

with the old fashioned style of the seventeenth-century John Webb house.<sup>64</sup> We are now left to contemplate whether or not this could have been one of Capability Brown's early architectural works, and indeed, what else Brown may have been responsible for here, if anything at all. In the nineteenth century, a return to a taste for the formal, and more directly for the *Italianate*, allowed for such a scene to be preserved and enhanced. It is not too difficult to imagine that whilst Alexander Copland built his new Tuscan-style villa in 1802 he was also keeping his eye on the historic garden ensemble over the wall, a scene he was apparently content to identify as the work of Brown.

To the Coplands, the Gunnersbury estate provided a spacious family home and a leisurely retreat close to London, where cricket and archery parties were amongst the chief activities of the summer months, and where the game of billiards took centre stage in The Temple.<sup>65</sup> By Rothschild standards, even from the early days of Nathan Meyer Rothschild's ownership, Gunnersbury was a relatively modest estate,<sup>66</sup> but one that the family would eventually greatly expand and improve, without ever destroying any part of the older sections of the garden. The Rothschilds entertained lavishly in the nineteenth century, and Gunnersbury served as the venue for their less formal receptions attended by family, friends, associates and favoured heads of state. Indeed, during the long period of Rothschild ownership, Gunnersbury acquired a highly cultivated and worldly demeanour, something not seen since the end of Princess Amelia's residence. Under the Rothschilds, the estate also earned a reputation for horticultural excellence, particularly in the hands of the head gardeners of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Mr G Reynolds and Mr James Hudson.<sup>67</sup> At Gunnersbury, we can observe the Victorian trend in gardens towards architectural eclecticism, the *Temple Garden* forming one of the various diverse scenes, others being the *Gothic picturesque* (Potomac Lake and Boathouse by J W Pulham, post 1861),<sup>68</sup> *Rustic picturesque* (The Farm, and Pulham's

alternative design for the Potomac Boathouse, post 1861),<sup>69</sup> *Turkish* (proposed Bath, designed by George Somers Clarke in 1872)<sup>70</sup> and, finally, *Japanese* (circa 1901, by Mr James Hudson).<sup>71</sup>

The fairly recent restoration of The Temple and the more recent restoration of The Italianate Garden and Princess Amelia's Bathhouse marks an exciting phase in historic garden conservation at Gunnersbury. I look forward to hearing of further developments, particularly in the repair of the Triumphal Arch and Balustrade, and possibly the return and restoration of some of the original garden statuary.

### A HISTORY of the ESTATE AND GARDEN at WROTHAM PARK By Alan Simpson

Wrotham Park Estate in Hertfordshire, home of the Byng family for over 250 years, lies beside the Great North Road between Barnet and Potters Bar, some 15 miles from central London. Named to commemorate family connections in Kent, Wrotham Park was built by Admiral John Byng on the site of two much older properties, *Pinchbank* and *Knightsland*. The land, consist-

68 'Baron Lionel Rothschild was able to extend the Park south-westwards in 1861, by the acquisition of copyhold land from the Bishop of London. A large claypit already on the site was adapted to form an ornamental lake, designated the Potomac Pond, and the tile kiln on its banks was cleverly converted into a Gothic tower-cum-boathouse by the addition of octagonal upper stories.' *As Finely Finished As Anything*, p. 3. 'Pulhamite artificial stone or stone cement appears to have been employed on the boat house as window and doorway stone dressings and gothic tracery, on the hood moulds, label stops, reveals and raised corner quoins, as well as the tabling to be found above the first floor which is wider than the rest of the tower the string moulding drip sills are also formed in this material.' *Notes on Pulhamite Survey*, report by Michael Wingate for Swann & Associates (historic plaster and mortar specialist, analysis, plaster condition surveys, research and consultancy), 29 February 1999. GPMA: Box File 1.

69 Elevation of Boat House etc, signed J W Pulham, design showing an alternative single-storey rustic boathouse above an arched bridge/inlet (the bridge inlet and balustrade detail are identical to the present Gothic version as built). Copy of photograph taken from the original drawing in the Rothschild Archives in GPMA: Box File 1. See also index for items: 85.103/28-85.103/75.

70 'One Rothschild scheme which, alas, did not get off the drawing-board was the exotic Turkish bath for which George Somers Clarke, architect of a notable Turkish bath in Jermyn Street, prepared designs in 1872.' *As Finely Finished as Anything*, p. 3. Copies of photographs taken from the original 4 drawings in the Rothschild Archives are in GPMA: Box File 1. See also index for items: 85.103/28-85.103/75.

71 '1876-1919 James Hudson became head gardener [at Gunnersbury House] to H J Atkinson (who styled himself Farmer-Atkinson) and continued under Rothschild for the whole estate, until his retirement in 1919. He laid out the Japanese Gardens as well as other areas.' *Chronological List of Archives on Gunnersbury Park*, GPMA: 94.165. See also: notes and articles on Hudson in GPMA: Box File 1.

