

# ISLE OF WIGHT GARDENS TRUST



## SPRING NEWSLETTER 2020





Front cover image— Glasshouse at Laverstoke Mill, designed by Thomas Heatherwick for the Bombay Sapphire distillery. Wiki Commons image photographer Andrew Rabbott

Back cover image—Tulips in a vase with a caterpillar a snail and a fly on a plinth in a landscape. James Sillett 1764-1840 (image from Wiki commons)

# **ISLE OF WIGHT GARDENS TRUST**

Charitable Incorporated Organisation No. 1165283

Member of the Gardens Trust

## **Committee of Management (Trustees) 2018-2019**

John Brownscombe (Chairman), Moira Sibley (Secretary),  
Tim Woodcock (Treasurer), Vicky Basford (Research),  
Pamela England (Membership), Susan Dobbs,  
John Harrison, Lynn Roberts and Susie Wright.

## **Newsletter and Website Editor**

John Brownscombe

## **Conservation Committee**

Vicky Basford, John Brownscombe and James Harrison

## **Registered address**

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## Chairman's Foreword

Dear Members,

Welcome to our latest newsletter. The committee of trustees and I are pleased to be once again offer an interesting programme of events in 2020. The front cover shows a bold new glasshouse design at Laverstoke Mill picking up on the theme for this year's Kate Harwood talk. Sadly, we will finally be saying farewell to Patsy as our events lead as she and Jack are soon to leave the island. They will be missed!

We are making great strides in organising our extensive archive and inventory. New IT equipment and the use of online storage have made this possible, this allows us to secure our important records now and for the future.

We await further detail on the proposals for Norris Castle and Springhill which we have previously reported on. I attended a public meeting at East Cowes Town Council before Christmas where the owners agents presented their latest ideas. We await the planning application to comment in more detail, but remain on alert and retain our concerns over proposals. We will also be examining and commenting on the proposals for the new England Coast Path when they are published and the latest version of the draft Island Planning Strategy to ensure that the conservation and enhancement of our historic parks, gardens and designed landscapes are fully considered.

In this edition we are very pleased to include an informative article written by Susan Oldham based on her 2019 Gardens Trust Mavis Batey award winning essay.

Happy reading and here's to warmer (and drier) weather this spring.

Best wishes

*John*

John Brownscombe

Chairman, Isle of Wight Gardens Trust

## Tribute to Ron Smith

You may have seen the obituary to Ron Smith in the County Press and a later tribute by Ray Foulk. These covered Ron's very active life as a County Councillor and his earlier tireless work in organising the groundwork and logistics of the pop music festivals from 1968 to 1970.

Working with the planning department, and in particular our own retired trustee Geoff Cadman, he recognised the importance of our Parks and Gardens. He commissioned Vicky Basford in the late 1980s to record the Island's historic Parks and Gardens culminating in the publication still available today.

At the same time there was a move nationally to create county historic gardens Trusts with Hampshire taking the lead. This was followed by Dorset, Surrey, Devon, Cornwall and Avon. Ron formed a steering group of garden owners including myself, Vicky and representatives from the planning unit. Out of this was born the Isle of Wight Gardens Trust which launched with me as the first chairman at Northwood House. Now Isle of Wight residents, Lorna McRobie, who was landscape adviser with English Heritage and her partner Mike Dawson from Surrey County Council attended our launch.

Ron was my vice-chairman and remained so for many years, becoming interim chairman and then president, giving both myself and our events with his wife Audrey such loyal support. I was able to attend his memorial on January 20<sup>th</sup> and Vicky attended Audrey's in 2014.

Ron was born in Birmingham in 1924, his father was a local steel worker. Having met Audrey, a Londoner they lived in a caravan for the first few years of their marriage looking for casual work on farms or engineering but finally settled in the Island in 1957 where Audrey's parents now lived.

Later moving to Totland and starting an engineering business in Yarmouth the couple became well known in the community. After his great efforts with the music festivals his energy was directed to being agent for Steve Ross who became the first Liberal MP for several generations, and then latterly his own political career.

