

Research materials



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There is no better way to understand a historic park or garden than to walk through it and see what's there, but in order to understand it fully we need to look at primary and secondary sources for information.

This presentation will give you an idea of the kind of the resources you might like to look through online, when visits to archives, libraries or indeed many of the sites themselves, are not possible.

Sources fall in to two categories:

Primary sources are usually found in museums, private archives and county or area record offices. They include old documents, letters, maps, plans, diaries, accounts books, census returns, parish registers, photographs, paintings and sketches. In normal times you can search collections and archive catalogues online and then make an appointment to go and see them.

Secondary sources include published books and magazines, research articles and dissertations, copies of original items and a wealth of transcribed online information, databases and blogs. Fortunately, we can look through many of these sources from

the comfort of our own home.

Where
to start?

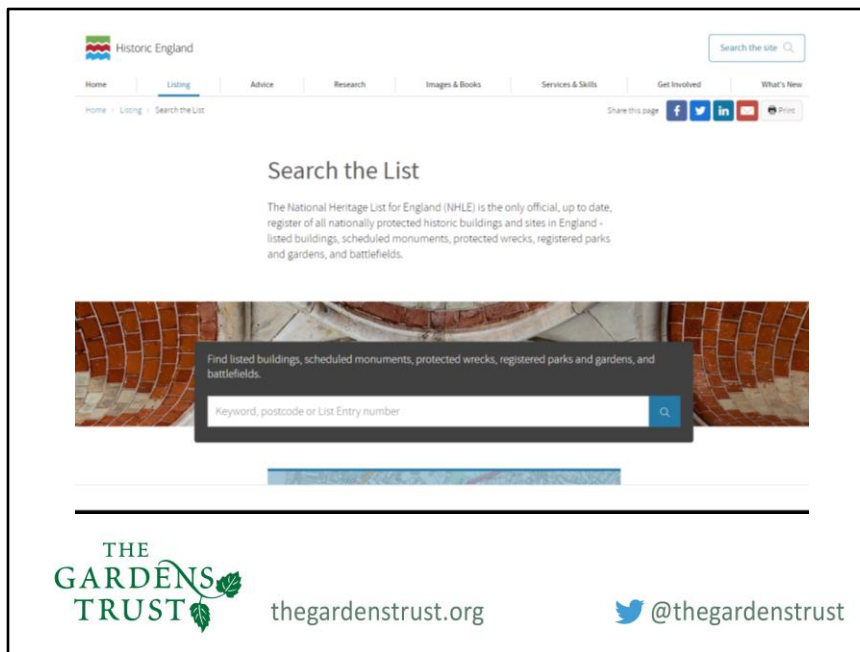


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The handout that accompanies this presentation gives you a long list of sites that can be searched online - and there are many more!

This can seem quite daunting so let's look at the basics first



Don't reinvent the wheel – check to see what is already known about the site.

To find out if your site is a Registered Park or Garden use this link to the Historic England Heritage List: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/>

The search box shown above takes you to an annotated map where a Registered Park or Garden will show up as a bright green area. If you click anywhere in the green area you will see the HE registered name and a link to Historic England's description and history of the site. (Also shown on the map are small blue triangles = Listed Building, red shaded areas = Scheduled Monuments and grey hatched areas = World Heritage Sites)

If your site is not a Registered Park and Garden, it may feature on the Parks and Gardens UK database if somebody has taken the trouble to research and submitted it: <https://www.parksandgardens.org/>



The Heritage Gateway is an immense database that aspires to draw together all the logged bits of research – from results of archaeological digs to entries on Parks and Gardens UK – to see what exists follow this link:

<https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/>

This database can be quite daunting, but the next few slides show screen shots of how a particular garden feature can be found (in this instance, in Wrest Park, Bedfordshire). Begin by clicking 'more detailed search' . . .

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The park or garden is entered into the search box and when you are happy that it is the correct location, click search

The screenshot displays the Heritage Gateway search results interface. On the left, a sidebar contains navigation options like 'Refine your search', 'Start new search', and 'Help and FAQs'. The main content area shows search parameters and a list of databases. A hand icon points to the 'HE PastScape' entry, which is the only one with results (102). Other databases like 'The National Heritage List for England' and 'National Designation Decisions' show 'No records matched your search'.

