



www.lrgt.org

Newsletter

No 41 Spring 2019

Registered Charity no. 1063075

Kim Wilkie to give our 2019 Annual Lecture



The LRGT have seen his designs at Great Fosters, Surrey (left) and Boughton House, Northamptonshire (right). We are returning to Boughton later this year.

Inside this issue

Events	Page 3
Kim Wilkie	Page 6
Research	Page 8
Toy Gardens	Page 9
Annual Lecture 2019: Speaker Kim Wilkie	Page 14
Booking Form	Page 15
Contact Numbers	Page 13

Chairman's Notes

As I sit here racking my brains about what to write I am looking out of the window to where it is a beautiful spring evening following two days of sunshine. The astute amongst you will realize that I am writing this at Easter when we are unusually enjoying exceptionally fine weather on a bank holiday.

The cherry tree in my neighbour's garden which overhangs my yard is a mass of white blossom at the moment. If it wasn't for the fact that we have had little rain recently leaving the ground dry, one would say that everything in the garden is looking lovely.

After the successful celebration of our twentieth anniversary last year, we commence on the third decade for the Trust. This year will see us revisiting some sites that we have visited in the past. It is always interesting to revisit sites at different times of the year to see how they look and, after a few years, to see how they have developed.

As I write this you will have seen in the news the protests by Extinction UK about the impact and the threat to our environment from carbon in the atmosphere: a theme reflected in a new television programme by Sir David Attenborough. The talk we had at the AGM from Matt Shardlow the CEO of Buglife, tied in with this as it covered the decline in insects and pollinators such as bees. Much of this is due to intensive farming practices and the use of chemicals. As gardeners this is something we need to think about and whether we can help by the choice of plants we grow and the use of chemicals in our own gardens.

This seems a gloomy note to end on, but we do need to care for the environment which we rely on for our wellbeing.

Stephen Barker
Chairman

Events

The **Friends Evening** had a makeover in November, when rather than just the usual tea and cake we had a 'bring and share' supper. There were fairy lights, pots of cyclamen on the tables and glasses of wine on hand, as well an interesting mix of food brought by The Friends. The hall had a welcoming and celebratory air.

Stephen told us about the toy gardens produced by Britains, known for the production of lead soldiers. In the thirties they started with lead gardens, which were made up to the war, and then later metal and then plastic. I had a lead one which, as child, I loved. Judith and Irene gave an update on how the Education group spent its money and Diane Horsfield told us about British War Cemeteries they had visited whilst in Burma and her rather mysterious uncle who had been involved in the Burma Campaign. As ever, an interesting mix.

I am sure that there are a lot of you out there who have interesting tales to tell and I just want you to come out and tell them at The Friends evening. It is your chance to entertain us. This new improved format for the Friends Evening will now be a regular part of our programme.

We returned to The Neville Arms in Medbourne for our **Winter Lunch**. The weather was okay and didn't put people off, as it had done the previous year. The food was generous, conversation lively but the tables being rather close together, meant it was somewhat noisy. We finished with the now traditional quiz, loved by some, hated by others; the subject was Leicestershire and Rutland. We had fun putting it together and now have lots of questions to keep you entertained for many more lunches.

When deciding which winter garden to visit, various factors have to be taken into consideration, which do not necessarily apply to other visits throughout the year. The main one is, of course, the weather which we can't change and another, the need to find a really good place for lunch where one can linger should it be really nasty outdoors. We went to **Thenford** in the summer and, as they do open for snowdrops, in February. I thought it would be interesting to see the park and garden at another time of year and



revisit certain areas, such the sculpture garden. I also knew we would get an excellent lunch at The Red Lion in Evenley, which we did, and came away with doggie bags! Time of departure is usually weather dependant: I just thought that for once the weather was not too bad and we could have stayed later than the 4.0pm closing time. There are times when we can't wait to get on the coach because of the cold. It was interesting to see the bones of the garden and park in winter, particularly the walled kitchen garden which is huge and has a delightful "Head Gardeners Cottage", and to say hallo to Lenin.

Matt Shardlow, who is CEO of Buglife, gave our **Spring Lecture**. Buglife is the only conservation body trying to counter the serious decline in the number of invertebrates. These tiny creatures are vital, as they keep our planet alive. Mono-culture, pesticides, loss of habitat and climate change have all contributed to this decline which must be halted. Matt feels that there is a need for some pesticide control but this needs to be done in a much more controlled way. The main problem seems to be a lack of joined-up thinking from the government and other bodies. British Telecom for example, built on an important wildflower habitat area, for an office development, whilst at the same time producing stamps featuring wild flowers. Flea powder for dogs,

interestingly enough, is an unexpected problem as it is a pesticide which eventually ends up in our rivers. His hope for the future is in reaching out to the public, particularly children in schools and in successful projects such as bee lines.