His attention was turned to assisting setting up the West Wight Swimming pool, (being the first indoor heated pool on the island) and there is no doubt without his tireless fundraising and persuasion the pool would not have been built, and after that he saved Dimbola, Julia Margaret Cameron's house from demolition and enabled its opening to the public.

Starting the Isle of Wight Gardens Trust must have been an easier task, obtaining an initial grant of £5000 from IWC to get the trust off the ground. Without his efforts we might never have been able to achieve all we have over the last thirty one years. He became an early supporter of the concept of having a National Association of Gardens Trusts ( now The Gardens Trust) and when it was eventually formed he became its first Treasurer – something I took on 12 years later.

Meanwhile he gave great support to Arts and Music including Quay Arts, even after he ceased to be a councillor . He became World Wildlife Fund local branch leader and a supporter of the formation of the Wight Nature Fund and Friends of the Earth.

Ron achieved the impossible and although he might sometimes have boasted about his achievements he never sought to make any financial gain from his commitment to the community.

Ron had a great presence and was tasked with calling out the raffle prizes at our Christmas parties and Audrey was a great one for helping with our fund raising plant stalls.

When Christine and I bought our own historic garden he gave me great encouragement in a quiet way commenting in particular on the wild flowers like foxgloves seeding in the beds, which encouraged me towards a more naturalistic style- something which is so much the norm now.

It is hard to imagine anyone ever contributing so much to art and conservation on the Isle of Wight as Ron did. As his professional adviser I became absorbed into many of his fundraising achievements.

It was an honour to work with you.

**John Harrison**

## Recharging the Battery

As people with an interest in gardens, we all know just how important manure is to create good quality growing conditions. You may or may not have heard of the National Poo Museum? Specialising in explaining, with humour, differences between animal species, the museum lifts the lid off what is often seen as a taboo subject.

Recently, they have relocated to Sandown Battery and are embarking on an ambitious project to restore the former defence structure to house the museum. Their plans include the reopening of the café and restoration of the public gardens around the site. With the help of Gerry Price the Coastal Gardener, they are looking to create a series of coastal wildlife gardens. I, for one, am looking forward to seeing this project progress and to the area regaining its importance as a public open space and garden for the ‘convenience’ of the local community and visitors to our Garden Isle.



Postcard showing the Sandown Battery Gardens in the mid C20th.

## SIR ROBERT WORSLEY'S 'REIGNING FOLLY':

### REDISCOVERING THE GARDEN AT APPULDURCOMBE HOUSE

In the early eighteenth century Sir Robert Worsley (1669–1747) laid out a garden to complement his new house at Appuldurcombe. Although the house has survived as a shell, nothing remains of the original garden. Yet by looking at evidence drawn primarily from the estate accounts, Sir Robert's Journal of his Grand Tour and his personal correspondence, it is possible to rediscover how the garden may have looked.

In 1687 Sir Robert Worsley set out on a Grand Tour. Returning two years later, he married Frances Thynne, daughter of Lord Weymouth of Longleat House. Sir Robert decided to replace the outdated Tudor house and garden he had inherited at Appuldurcombe with a fashionable new English Baroque house, arguably designed by John James, a young architect who shared Sir Robert's interest in gardening.

Appuldurcombe House was built of local 'Ventnor Green' stone and dressed with Portland stone. It was a laborious process which stretched Sir Robert financially, and in 1711 he decided to leave the house unfinished.



Appuldurcombe House and Park - Brannon 1825

Nevertheless, he declared himself 'much pleased with the Building' which appeared in Colen Campbell's book of prestigious country seats, *Vitruvius Britannicus*.

As an enthusiastic gardener and keen, no doubt, not to overspend, it is likely that Sir Robert designed the new garden himself, possibly with guidance from his architect. There is little factual evidence of how the garden was laid out, although a 1769 map of the Island by surveyor John Andrews shows a park with tree-lined avenues and an enclosed formal garden with rectangular flower beds.

