

HANDOUT 4

Researching Historic Designed Landscapes for Local Listing

Historic Landscape Project – Southeast



SITE SURVEY AND SITE RECORDING

SITE SURVEY

Prior to attending a site to carry out a survey, there are various risk factors and basic requirements that you should take into account. A good practical guide to preparing yourself for fieldwork can be found in the Parks & Gardens UK Volunteer Training Manual, Section 2.10. This can be found at www.parksandgardens.ac.uk via the right hand menu, under 'Research and Recording', pages 39-41 and is reproduced below.

2.10 MAKING A SITE SURVEY

Alongside the documentary research, it is important to make a physical survey and analysis of the site itself, to establish what actually happened in a garden and the extent of its remains.

Carrying out a site survey can be a challenging process, as well as physically demanding. We suggest that you work with a partner at this stage, if possible, particularly if you are new to garden history research.

2.10.1 Preparation

- Make contact in writing with the owner of a garden or his representative to explain what you wish to do and gain agreement for recording the park or garden (see Part Four - Forms for sample permission letters and consent forms).
- Some owners are reluctant to let outside bodies record details of their site as they are suspicious of interference. You can reassure them by giving examples of why it is important to record a garden for future reference. For instance to identify important features of the site, or to help protect the site in future if it is threatened with unwelcome development.
- Set a firm date for your visit and if possible arrange to meet the owner or his representative.
- Conduct a preliminary risk assessment regarding your visit to the property.
- Ensure that you have public liability insurance which covers you for any accidents while on site. This may be available through the organisation you are representing, or may have to be taken out personally. Some garden owners may require proof of insurance cover before agreeing to a site visit.
- Ensure you are properly equipped and dressed for work on site. Appropriate wear may include wellington boots or other sturdy footwear and a waterproof jacket. Equipment should include site maps, clipboard, pens and pencils, retractable tape measure, compass, a tree identification guide, recording forms (see Part Four - Forms and section 7.5 Sample research and recording forms), notebook, camera and mobile phone. For detailed recordings, a 15m or 30m tape measure may be necessary.
- Take enough food and drink to keep you going through the day.

2.10.2 On-site practice

- Make yourself known on arrival.
- Treat all those encountered on the site with tact and politeness.
- Ask permission before taking photographs, as there may be some concern about photographing certain features, such as statuary, for security reasons.
- Respect any requests regarding confidentiality that owners may have, and note all requests carefully.

- Do not offer any advice to the owner or a member of his staff at any time as you will have no cover for professional indemnity regarding faulty advice that may cause the owner consequential financial loss.
- Pay due attention to health and safety risks (see below).
- Take particular care when researching in isolated places. Always inform somebody of your whereabouts and carry a mobile phone.

2.10.3 Health and safety

Try to conduct some form of risk assessment before making a visit to a property. This may be a fairly simple exercise but some thought needs to go into it.

Questions to ask include:

- Will the journey to the location present any obvious problems?
- Are weather conditions suitable?
- Will I need to enter buildings on the site or can the recording be conducted externally?
- Will I be accompanied?
- Is there a need for particular clothing or equipment, such as hard hats, gloves, sturdy boots, a torch, or binoculars?
- Is the site derelict or unused? If so:
 - Are services disconnected?
 - Is the site contaminated?
 - Are floors, stairs and roofs stable?

Ensure tetanus injections are up to date and carry your tetanus record card with you. Always tell someone where you are going and when you will be due back. Carry a mobile phone. Do not travel when tired or when conditions are unsuitable.

During the visit, take extra care to avoid potential hazards. If you are in any doubt as to the safety of the site, please do not continue the visit.

- Re-evaluate your original risk assessment for any additional factors.
- Look out for potential hazards such as uneven paths, crumbling walls, derelict buildings, banks or inclines and areas of water.
- Do not enter property or buildings that may be unsafe.
- Do not let examination of the garden distract you from looking where you are going or what is underfoot.
- Overgrown ground should be treated with care, as undergrowth may conceal hazards such as holes in the ground or sharp objects.
- Watch out for hazardous plants, such as giant hogweed or toxic blue green algae.
- Insects and wildlife can also be dangerous, such as wasps' nests and snakes.
- Record any hazards you encounter and keep this with the recording form, as well as marking hazards on a site survey.

Once your visit is complete, tell people that you are leaving the site.