He was an excellent speaker and passionate about his subject. As I went to bed that evening I could not help but think of all the insects I have swatted and killed. I do wonder about flies though, perhaps we ought to invite him back to enlighten us about them?

I would just add that The Bowling Club now has a public address system, which is excellent and it also meant that we did not have to turn the radiators off to hear the speaker. This is why it got rather unpleasantly hot towards the end of the evening. We will be aware of this at future meetings.

Future Events

Kim Wilkie, our celebrity lecturer this year, is not a household name but he is a world renowned landscape architect whose work we will have the opportunity of seeing the day after his lecture, at Boughton House. It will be an interesting evening.

Check him out on line and see Stephen's article below and you will see what I mean.

The visits to **Winwick** and **Springbarrow** Farm are also rather unusual events but, having done both, I think you will enjoy them. With regard to the former, the road into the village will not accommodate a large coach so we are restricted to a 35 people in a coach and the owner will allow for only 2 parked cars. It will be a matter of 1st come first served, so book early to avoid disappointment, as they say.

A Post Script

I ended my piece on Matt Shardlow's Buglife lecture with a note about flies and how we may have to invite him back to tell us about their importance, (if any).

A couple of weeks later I caught Jim Al-Khalili's programme on Radio 4, The Life Scientific. His guest was Dr Erica McAlister, a Senior Curator at The Natural History Museum, whose main interest is flies. There are many varieties, some of which are pollinators and some of which are essential to the destruction of indescribable objects, so don't be in too much of a hurry to swat a fly when you see one. I had my answer, a riveting programme well worth hearing, which may still be available on iPlayer.

Elizabeth Bacon

Kim Wilkie

For the Annual Lecture we are delighted to announce that the speaker this year will be the celebrated landscape designer Kim Wilkie. To those members who visited Boughton House in Northamptonshire with the Trust they will remember Orpheus which is a massive inverted pyramid with a pool at the bottom representing Hades. This design came about as a response to the Duke of Buccleuch who, having restored a pyramid mound in the formal garden, was thinking of adding a new feature. Wilkie's response was to go down rather than up creating the innovative Orpheus. As Kim Wilkie is quoted as saying "All great gardens are about someone with a vision doing something slightly mad"



Kim Wilkie was born in Kuala Lumpur: his grandfather was a rubber planter and his father an Army officer. As a child he spent time in Malaya and Iraq before being sent to boarding school in England His parents purchased Franklin Farm in Hampshire where he now spends

most of his time after having run his own landscape practice for 25 years. He still works as a strategic and conceptual landscape consultant, combining this with teaching and lecturing in America and writing.

Kim studied History at Oxford, but his introduction to landscape design came when, in his final vacation from Oxford, he was sent to cover, for an English language newspaper, the opening of a botanic garden in Tehran. He realised that everything he loved, people, land, biology and drawing could be combined in one profession as he said “This isn’t work, it’s pure pleasure”. He went back to university this time to the College of Environmental Design at Berkley, California and started again.

In his successful career Kim has worked on a large number of projects in both the UK and abroad including major urban landscaping projects and works on the Thames Landscape Strategy. He has received many awards both at home and overseas and has been employed as an advisor on a number of public policy bodies, most recently Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission and on the South Downs National Park Design Review Panel.

For Kim Wilkie, inspiration comes from the land, its people and its history. As a landscape architect he tries to understand the memories and associations embedded in a place and the natural flows of the people, land, water and climate. On his website Kim has a page devoted to the philosophy that underpins his work, with quotations taken from a variety of authors. The last quote is from his own writings “Look back with fondness and freedom; look forward with hope but not hubris; and most of all swim in the present second, which is eternity”

We are fortunate that Kim Wilkie has agreed to come to speak to us on his work. We are even more fortunate that Kim has generously waived his usual fee for giving talks after he understood that we use the proceeds from the talk for the Trust’s education programme. I therefore

hope you will all be able to attend the lecture and will encourage your friends to come as well.

Stephen Barker

Research Group

This Spring's Walled Kitchen garden update from the Research Group is quite short. Health and family matters have taken up much of the time of some of our members, so research has had to take second place.

Having said this, the "South-East Group" has completed excellent research on Westbrooke House, Little Bowden. This is written up and is available to view on the Trust's website. Elizabeth is planning a visit there for the Trust next summer.

The "West Group" have almost completed writing up Whatton House and this should appear on the website very soon.