The estate accounts offer a glimpse into the construction of the garden. In 1702 a wall was made around the ‘best garden’, and hedges were laid to protect young plants. An upper garden with a summerhouse was built, and later a walled north garden and an upper terrace. In the 1720s the first kitchen garden was built and there was a ‘new inclosed garden’ which required hedging and ditching. In 1728–29 four marble stones were supplied, together with brick, lime and ‘two hundred weight of Plaister of Parris’ to make a ‘bason’ for the garden. And in 1731 a second kitchen garden was made.

The accounts also provide details of the upkeep of the garden, disclosing a busy schedule of tasks which included ‘taking moles’ and ‘setting beans’. Goody Woodnutt was paid for weeding and ‘picking stone in the North gardens’. Work sometimes involved entire families—in 1727 John Parker, his wife and children spent three weeks haymaking.



Appuldurcombe House and Inner Park—Ackerman 1826

From what we know of Sir Robert Worsley himself, it is possible to imagine the sort of garden he may have designed. The journal of his Grand Tour describes the gardens he visited with their walks, hedges and arbours. He admired statues, such as the ‘very fine Copper Statue of Hercules killing the Hydra’ at Kalber near Stockholm. He enjoyed water features, especially those at Villa Aldobrandini at Frascati with their ‘vast spout of water that comes up with a great force and makes a noise like a kettledrum’. Memories of these distinguished gardens would have been fresh in Sir Robert’s mind when he returned to England to design his own.

Sir Robert was no doubt also inspired by his father-in-law’s Longleat garden, recently updated by top designer George London and embellished with statues by the sculptor Cavalier David. Following the shipwreck of the *Mary* in Chale Bay, Sir Robert invited Cavalier David to Appuldurcombe where he created an ‘Alexander Bust’ from the statue of a sibyl salvaged from the *Mary*’s cargo of marble.

Sir Robert was passionate about gardening. Lady Worsley referred to him being ‘perpetually’ in his garden. And Sir Robert told his brother, Henry, that he was impatient to return to the Island because ‘I have a great deal of planting to see done which is at present my reigning folly’. As envoy to Portugal, Henry was able to send him plants such as ‘Azores Jessamy’ (*Jasminum azoricum*). Sir Robert was excited that this ‘very scarce Plant in England’ had survived and was about to flower. But he declined Henry’s offer of lemon trees, saying ‘I am for no plants that will require fire in my Green House’. He was, nevertheless, an enthusiastic fruit grower, raising melons from Italian seed for the best size and flavour.

In 1734, at the age of sixty-five, Sir Robert remained busy in his garden, planting a tall yew hedge and being entertained by ‘a great harmony of blackbirds and thrushes’. Gardening was still his ‘reigning folly’.

#### PRINCIPAL SOURCES

*Appuldurcombe House* by L.O.J. Boynton

Lindsay Boynton Archive, held at Hartley Library, University of Southampton  
Stewards Accounts, held at Isle of Wight County Records Office.

Sir Robert Worsley’s *Journal* of his Grand Tour, held at Lincolnshire Archives

Our thanks to Susan Oldham for writing this article for the newsletter based on her essay which was the winner of The Gardens Trust Mavis Batey Essay Prize in 2019. The full article can be accessed on the internet using this link <https://tinyurl.com/tvzteqr>

## **Historical Association honours Johanna Jones**

Johanna Jones was for many years a member of the Isle of Wight Gardens Trust and members will be pleased to hear that the Historical Association has recognised her contribution to historical research and education by awarding her an Honorary Fellowship. Johanna's research interests and publications have been wide-ranging. She gained her M Phil from the University of Southampton in 1982 with a thesis on 'The Administration of the Poor in the Isle of Wight 1771-1836'. In collaboration with her husband Dr Jack Jones she wrote 'The Isle of Wight: An Illustrated History' (1987). Her research into the Swainston Manor Survey of 1630 was published in the Isle of Wight Natural History & Archaeological Society Proceedings (1991 & 2003) and represents a major contribution to Island landscape history. She ventured into the field of garden history in her article 'Thirteenth century gardens in Carisbrooke Castle', also published in the Proceedings (1989). A short resumé of this article appeared in Issue No.4 of the Isle of Wight Gardens Trust Newsletter for September 1990. The architectural history of the Isle of Wight has been another research interest, reflected in her book 'Castles to Cottages: The Story of Isle of Wight Houses' (2000). More recently, Johanna has been researching the life of Isabella de Fortibus, the last quasi-independent ruler of the Isle of Wight.

