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# Welcome to October 2023 Bulletin - FOLAR symposium and Robert Marnock special

**FOLAR**  
Friends of the Landscape Archive at Reading



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## The Landscape of Communities - FOLAR annual symposium

18 November 2023 10.30-16.30 at The MERL, Reading



Photo: Bankside Open Spaces Trust

This year's FOLAR Annual Symposium will be on the subject of the Landscape of Communities. These are seen as amenity landscapes which respond first to the wishes and ways of the local community, whether local residents or workers.

We will bring an exciting line up of speakers including Leah McNally of the London Wildlife Trust on their community involvement; Guy Redmond of Leaves of Green on their work for parish councils on nature based green space; Rosie Whicheloe on her work in Sutton; Helen John on the Crossbones Graveyard and Garden of Remembrance: an intergenerational legacy concerning her work for the Bankside Open Spaces Trust in Southwark; Jan Woudstra on the work of the landscape gardener Robert Marnock's concept for the Ladbrooke Grove Housing development in the mid nineteenth century; and Sarah Cooke from the Groundwork Trust on their work with communities in London

One theme for the FOLAR symposia is how the past can inform the present and the future. This is a symposium with full opportunity for discussion with question time after each talk and a general discussion with the speakers at the end of the day, so everyone can have the opportunity to speak.

There will be time to talk and network, to explore the MERL's pop up exhibition in the reading room (showing material from our, and other, archives on landscapes for housing), time to browse and buy from the FOLAR book stall, and more!

FOLAR members and non members are welcome We look forward to seeing you there! (Numbers are limited to fifty.)

Book your tickets here: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/728908483897?aff=oddtcreator>



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FOLAR decided to dedicate some of the Bulletins to look in depth at one topic or person of special interest. Celebrations for Robert Marnock have been taking place throughout this year, and we have invited Jill Sinclair, Trustee of the Gardens Trust, to be the first of our contributors to tell us more about the work of Marnock and the different ways information about him has - and is - being made available to the wider public.

FOLAR is pleased also to contribute to the celebrations with a presentation about his work at Ladbroke Grove by Jan Woudstra at the forthcoming FOLAR annual symposium on Nov 18, (see above for details).

## Celebrating Robert Marnock (1800 – 1889)

This summer has seen a national celebration of landscape gardener Robert Marnock. Born in Aberdeenshire, Marnock was a designer, curator, nurseryman, head gardener, garden writer, editor and philanthropist. Over his long career he became one of the most productive and sought-after landscape gardeners of the nineteenth century.

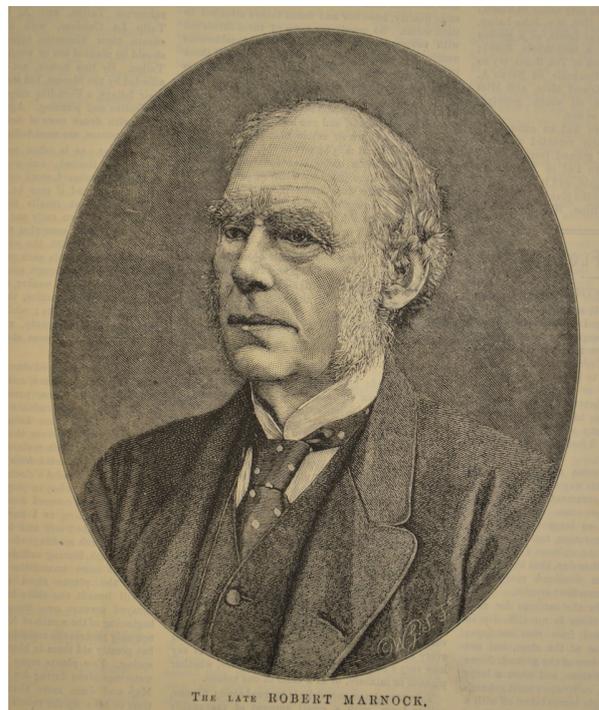


Photo: Robert Marnock. From *The Gardeners Chronicle* 3:6 (1889) [public domain]

The Marnock celebrations have been organised by a team from Sheffield Botanical Gardens (one of Marnock's earliest commissions), in partnership with the Gardens Trust, the national charity that works to protect and conserve historic designed landscapes.

Marnock first came to prominence as head gardener at Bretton Hall, Wakefield (now the Yorkshire Sculpture Park), working for the flamboyant Diana Beaumont. In his early thirties he won the design competition for the botanical gardens in Sheffield, with a plan praised by the great gardening journalist John Claudius Loudon as showing 'a mind deeply imbued with knowledge of his profession' (*Gardeners' Magazine*, 1834, p276). Marnock moved to Sheffield to oversee the creation of the gardens and become their first curator, and was soon advising on planting and design elsewhere, including the adjacent cemetery. During this time, Marnock married Anne Hobson, the daughter of a dissenting minister and advocate of the Lancasterian system of education (which enabled the poor to be taught). This family influence greatly affected Marnock's future clientele and the social emphasis in his designs.