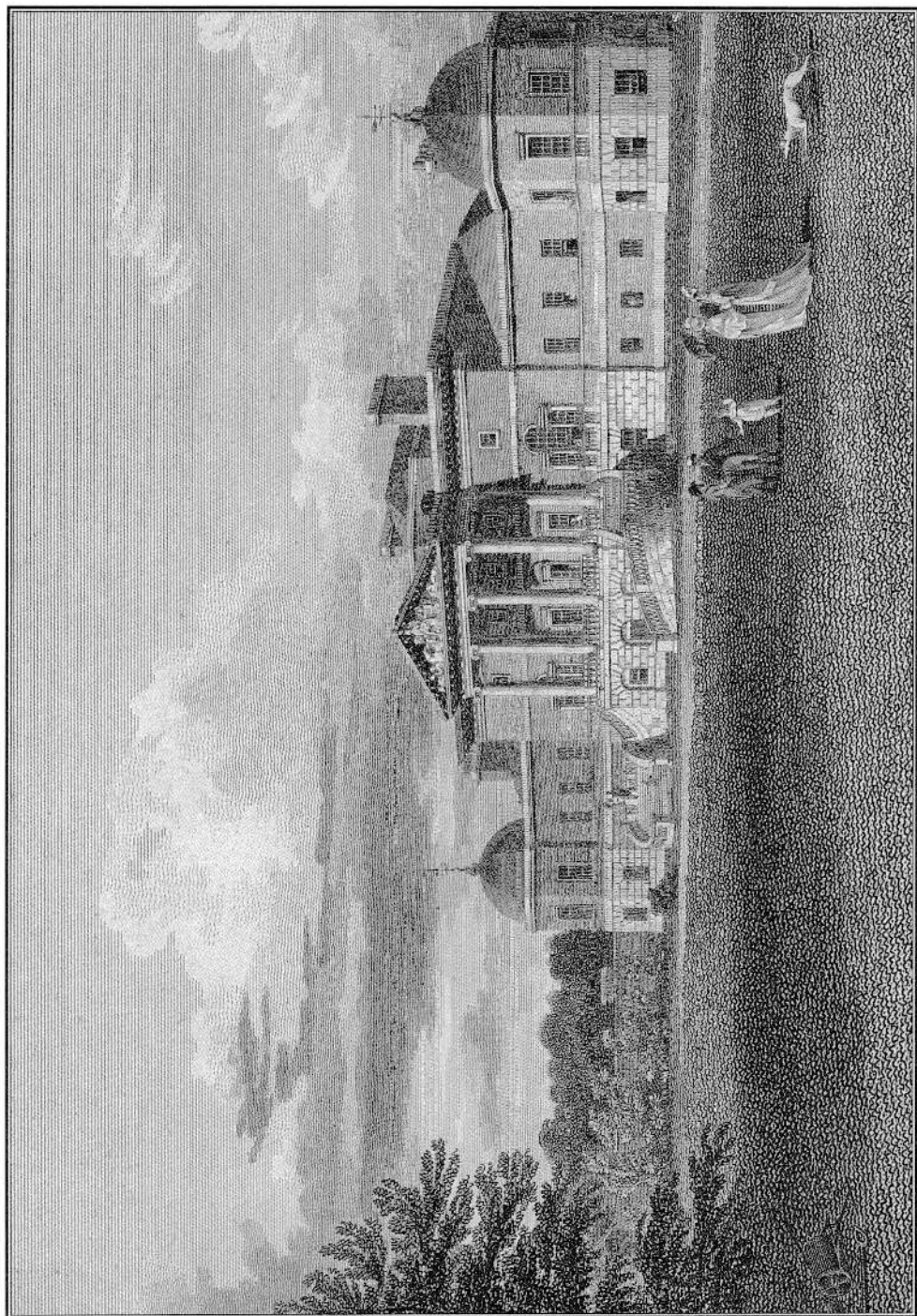
1 The site also encompasses part of the field of the Battle of Barnet (1471), one of the last actions in the Wars of the Roses.

64 John Webb, p. 321. GPMA: Box File 1.

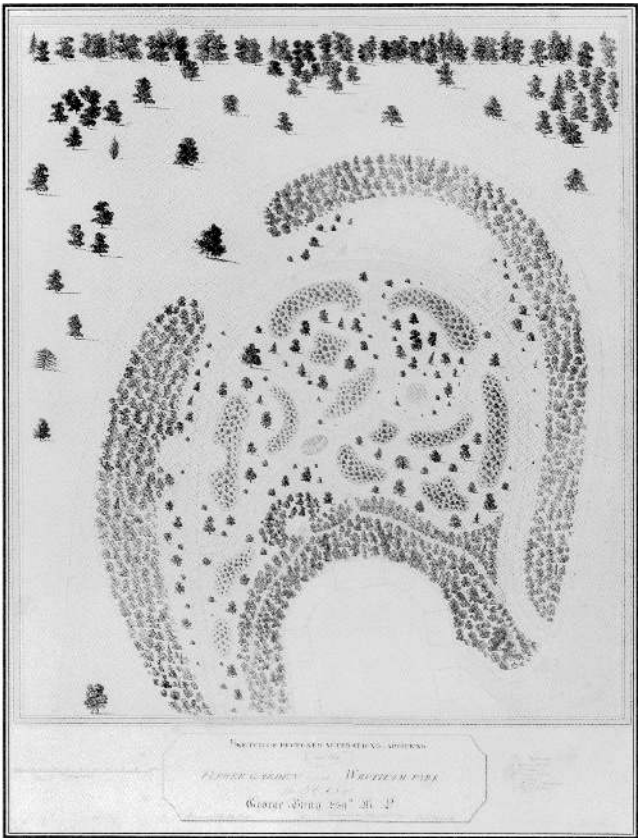
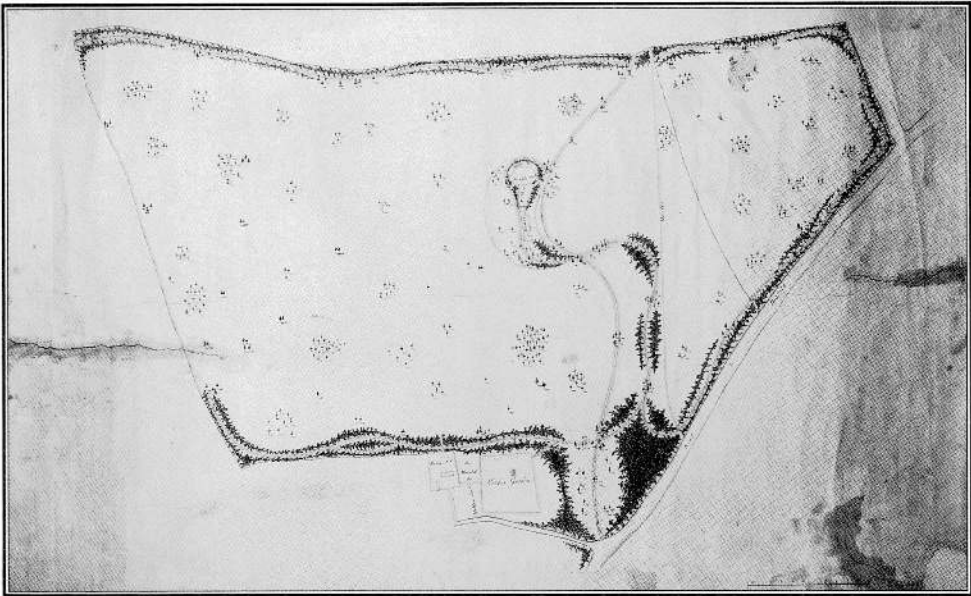
65 *Memoranda*, pp. 73, 76.

