

THE POTTING SHED

 WALLED KITCHEN GARDEN *network* MAGAZINE

ISSUE ONE • JUNE 2006

Come into The Potting Shed!

Welcome to the first Newsletter from the Walled Kitchen Garden Network, an alternative 'virtual' forum. We hope to make this a regular feature, but we would like to ask for your input for future editions. If you have any news, events, recent research, ideas or tips that you would like to share, we would be happy to hear from you. Please send your copy, preferably no more than 500 words, (no images I'm afraid) to: f.grant@walledgardens.net

Network News

We are pleased that Adam Hunt has joined the Network team as a volunteer. Adam is an experienced project manager and fund raiser, and is currently project manager for the Walled Garden at Cowdray, so he will be able to advise on planning, funding, project management, etc. adamhunt@walledgardens.net

The list of walled gardens to visit is now up on the website on the 'Garden Finder' page. There are over 90 entries, however we do not claim that this is a complete list, so if you know of any gardens that you think should be included (they should be accessible to the public) please let us know.



WKGN FORUM – HELIGAN

21st October 2006

Over the past few years the WKGN has witnessed a surge of renewed interest in walled kitchen gardens. There are now many successful examples of restored and working kitchen gardens, a fact recognized by John Harris, the eminent architectural historian, when he writes that 'the restoration of redundant kitchen gardens throughout Britain has been a success story'.

So it is appropriate that this year the 2006 Forum will be held at Heligan, where the owners were among the first to appreciate the potential of their derelict kitchen gardens. These have been meticulously restored to create a successful and thriving visitor attraction.

Speakers at the Forum will be Susan Campbell, chair of WKGN, historian and author; Tom Petherick, Independent Consultant and early member of the Heligan team, Philip McMillan-Browse, Horticultural Consultant for Heligan and Peter

Thoday, Horticultural Consultant specializing in historic gardens.

In the afternoon there will be a choice of guided tours of the gardens led by the gardeners and the speakers. As usual this will be an all day event. Tickets will cost £50 to include lunch, tea/coffee and admission and tour of the gardens. Note that this year we are able to offer concessions to students and community organisations.

More information and booking form can be found on our 'Events' page.

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NEWS & EVENTS

Lydiard Park

A major restoration is taking place at Lydiard Park near Swindon, once home of the Bolingbroke family. A £3 million grant from the HLF has enabled present owners, Swindon Borough Council to begin restoration of this important historic landscape, which includes the 18th century walled garden. Unusually this will be recreated as an ornamental fruit and flower garden, in the Anglo-Dutch style, which is believed to be in keeping with Lady Bolingbroke's tastes. The project is due for completion in 2008. Head Gardener Nick Burton (previously from Kelmarsh Hall) will lead a guided tour of the garden on Wednesday, the 26th July, at 2pm. For more information visit their website: www.lydiardpark.org.uk

Shugborough Hall

The National Trust is restoring the walled kitchen garden at Shugborough Hall, near Stafford. The intention is to create a working garden that is historically accurate to 1805, the date when the garden was built. Old varieties of fruit and vegetables appropriate for that date will be grown, and for even greater authenticity, the gardeners will dress in period costume, using replica tools and horticultural techniques of the period! Now open to the public.
Tel: 01889 881388 www.shugborough.org.uk

Chiswick House

The Chiswick House Kitchen Garden project started in 2005, when a group of volunteers was given the key to the neglected walled garden created by Sir Stephen Fox in 1682. Partially used as a council storage nursery and overgrown

with saplings, brambles, hemlock and bindweed, the garden lies behind the early 19th century conservatory that was added to the Chiswick House estate in 1812. The Kitchen Garden Association is reviving the gardens to a place of productivity and beauty in association with schoolchildren who come to dig, plant and eat their own-grown produce as part of their curricular activities. Over 800 child sessions have so far been held and the project is booked up to capacity. Earlier this year a large Heritage Lottery Fund regeneration grant threatened to turn half of the walled garden into a car park, but negotiations are currently under way to ensure the continuation of the project and a gentler approach to solving the problems of overflow car parking for fund-raising activities within the grounds. The next Open Days are on Sundays 7 May, 18 June and 16 July, 1-5pm. For more information, or to be added to the mailing list, see www.kitchengarden.org.uk