GUIDANCE ON SITE RECORDING

Having a systematic approach to preparing for and recording your site visit will help ensure that you get the most out of your fieldwork, particularly important for private sites that you might only be able to visit once or can only access via public footpaths. The Parks & Gardens UK Volunteer Training Manual gives useful guidance in Section 2.11. This can be found at

www.parksandgardens.ac.uk via the right hand menu, under 'Research and Recording', pages 41-51 and is reproduced below.

2.11 SITE RECORDING AND ANALYSIS

There are three aspects of analysing and interpreting the material gathered during a site survey. These are:

- A prior examination of all the documentary and visual sources that you have gathered
- A knowledge of the main trends in garden history
- Field experience gained as you examine other parks and gardens.

Careful inspection of a site can provide vital evidence about its history and development. It is important to compare the information you have gathered through research with the surviving features of the site.

Where possible, take copies of old maps, plans and illustrations with you on a site inspection. Make a note in advance of specific questions that you want to answer. For instance: is a particular feature shown on an old map still there, or are there any traces of it?

Parks and gardens generally develop as a series of additions or alterations to a layout. Not all phases will necessarily be of equal significance. Indeed, one or two key phases will often be of overriding importance.

In some cases the value of the place may be the fact that there is evidence of a series of phases, each or several of which may be of interest in themselves.

Additions or alterations to key phases, depending on their nature and extent, can (but do not necessarily) diminish the place's value. On the other hand, parks and gardens that are the result of one phase alone can be of particular interest for that reason.

2.11.1 Making a site plan

A sketched site plan, drawn approximately to scale, showing the historical boundaries of the site, and indicating its main features, is a very useful tool. Current maps are not always up to date in what they show, and having a plan will make your ultimate description of the site far easier to write.

A sketch plan can be made by annotating a photocopied map, or tracing over a modern Ordnance Survey base map. Use a 1:10 000 scale (6 inches to the mile) for gardens under one hectare, and a 1:2 500 or 1:1 250 scale for larger estates. The plan should indicate the position of the site in relation to other nearby main features, such as roads or villages.

Elements to mark on the plan include:

- The principal building, or the geographical centre of the site if there is no building.
- The orientation of the site (the direction of north).
- The historical boundaries, where they can be defined. This can be estimated by eye. For more detailed guidance on how to plot boundaries, see below.
- The location of current entrances.
- The location of garden structures and buildings.
- The location of existing features, marked by means of an identity number (see below).
- The position and layout of trees and other historical plantings.
- The main viewing points, together with their directions and a note on the views themselves.

Area measurement

The area of a site may already have been worked out and given in a sale catalogue, guidebook or historical record. If this is not available, one method of estimating the approximate area in hectares of the overall site is as follows:

- Using an OS map, trace the boundary of the site on to tracing paper (1:50 000 scale is often sufficiently accurate).
- Construct a grid of hectares drawn up at the same scale as the maps. Each one-kilometre grid square on the OS map covers 100 hectares, and these can be sub-divided into areas of 50, 25 10 or one hectare.
- Place the tracing paper over the grid and count the number of hectares covered by the site.

For the area of a small or medium-sized site, look at the OS maps at a scale of 25 inches to one mile (1:2,500), on which the areas of separate parcels of land are given.

Area measurements are often given on historical plans in acres, roods and perches, signified by a, r and p respectively. Take measurements in metres. (For conversions, see Part Seven, 7.6 Historical measurements).

[See also guidance on using MAGIC given in the separate handout 'Site Descriptions of Parks and Gardens']

Plotting the boundaries

In order to locate the historical boundaries it is useful to look for such indicators as:

- The furthest extent of drives and path systems that originate at the house or other main components.
- The location of entrance gates and lodges.
- The pattern of the main plantations, especially perimeter belts. These can often be identified by looking at an Ordnance Survey map of an appropriate scale (such as 1:25 000 or 1:10 000).

Boundaries, especially those for small gardens, should be checked on the ground and where possible against historical maps, or by talking to the present owners and historians who have a special knowledge of the place.

Historically, the park or garden would usually have been in single ownership or occupation, but in many cases the current ownership, occupation or management will be divided. There are also many parks and gardens where few original features survive, or which are no longer in their original use. For example, former parkland may be entirely given over to arable farming.

However, the boundary for the survey should be determined by reference to the historical extent of the design and not to present patterns of ownership and management.

There may be ornamental plantations or eye-catchers beyond the boundary which form part of the landscape concept and design. Sometimes open space in urban areas is composed of a chain of detached parts. Include any such 'outliers' from the main park or garden on the plan.