66 Ann & James Collett-White, *Gunnersbury Park and the Rothschilds* (1994), pp. 15, 25.

67 *Journal of Horticulture and Cottage Gardener*, 27 July 1899.



50. Wrotham Park (the Seat of George Byng Esq.)  
Drawn and Engraved by W & G Cooke, 1803  
(WROTHAM PARK ARCHIVE)



51. Survey Map of 1780, showing the Mansion and Kitchen Garden within the Wrotham Estate  
(COURTESY BRITISH ARCHITECTURAL LIBRARY, RIBA, LONDON)

52. Lewis Kennedy's proposed Flower Garden at Wrotham Park, 1811.  
The main outline is similar to that of the garden today  
(COURTESY C W HIND COLLECTION, LONDON)

ing of some 250 acres, slopes gently southwards between the ancient roads to Hatfield, St Albans and the North.<sup>1</sup> The Mansion, designed by Isaac Ware, was placed at the highest point of the land, at the head of a small valley containing a stream called *Margery Mead*.<sup>2</sup> (fig. 50)

When Admiral Byng began building in 1754, he no doubt saw his Palladian mansion, set in its modest Park a few hours coach ride from London, as a rural retreat, somewhere to retire to after a worthy, if unspectacular career in his country's service (his father, also an Admiral, had been a great hero against the French and Spanish, but no such opportunities for glory had come John's way). Alas, a bungled operation in the Mediterranean, a vindictive Administration, and a concerted and venomous public campaign saw him court-martialled and shot in 1757 for 'neglect and want of zeal', the only British admiral ever to suffer this fate.<sup>3</sup> John had no son to inherit, and Wrotham Park passed to his nephew, George Byng, who, having had little to do with its construction, seems to have had less idea what to make of it. He did buy an additional 50 acres of what had been part of Enfield Chase to add to the Estate, but otherwise he allowed it to develop in an ad hoc manner, thus establishing a precedent that continued for the next hundred years.

The Parkland itself was designed by Samuel Lappidge in 1765 and followed established Brownian principles of open landscaping, with numerous trees planted singly or in clumps, the whole affording an air of manicured rurality.<sup>4</sup> This landscape, albeit altered and now somewhat over-mature, still exists, including one particular feature initiated by Lappidge and much appreciated by subsequent occupants of the Estate, namely a substantial perimeter belt of oak, lime, horse- and sweet chestnut which today very effectively screens the noise and disturbance from the busy roads which surround the Estate (now including the M25).

While the Byngs continued their

improvements to the Mansion and Estate, their interest in the Garden, even from the earliest stages, was less pronounced. There is evidence from maps and documents held at Wrotham Park and elsewhere of a first attempt at a garden to the west and north of the Mansion soon after it was completed, and there is mention in the 1760s of an *Oval Garden*, probably to the east of the Mansion, although no trace of any of this exists today. It is not until 1780 that a map shows the rudiments of what became a garden to the north of the Mansion, and the first indication of the walled *Kitchen Garden*, some distance to the south. (fig. 51) This Kitchen Garden, the walls of which still stand, contained an extensive glass range housing a vine dated 1785, which, despite the now-dilapidated state of the Vine House, still grows away happily.<sup>5</sup> The inevitable conclusion to be drawn from this lack of certainty is that the Byngs of that time did not regard the garden as a priority, and perhaps allowed gardeners working at Wrotham to implement their own designs, each of which was replaced by later ideas. Thus, during the first half century of Wrotham's existence, there is no evidence of an overall design for a garden.

The first documented proposals for a *Flower Garden* to the north of the Mansion come in 1811, in a design drawn up by Lewis Kennedy, a nurseryman of the time.<sup>6</sup> (fig. 52) It is not clear how much of Kennedy's rather elaborate design was actually implemented (no doubt it was designed to utilise as much of his own nursery stock as possible), but it is interesting to note how closely the shape of his proposal is reflected in the garden as it exists today, with paths and borders following similar lines. This shape was further consolidated in 1847 with the construction of a stone seat as the focal point of what has become the most important south / north axis in the garden. This seat has never been moved since it was built, but it has been embellished by an ivy which, anecdotally, came from George Washington's garden in America.

Agriculture first intruded into the Park in the shape of a farm, established by George

<sup>2</sup> The Mansion is variously described in *Vitruvius Britannicus* (1771), *The Beauties of England and Wales* by J Norris Brewer (1816) and Pevsner's *Herefordshire*, and is regarded as a fine example of Burlingtonian-Palladian style.