Johanna has been significantly involved in several organisations, notably the Isle of Wight Branch of the Historical Association, to which she belonged for many years. She was a long-term tutor for the Workers Educational Association, inspiring many students with her courses on local social history, landscape history and architectural history. As President of the Isle of Wight Natural History and Archaeological Society from 2008-2010 Johanna was responsible for organising an exhibition at the Minster Church of St Thomas, Newport in 2009 celebrating the centenary of Frank Morey's 'Guide to the Natural History of the Isle of Wight', published in 1909.

On Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> January I was delighted to attend a short ceremony where Johanna was presented with a framed certificate giving details of her Honorary Fellowship of the Historical Association. The award was presented by Ken Hicks, President of the Isle of Wight Branch of the Association. Also present were Vivian Roberts (Chairman), Terence Blunden (Secretary) and Gillian Burnett (Treasurer).

**Vicky Basford**

## EVENTS PROGRAMME

### **Glasshouses through the ages' - Kate Harwood Talk**

**Tuesday 24th March 2020 10:00am**

Kate Harwood has agreed to return to talk about glasshouses through the ages. Those who have joined us for one of Kate's previous talks will know how knowledgeable she is as an experienced lecturer in garden history, planning and conservation. As always, her illustrated talk promises to be both informative and entertaining.

10:00am      Tea & Coffee

10:30am      Talk '**Glasshouses through the ages'**

12:30pm      Lunch

2:00pm      Guided walk around Northwood Park

Northwood House, Ward Avenue, Cowes, Isle of Wight. PO31 8AZ

**£25.00** to include lunch, tea and coffee.

Please contact Pamela England to book.

Email [pamelanpaul@icloud.com](mailto:pamelanpaul@icloud.com) or telephone 01983 752194 or fill in and return the enclosed booking form.

### **Annual General Meeting and Garden Visits**

**Wednesday 10th June 2020 2:30pm**

Bembridge Sailing Club, Embankment Road, Bembridge. PO35 5NR.

Plenty of parking in the car park opposite the Club House next to Spinaker Chandlery. Tea and coffee will be available at £1.50 per person

2:30pm      AGM

Before the AGM some of us will be meeting from 12:30pm at The Pilot Boat Inn for a light lunch (payable locally), please join us if you wish. After the AGM there is an opportunity to visit the private gardens at Tyne Hall (courtesy of Mr & Mrs Grimaldi) and East Cliff (courtesy of Sir Ian and Lady Cheshire). Parking for this will be available in the large field adjacent to Tyne Hall. To help us with logistics, please let Moira know if you are able to come. [Moira.iwgt@outlook.com](mailto:Moira.iwgt@outlook.com) or telephone 07759971074

## **Isle of Wight Walking Festival Walk Saturday 9th May**

### **Gardens and Landscapes of West Ryde**

An Isle of Wight Gardens Trust three-hour guided walk. Starting at 1.30 pm from Lind Place car park, off Lind Street, Ryde, PO33 2NQ (SZ 58959258).

Part of the Isle of Wight Walking Festival 2020 this walk will show how Ryde developed from farmland, woodland and commons into the largest town on the Island and how it coped with the increase of inhabitants and with the large number of burials.

The walk will start at St Thomas church. Built in 1719 by Thomas Player, the main Ryde landowner, St Thomas was a privately-owned Anglican chapel in a rural location to serve the then two small villages: the fishing village of Lower Ryde and the hilltop farming community of Upper Ryde. With the growth in Ryde's popularity as a seaside resort for holidays, residence and retirement, starting in 1780, Thomas Player's son William, laid out what is now Union Street to link the two villages. St Thomas at the heart of the expansion was soon too small and was rebuilt in 1827. Three more Anglican churches were built in the 1840s and in 1872 All Saints was consecrated as the new main parish church – a sign of the prosperity and pride of what had become a considerable town.