The "North-East Group" have been frustrated in their attempts to get access to Ratcliffe Hall. We have explored the perimeter of the site and, from a distance, have been able to see the curving walls and some of back sheds. But we have been told that we cannot get full access until major building work on the Hall has been completed (for health and safety reasons).

We are continuing to maintain our contact with The Secret Garden Project at Glenfield Hospital (the former walled kitchen garden of Leicester Frith - the Victorian Mansion House on the hospital site. We have now visited to survey the site properly and to see the four gardens which were created last summer for a TV programme for Channel 5, hosted by Carol Klein, which is due to be aired this spring. Much of the history of the site has already been provided for us, and, with a visit to the Record Office, to clarify some details, it should be possible to write up the research quite easily.

Sue Blaxland

Membership

Currently we have 150 members and 6 new members for 2018-19. Last year we had a total of 155 members with 20 new ones - boosted by the Hoby experience. With your support we should be able to do as well this year.

Obituaries

Sadly one of our Founders and original Trustees, **John Oakland** died in December 2018 having supported the Trust until very recently. In fact, the Research Group had enjoyed their annual picnic in his garden at Long Close, Woodhouse, just last summer.

.John Oakley, a former Friend died in February after a long illness.

We were shocked to hear of the death of **Peter Rawson** on 14th March 2019. He had contributed much to the Gardens Trust and was a regular visitor on most events with his wife Simone. We send her our thoughts and best wishes and will hear more about Peter in our next newsletter.

Irene Jones

Toy Gardens

At the last Friends Evening I gave a short talk on toy gardens produced Britains Limited. I should say that as a child in the 1960s I had played with the plastic toy garden produced by Britains, but it wasn't until I was looking on Ebay that I realized that there had been an earlier version produced in lead in the 1930s.

William Britain was a Midlands metal worker who moved to North London in 1847. In 1893, he invented a new production process of hollow casting in lead which was used to create toy soldiers. This was a

great success and is what Britains are still best remembered for. After World War I, the demand for toy soldiers declined and Britains expanded their ranges into new fields. In 1923, they launched their highly popular Farm Figures and, in 1930, the Miniature Gardening. To quote from the 1931 catalogue “In introducing their latest series to the public, Britains Limited feel that they are fulfilling a long-felt want, that of enabling the gardener, amateur or professional, to plan out his garden in thoroughly practical manner from the laying out of the beds, paths, crazy paving, arches, pergolas, etc., and, last but not least, filling it with a large variety of plants in full flower and in Nature’s gorgeous colourings, arranging and rearranging his design in miniature until a satisfactory one has been achieved.”



It is only then that its merits as a toy are discussed “On the other hand, regarded purely as a toy, Britains Miniature Gardening has no equal, as the novelty of making a garden, the beautiful colourings, the realistic appearance, will hold children of all ages in keen enjoyment for hours on end, and the interchangeability of all the parts which compose Britains Miniature Gardening has been given very careful consideration by the designers so that even with a small collection of pieces, very satisfactory results are possible.”



Brighton Toy and Model Museum

A wide range of pieces were available consisting of flower beds, crazy paving paths, grass lawns, ponds, rockeries, plants such as lupins, roses, hollyhocks, asters, spring bulbs, etc. With this came a greenhouse, cold frames, balustrading, stone walls, fencing, pergolas, seats, lawn mowers, wheelbarrow and rollers. Figures were provided consisting of those sitting or playing in the garden and the men for the lawn mower, roller and wheelbarrow. The plants were cast flat and fitted into holes in the flower bed, being made of lead the stems could be twisted or bent to give a more realistic appearance. It would be fair to say that the Miniature Garden was based on a middle class suburban garden. How successful this was as a toy is hard to say but it was not included in the catalogue in 1940 shortly before all production stopped due to the war. It was not revived in 1945.

In 1960 a new range was Britains Floral Garden was introduced this time manufactured in plastic which required a complete redesign carried



out by Roy Selwyn-Smith who had a long and successful career designing toys for Britains and other manufacturers. To exploit the properties of plastic, the plants were moulded flat in a circle as you pushed them into the hole in the flower bed with the special planter the plants closed up and created realistic-looking plants compared to the flat plants of the 1930s. Another benefit of plastic was that the flower heads could be moulded separately to be clipped on by the children. Again the range of plants and features were similar to those in the 1930's creating a suburban garden. Apart from some larger starter packs

the Floral Garden was sold in small packs aimed at children's pocket money. In the mid-1960s the Floral Garden People were introduced. The models were created by a Royal Academician Norman Stilman. If the figures were designed to make the Floral Garden more popular they only had a limited success as The Floral Gardens ceased production in 1970.