<sup>3</sup> This prompted Voltaire's wry comment in *Candide*: 'Dans ce pays-ci il est bon de temps en temps de tuer un amiral pour encourager les autres'.

<sup>4</sup> The great man himself is reputed to have made two visits to Wrotham Park to advise Lappidge.

<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, this Kitchen Garden is shown on a later survey map of 1793, although this has no trace of a Garden near the Mansion. (Copy held in Wrotham Park archive).

<sup>6</sup> A copy is held at Wrotham Park; the original is held by Charles W Hind, Curator of the Drawings Collection, RIBA.

Stevens Byng in 1854,<sup>7</sup> and Lappidge's simple landscape was broken up by hedges, field boundaries and, later, paddocks for horses. However, this proved advantageous in that the laying down of an extensive system of drains (essential on Wrotham's heavy clay) relieved the chronic saturation of the land.<sup>8</sup> These drains led to a lake that was formed partly by excavation, and partly by the damming of Margery Mead. The farm complex included a forge, steam pump and numerous workshops, as well as accommodation for workers and animals. So proud was the Earl of his Farm that he had designs drawn up for gardens to be established to the west of what was referred to as the *Ladies Room* on the farm, where visitors could admire modern agricultural practices on the one hand, and commune with 'unspoiled' nature on the other. These gardens, planned to contain exotic plants from America and other foreign places, were never completed, but there is a *pinetum* beside the farm that may date from this time.

Illustrations of the Mansion made in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries show flowerbeds in front of the west front of the Mansion (although the presence of fanciful peacocks and other animals causes one to wonder how much artistic licence has been employed).<sup>9</sup> (fig. 53) In 1856, the west front was completely altered by the building of a Terrace as part of underpinning work carried out on the Mansion. This was further enhanced in 1870 when paths and steps were made linking the Mansion and Terrace to a new garden, consisting of a lawn surrounded by flower and shrub borders; a path led from this garden to the Lake, where a Palladian Temple was erected (part decorative flourish, and part practical disguise for the overflow conduit). The Temple remains (just), but the path has long since vanished.

This *West Garden* was, for many years, the home of two Coade statues, one life size, one slightly smaller, representing classical female figures (possibly *Flora* or *Circe*), and a stone caricature of Jeffrey Hudson, Queen Henrietta Maria's favourite dwarf. (fig. 54) Redevelopment of the area necessitated the

removal of these statues and they are now within the garden that is north of the Mansion, where they have joined a marble group of three putti. The Terrace still boasts four large urns representing the Seasons, which, according to contemporary sources, seem to have been in this position for some time before the Terrace was built. Around the Mansion and in the garden there are various stone urns, none of any great interest, and, until they were stolen in recent years, some lead and cast iron ones. In storage, there are a pair of (damaged) female figures in ceramic and about half life size, which came from the Byngs' former London House in St James's Square; when repaired, these will be placed in the *Rose Garden* (see below). Wrotham Park's collection of statuary and stoneware is modest by some standards, but has a certain charm.

In 1869, a new Conservatory was built beside the north path in the Flower Garden (which thus, in a rush of imagination, was given the name the *Conservatory Garden*). (fig. 55) This building replaced an older Conservatory which stood to the west of the Mansion, and which was removed as part of the terracing works mentioned above. The new Conservatory was built to an ingenious design by the firm of John Weeks & Co of Chelsea,<sup>10</sup> incorporating a system of internal gutters and drains, a patented type of ribbed glass and an integral boiler house and heating system, the whole being built of cast and malleable iron on a stone base. Sadly, over the years, the iron gutters and downpipes, which also formed the structural supports, corroded and began 'blowing'; because of its nature, the cast iron could not easily be repaired so that by the 1980s, the iron and glass had to be dismantled. It had been hoped that it could be rebuilt quickly, but this proved impossible and, more recently, the brick boiler house and back wall, which had remained, became dangerous and had to be taken down. (fig. 56) Now kept in storage on the Estate, it is not clear what will become of the structure unless funds become available for its restoration.<sup>11</sup> All that remains is the stone base, which is currently being developed as a Rose Garden.

<sup>7</sup> This branch of the Byng family had been elevated to the rank of Earls of Strafford in 1845.

<sup>8</sup> It is a tribute to the quality of this system that parts of it are in use today.

<sup>9</sup> Engravings held in the Wrotham Park archive.

<sup>10</sup> Not, as family tradition has it, by Paxton, after his work at Kew. (Documents held in Wrotham Park archive).

<sup>11</sup> The construction of the Conservatory in 1869 cost £778 0s 0d; the latest estimate for its reconstruction is in the region of £80-100,000. (Documents held in Wrotham Park archive).