More distant views, such as a prominent hill, planted component or buildings can be noted in the description, and marked in diagrammatic form on the boundary map.

[See also guidance on defining boundaries given in the separate handout 'Notes to Help in Defining the Boundary of a Site's Designed Historic Interest']

Labelling the site plan

Give each area and feature of the site an identity number, and include a key to these down one side of your plan. In addition to the key your plan should contain a separate box with the following information:

- Place name.
- The name of the highest-level local authority in which the principal building lies.
- The serial number of the particular sheet or sheets (if the place needs to be on more than one A3 map) and the total number of sheets in the series. For example in a series of 3, the sheet numbers will be 1 of 3, 2 of 3, and 3 of 3.
- The scale of the mapping.
- The Ordnance Survey grid reference (instructions on how to establish a grid reference are included on modern commercial OS maps, and see also section 7.2 National grid references).
- The name of the person who drew the plan, and its date.

2.11.2 Analysing the site

It may be helpful to think of parks and gardens in terms of five divisions or component areas. The features may then be grouped accordingly. The five divisions are:

- The principal building.
- The pleasure grounds and ornamental gardens.
- The park and other land, such as farmland or woodland, within the boundary of the site.
- Land which is beyond or outside the boundary of the site which has important features and makes an important contribution to the character of the site.
- The kitchen garden and other productive areas.

There may also be important archaeological remains or natural habitats on the site. These should be noted, but the main focus of your investigation should continue to be the historical aspects of the garden.

Draw the boundaries of each area on your map. Within these divisions, the features may be thought of under the following headings:

- Main component areas
- Constructions, buildings and architectural ornaments
- Water features
- Plants and planting
- The natural topography: landform, earthworks, rocks and soil.

See Part Five - Thesaurus for a list of relevant terms for features.

Survival of the design

Garden sites vary widely in their levels of completeness, and there will be many places where certain areas are no longer in their original use. Former parklands, for example, may be entirely given over to arable farming, but this does not necessarily mean that the site is of no historical interest.

When assessing the surviving physical evidence in a garden, you should bear in mind the standard that might reasonably be expected for the age and type of the park or garden, area or component in question.

For example, a garden of the 16th century, because of its rarity, might be deemed of significant interest if only the earthworks and some architectural components survive. On the other hand, a late 19th-century garden, which is more common, would be of less interest if it only contained such remnants.

For more information on the classification of historical interest, see Part Seven, section 7.1 Criteria for registering historic parks and gardens.

Classify each component of the garden and its features using the following terms:

- Extant.
- Part: ground/below ground level remains.
- Part: standing remains.
- Lost.
- Reconstructed.
- Unknown.

For further information, see 2.2.12 Extent to which the designed landscape survives.

2.12 TAKING PHOTOGRAPHS

Photography is an important part of the recording process, and is best done after you have completed your site survey and notes. Photographs can be very helpful to the continuing research process and in writing up a report, as well as providing a visual record of the site.

- Digital cameras are now comparatively inexpensive and are fast becoming indispensable tools for recording. They cope well with low light levels, and you can see the picture instantly.
- Take digital images at a high level of resolution, such as 300 dots per inch (dpi) or higher.
- Aim to record the visual character of a garden and its main features as accurately as possible.
- Take photographs in a logical order, moving from general pictures of each part of the garden to details of specific features.
- Photograph all elements or details that you intend to refer to in the garden description.
- Take at least two shots of each element. Some structures may need to be photographed from several angles.
- Take views beyond the garden that formed part of the original design concept.
- Photograph elements such as plaques and other features that convey information about the garden, its owners and history.
- Make a note of each photograph you take as you go along, for labeling later on.
- Figures can be included in some images, for human interest and/or scale, but do not take photographs of children.
- File and store images carefully. Number and label images and keep a list.
- Store negatives separately in a fireproof location.
- Keep a back-up of digital images on CD, DVD or external hard drive (see 2.20 Archiving research).

Always ask permission of the owner before taking photographs, and respect requests for any images to remain confidential.

Legally, permission does not need to be sought when taking photographs of a public site, or of a private site from outside the boundaries (for instance from a public footpath or bridleway). However, the privacy of owners and occupiers should always be respected, and it is good practice to seek the owner's permission when taking any photographs of their property, particularly when these are intended for publication in any form.

2.13 IDENTIFYING AND DATING TREES

Of all the elements in a landscape, planting schemes are the most ephemeral. Trees, however, are far more long-lived and their arrangement and condition can offer important clues to a site's previous uses, layout and patterns of planting.

