

Medieval and Tudor Gardens: recent research**A note by Pamela and Richard Savage of a Conference held at the University of Cambridge on 9th June 2012**

We attended the Conference not only out of general interest but in the light of our continuing work to understand more of the development of the apparently extensive gardens and landscape features at Woking Manor from the 13th century onwards through to their probable apogee at Woking Palace during the reigns of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. The Conference, organised by the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research at Cambridge in conjunction with the Association of Gardens Trusts, featured an outstanding array of expert speakers. The day started with two excellent overviews of the development of historic garden studies, both packed with information. Other speakers then took us through some of their more recent research, although some of the latter was still very much ‘work in progress’ and not yet entirely compelling. The comprehensive nature of many of the presentations is indicated by the dozens of pages of notes that we took during the day. This report cannot do more than outline some of the high spots and provide pointers to sources which readers might wish to follow up for themselves.

The day was opened by **Dr David Jacques**, who had been the first Inspector of Historic Parks and Gardens at English Heritage from 1987 to 1993 before his many recent senior roles in this field, including being the principal consultant for the recreation of the Elizabethan Garden at Kenilworth. Dr Jacques pointed out that there were virtually no surviving contemporary descriptions of medieval gardens and that the principal evidence for them was provided by manuscript illustrations and by a few excavations. However, it was clear that the earlier medieval gardens and landscapes around high status houses favoured water and extensive views, preferably over rising ground towards woods – and the moated site of Woking Manor fits this perfectly. ‘Foreign’ plants had not yet been imported into England and gardens were essentially green throughout the year except for short flowering periods in spring and the early summer. The medieval garden frequently contained herbs and other scented plants but was not organised formally. Sources in chronological order referenced by Dr Jacques included:

Ichnographia Rustica, Stephen Switzer, 1715
The History of Gardening in England, Alicia Amherst, 1895
Medieval Gardens, Sir Frank Crisp, 1924
Medieval Gardens, John H Harvey, 1981
The Medieval Garden, Sylvia Landsberg, 1996

Although not referenced at the Conference we have found Stephen Miles’s *Parks in Medieval England*, OUP 2009, very helpful on the inter-relationship between the Deer Park and the gardens at high status medieval sites. Dr Jacques mentioned the work of RCHME surveys in the 1960s and 1970s, including the earthworks at Collyweston in Northamptonshire which were interpreted as gardens remodelled in 1486 by Lady Margaret Beaufort – we may speculate on how much of this work, with its terraces, canal and two fishponds, reminded her of Woking Manor, her principal home from 1466 to 1471.

Ornamental structures begin to appear in English gardens by the time of Henry VIII, with the carved beasts on columns. Ornamental fountains appeared and early examples are known at Whitehall and Winchester Place. Aviaries also appeared (copied from the Italian fashion) and are known to have existed at Hampton Court, Whitehall and Nonsuch. Obelisks apparently of porphyry (again copied from Italy) were probably constructed from painted wood.

Knot gardens may have been inspired by French gardens and seem to have come into widespread use in England in the 1560s (but see below the date of 1505 for the earliest knot gardens in London given by Dr Henderson in her presentation). Many examples – together with tunnel arbours - are illustrated in the book on garden design published by Hans Vredeman de Vries in 1583. Surname evidence suggests that many of the new style of gardens in England were constructed by French designers, although in general the upkeep of the gardens would then have been undertaken by English gardeners. Courtiers rushed to impress Elizabeth I with the construction of lavish new gardens and water-features.

However these lavish new gardens could be quite short-lived. The very elaborate one acre formal garden at Kenilworth – described in considerable detail in a contemporary letter by Thomas Langham – which was constructed in the North Court within the castle walls by Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, for Elizabeth I's progress in 1575 had been removed in its entirety by 1620 and the site was later used as a kitchen garden and orchard. Nonetheless Leicester and his father had had some form of impressive garden at Kenilworth much earlier; there are glowing accounts of a garden and the surrounding landscape at the time of an earlier visit by Elizabeth I.