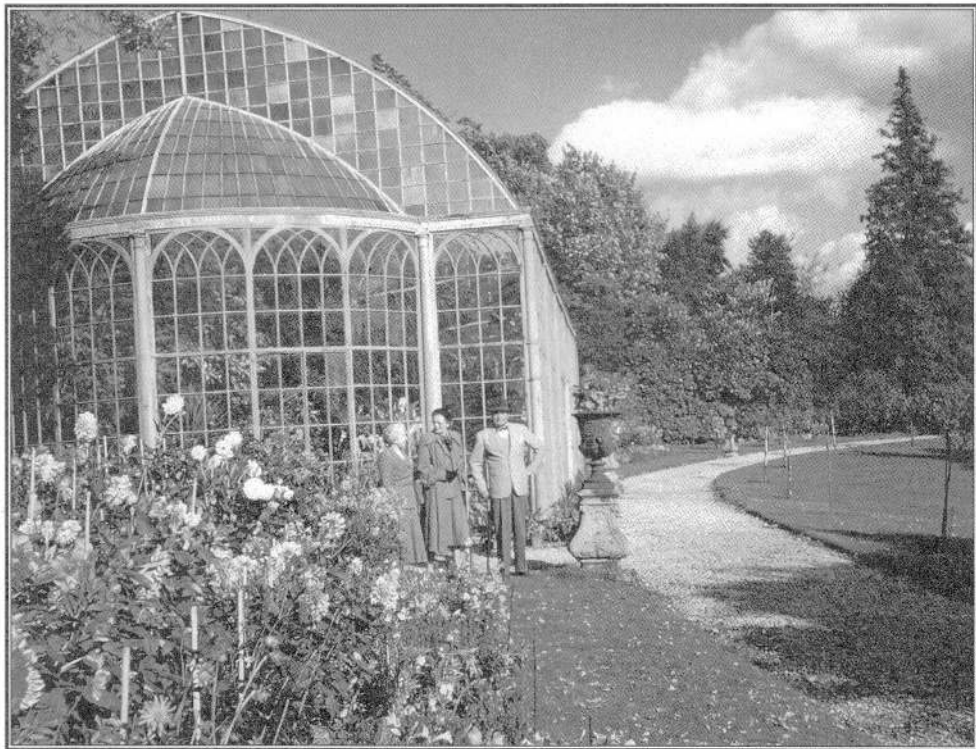
Wrotham Park in Middlesex, the Seat of George Bragg Esq.

Published at the Theatre, June 11, 1791, by W. Watts, Designer, & Engraver, Chelsea.



52. The West Front of Wrotham Park Mansion, showing possible flower beds in this area.  
Drawn and Engraved by W Watts, 1781  
(WROTHAM PARK ARCHIVE)

54. Looking west from the Mansion, showing topiary along the edge of the former West Garden (now green), c. 1970  
(WROTHAM PARK ARCHIVE)



55. The Conservatory, 1952  
(WROTHAM PARK ARCHIVE)

56. The demolition of the Conservatory wall for safety reasons in 2000.  
The new Rose Garden is visible to the right  
(PHOTOGRAPH: ALAN SIMPSON)

North of the Flower Garden, a gradual expansion of what was known as the *Pleasure Ground* began during the 1830s and '40s, consisting of - to the east - a *Woodland Garden* and - to the west - a *Sunken Garden*, linked by an area laid out in the 'picturesque' style, with paths winding between trees. No detailed plans have been found showing these developments, so it is not possible to be certain who was responsible for them, who carried them out or exactly when they were done, but it is clear from such evidence as does still exist, that this was an effort to unify the various areas in what is an awkwardly shaped garden.<sup>12</sup>

The *Sunken Garden*, with its associated *Sunken Walk* and pond, are shown on an Ordnance Survey map of 1860. Little detail is shown on the OS map, and it is difficult to see today what this area would have looked like in its prime. There are a number of oak, lime and yew trees here which pre-date the Mansion, as well as several large horse-chestnuts which may have been original plantings by Lappidge, and it seems likely that these attracted the designers of the garden features, and of the family Mausoleum which was built here in 1880, perhaps providing a link with the past and an evocation of the endurance of *Nature*. Over the years, the pond dwindled to the size of a large puddle and was filled in, the *Sunken Garden* became choked with bramble and holly, and the *Sunken Walk* disappeared in a tangle of laurel and sycamore. Recent clearance has brought them, relatively intact, into the light again, and further development of this area is planned.

At the other end of the *Pleasure Ground*, the *Woodland* was an area of rhododendrons, azaleas and other shrubs planted under a canopy of oak, lime and chestnut. Within this informality, there was a more formal area, circular in shape, containing smaller plants. This feature has long since disappeared, but glimpses of what it was like can be gained from the occasional metal plant label which turns up from time to time; lilies, primulas, meconopsis and raphiolepis all seem to have been grown there at one time or another (indeed, lilies seem to have flourished throughout the *Woodland Garden*). There is no indication of when this circular garden was

abandoned, but it was long gone before the character of the *Woodland* was drastically affected by the gales of 1987 and 1990, which caused much damage to the area. Many of the large rhododendrons were destroyed by falling trees, and the sudden gaps in the canopy led to a lack of shelter which has been responsible for the loss of other trees since. Over the last few years, however, a replanting programme of oak, lime, hornbeam and chestnut has been initiated which will replace the lost trees, while shrubs and bulbs are also being planted.

Between the *Woodland* and the Mausoleum lies the *picturesque* area. This part of the garden has been much altered over the years, with the intrusion of a Bowling Green, later replaced by a Swimming Pool, with surrounding hedges and associated topiary figures. The Swimming Pool is still there, now converted to an ornamental pool, although extensive work still needs to be done to soften its utilitarian shape. The hedges, possibly victims of extreme waterlogging and *phytophthora*, began to die some years ago and have been removed, but the topiary figures have been saved and are to be incorporated in the redesign of the area that is taking place. (fig. 57)

One later feature, which now dominates the area, is a 2-acre, 15-foot deep *Ornamental Pond*.<sup>13</sup> (fig. 58) The construction of this was the result of a catastrophe in 1883, when fire gutted the Mansion and there was no water supply nearby to put it out; the pond was dug to provide such a supply in the future. Although no longer required for this purpose, it has become an integral part of the landscape and is home to a wide variety of fish, amphibians and wildfowl (an example of it being an ill wind indeed that does no good at all). As for the rest of this area, the difficulty of gaining a true sense of its original nature has already been mentioned as a result of the lack of contemporary plans and the changes it has undergone, but it does contain a number of specimen trees, including a large *Nothofagus*, a mature specimen of the Kermes Oak and a number of large, mature magnolias. During clearance in the area, several groups of mature Japanese maples were discovered which appear

<sup>12</sup> The Wrotham Park archive, currently undergoing a major overhaul, contains many unfortunate gaps.