Trees were an important estate crop, grown for coppicing, fruit and timber. They also had a wide variety of uses in the landscape: providing an ornamental framework, offering cover for game, or as specimens in a botanical collection.

Aerial photographs can be a valuable resource for identifying former tree planting pits, particularly where the trees were set out in regular schemes.

Planting practices varied between different periods, and may give clues to the age of trees. For instance:

- A low-growing oak with a very thick trunk and many branches may be a sign of past pollarding and a wood-pasture zone.
- A regular line of trees could once have been a pleached row or hedge.
- Multi-stemmed trees, planted two or three to a hole, may be survivals from the 18th century.
- An avenue of evergreen trees would be most likely to date from the 19th century.

Most trees will be less than 200 years old, but a few may be older. Estate accounts will often give accurate dates for the planting of trees. An approximate method for dating trees on-site is to:

- Measure the girth of the tree about 150cm from the ground.
- If the tree is standing alone, calculate one year of age for every 2.5cm of girth.
- If the tree is in woodland, or in close competition with other trees, calculate one year of age for every 5cm of girth.

You should also take into account the soil and climatic conditions, as these will affect tree growth.

The OS first edition 25-inch maps are a useful source of information on parkland trees, which are identified as either coniferous or deciduous. However, not all trees were recorded, so it should not be assumed that a tree on site which is undoubtedly old was not there if it is not present on the map. On the other hand, where a tree is recorded, it will have been individually surveyed, and its position can therefore be taken as accurate.

You may be able to make a provisional identification of tree species using an identification guide, such as *A Field Guide to the Trees of Great Britain and Northern Europe* by Alan Mitchell, which includes a rough guide to dating trees and dates of introductions for ornamental species. These results can then be cross-referenced with documentary sources about the planting.

If immediate identification is not possible, take photographs and make notes of what a tree looks like: its overall shape, height and spread, leaf shape and arrangement, and type of bark. Take a leaf as a sample to compare with reference books later.

A starting point for identifying garden plants from books could be *The Royal Horticultural Society A—Z Encyclopedia of Garden Plants* or *The Hillier Gardener's Guide to Trees & Shrubs*. There is a useful plant information and identification guide on the Science and Plants for Schools web site at www.saps.plantsci.cam.ac.uk/trees/index.htm

The RHS plant identification service offers help to RHS members in identifying plants from plant material and images. www.rhs.org.uk/plants/advice.asp

Some estates contained collections of rare trees, and it may be necessary to call in a specialist to help with the identification of trees.

For further guidance on the usefulness of trees in the analysis and dating of parks and gardens see: 'An Approach to the Methodology of Recording Historic Landscapes' in *Garden History*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Autumn, 1983), pp. 167-175 and 'Groves and belts' in *Garden History* 19(2): pp175-187, both by John Phibbs.

For information on ancient trees, see the Ancient Tree Forum pages on the Woodland Trust website. www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/ancient-tree-forum

For historical plant names and information about when and where plants were introduced, *The Origin of Plants* by Maggie Campbell-Culver is a good source of reference.

For up-to-date plant names, please check the RHS plantfinder at www.rhs.org.uk/rhsplantfinder/plantfinder.asp

For further information on the dating of trees and other planting features, see *How to Read an English Garden* by Andrew Eburne and Richard S. Taylor.

2.14 IDENTIFYING CULTIVATED PLANTS

[NB: When writing up a site description limit horticultural detail to generics such as herbaceous borders, mixed shrubberies, scented garden etc, but do refer to any national collections.]

Plants are an essential part of a garden and can give vital clues to the character and status of previous owners. Trees in particular can be very long-lived and can provide indications of a garden's previous uses, layout and patterns of planting (see 2.13 Identifying and dating trees).

However, relatively short-lived plants can also be an important aspect of the history of a garden and its owners and designers, as well as being of intrinsic value in themselves. Planting schemes and design are essential characteristics of a garden and can, over time, reflect the influence of fashion and of the preferences of different owners.

Throughout the history of gardens, enthusiastic garden owners have competed with each other to introduce the latest garden design features and newly introduced or developed plants.

Owners often encouraged their gardeners to breed and introduce new plants that later became an accepted part of our horticultural heritage. Some gardens contained collections of rare plants that were – and may still be – of great horticultural, historical or cultural importance.

A garden may have a history of being the first to grow new plants successfully and to show them to the world at prestigious shows such as those run by the Royal Horticultural Society.

