full-time college course, qualification similar to BTEC National Diploma in Horticulture.
- Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) qualifications.
- RHS General Examination in Horticulture: 1–2 year part-time college course or distance learning. Two 1-hour written papers
- RHS Advanced Certificate in Horticulture, introduced in 2000: written examinations and assessment of practical skills.
- RHS Certificate in Practical Horticulture: one practical year's training at Rosemoor or Hyde Hall, based on continuous assessment.
- RHS Wisley Diploma in Practical Horticulture: 2-year course of practical training at Wisley with practical examinations and day release for 20 months to study for RHS Diploma in Horticulture. Entry requirement: one year's practical experience plus either NVQ Level 1 in Amenity Horticulture, or First Diploma in Amenity Horticulture, or RHS General Examination. The course takes 14 candidates a year.



# The Restoration and Maintenance of Historic Gardens

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Staff gardener at Belsey Hall

- RHS Diploma in Horticulture: one day a week college course for two years; examined in practical skills and applied horticultural knowledge.
- RHS Master of Horticulture, MHort (RHS) entry qualification: RHS Diploma and minimum of 5 years' professional experience in horticulture. Degree equivalence.
- Kew Diploma: a broad-based 3-year training at the Royal Botanic Garden Kew, including studying scientific, technical and managerial subjects at first-degree level with practical experience as a student gardener. Entry requirements: 4 GCSEs and 2 A levels.
- BSc Degree entry requirement: 5 GCSE Grade C and above, 2 GCE A levels. Courses are 3 years full time or 4 years sandwich, or 1 year for holders of Higher National Diploma to convert to BSc.
- Higher Degree entry requirement: good honours degree or equivalent.
- Advanced Modern Apprenticeship in Amenity Horticulture: work-based training for those having completed Foundation Modern Apprenticeship. leading to NVQ Level 3
- Modern Apprenticeships with Royal Parks and National Trust and English Heritage. Entry requirements: 4 GCSEs, applicants aged 16–20 for Royal Parks, any age for National Trust. Training consists of 3-year apprenticeship with residential blocks of college learning leading to a range of qualifications – NVQ Levels 2 and 3, RHS General Certificate, Garden History Certificate. Apprentices train at 8 royal parks and 12 National Trust gardens. The NT takes one apprentice a year at each of 12 gardens. By 2000 the NT scheme had been running for 10 years and had produced 56 graduates. From 1998 the National Gardens Scheme supported funding for an extra 5 apprentices for the lifetime of their apprenticeship.
- Professional Gardeners' Guild Traineeship in Horticultural Practices: a 3-year residential traineeship which started in 1995; applicants aged 20–30; trainees spend one year gaining practical experience in each of the three historic gardens: Waddesdon Manor (Buckinghamshire), Chatsworth (Derbyshire) and West Dean (Sussex). A second parallel scheme started, based at Waddesdon, Sutton Place (Surrey) and an undecided third garden. Six trainees completed, six presently participating.
- Women's Farm and Garden Association: the Women Returners to Amenity Gardening Scheme (WRAGS) offers placements to women returning to work to take up a career in horticulture, where they can gain practical instruction.

Apprenticeships, which include:

- Foundation Modern Apprenticeships in Amenity Horticulture: in operation since 1998 (formerly National Traineeships and Modern Apprenticeships and prior to that Youth Training Scheme). Entry at 16–17 for work-based training leading to NVQ Level 2. From September 2004, open to people aged over 25.

## The role of Lantra and validating bodies

Lantra is the government recognised Sector Skills Council for the land-based sector. It is an employer-driven organisation which identifies employers' needs, carries out training and development and sets standards. Its role includes working closely with providers of learning to ensure the closest possible match between the demand for, and provision of, services that support this aim. Lantra's *The Land-based Sector Workforce Development Plan 2001–2* states:

*Both 'best-value' contracts in the public sector and more discerning private and commercial clients are demanding higher levels of skills in both contract management and craft areas. Specialised skills associated with historic gardens, restoration, interior landscaping and environmental conservation and management are also expected to increase in importance.*

Its role also includes a watching brief on the labour force and projecting what it will look like in 10–15 years' time and identifying the skills gaps. Lantra has recently been involved in two research projects on skills issues. One has examined skills issues in the management of urban green spaces, in conjunction with English Heritage and the Countryside Agency, and is nearly completed. An important conclusion is that the age profiles of those maintaining urban green spaces is such that in 10 years time nobody will be left to carry out the work. A second project, now at the planning stage, will map the occupations of those responsible for managing heritage and botanical gardens. This is in response to the recruitment, retention and succession problems currently facing this sector. It has the support of the RHS, English Heritage, Plantnet, the National Trust and the Royal Parks.

### Validating bodies

- *Professional qualifications:* Membership of the Institute of Landscape Architecture is validated by the Institute. Membership of the Institute of Horticulture is validated by the Institute.
- *University courses:* validated by the individual universities. Degree courses at horticultural/agricultural colleges are validated by the university with which they are associated.

### Other courses

- NVQs are overseen by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and awarded by a number of organisations, including City & Guilds; Oxford, Cambridge and Royal Society of Arts (OCR) and Edexcel.
- Modern Apprenticeships are validated by Lantra.
- National Diploma in Horticulture (NDH), Higher National Diploma in Horticulture (HNDH), and BTEC qualifications are validated by Edexcel.
- National Certificate in Horticulture (NCH) and Advanced National Certificate in Horticulture (ANCH) are validated by City & Guilds of London Institute.
- RHS courses are validated by the Royal Horticultural Society School of Horticulture.
- The Kew Diploma is validated by the Royal Botanic Garden Kew.



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## Recommendations

**There is strong evidence of a much increased and still growing demand for skilled personnel in the restoration and maintenance of historic gardens. Shortages of skilled manpower have been identified and there is evidence of some improvement in the training provision in a number of key areas.**

Shortfalls persist, however, and are likely to continue among skilled gardeners and, more particularly, head gardeners and garden managers who are responsible for day-to-day maintenance, the implementation of new schemes and, in many cases, training in the practice of gardening as opposed to the theory.

A recurring criticism is that the holders of qualifications in amenity horticulture lack the requisite practical skills, and are unable to apply their book knowledge to the work situation. Perhaps most crucially, the older generation of gardeners, rich in practical experience and who had undergone a traditional training, are dwindling in number. As a result there are fewer and fewer people able to act as trainers and mentors for new entrants.

Senior gardeners would like to see the future of training in terms of a better balance between theory and practice, with a larger workplace element. The problem is that employers are reluctant to take on trainees and some do not see it as their role without a financial incentive. Trainers are also deterred by the bureaucracy of the training procedures, not least by the fact that they themselves have to be trained and accredited to take on the role. A major blow from which the industry has not yet recovered was the disbandment of the local authority direct labour forces following the introduction of mandatory competitive tendering in 1996.

In short, the demand for skills in historic gardens is increasing with the rise in the numbers of gardens open to the public and restoration schemes. The numbers wishing to take up gardening as a second career are increasing, with the consequent implications for training. The lack of public funding means that the majority of these entrants have to pay for their own training, which often consists of short courses with relatively little 'hands-on' experience.

The question is: can the situation be ameliorated without a large injection of public money to support practical training schemes? How easily can the future needs of amenity horticulture be met within the new training framework of the Sector Skills Council recently created for the land-based industries?

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