<sup>13</sup> This is commonly referred to as the 'Lake', although it is tiny in comparison with the real lake.

to have been planted, probably in the 1920s or '30s, with the intention of forming a link from one end of the garden to the other.

The Second World War saw the same changes at Wrotham as affected many other large gardens and estates. With the removal of men into the armed forces, the garden was left to its own devices and inevitably began to show signs of neglect, while enforced arable production led to a reduction in the open spaces of the parkland. The latter was rectified at the end of the war, but the men never returned in their former numbers, and the process of reversion continued in the garden. Unable to find and pay for the gardeners needed to return to the standards of the pre-war years, the Byngs had to accept that, for instance, the Kitchen Garden could no longer provide the Mansion (or the Estate as a whole) with all its needs, nor could the outlying parts of the garden - the Woodland, the Lake, the perimeter belts and so on - be maintained in their former style. Effort was concentrated on the areas around the Mansion, particularly the Conservatory Garden and the important family areas at the Mausoleum and Swimming Pool, although maintaining even this represented no small task. (*fig. 59*) The fashions of the 1920s and '30s had left a legacy of large numbers of flower beds and borders, hedges, over a hundred standard roses around lawns and hundreds of yards of edging to be kept clipped, as well as lawns and paths to be maintained. It is a tribute to the dedication of the small number of people who undertook the labour that the garden did not fall apart altogether.<sup>14</sup> Eventually one man, with very occasional help, was responsible for all the work, and it was only his diligence that preserved the garden at all.

The 1970s saw the beginning of a revival. Much work was being done to the Mansion to modernise it, and the same, to a limited extent, was true in the garden. It was realised that the maintenance of such an area could not be left to one person, so the vacant post of Head Gardener was once again filled, and a number of gardeners were employed. It was also realised that the shape of the garden needed to be revised since it had become too fussy and time-consuming to maintain. The designer

Vernon Russell Smith was called in to advise and he recommended the altering of paths, the removal of a number of beds and borders, and a replanting programme to be initiated; he was keen to re-establish the 'eighteenth-century' feel of the garden.<sup>15</sup> Mr Russell Smith's plans were not fully implemented but his recommendations acted as a spur to a number of necessary changes, largely to simplify the garden and get rid of some of the clutter of previous ages.<sup>16</sup> Sadly, the most obvious change during this period, and not one of Mr Russell Smith's recommendations, was the obliteration of the Garden to the west of the Mansion, which destroyed the definition of both the Garden and the Mansion along this front. A pressing need for an area to hold corporate entertainment events, now a major part of the business of the Estate, meant that this Garden has been overtaken by an 11-acre lawn.

As mentioned, the Conservatory was taken down with every intention of it being restored, although this has not proved possible. In the Kitchen Garden, the glasshouse range was also inspected to see whether it would be possible to reinstate it. Unfortunately, again this proved to be too great a task for the available resources and, sadly, the decline of this historical feature has continued (the ongoing collapse of the extensive brick outhouses holding the back wall up means that the physical integrity of the entire structure is now compromised). A similar decline is evident at the Temple on the Lake, which is slowly being pushed over by a large willow; plans are in hand to remove the tree (a task complicated by the fact that, paradoxically, it is also holding the structure up!), after which the Temple will be rebuilt. (*fig. 60*)

Following a period of relative stability in the late 1970s and '80s during which the encroachment of the wilderness was halted, it was decided that greater emphasis should be paid to restoring the garden to something approaching its original state. As a prelude to this, in 1987 John Phibbs was commissioned to survey the Estate and Garden, and his report has proved extremely valuable, providing not

<sup>15</sup> It must be said that no-one before or since has been able to detect Mr Russell Smith's 'feeling', and he moved on before he could explain it.

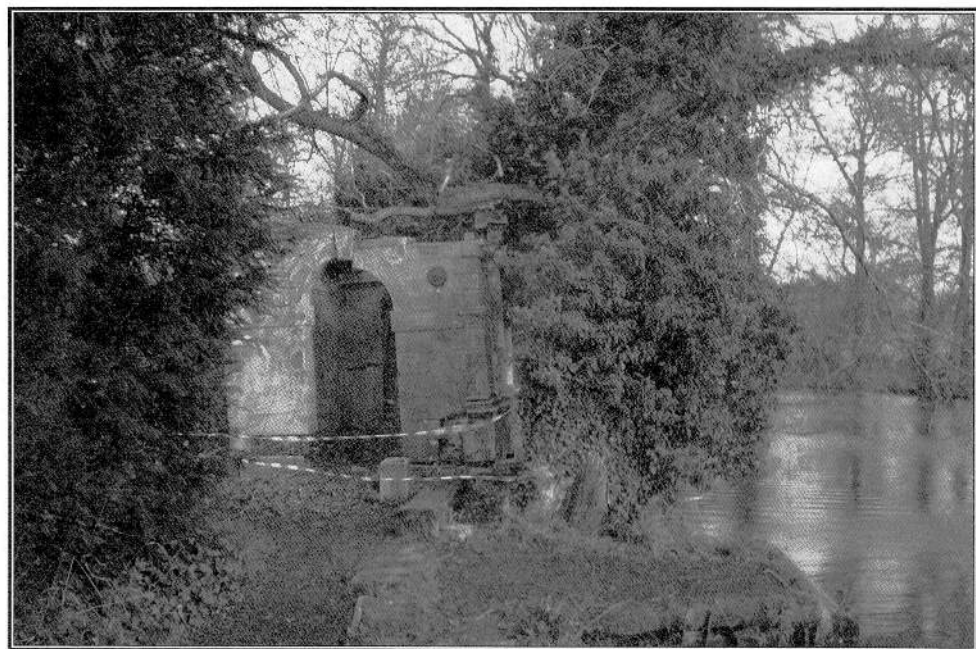
<sup>16</sup> Copies of the correspondence between Vernon Russell Smith and Julian Byng, then incumbent at Wrotham Park, along with copies of some of his plans, are held on file at Wrotham Park.