St Thomas church has a churchyard, but with the growth of Ryde in the 19<sup>th</sup> century this and the few other churchyards soon became overcrowded. In 1840 William Player's son George donated land for a burial ground. Ryde Cemetery opened in 1842. It is the oldest municipal cemetery on the Island. The prosperity of many local trades people and businessmen can be seen from the considerable number of imposing and elaborate stone memorials. Some of the wealthiest families purchased sufficient space for the construction of family vaults. The Cemetery was extended in 1862 when two central chapels were built. The existing chapel was converted to a mortuary and a lodge was also built. The Cemetery was extended again in 1881 taking the area to its present extent of 12 acres. Ryde Cemetery is now home to a huge variety of plants, some planted, but many self-seeded. Some of the trees are more than 150 years old surviving from the original planting scheme. The Isle of Wight Gardens Trust surveyed all the mature trees in the Cemetery in 1999.

In addition to the building of churches and the Cemetery the walk will also explore how houses and gardens, schools, parks and open spaces were developed for the needs of the increased number of residents. In the 20<sup>th</sup> C much of the increased population was housed by urban extension to the west of Ryde. Some of this area shows how existing natural features such as streams, woodland and trees have been carefully incorporated into the new development. This includes some of the oldest trees on the Island.

This will be a circular walk at easy pace on mostly good even surfaces. It will be possible to take a shortened route if wanted. A donation is requested to the Isle of Wight Gardens Trust.

For further details please contact walk leader Mike Dawson:

email: [mike.dawson@mcrobie.org.uk](mailto:mike.dawson@mcrobie.org.uk) phone : 07794173865

## Visit to Folly Farm

**Thursday 18th June 2020**

The Isle of Wight Gardens Trust have been offered a guided visit to Folly Farm through Simon Goodenough the Estate Manager and former curator of Ventnor Botanic Gardens.

Folly Farm at Sulhampstead, near Reading was one of the finest collaborations between Edwin Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll. Much had been lost when Jonathan and Jennifer Oppenheimer acquired it for their family home a decade ago. Together with the Lutyens Trust, Jennifer set about researching the C17th house history and regenerating the gardens and landscape setting. A 'dream team' of architects and garden design including Dan Pearson was assembled, and managed by Simon Goodenough.

Sadly Jennifer died May 2017 but the work continues as a tribute to her vision and energy. On a few special occasions when the family are away the estate is open to small groups of 30 with donations to Perennial Gardeners Royal Benevolent Society

### TRAVEL

This will be in two 16 seater mini buses from the Wight Minibus Company One starting from Shanklin one from Chale crossing on Red Funnel Ferry. Pick up points and times will be confirmed nearer the time.  
9.30am East Cowes to Southampton Return 7.15pm Southampton to East Cowes (depending on traffic)

### LUNCH

The Spring Inn at Sulhampstead will provide a light lunch for us before the 1.00pm visit to Folly Farm with guided tour and afternoon tea. We depart Folly Farm 4.30pm.

### COST

£65.00 to include all transport costs, lunch, entrance to Folly Farm with donation to "Perennial" and tea.

### RESERVATION

We are limited to 30 places. Booking is on a first come first served basis. **£65.00** is required by **MAY 1st 2020**. Any spare places after this date will be offered to our friends at Ventnor Botanic Gardens, as their day in July is fully booked.

Please complete the enclosed booking form. Further enquiries to Susan Dobbs. Email [Sk.dobbs@icloud.com](mailto:Sk.dobbs@icloud.com) Telephone:01983 612132.

## **Advanced notice of planned trip to visit Cornish gardens in 2021.**

We are planning a trip to Cornwall at the end of March or Mid April 2021, visiting six or seven gardens including gardens enroute in Dorset and Devon.

