

PART ONE - AN OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH AND RECORDING PRACTICE

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1.1 What is a historic garden?

A wide range of landscapes in the city, town and countryside are important to our heritage. They include:

- Archaeological remains
- The gardens and landscape parks of large houses
- Smaller parks and gardens (both urban and rural)
- Public parks
- Community gardens
- Civic landscapes
- Urban squares
- Cemeteries and churchyards
- Hospital grounds
- Allotment sites
- 'New town' landscapes
- Urban green spaces and 'green corridors'
- Village greens

Gardens, parks and other green spaces are of historic interest when:

- They are particularly old (early 18th century or before). In general, the older a garden, the more likely it is to be a rare example of its kind.
- They illustrate some particular aspect of garden history. For example, they may show the work of a particular designer, or have components remaining from a particular period or which are designed in a particular style.
- They have significant historical associations, perhaps with a particular person or event.
- They have a group value in combination with other buildings or landscape, which together make them of historic interest.

The historic garden registers and inventories maintained by state agencies for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland cover places that are considered to be of *special* historical interest. Because of this, they are highly selective (see Part Four, Appendix 4.1 for more information on the criteria for registering historic parks and gardens).

The criteria used by the national agencies can be a useful starting point in defining gardens of local and regional historic importance, but here a wider definition of 'historic interest' may be used, reflecting regional and local interests. For example, there may be a greater emphasis on plantsmanship in a county renowned for it. A garden may be the work of a designer of local importance, or be connected with prominent figures in local history.

1.2 Why record historic parks and gardens?

Researching and recording historic parks and gardens helps to highlight their value and the contribution they make to the landscape. It can help to protect them and assist with restoration or conservation. Research of this kind also helps other people to learn about historic gardens, and increases understanding.

There are many reasons for researching a garden, and it is important to define the main reason for recording a particular garden. For example, it might be:

- To identify places that ought to be nominated for a local or national register or inventory.
- To highlight gardens of which local authorities and special interest groups should be aware.
- A first step in making an application for funding.
- To underpin plans for the future conservation, restoration and management of a garden.

1.3 What does researching a garden involve?

Researching and recording a garden includes:

- Locating and analysing relevant background materials and sources of information.
- Doing a site survey to establish what remains of a park or garden, and the historical evidence it contains.
- Making a written and photographic record of the history and surviving features.
- Presenting and circulating the results.

1.4 Who can help?

Before you begin, check whether any research already exists on the garden you are interested in. Find out whether the garden is on a national register or inventory. If a garden is on these lists, it will already have been researched in some depth. The main registers are:

- English Heritage's *Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England*.
- Cadw's *Register of Landscapes, Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in Wales*.
- Historic Scotland's *Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes in Scotland*.
- The *Register of Parks, Gardens and Demesnes of Special Historic Interest in Northern Ireland* (currently in preparation by the Northern Ireland Development Agency).

For more information on these registers and inventories, see Part Four, Appendix 4.1

A great deal of research into historic parks and gardens is done by Gardens Trusts. There are 37 trusts across England and Wales, which can provide help and training in the research and recording of gardens, as well as access to a network of contacts. To find your local trust, see www.gardenstrusts.org.uk

Other sources to check include:

- Local authority Historic Environment Records (sometimes called Sites and Monuments Records), which include parks and gardens.
- Reference or local studies libraries, county records offices or museums.
- Specialist publications such as *Garden History* and *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes*, which carry articles on research that has been carried out into particular parks and gardens.

1.5 Preliminary investigation

A preliminary investigation is useful to determine whether a garden is worth researching in more depth. It may involve some map or documentary research, an inspection of the site, or both. At this stage, you should aim to collect:

- Brief notes on the history of the park or garden, the main existing components (such as a walled kitchen garden or maze) and its current use and condition.
- A note of any key sources of information about the place and its history.
- Copies of plans, photographs or illustrations, both current and historical, relating to the garden's development.

1.6 Gathering information

Once you have decided to go ahead in researching the history of a park or garden, there are many kinds of documentary material that you might consult. These can include (but are not limited to):

- Maps and plans
- Paintings, prints, engravings, photographs and drawings
- Aerial photographs
- Estate papers and sales particulars
- Family and personal papers
- Contemporary articles, books and guidebooks
- Visitors' accounts
- Other records, such as deeds and wills, or bank, parish or manorial records

A chronological sequence of maps is particularly helpful in showing how a garden and its boundaries have changed over time. Of the many different types of map available, the Ordnance Survey, which began in the mid-19th century, is probably the most important.