<sup>14</sup> Most were untrained as gardeners; one was a groom, and another the Estate handyman.



57. The Old Swimming Pool area, which requires extensive development.  
The topiary figures are just visible in the background  
(PHOTOGRAPH: ALAN SIMPSON)

58. The Ornamental Pond in the picturesque area, undergoing dredging and cleaning in 1996  
(PHOTOGRAPH: ALAN SIMPSON)



59. The Conservatory Garden  
(PHOTOGRAPH: ALAN SIMPSON)

60. The Temple on the Lake, showing the damage referred to in the text  
(PHOTOGRAPH: ALAN SIMPSON)

only an indication of the historical development of the landscape, but also of its current condition. Although not fully implemented, and, in places, overtaken by subsequent developments, Phibbs' major contribution was to highlight the alarming gap in the tree succession, with large numbers of mature trees and no new ones coming up. A phased programme of replanting has been initiated, along with clearance of weed species such as laurel and rhododendron, especially in the perimeter belts.

It was recognised that, without the staff to maintain it, full restoration of the garden would never be possible, but it was felt that the worst infestations of bramble, laurel, rhododendron, birch, sycamore and elder could be tackled, and the three elements of the Pleasure Ground could be opened up once more.

This work began in 1995. It quickly became evident that radical measures were needed and that the chainsaw and the JCB would prove more effective tools than loppers and a spade. There could not, however, be a wholesale swathe cut from one end of the garden to the other. Clearing had to be undertaken slowly, to ensure that lost or hidden features were not destroyed. The groups of Japanese maples already mentioned, the Sunken Walk, the original lines of paths, the remains of borders, and any number of interesting shrubs and trees have all come to light as a result of this patient approach. Not all that has been found could, or should, be saved - some things are too far gone, others are inappropriate or out-of-place - but each feature has to be uncovered and assessed. Initial clearing took over three years, followed by more detailed uncovering and reshaping. Then came the task of deciding what should be done in the short and long terms. It would clearly be unacceptable to have the garden looking like a building site for any length of time, but nor was it desirable to rush into replanting and making changes without proper planning.

The first consideration was what the garden was for. Was it merely an adjunct to the Mansion, without purpose in itself? Certainly, the current use of the Estate as a venue for filming and corporate entertainment indicates that the main priority for the future will be focused on the Mansion. But Wrotham is still the private residence of the Byngs and,

although they have never been a 'gardening' family,<sup>17</sup> they value the peace and tranquillity that the garden offers. The garden, then, has to fulfil two objectives. One is to provide an attractive backdrop to the Mansion in its 'working' role as a corporate and filming venue, the other is to provide a private and tranquil space for the family, should they desire it.

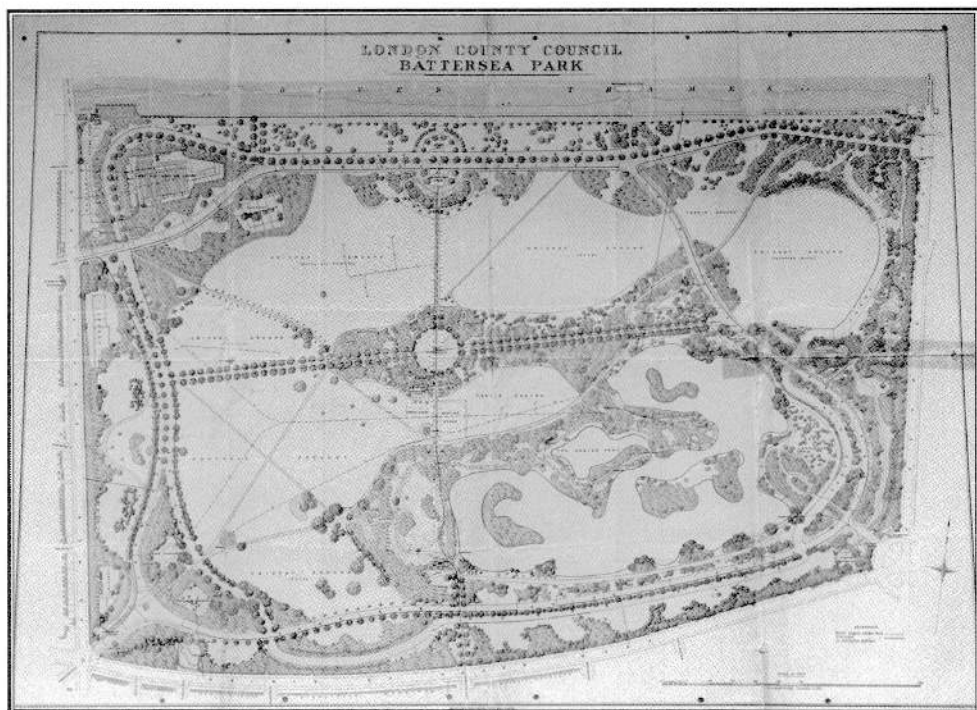
The second consideration was how the garden would be maintained after restoration. Clearly, both time and money would be wasted if spent on a project that was then overlooked or starved of resources. These days, no estate like Wrotham has unlimited funds, and every expenditure has to be justified. It is essential that a realistic assessment should be made of what can be achieved *and maintained*, as opposed to what might be dreamed of. This has meant that renewal has progressed at a more considered and deliberate pace than some would have expected or desired, but such are the realities of financial restraint.