In 1976 another attempt was made to relaunch the toy garden as Lucy's Little Garden clearly aimed at girls. Despite new accessory packs being released in 1977 the range was discontinued in 1979. In 1984 Britains was sold by the family and it passed through several hands and is now owned by an American company that produce "collectables" such as toy Guardsmen, Beefeaters etc.

In passing I should mention that at least two other companies produced garden toys in the 1930s. The first was John Hill & Co or Johillco, which was founded in 1898 by a former employee of Britains named Mr F H Wood. Unlike Britains they sold their figures individually and not in boxed sets, as such they appealed more to working class children. The figures were painted less ornately than those of Britains, the figures had a greater variety of poses but the quality of the modelling ranged from "the good, the bad, and the ugly" reflecting the variety of sculptors employed. Whilst they produced some shrubs, trees, fences and garden figures and accessories including a greenhouse, they do not appear to have the same range as Britains.

The other firm is Pixyland-Kew which were originally two separate London based manufacturers Pixyland and F. Kew who merged around 1929-1931. F. Kew before the merger had produced farm animals and farm pieces. As Pixyland-Kew they produced Gardeners and accessories. The quality of the moulding and painting is inferior to both Britains and Johillco.

References and further reading

William Schmidt and Vance Gerry (pub), *Britains Limited Miniature Gardening Series* (The Weather Bird Press, 1973)

The Brighton Toy and Model Index. This has categories on Britains Garden, Johillco and Pixyland-Kew. The entries for Britains are well illustrated with items for the catalogues for the different ranges

The Gardens Trust blog. Gardening in Miniature. This is a well-illustrated article ref: <https://thegardenstrust.blo/2018/05/12/gardening-in-miniature>

On the blog site *A3 Traveller, the Adventures of a Southern Traveller*, there are two good articles with close up photos of the plants and figures of both the lead and plastic gardens produced by Britains.

<https://a3traveller.com>

Britains Miniature Garden and A miniature world rediscovered. If you get to the home page of the blog site and put in miniature garden into the search box it will bring up the link to the two articles.

If you go onto Ebay you can find items of the miniature garden for sale, some still in their original boxes.

The Garden History Museum in Lambeth has a small display of Britains Miniature Gardens.

Stephen Barker

Useful Contact Numbers

Chairman	Stephen Barker	07977923631
Membership	Irene Jones	0116 2709370
Events	Elizabeth Bacon	0116 2705711
Newsletter	Deborah Martin	0116 2707525
Research/ Secretary	Sue Blaxland	0116 2609748

2019 Annual Lecture

The Future of Landscape Architecture

Speaker: Kim Wilkie, Landscape Architect

Tuesday 10th of September 2019 at 7.30pm

“The contribution which landscape architects can make at this point is immense and pivotal. Landscape architecture addresses both the built and the cultivated environment. It thinks about city as well as countryside; housing as well as agriculture; cultural history as well as nature conservation. “

After 25 years of running his own practice, Kim now works as a strategic and conceptual landscape consultant. He collaborates with architects and landscape architects around the world and combines designing with the muddy practicalities of running a small farm in Hampshire.



Our local Kim Wilkie project, at Boughton House, is *Orpheus* and takes the form of an inverted pyramid, sunk into the earth and open to the elements. It is at once a negative space and a sculptural form. Its serene lines seem to invite you to

descend into its depths and enjoy the tranquillity

Venue: Ken Edwards Lecture Theatre 1, University of Leicester
University Road (Location map will be sent with tickets)

Cost: Friends £10.00 Guests £12.50
(includes a glass of wine or soft drink.)

Profits from this event will go to the Trust's "Schools into Gardening" scheme.

Welsh Limericks from Paul Knight- memories of the after dinner entertainment on our last night on holiday in Wales

There was a young girl from Llandeilo
Who got swept out to sea on her lilo.
Immune to her charms
A shark bit off both arms.
Now she looks like the Venus di Milo.

A plucky young harpist from Neath
Tripped over and lost her front teeth.
Then, equipped with new dentures
Suffered further misadventures
With a dastardly Druid called Keith.

.....more to follow

Booking Form

**Annual Lecture-Kim Wilkie
Tuesday 10th September 2019**

Please return as soon as possible to Elizabeth Bacon, 51 Elms Road, Leicester LE2 3JD.

Name/s

Address.....
.....

Telephone

Email

Please reserve tickets for Friends @ £10.00 and
..... Guests @ £12.50

Cheque enclosed for £..... Cheques payable to Leicestershire and Rutland Gardens Trust

Please enclose SAE for your tickets