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In 1839 Marnock and Anne moved to Hackney (then a centre of horticulture), where he intended to settle as a nurseryman. His reputation soon brought him the commission to design a garden for the Royal Botanic Society in the inner circle of Regent's Park. He subsequently served as curator for more than 20 years and his enormous Flower Shows became one of the horticultural events of the year.

He also undertook a substantial number of private commissions across the country, as well as sites in Italy and Belgium. Examples include the Inner Temple garden on London's Embankment, Rousdon in Devon for tea importer Sir Henry Peek, and the parterre gardens and rose garden at Warwick Castle.



Photo: Marnock's rose garden at Warwick Castle, designed in 1868 and controversially removed in 2016. Photo credit: Kay Keeton

Marnock promoted the natural style; modern observers have tried to link him with the gardenesque, but this was not a term he ever used, though he did admire and befriend Loudon, its originator. He coupled a naturalistic appearance in horticultural style and maintenance with a wide range of plant introductions.

Marnock also edited the monthly Floricultural Magazine aimed at the middle-class amateur gardener; and the weekly United Gardeners' and Land Stewards' Journal, with profits being donated to gardening charities.

The Irish gardener and journalist William Robinson worked under Marnock at Regent's Park, and praised him on his retirement as 'the most successful of English landscape gardeners' (The Garden, 1879, p388). In his final years, Marnock was instrumental in helping Robinson design his still-celebrated garden at Gravetye Manor in Sussex.



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Sadly many of Marnock's plans and other papers are lost, and there is no central repository for his archive, but his magazine publications are a good source of information and enthusiasts are managing to trace unpublished records in various locations. At least seven sites designed by him have been researched and restored with Heritage Lottery funds, including Sheffield's Botanical Gardens, General Cemetery and Weston Park; Alexandra Park in Hastings; Dunorlan Park and Grosvenor & Hilbert Park, both in Royal Tunbridge Wells; and Stephens' House and Garden in Finchley. In addition, Dr Jan Woudstra (a FOLAR committee member) has published several scholarly articles on aspects of Marnock's work, most recently on the creation of Alexandra Park in Sussex for the July 2023 edition of *Garden History*.



Photo Marnock's Alexandra Park, Hastings, opened in 1882. Photo credit: Philip Masters

As part of this summer's celebrations, a variety of events have been taking place around the country, many based on archival materials and new research. Sheffield Botanical Gardens hosted a month-long exhibition of original editions of Marnock's Floricultural Magazine, alongside display panels about his life and work, attended by over 1,600 people. It was complemented by an illustrated talk by Jan Woudstra, and a series of guided walks examining plants that he used. The Friends of the Gardens commissioned two seats inspired by a bench seen in an 1840 engraving published by Marnock, as a permanent reminder of the celebrations



Photo: The Marnock exhibition held in June 2023 at Sheffield Botanical Gardens. Photo credit: Jill Sinclair



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In Tunbridge Wells, the owners of a house where Marnock lived in the 1870s opened the garden to visitors and shared the plans drawn up by Marnock for the garden. Two Marnock parks in the town organised guided walks, with one offering Victorian-themed refreshments afterwards. A fortuitously timed public realm art project funded under section 106 (the community infrastructure levy) saw street art featuring Marnock added to a bridge near the entrance to Grosvenor and Hilbert Park.

Heritage Open Days was an opportunity for several places to celebrate Marnock. The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust, for instance, organised an exhibition on Marnock's work at three sites in the south of the county – Taplow Court, Hitcham House and Berry Hill, sharing new research from the local county archives. As part of the Lambeth Heritage Festival, the Streatham Society organised tours of the Marnock-designed Park Hill gardens – and hosted a talk on 'Marnock - giant of 19<sup>th</sup> century gardening', by Dr Brent Elliott, former librarian at the RHS and author of the seminal book *Victorian Gardens*. A recording of the talk is available to view on the Streatham Society YouTube page at [www.youtube.com/@streathamsociety](http://www.youtube.com/@streathamsociety).

Although the celebrations are coming to a close in September, a new website has been established as part of the project, which will continue to collect and share information about Marnock's life, style and commissions. It includes a map of places with known links to the designer, stories about the plants he used, copies of botanical illustrations from the magazines he published, and new photographs of his work at various sites around the country. The website is at [www.sbg.org.uk/celebrating-marnock](http://www.sbg.org.uk/celebrating-marnock).

The organisers of the celebrations are keen to continue to develop the website. If you have information or images to offer, or can shed further light on any of the sites where Marnock worked, get in touch with Gardens Trust trustee Jill Sinclair on [jill.sinclair@thegardenstrust.org](mailto:jill.sinclair@thegardenstrust.org)



Visitors examining some of the original Marnock plans for his 1870s home in Rusthall. Photo credit: Clare Kelly

A further stimulus in spreading the word about this important landscape gardener will be a monograph on Marnock by Jan Woudstra, due for publication in 2024.