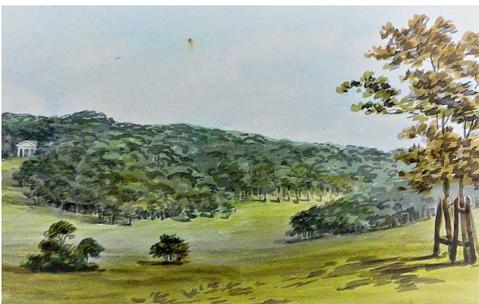




Daring to jump:

a rudimentary approach to making garden and landscape history more inclusive.

Above: the mural study 'Abundance of Today' which advertised the Gardens Trust lecture series discussed in this paper. Below are the images for each of the nine lectures in the series.



Lecture 1. Guns and Roses: Humphry Repton at Warley Park. Advolly Richmond on Repton's work for the Quaker gun manufacturer Samuel Galton Junior at his estate at Warley Woods, Birmingham, and early 19th century attitudes to the 'African trade' through the particular debates among the Quakers - and Galton's own family - about the source of his wealth.

Turning traditional history teaching into something that is more appropriate for 2022 can seem an overwhelming challenge. So many issues need addressing, so little published research is available, so much of the profession feels ill-equipped to tackle the demands of discovering and debating new historical narratives. The future for teaching landscape history seems one of trepidation and danger.

This paper outlines one approach to the challenges, as trialled by the Gardens Trust, the London-based charity dedicated to the research and conservation of designed landscapes in England and Wales. The aim was to introduce contemporary themes and ideas quickly into an existing programme without needing to start again from first principles.

The result was a ten-week online series run in Spring 2021, which strove to hear voices in the history of gardens, horticulture and landscapes that had been



Lecture 2. Historic Landscapes for All: Learning to Share. Linden Groves on lessons learnt from the Heritage Lottery-funded 'Sharing Repton' project run by the Gardens Trust, which engaged diverse communities, including refugees and asylum-seekers, with historic landscapes.



Lecture 3. Learning from The Blackamoor. Patrick Eyres on how the Atlantic slave economy permeated the garden culture of Georgian Britain, with a focus on the history and current interpretation of The Blackamoor - a lead statue representing the commercial bounty of enslavement.



Lecture 4. Ingrid Pollard on questions of representation, landscape, heritage, identity, race and difference in her work, with a focus on visual ways of upsetting the balance of power and challenging stereotypes and preconceptions, and the role of landscape and language in establishing our sense of identity.

silenced by the legacy of colonialism and enslavement. It sought out more diverse stories and inclusive themes, with topics ranging from refugee perspectives on Reptonian landscapes, ways of making colonial histories explicit in public parks, and the interpretation of visible reminders of the slave trade, to the role of landscape and language in establishing our sense of identity. Nine lectures were followed by a discussion panel exploring some of the issues and themes that had arisen, and allowing the audience to offer reflections.

The series was designed as a swift, imperfect response to the #BlackLivesMatter movement and other contemporary pressures, and allowed the Trust quickly to show its engagement with the issues, rather than waiting for a more thorough overhaul of garden history teaching. It was a way of testing the water, trialling new material and new perspectives, and gauging the response, at speed.

No attempt was made to provide a full spread of material by chronology, geography or discipline. Few of the speakers had formally published their research and many were still in the midst of investigation or analysis. Compelling narratives and diverse perspectives were more important than specific professions. So speakers included garden historians, but also horticulturalists, gardeners, academics, journalists and artists.

We sought formal evaluation from the 350-strong international audience. Around 40% told us that they joined the series to further their career development or to support academic studies. The first aim of the series - to hear some of the voices usually absent from garden history - was judged completely or largely met by 85% of respondents; for the second aim - to explore new ways of engaging with the whole history of gardens, landscapes and horticulture - the figure was 70%. Typical comments included 'Very varied, thought-provoking and enjoyable ... It offered the kind of nuanced good-faith conversation that is in short supply.'



Lecture 5. Collecting with Lao Chao. Yvette Harvey on George Forrest's plant hunting expeditions in China, juxtaposing archival evidence of the extensive role of his team of local collectors, headed by Lao Chao, with the lack of credit for their work in Western accounts or the naming of the collected plants.



Lecture 6. Telling Tales about Trees. Camilla Allen on the Great Green Wall project in Africa, exploring some of the proponents of a linear forest across the degraded landscapes of the southern Sahara; the language and stories around the project; and the ideas that have helped sell it.