For Langham's letter of 1575 (by far the best surviving documentary source for these elaborate gardens in England) see

<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/daysout/properties/kenilworth-castle/elizabethan-garden/langham-extracts/>

Around 1590 there was another considerable change in fashionable gardens. For the first time there was large-scale introduction of 'outlandish' plants from Turkey and other foreign parts which came to supersede the largely native scented plants (the 'gillyflowers') of earlier times, which retreated to cottage gardens. The violet was largely replaced by species of flowering bulb and for the first time spring became an important season in the English garden. Carnations had been introduced by 1542 but few other introductions were made until nearly the end of the century, before an explosion of gardening for pleasure as shown by the development of flower 'varieties' took hold in the early Jacobean period. Gardening would no longer be so closely related to medicinal and culinary activities.

Dr Paul Everson, formerly of RCHME and English Heritage and a past Chairman of the Society for Landscape Studies, spoke on parks and gardens as parts of larger designed landscapes.

His first – and earliest - example was Stow Park in Lincolnshire, already owned by the Bishops of Dorchester and Lincoln before the Norman Conquest. The moated site, with fishponds, bays and a causewayed entrance, was already said to be "delightfully surrounded by lakes and ponds" by the late 12th century and much of this might already have been in

place before the Conquest. The church at Stow acted as the pro-Cathedral for Lincolnshire until the establishment of the see at Lincoln in c.1072.

Turning to undoubted medieval establishments, Dr Everson referred to the Bishops Palace at Somersham in Cambridgeshire and Bodiam Castle in Sussex. Both of these were approached in a rather contrived way through designed flanking sheets of water, probably intended to impress the visitor with the power and prestige of the owner. The traditional rather static and essentially 'Romantic' view of such sites has been challenged as lacking in rigour by Matthew Johnson in his study *Behind the Castle Gate: From Medieval to Renaissance* (Routledge, 2002). He advocates a programme of much more detailed examination of the physical remains of 'watery sites' in their wider landscape settings and suggests they were created as essentially 'stage settings' in which changing roles could be played out in the transition from the medieval to the Renaissance. In the light of this we may well wonder whether the very 'watery area' known as Sluice Mead which lies between the moats of Woking Palace and the medieval and Tudor 'approach road' from Guildford and the west was once flooded and, if so, at which period of the 400 year history of the site.

Other medieval examples explored by Dr Everson included the landscapes around Wingfield Manor (mid 15th century), Harewood Castle, Stafford Castle and Wharram Percy. The 'viewshed' of the landscape from the principal house and other important points (such as any Lodge in the adjoining deer park) should be considered in detail. Dr Everson mentioned there were problems with the term 'designed' landscapes; it could often be shown that various elements of the landscape were introduced at very different periods and what we see today is the culmination of a long period of 'evolution' and not the result of a single 'planned' development.

Moving on from the medieval Dr Everson discussed the great changes in landscape settings that occurred following the Dissolution of the monasteries from 1530 onwards through to Jacobean times. Secular use of former monastic sites led to a strong 'after-life' or indeed new life for such sites. While the former church and cloisters can often be clearly read there are many difficulties with the new 'great' country houses. Many of features of the new houses and surrounding estates can be read as making overtly political statements, along the lines of "utter ruin was the fate of the King's enemies..." Churches and cloisters might be converted to stables while the new great houses avoided the site of the main monastic buildings, sometimes being developed from the Abbot's own Lodge. Examples from Lincolnshire include Barlings Abbey and Kirkstead Abbey. Many of the new owners of monastic houses already had grand houses of their own and so the new buildings and gardens they constructed on the former monastic site might be used only occasionally and for largely social or political purposes – examples include Lord's Place at Lewes Priory and Haughmond Abbey at Shrewsbury. Grand lodges and gardens for recreational use (as distinct from main residences) began to be built by wealthy families, e.g. as at Quarrendon in Bucks and Wothorpe near Stamford. Some of these buildings and their gardens used religious symbolism to express the faith of the builder, e.g. at Lyveden and Rushton. A new water garden with triangular and other fishponds was constructed at Tackley in Oxfordshire by John Harborne in the years immediately after 1612 probably to express the philosophy of 'Quietism' through fishing. Other fishing gardens were constructed at Madeley Old Manor (Staffordshire) and Owthorpe (Notts). A phased analysis by Dr Everson has elucidated the sequence of gardens constructed at Old Hall, Little Sturton (Lincs).