Even over quite short periods – a few years – fashions can change. Plants and design features that were once common can rapidly become rare or disappear from cultivation.

It is important to document the plants in each garden that may have particular associations with the owners or designers of the garden. You may also be able to identify plants which are rare or endangered – both wild and cultivated varieties – and make arrangements to ensure their survival and return to wider cultivation.

The starting point will be research into the history of the garden via household and personal records. If there are indications that an owner or head gardener did exhibit at major shows, the RHS Lindley Library has records that can provide information on his or her specific interests and successes.

The local county record office may hold documents such as planting lists, seed order forms or actual plans of specific parts of the garden. There may also be papers from relevant local businesses - such as plant nurseries - especially if they were of note. These could include actual order lists and catalogue lists.

Knowing which plants were for sale locally can be a very good guide to what was available and therefore likely to have been purchased. However, some caution needs to be taken with nursery lists as it was (as it still is!) often the case that the nurseryman may not have the plant in stock.

If the plants of interest are relatively long-lived shrubs, then they, or remnants of them, may well still exist. As well as written records, many enthusiastic gardeners also kept books of pressed flowers or leaves. There may also be records of plants given or sold to other gardeners.

When trying to identify a plant, take several photographs (including close-ups of flowers, leaves and stems) and make notes on the size and habit of the plant.

A starting point for identifying garden plants from books could be *The Royal Horticultural Society A—Z Encyclopedia of Garden Plants* or *The Hillier Gardener's Guide to Trees & Shrubs*. The *Garden Plant* series by Roger Phillips and Martyn Rix has individual volumes on shrubs, roses, perennials, herbs and bulbs, with photographs of every named specimen, as well as information on their history.

There is a useful plant information and identification guide on the Science and Plants for Schools web site at www-saps.plantsci.cam.ac.uk/trees/index.htm

Both NCCPG Plant Heritage (www.nccpg.com) and the Hardy Plant Society (www.hardy-plant.org.uk) can provide general or specific help in narrowing down identification.

The RHS plant identification service offers help to RHS members in identifying plants from plant material and images. www.rhs.org.uk/plants/advice.asp

If there are indications that a garden may have received new introductions or have contained unusual or unique plants, possibly with connections to well-known plant hunters or breeders, specialist help may be needed with identification. Specialist plant societies such as the NCCPG may be able to provide or recommend an expert in the field, such as a National Plant Collection holder.

For historical plant names and information about when and where plants were introduced, *The Origin of Plants* by Maggie Campbell-Culver is a good source of reference.

The RHS Plant Finder database is a good source of information on up-to-date names, and can indicate the availability of a plant through nurseries. www.rhs.org.uk/RHSPlantFinder/plantfinder.asp

2.15 IDENTIFYING AND DATING GARDEN FEATURES

Approach the identification and dating of garden elements such as buildings, structures, statuary and water features with care.

Your main aim should be to record enough information to enable the feature to be identified from other sources, if necessary. Your record should include:

- A description of the feature, its form and shape.
- Details of the material(s) used, and an indication of whether these are natural, man- or machine-made.
- Particular ornamental details (these can be a key factor in identifying period).
- Any indication of extensions and/or alterations to the feature, and any signs of repair or damage.
- Any other information on the feature, such as signatures, inscriptions or dates.

Take photographs to support each item of written information. In particular, take a shot of the feature from several different angles.

Your documentary research may help with the further identification and dating of features. The online resource www.imagesofengland.org.uk also contains many photographic examples of particular styles of architectural features.

If the garden is known to be the work of a particular designer, cross-referencing your findings with details of the designer's other known work may help further.

For more information on building types, materials and features, based on the Pevsner Architectural Guides, see www.lookingatbuildings.org.uk

Catena, is a digital archive of features in European and American historic parks and gardens, at <http://catena.bgc.bard.edu>

Trade directories can be a useful source of reference for builders, blacksmiths and other trades that may have constructed elements of a garden. The local studies section of the public library is likely to contain local ones. There is a large collection of digitised English and Welsh trade directories from 1750 to 1919 at www.historicaldirectories.org. Local records offices may also hold the business archives of local manufacturers.

For further information on garden architecture and features, see *How to Read an English Garden* by Andrew Eburne and Richard S. Taylor, and *A Glossary of Garden History* by Michael Symes.

Extracts taken from *Parks and Gardens UK Volunteer Training Manual* March 2009, available to download from www.parksandgardens.ac.uk

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