Where a garden is private, estate records and family papers may still be in the possession of the owner or previous owners. It is worth asking, as the owner may not always be aware of the relevance of the materials they hold.

The personal recollections of owners, occupiers, gardeners and local people can also provide valuable information, and it is a good idea to sound-record or video such interviews if possible.

Reference or university libraries, local studies libraries and county records offices are a useful starting point to find out what materials are available.

A comprehensive source for identifying relevant printed materials (up to 1984) is *A Bibliography of British and Irish Gardens* by Ray Desmond (St Paul's Bibliographies, 1988, ISBN: 1873040415). The GHS has also produced a Bibliography of books and articles, including those from its academic journal, *Garden History* (up to 2000). This can be downloaded from <http://www.gardenhistorysociety.org/publications/bibliography/>.

For unpublished archival material, the National Register of Archives can help to locate relevant sources within local and national collections and archives, both in the UK and overseas. www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/nra

The footnotes and references of the scholarly journals mentioned above are another good source of information on materials available.

For a detailed guide to the many potential sources of information and where to find them, see *Parks and Gardens: A Researcher's Guide to Sources for Designed Landscapes* by David Lambert, Peter Goodchild and Judith Roberts.

1.7 Getting organised

Begin a basic file or dossier at the outset of your research. Initial information to note should include the site's name, address, local government district, OS grid reference, and the factors that led to your interest in researching the garden's history. Be sure to also review the information requested on the Parks & Gardens UK Research Recording Form if you plan to submit your research to the database. It is available on the Research & Record Downloads page (<http://www.parksandgardens.org/research-and-record/193-downloads>).

As the project progresses, you are likely to gather a large amount of information, so it is important early on to establish a system for organising and storing all the written, digital, audio and visual materials you collect.

A careful record of information gained, its source, and where it can be found, is essential for future reference, checking and further study. Always make careful notes, as information that does not seem very important initially can later become significant.

It is advisable to make thorough notes from the start of your project. Developing a standard record sheet to include the date and details of each contact you make can be a helpful way of assembling and filing information as you go along.

1.8 Making a site survey

Making an on-the-spot survey of the garden itself is as important as doing the documentary research. Designers' plans were (and are) rarely carried out exactly, and a survey can provide more reliable information about what actually happened than archive material alone.

- Walk over the site with copies of old maps, plans and illustrations and identify changes in boundaries and any surviving features.
- Locate the principal building and the main component areas of the site, such as a walled kitchen garden, a rose garden, or a maze.
- Look for 'lumps and bumps' on the ground, which may be the remains of former features (drives, paths, buildings or water features).
- Identify current elements of the garden, such as water features, garden architecture and ornaments, trees and the remains of planting schemes.
- Make a written note of the condition of all garden features and structures, and take plenty of photographs.
- Identify tree and shrub species, their position and condition, and estimate their age.
- Look for signs of planting schemes, such as rows or clumps of trees or tree pits in parkland, showing where trees once stood.
- Identify important views within or beyond the garden that may now be hidden by younger planting.

1.9 Writing up your findings

In general, your final report should include some or all of the following:

- A current description of the site as it is today.
- A chronological history of the garden and its development up to the present day.
- Notes on the key people connected with the garden (owners, family dynasties, designers, gardeners and others).
- Notes on the surviving historic features of the garden.
- An assessment of the current condition of the garden's remains.
- Maps and plans showing the development of the site and boundary changes up to the present day.
- Historical photographs and illustrations as well as current photographs.
- A bibliography of both the published and unpublished sources of information that you have consulted.

As noted in 1.7, if you plan to submit your research to the Parks & Gardens UK database, please be sure to review the Research Recording Form to ensure you provide the information requested in your report.

1.10 Consultation

It is good practice, once your report is at draft stage, to send a copy for comment to the owner(s) and/or occupier(s) of the place and to individuals and organisations that have contributed to your research.

Bodies which may like to receive a copy of your final report include:

- Your local Gardens Trust, or equivalent.
- The local planning authority.
- Local Historic Environment Records.
- Special interest organisations, such as local history societies.
- Parks & Gardens UK (info@parksandgardens.org).
- Individuals with a specialist interest or relevant knowledge.