Dr Paula Henderson, author of *The Tudor House and Garden: architecture and landscape in the 16th and early 17th centuries*, gave a fascinating presentation entitled “Medieval to modern: the evolving garden from 16th century London”.

Early sources show there were gardens within London from at least the 13th century although details of their form and the plants in them are limited. Winchester Palace (on the south bank in Southwark) had a privy garden, a greater garden (possibly a kitchen garden) and an orchard at that time and by the 1480s also included an early tennis court. In the later medieval period the Inns of Court had nut gardens, a Fig Tree Court and a coney (rabbit) garden. By the early Elizabethan period a characteristic garden in London would be enclosed by walls or paling (see also the religious symbolism of such a Hortus Conclusus) and might contain areas of grass, beds of herbs, benches, fruit trees (some on trellises), arbours and various hard ornamental features (such as galleries or cloisters). Only the very grandest gardens would have had ornamental fountains. Knot gardens seem to have been slowly introduced from about 1505.

Illustrations of London that are sufficiently detailed to show garden features survive from the 16th century. Some of the earliest are included in *alba amicorum* (for background see *The Album Amicorum and the London of Shakespeare's Time* by June Schleuter, pub 2011). Three copperplate maps of parts of the City survive from c.1555, dated by a representation of Queen Mary's barge on the Thames. The two plates covering the eastern part of the City show that it was heavily built up by then but with more space in the western part of the City. North of Bishopsgate there was still a lot of space. There is a set of London views dated 1572 and another wood-cut based one in the Pepys Library. These appear to depict gardens fairly accurately.

A small alabaster classical sculpture, pierced to take a pipe or similar, from Suffolk House may have come from the extensive garden behind the house. With the Dissolution of the Monasteries the grand London houses of the Bishops generally passed to new secular owners.

Dr Henderson then presented a newly-discovered plan dating to 1562-65 showing Lord Burleigh's house and garden in the Strand. The house is shown to be fashioned around an axis leading to the garden; this is particularly early for such a close association of house and garden. The garden contained inter alia a tennis court, a bowling alley, archery butts and a 'snail mound' in one corner. It also shows a 'banqueting house' built at the rear of the main house; other documents suggest this had been constructed in 1560 and may have encroached on land owned by the Earl of Bedford. In 1565 Burleigh wrote to Bedford to purchase land for three 'banqueting houses', probably that on the back of the house and two smaller detached structures which we might well call pavilions. One parcel of land seems to have been 15x32 ft and at least one of the others 15x12ft. The highly-detailed plan of c.1565 shows that John Norden's 1593 plan of the Strand houses and their gardens was fairly accurate.

Ms Cathy Stoertz, recently retired after 35 years with the Department of Aerial Survey and Investigation at English Heritage, spoke on “Lost gardens and gardens which never were: stories from aerial photographs”. Until 1977 garden earthworks and moated sites had been the province of the field investigators and such sites had normally only been subject to aerial analysis when completely ploughed out. However aerial photos of earthworks remaining from such sites now received a good deal more analysis.

The core of the presentation was (inevitably) the aerial photographs themselves, including sites featured in the presentation by Paul Everson (including Stow Park, Quarrendon and Lyveden). Others were of sites where gardens had not previously been recognised, including at Linwood (Lincolnshire) and East Haddesey (North Yorks) where there was a late 13th C reference to the construction of a new house and garden. Ms Stoertz cautioned that not all water features should be assumed to be from decorative features; some were clearly wholly or primarily practical in origin.

At Maiden Bower (N. Yorks) aerial photos implied that an earlier motte and bailey had been incorporated in a garden around a manor house built in 1489. Features in Savernake Forest appeared to be more likely to be conduits for the supply of water over a distance than relicts of a garden. Many sites have multiple moats, not all surrounding houses, and aerial photography can often disclose which of these are undoubtedly associated with gardens or fishponds (illustrated by an example from Weston sub Edge (Gloucs) – we were already aware that the moat system at Woking Palace seems to be of differing ages and functions, with some of the moats surrounding only fishponds and gardens rather than the buildings of the manor house and later Palace).