Croome Court

The owner of Croome Court, Worcestershire is seeking planning permission to build 5 bungalows in one half of the Grade II listed 7.5 acre walled kitchen garden. The landscape and gardens are of particular significance since they were Capability Brown's first commission. The National Trust, who own the surrounding parkland which they are in the process of restoring, have made an offer of £2.25 million for the property, which has been dismissed by Mr Bilton, the owner, as "derisory". The other half of the walled garden is also in private ownership and is being lovingly restored by its enthusiastic owners, Mr and Mrs Cronin. See The Daily Telegraph, April:22nd 06



Chiswick House



Lydiard Park



Croome Court

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FEATURE

The Kitchen Garden at Downing Hall

by J P D Williams

Downing Hall, in the parish of Whitford, Flintshire, was built by the Pennant family c.1624. In the later 1760s their most famous son, naturalist and travel writer Thomas Pennant (1726-1798), used profits from lead mining to refurbish the house, removing the stables a short distance to the south. The walled kitchen garden, just beyond these new stables, was probably constructed around this time (fig-1).

In a local landscape characterised by steep dingles, relatively flat land is rare; that restriction may account for the garden's irregular shape and relatively short south-facing wall, but even so it slopes significantly east to west. Bricks for the walls were probably burnt on the estate, perhaps in an area nearby dubbed 'the brickfield'. Some of the coping stones appear to be of fireclay, perhaps from a local brickworks supplying the area's furnaces. Thomas had an old-fashioned solid-roofed greenhouse in the ornamental grounds, but the first recorded productive glasshouse was built for his son David (1763-1841), a member of the Horticultural Society, in 1806-7. His father's friend Samuel Vernon of Chester sent young vines for 'your new building' including 'sweetwater grapes', 'Hamburgh Grapes' and 'St. Peter's Grape' to be put 'into a larger Pot immediately' and 'sunk into the Back [Pit]'. Vines were also supplied by nurseryman James Hunter of the Cottage, Hockley near Birmingham; raised from bud rather than by layering, these seem to have failed. Discontinuities in the brickwork of the north wall hint that David added further glasshouses. Its western section was heated by a flue with an unusual, sloping top (fig-2); by 1871 this flue

had been incorporated into a lean-to glasshouse, but the roofline partially obscured a window in the western wall, indicating it was a later addition (fig-3).

This window relates to a ruined structure outside the NW corner, perhaps a gardener's cottage or, given its small size, office. In 1853, on the death of David's granddaughter Louisa, Downing passed to her widower, Rudolph Feilding, later Earl of Denbigh. In 1858 Rudolph, having remarried, substantially enlarged the Hall. It was probably around this time that the lean-to glasshouses were re-built in their final form, using machine-pressed bricks and a uniform design with wide piers to the front wall (fig-4).

To maintain a level through the central range of three vineries their base was raised almost 2m at its western end. The first series OS map of 1871 shows six glass structures within the kitchen garden and a further two in the frameyard to the north (fig-1). One of the most interesting features of the garden is a curved projection in the north-east corner. This contained a large north and west facing rockery, probably a hardy fernery. A door from this leads to a sunken path along the

