

The Formation Of The Gardens Trust: A Powerful New Voice For Britain's Parks And Gardens

Monday 27 July, 2015

On July 24, the Garden History Society and the Association of Gardens Trusts voted to merge to form The Gardens Trust. Please see the press release attached/below.

Today, at their respective AGMs in Newcastle, the Garden History Society (GHS) and the Association of Garden Trusts (AGT) voted to merge to become The Gardens Trust, a new body created to harness the strengths of the two existing organisations.

The main aims of the merger of the GHS and AGT are:

- To speak with a more powerful voice for the protection of parks, gardens and designed landscape;
- To play a key garden conservation role in the planning system as a statutory consultee;
- To provide support to strengthen the local activity of the County and Country Gardens Trusts;
- To be an internationally regarded centre of excellence in the study of garden history;
- To live within the means of the merged organisation and be financially sustainable over the long term.

The first AGM of The Gardens Trust elected a slate of 12 members of the Board, and a new chairman, Dr. James Bartos and a new Vice Chairman, Michael Dawson, were elected by the Board. Dominic Cole OBE, formerly chairman of the GHS, was elected President. Five sub-committees were established to reflect the areas of activity and interest of the new organisation, covering conservation, events, publications, membership and administration and finance.

The creation of The Gardens Trust is the culmination of some five years' work and discussion which also involved Parks and Gardens UK (the gardens database and website) and the Garden Museum. The move is fully supported by Historic England. The impetus for the merger was a sense that both the GHS and the AGT would be much stronger if working together, especially in terms of conservation activity. To that end, the Historic Landscape Project was formed in 2010 by the AGT to begin the process of devolving much of the responsibility for the conservation of historic landscapes to the County Gardens Trusts (CGTs). A small team of conservation officers travelled around Britain with the objective of establishing or consolidating conservation activity within different CGTs -- an initiative that has proved extremely successful. The intention is that the CGTs will over time take on more of the conservation work within their regions, with the central Gardens Trust conservation team concentrating on larger or more complex cases or national policy.

Dr. James Bartos, the first Chairman of The Gardens Trust, was formerly a member of Council of the GHS and of its finance and general purposes committee. 'I am extremely pleased that both memberships have voted in favour of the formation of The Gardens Trust,' he said. 'This is something we have been working on for some time, and I believe it will transform our ability to make a difference when it comes to the protection, conservation and understanding of our gardens and designed landscapes, helping to ensure their continued enjoyment into the future.'

Dominic Cole OBE, first President of The Gardens Trust, became Chairman of the GHS in 2002. 'I'm delighted at this outcome,' he said. 'I never really understood why we had two organisations doing much the same thing. Now the combined memberships of all the CGTs -- all that knowledge and enthusiasm -- can be merged with the specialist expertise and academic clout of the old GHS to become much more effective not just in conservation but in actively campaigning to protect our designed landscapes. I believe that this merger is a great opportunity for both organisations.'

Further Information:

The Garden History Society was founded in 1965 and celebrated its 50th anniversary this year. The GHS put garden history 'on the map' as an academic subject and almost immediately began to publish the twice-yearly academic journal *Garden History*, which remains the leading forum for scholarly work in this area. In addition it has pursued an active conservation and campaigning role, with a small professional

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team of conservation officers employed to comment on developments affecting important gardens and designed landscapes. Since 1995 the GHS has been the statutory consultee for designed landscapes and is therefore informed of any proposals which may affect places listed on Historic England's Register of historic parks and gardens (graded I, II and II*). All of these existing functions of the GHS will continue to be an important part of the role and remit of the new Gardens Trust, which inherits the charity number of the old GHS. Current members of the GHS, who become individual members of The Gardens Trust, stand at about 1,200.

The Association of Gardens Trusts was established in 1993 as a central 'umbrella organisation' intended to promote the care, conservation and enjoyment of historic designed gardens, landscapes and parks and to provide a strategic focus and training for the many CGTs established up and down Britain (currently 36). It publishes an annual Yearbook as a digest of the activities of the CGTs (which is to be continued) and organises study days and an annual conference. Each CGT is a CGT member of the new Gardens Trust in the same way that they were each a member of the AGT. Individual members of CGTs still belong to their respective county organisations, paying their annual subscriptions directly to them. In addition, individual members have the option of joining The Gardens Trust, to include a subscription to the journal *Garden History* and the new Gardens Trust newsletter, incorporating the opportunity to book for study days, foreign trips, lectures and seminars. The total combined current membership of all the CGTs currently stands at about 7,000.

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