Aerial photographs of Holdenby House and its gardens (Northants) provide dramatic confirmation of the scale of the works undertaken by Sir Christopher Hatton from 1575 to 1587 in order to impress Elizabeth I. He tore down the old manor house and built what was said to be the largest house in Elizabethan England, with 123 huge glass windows around two courtyards. He removed two entire villages to create a park and extensive gardens which included orchards, spinneys, terraces, knot gardens, ponds and compartments delineated by paling. In the event Elizabeth never visited Holdenby and Sir Christopher died childless in 1591. The huge house was reduced to a single wing in 1651 but aerial photographs show that most of the extensive landscaping of the park and garden has survived as earthworks.

Aerial photographs also show that at Campden House (Gloucs) earthworks remain of the terraced orchards, water gardens, sunken gardens and a Union Jack parterre created by Sir Baptist Hicks from 1613. The main house was burnt down in 1645 but the impressive East Banqueting House still stands among the earthworks.

Aerial photographs of Quarrendon (visited by Elizabeth I in 1592) show the water garden and a moated garden with broad raised platforms around it. These platforms resemble one within the moated ‘garden’ or ‘copse’ area at Woking Palace, so it may be that the broad bank at Woking is not from the 13th or 14th century as we have tended to assume, but rather from the 16th century (a possibility suggested a couple of years ago by a respected medievalist).

Ms Stoertz concluded with a presentation on Sudeley Castle (Gloucs), the earlier manor-house on the site and the complex water and garden features which still survive in the surrounding area. Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn visited in 1535, Edward VI in 1547 and Elizabeth I in 1574, 1576 and 1592 (on this last occasion for a ‘feast’ lasting 3 days to celebrate the defeat of the Spanish Armada).

Mr Spencer Smith, an investigator at RCHMW, then gave a presentation entitled “Parks, Gardens and Designed Landscapes of Wales and NW Shropshire” based on his current doctoral research.

Welsh poetry of the period 1350 to 1650 contains many examples of verse praising the homes of the local lords, including not only the castles and houses but also descriptions of the gardens and the landscape settings. The sudden appearance of the main dwelling in a setting that also contained water features such as moats or lakes seems particularly prized. There are documentary references to gardens at Whittington Castle (near Oswestry) dated to 1330 and 1378 and gardens have been dated at other high status sites near Oswestry to the 14thC by ditch fills. It is possible that there were gardens earlier at Harlech Castle (where there is a Garden Tower, although the garden would not have been visible from within the castle itself), Conwy Castle and Holt Castle (on the border of Denbighshire and Cheshire). There is documentary evidence for a garden enclosed by paling and thorns at Overton Castle (Flintshire) in 1301/2.

Mr Smith then spoke more generally about his research and the potential importance of studying comparative features in a variety of castles and other high-status dwellings, taking as an example the relative location of towers, watching chambers and receiving chambers at Llanberis Castle which is situated on a promontory in Lake Llanberis with outstanding views of the Snowdon massif.

Mr Magnus Alexander, an Archaeological Investigator at English Heritage, gave the final presentation which was entitled “Redesigning gardens for privacy: two new examples from 14th-century castles”.

His two examples were sites he had surveyed, firstly the royal castle of Hadleigh (Essex) in 2009 and the second Codnor Castle (Derbyshire) in 2007. At both sites the physical evidence was slight, especially at Hadleigh Castle which has suffered from major slumping down the hill since 1863 (when the curtain walls were still in good condition). Both sites have good views, with the presumed royal apartments on the south side at Hadleigh having outstanding views across the Thames Estuary. The survey suggests there was a terrace along the outer side of the south curtain wall but the evidence is not strong enough to suggest whether it had buildings on it. At Codnor the surviving earthworks had good views across a valley. Mr Alexander said that at both sites he would have difficulty in explaining how the possible terrace gardens from the late phases of these buildings were accessed from the private chambers and noted that at both sites the medieval garderobes discharged onto the terraces. We were not convinced from the evidence presented that there had been later terrace gardens accessed from the private apartments at either site but further research may confirm the thesis.

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6 February 2013 (from our notes taken on 9 June 2012)