fig1

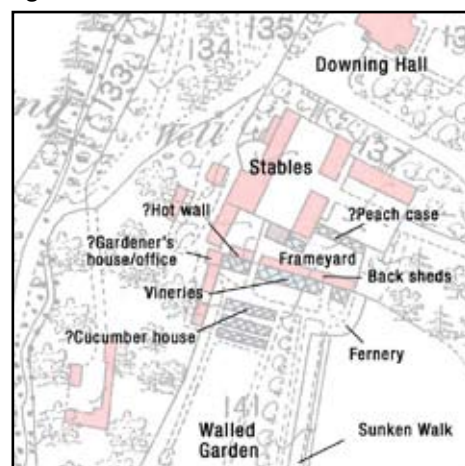


fig2

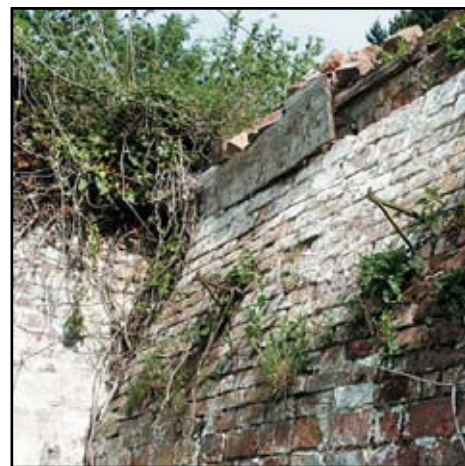


fig3



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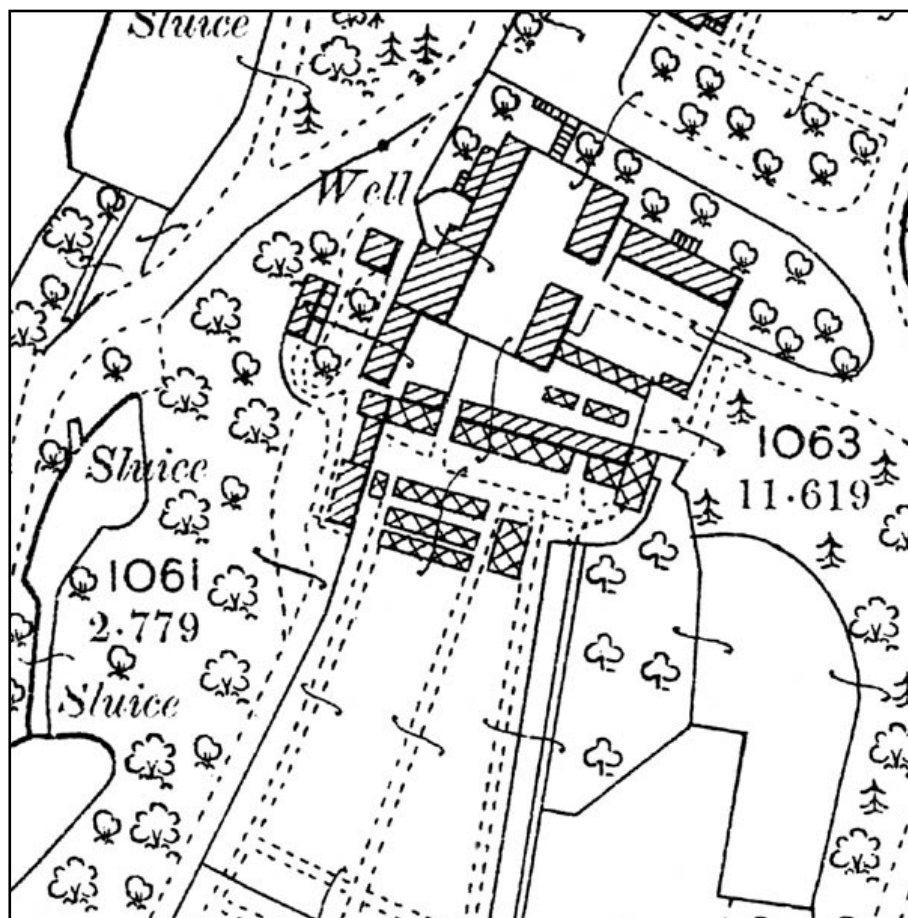
fig4



fig6



fig5



outside of the east wall; this would have provided an attractive 'visitor route' to the orchard beyond, with the option of a circuit returning down the centre of the garden.

From 1869, except for one brief period, Feilding moved back to his Warwickshire seat, Newnham Paddox. Downing was let as a sporting retreat to tenants including glassmaker William Pilkington, industrialist Thomas Storey and sugar magnate William Henry Tate. The kitchen garden continued to develop however; the 1899 OS map shows two new span-roofed glasshouses within the garden (one obscuring part of the fernery), and changes in the frameyard (fig-5).

Downing was offered for sale in 1920 with 'Two Acres of deep fertile soil planted with Bush, Standard and Espalier Fruit Trees', a 'Potting House, Fruit Room, Pot Store, Rhubarb Forcing House, Gardeners' Room, Bothy and

Three Stoke Holes ... and a Boiler House'. Only one back shed survives, with two storeys it was perhaps the gardener's room and bothy (fig-6).

The glasshouses were recorded as: GREENHOUSE, 25 ft. by 16 ft., heated. Range of THREE VINERIES, 68 ft. by 16 ft 6 in., heated. PEACH HOUSE, 20 ft. by 15 ft., heated. GREEN HOUSE, 34 ft. by 20 ft., heated. PEACH HOUSE, 34 ft. by 20 ft., heated. CUCUMBER HOUSE, 34 ft. 9 in. by 12 ft., heated. Two Forcing Pits, and one Cool Pit.

Some of these can be identified on the OS maps, while others are less clear. Some structures, notably the long, thin glasshouse in the frameyard (perhaps a peach case, ventilation holes in the back wall survive) seem to be unlisted.