This will be a three night trip, particularly focusing on gardens which are not always open to the general public, trying to catch the spring Magnolias and Camelias. These will include Boconnoc and Caerhays Castle, where we have contacts. The cost will be in the region of £450 per person to include all travel and accommodation.

If you are interested in joining us please let John Harrison or Susan Dobbs know and do bring friends. Please also let us know if you would be happy to share rooms or prefer a single room. Expression of interest by 31st May 2020 please. Booking will be required by 31st October 2020 and full payment by 31st December 2020.

Susan Dobbs email: [sk.dobbs@icloud.com](mailto:sk.dobbs@icloud.com) Tel: 01983 612132

John Harrison email: [johnandchristine@northcourt.info](mailto:johnandchristine@northcourt.info) Tel: 01983 740415

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## **The value of shelterbelts**

Writing in the midst of the worst storms they say for this decade reminds me of the importance of shelterbelts.

In making any large garden the first task would have been to create the shelterbelt. Designed to slow down the wind rather than block out the wind they were most important for gardens in the southwest where salt laden winds would destroy many new shoots and flowers.

These vital shelterbelts also provided the necessary dappled shade to allow the woodland loving camelias to flourish, to replicate conditions in the Himalayan foothills. Evergreen oaks, Cupressus macrocarpa and Pines would have been the preferred trees, supplemented by beech and other deciduous varieties in less maritime locations.

Thinking about our proposed visit to Cornwall next year I am reminded particularly of the shelterbelts at the great gardens of Caerhays Castle whose early magnolias would be ruined in these gales. Normally the National Collection of Magnolia would start flowering in mid-February when the early Cambellii varieties come into bloom, which is when Cornwall declares Spring has arrived.



Hooker, Joseph Dalton; Cathcart, John Fergusson; Fitch, Walter Hood: Illustrations of Himalayan plants

This year I suspect they are already showing colour and will be susceptible to these strong winds and the cold to come but a shelterbelt of pines (probably Monterey) provides the valuable protection from the south-west and the camellias have their own shelterbelts of laurel grown 20 feet high. Here the most famous of Camellias Donation and other Williamsii hybrids were first bred.

Another vital shelterbelt I remember is at Tresco, which suffered substantial damage some 20 years ago, without which little above six foot could grow.



Caerhays Castle

Caerhays has an important association with the Island as it is one of two surviving Castles built by John Nash. His own Castle at East Cowes sadly with many others were demolished as too costly to maintain and built to look at rather than live in. Caerhays has a commanding position over the Porthulney beach and looking back may remind you of how it looked as Manderley in the classic Rebecca film.

Caerhays opens on February 14<sup>th</sup> to capture the Magnolias. I would expect ours at Northcourt to be 3 weeks behind the Cornish ones, and would expect Ventnor Botanic Gardens to be about 10 days behind then, but I have already seen a glimpse of colour in ours-oh dear what climate change is doing! We have our garden open on April 5<sup>th</sup> and we had hoped the magnolias would still be out and camellias at their best, but if they are over, we will instead feature our many trees and early shrubs. We try to be like a Cornish garden, but we lack the summer rainfall and protection from those cold north east winds, but we are wonderfully sheltered from these damaging storms we are having

Do come and visit us at Northcourt on the afternoon of Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> April for our NGS garden opening and sign up your interest in visiting the great gardens of Cornwall.

**John Harrison** February 10<sup>th</sup> 2020. Northcourt, Shorwell.

### **Discounted membership of The Gardens Trust**

The Gardens Trust are offering a concessionary membership rate of £25 to all existing members of County Gardens Trust (like ourselves). This is a significant discount from their usual rate of £35 single and £43 joint membership fees.

The Gardens Trust is the only UK national charity dedicated to protecting and conserving our heritage of designed landscapes at a national level. They campaign, research, undertake conservation work, and encourage public appreciation and involvement working closely with the County Gardens Trusts to do so.

Please consider becoming a member and helping support their excellent work. [www.thegardenstrust.org/support-us/](http://www.thegardenstrust.org/support-us/)