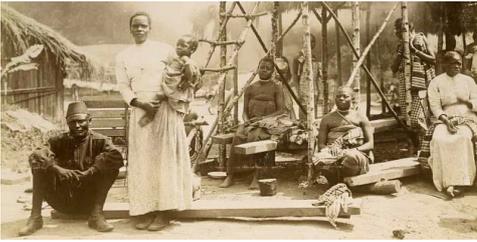


Lecture 7. Making Botanic Gardens More Inclusive. Sonia Dhanda, Sharon Willoughby (both Kew) and Caroline Lehman (RBGE) on wide-ranging reviews of the two gardens' history, collections, practices, language and public engagement, focusing on social and racial justice, with community story-telling as one element in achieving inclusivity.

RESOURCES REQUIRED

This paper is being presented in the conference session about the resources needed to improve history teaching. From the Gardens Trust's experience, we found that the key resources were:

- Thoughtful, informed and early **advice about language, terminology and tone**. For instance, we quickly regretted titling the lecture series 'Other Voices in Garden History', given the negative connotations of 'othering.' Instead we needed help to find language that expressed how the voices now being heard were not somehow different from the people listening. We also started to discuss terminology and tone in advance and to agree (or agree to disagree over) usage of words, especially where no one term is widely accepted.
- An **agreed approach to the issues**. We were explicit that the series was not aiming to point fingers or to encourage hand-wringing, but to be a celebration of voices starting to be heard.
- **Perspectives that start with the previously unheard voice**. This was one area where we realised in retrospect that we had largely failed. Most of the history we presented began with the traditional account (the context of the 'usual oft-sung characters and euro-centric viewpoints' as one evaluation comment put it) instead of focusing immediately on forgotten stories.
- The time and **understanding of everyone within the organisation** who was involved in the series, from senior managers to occasional volunteers. They did not need necessarily to be enthusiastic proponents of the project, but at least to feel comfortable discussing its rationale and prepared should they be challenged.
- The widespread interest and **support for new historical perspectives among potential**



Lecture 8. Hearing the Voices from a Human Zoo. Jill Sinclair on the interpretation of European landscapes funded by the colonisation of central Africa, with a focus on the exhibition grounds at Tervuren, designed for Leopold II, king of the Belgians, where people from the Congo river basin were displayed in what were, effectively, human zoos.



Lecture 9. Contested Landscapes. Maxwell A. Ayamba on how the notion of race affects the use of countryside spaces, with the presence of minorities sometimes seen as a dissolution of the English national identity, alongside his personal reflections as co-founder of the Black Men Walking Group.



students. Even with our traditionally middle-aged, middle-class, largely white membership, the lecture series was widely welcomed. The most common question was not ‘why are you doing this?’ but ‘why have you not done it sooner?’

- The most important resource was the **enthusiasm, honesty and willingness of our speakers.** Few of us felt expert on the topics we were discussing and our arguments were often based on unpublished research or our own experience. Being candid about the limitations of our knowledge and the paucity of existing literature meant that our audience accepted the lectures as tentative introductions to a wide range of topics. Typical evaluation comments welcomed ‘the honest and factual way in which the subject matter was presented ...the pragmatic approaches taken by the lecturers ... the discussion of ongoing research and personal experience... the chance to listen to the way different people are grappling with different ways to approach garden history ...the humility and willingness to learn and improvethe acknowledgement of painful lessons learned.’

Resources for further study were requested by several in the audience and some suggestions were subsequently provided here: <https://thegardenstrust.org/conservation/vs-hub/networking-materials/other-voices/>

Jill Sinclair, convenor of the lecture series, is a member of the Gardens Trust Education & Training Committee. She teaches the History of English Landscape Gardens online for the University of Oxford and is a trustee of the Historic Gardens Foundation.

Image credits: p1: study by F. Luis Mora, Smithsonian American Art Museum; watercolour from Humphry Repton’s Red Book for Warley Park, 1795; p2: participants in the Sharing Repton initiative at Blaise Castle, photo: Gardens Trust; The Blackamoor by Andrew Carpenter, c.1731, photo: Patrick Eyres; Wordsworth Heritage image © Ingrid Pollard; p3: Forrest’s collecting team, Lao Chao fifth from right © RHS / Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh; the Sahara desert and the Sahel from space, NASA, 2002; the pagoda at Kew Gardens, photo: Rafa Esteve under a CCA license; p4: A ‘human zoo’, collection RMCA Tervuren, photo: A Gautier, 1897; Black Men Walking Group, 2013, photo: Maxwell Ayamba.