The Hall burned down in 1922 and the ruins were demolished in 1953. Although the house was recorded photographically, no record was made of the kitchen garden; no photographs

of the garden in its heyday have come to light. During the following decades nearly all glass, wood and metalwork was removed, leaving only decaying glasshouse bases. In the 1990s the remaining estate was divided and the walled garden sold off with planning permission for a dwelling. Construction is likely to start in 2006; of modernist design, using a three-quarter span roof, the house will occupy the site of the central vinery range.

There is no public access to Downing kitchen gardens, although public footpaths through other parts of the estate make attractive walking and are included in a series of waymarked 'Pennant Walks'.

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Tatton Talk – From the kitchen garden

A VOLUNTEER'S VIEW by Marion Prescott

Today I made some curtains. Not quite as riveting an opening sentence as "last night I dreamed of Manderley", but all will be explained. First– a bit of background.

The project for the recreation of the Victorian/Edwardian walled kitchen garden at Tatton Park, Knutsford, Cheshire, started some five years ago, and I was fortunate to be involved right from the start, in the capacity of skilled volunteer, as I had just "retired" from a career as a professional horticulturist.

The kitchen garden team started with a blank canvas, and together with the archaeologist, the architect, and the contractors, gradually started to lay out the skeleton of the garden. The genius loci approved.

The project attracted the attention of a few enthusiastic gardeners and allotment holders after the garden began to take shape, and now having worked together for several years, the Tuesday volunteer crew – 15 strong in full muster – make a very productive and hardworking team, working all through the year, and in all weathers, thus achieving much.

There are keen volunteers on Wednesday and Thursday, and although seasonal, make a good contribution to the manpower needed to keep the kitchen garden and orchard up to speed. The end of

the 2005 season was the first time we managed to be up to date with the jobs!

This winter has been more of a traditional one, and although the soil here is a sandy loam, and the walls offer some degree of protection, the frosts have been keenly felt. This is where the curtains come in. Fleece curtains – to protect the plum blossom on the north wall of the orchard. The tall walls are wired for training the plums in fan shape, so it was a fairly simple matter to staple the fleece onto canes top and bottom of the drop, and send Simon (the gaffer) up the ladder to fix the canes to the wires. (He's a young chap, and I'm getting on a bit.)

Finally, for a superb end-note (which is a one-off) one set of the two husband and wife teams of Tuesday volunteers recently celebrated their fortieth wedding anniversary, and having saved up their shared petrol expenses over the last few years, commissioned a pair of very fine, craftsman-made iron gates which have now been installed between the orchard and the kitchen garden, thus providing the missing link between the two areas. The gates incorporate acorns for the National Trust, and design elements from the pair of iron gates at the other end of the kitchen garden. The wooden half-gate which previously filled the gap has been recycled as a compost bin lid.

Nothing wrong with us oldies! by Ray Warner

I am often asked about the benefit it is of growing heritage vegetable varieties rather than modern F1 types. My answer is simple, if a variety has been grown for 50 years or more, it must have something going for it; and in most cases it will be flavour. Next time you eat a basic supermarket Tomato, consider what it actually tastes of, and then think back to those you ate 20 or 30 years ago, which would usually have come from the garden rather than the shops. Older varieties like Harbinger, Golden Sunrise and Pink Brandy-wine actually taste of Tomato and generally speaking have thinner skins. Yes they may take longer to ripen but then who wants to go to the time and effort of growing "Supermarket" Tomatoes. Especially when you see signs about Tomatoes being "specially grown for taste" (what else would they have been grown for?)

Head-gardeners jobs depended on them producing a good selection of fresh vegetables on a daily basis, and varieties came to be developed which ensured that this could happen; passed on between gardeners they eventually became commercially available. One of our best selling varieties is the "Fat Lazy Blonde" lettuce; the name is the anglicized form of "Grosse Blonde Paresseuse". Fat, because it is a large, Lazy since it does not run to seed in hot weather and Blonde for the reason that the central leaves are a pleasing greeny-gold. So, nothing to do with sexism, but a practical name for a practical lettuce! F1 hybrids were developed to produce a crop that matures all at once, whereas most gardeners want to be able to pick a small amount daily, rather than deal with pounds of produce; this perhaps suits the commercial grower and the supermarket, so therefore has its place, but not, I suggest, in the gardens of those of us who "grow their own."