The third consideration was, quite simply, restoration to what. As has been made clear, there is little real evidence of the intentions of the original creators of the garden, and it is suggested that development took place in an *ad hoc* manner; it is possible that this lack of formal planning and attention to fashion are what has resulted in a rather individual garden. Because of this, the current designs, whether classical or modern, will be as valid an expression of Wrotham's 'spirit' as anything that has gone before, since so much of what has gone before has gone! The garden does not exactly present a blank canvas, but nor is there a fixed concept to work to, and there is much scope for imagination. Whatever happens, the construction of a generic 'eighteenth-century' or pastiche 'mid-Victorian' garden, divorced from historical fact, is not to be contemplated.<sup>18</sup>

Replanting and rebuilding has begun slowly. Some features, such as paths that had been ripped up or altered, have been restored. The shrubs and trees brought out during clearance have been pruned, shaped and cosseted, and most are now responding by beginning to

<sup>17</sup> With one or two worthy exceptions, such as Lady Mary Byng, wife of the 6th Earl of Strafford (and last to live at Wrotham Park), who, in the 1920s, '30s and '40s, carried out extensive correspondence about the Garden with, among others, E. A. Bowles of Myddelton House, Enfield, and who was sent plants and bulbs from as far away as Burma. (Correspondence in Wrotham Park's archive).

<sup>18</sup> With all due respect to Vernon Russell Smith!



61. John Gibson's plan for Battersea Park (c.1855/6)  
(COURTESY BATTERSEA PARK ARCHIVE)

62. 'Wintry scene at Battersea Park which is rapidly being converted into Pleasure Gardens for the Festival of Britain' (1951)  
(COURTESY BATTERSEA PARK ARCHIVE)

flourish again. New plans have been drawn up to make use of those features which, like the old Swimming Pool, have been replaced by newer versions, or to replace those which, like the Conservatory, have disappeared altogether. Each year, new plants are bought in or propagated to extend the beds and borders as part of an overall plan to bring back a sense of colour and texture to the garden. Each year, essential yet unglamorous work is carried out, such as the renewal of drains and overflows. These things are being done slowly, with care, and in the knowledge that resources are not unlimited. The staff is small, two full-timers and a part-timer to look after the 35 acres of garden, with the Head Gardener also acting as Parkland Manager, but they have access to a range of machinery and equipment undreamed of by their predecessors, and access too to the assistance of outside contractors when required. Without this extra help, the renewal process would stop, and the garden once more begin to retreat. It will take many years for the Garden at Wrotham to once again be regarded as settled and to approach its potential, but the journey between where it is now, and where it will be, promises to be an interesting one.

#### RESTORATION OF THE FESTIVAL of BRITAIN PLEASURE GARDENS, BATTERSEA PARK By Virginia Liberatore

The 1951 *Festival of Britain Pleasure Gardens* in Battersea Park, designed by Russell Page, are currently being restored. Having been allowed to deteriorate into bleak, meaningless space, their recuperation promises not only to improve the general atmosphere of Battersea Park, but also to re-enliven the memory of their origins. The landscape designers charged with their restoration have come up with a plan that neatly folds the mid-twentieth-century design into the original mid-nineteenth-century park.

The Victorian park was designed in the mid-1850s by John Gibson, a student of Joseph Paxton, who created a lush and varied landscape with axial and winding walks, a serpentine lake, planted mounds, a riverside promenade and a carefully choreographed sequence of views. (fig. 61) Planted in 1856 at the height of Victorian horticultural enthusiasm,

Battersea Park quickly became celebrated for its spectacular diversity of trees and shrubs, many of which had only just been introduced to Britain by the many plant-hunting expeditions that had pushed into the furthest corners of the Empire. Also included in Gibson's landscape plan were open spaces:

The drama of the individual garden areas was heightened by their enclosure and their contrast with open fields. The sense of great exuberance was matched by a passion for detail. All this, enhanced by a rich palette of colour, texture, light and shade, created a magnificent landscape. These are all themes that govern the restoration.<sup>1</sup>

In their assessment of the character of Gibson's park, the designers claim that what unified its diverse elements was a 'dynamic conjunction of opposites', a principle that has proved quite useful in linking the modernist design of the Festival Gardens to the older park design.

Conceived under Clement Atlee's post-war Labour government as a means of cheering up a ration-weary populace, the 1951 Festival of Britain aimed to celebrate victory in the Second World War and to highlight British cultural and industrial achievement. It also served as a centennial commemoration of the 1851 Exhibition. The South Bank was chosen as the site for an art and industry fair, while the London County Council (LCC) provided 37 acres of Battersea Park, much of which had been dug up for allotments during the war, for the Festival Gardens and a Fun Fair.<sup>2</sup> (fig. 62)

The May 1950 prospectus for the construction of the Festival Gardens stated that:

This reserved area is a most pleasant part of Battersea Park and is well provided with trees and shrubs and the natural contours lend themselves to suitable development.

The contours were not, of course, natural, but remnants of Gibson's mounding which had given the site, originally a swamp, a more interesting topography. The contouring and the abundance of mature trees already in place

<sup>1</sup> Hilary Taylor and Associates, 'Battersea Park Restoration Project', design proposal, January 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Many people objected to the whole idea of the Festival as a frivolous undertaking in a time of economic hardship, but it was the Fun Fair that caused the greatest consternation, not only for its dubious value as wholesome entertainment, but also because it required the purchase of rides and other expensive equipment from the US. (Public Record Office, London, CAB 21/3802). The extracts that follow are from this same set of documents.