Database	Results
The National Heritage List for England	No records matched your search
National Designation Decisions	No records matched your search
Devonshire Decision Records (ie-listed entries)	No records matched your search
Devonshire Decision Records (non-designated entries)	No records matched your search
Non-Statutory National Data	
Historic Milestone Society Database	No records matched your search
HE PastScape	102 results
National Trust HMSM	No records matched your search
Parks and Gardens UK	1 results
CHSA	An error occurred
NMI Excavation Index	2 results
Church Heritage Record	No records matched your search
Local Records	
The Historic Environment Record for Bedfordshire	63 results
Durham Historic Environment Record	No records matched your search
Gloucestershire County Council Historic Environment Record	No records matched your search
Herfordshire HER & St Albans UAG	An error occurred
Northamptonshire Historic Environment Record	No records matched your search
Northumberland Historic Environment Record	No records matched your search
National Image Collections	10210 results

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You can now see all the databases that are logged with the site, some will show no results and but in this case the HE Past Scape has 102, click the link to see what they are . . .

HERITAGE GATEWAY

[Home](#) | [Results](#) | [Text size: A A A](#)

SEARCH

[Back to Gateway results](#)

[Refine your search](#)

[Start new search](#)

[Help and FAQs](#)

[Cookies](#)

PASTSCAPE

Viewing results 46 to 60 of 102

Results Page: [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [7](#) [Next >>](#)

Title	Location	Description
MONUMENT NO. 1519528	Central Bedfordshire	The American Garden. The earthworks of four large mounds surrounded by mature trees arranged symmetrically.
MONUMENT NO. 1519530	Central Bedfordshire	The Rose Garden. A former parterre garden associated with the post-1820s West House which has been excavated.
MONUMENT NO. 1519560	Central Bedfordshire	Cropmarks and earthworks of former tree holes which are the remains of the southern extent of an 18th-century plantation to the west of the site of the earlier house at West Park, possibly a side drive to the house.
MONUMENT NO. 1519599	Central Bedfordshire	Location of a possible former status plinth visible as a parchmark at the corner of one of the lawn...
MONUMENT NO. 1519599	Central Bedfordshire	Location of a possible former status plinth visible as a parchmark at the corner of one of the lawn...
MONUMENT NO. 1519599	Central Bedfordshire	Location of a possible former status plinth visible as a parchmark at the corner of one of the lawn...
MONUMENT NO. 1519600	Central Bedfordshire	Location of a possible former status plinth visible as a parchmark at the corner of one of the lawn...
MONUMENT NO. 1519600	Central Bedfordshire	Cropmark/parchmark traces of former borders or walls associated with the gardens of the earlier house.
MONUMENT NO. 1519600	Central Bedfordshire	Cropmark traces of part of a broad path associated with the gardens of the earlier 18th-century house.
MONUMENT NO. 1519616	Central Bedfordshire	Location of a possible former status plinth visible as a parchmark within the Horseshoe Lawns at W.
MONUMENT NO. 1519641	Central Bedfordshire	The slight earthwork traces of a large square area within the present-day orchard at West Park W.
MONUMENT NO. 1519641	Central Bedfordshire	The cropmark traces of a possible former status plinth and circular borders to a former garden part.
MONUMENT NO. 1519648	Central Bedfordshire	The earthwork traces of a mound beneath a mature tree in the NW corner of the Horseshoe Lawns at W.

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Select the one you want to look at . . .

7

HERITAGE GATEWAY [Login](#) | [Register](#) [Site Map](#)
Text size: [A](#) [AA](#) [AAA](#)

View you here: [Home](#) > [More Detailed Search](#) > [Subways Results](#) > [HE PastScape Results](#) > HE PastScape Result

PASTSCAPE [View this record on HE PastScape](#) [Print](#) [Share](#)

MONUMENT NO. 1519528
 County: Central Bedfordshire
 District: CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE
 Parish: SILSOE
 Monument Number: (TL 03 NE 116)

GEORGIAN GARDEN 1714 - 1830
GEORGIAN PATH 1714 - 1830
VICTORIAN GARDEN 1837 - 1901
VICTORIAN MOUND 1837 - 1901
VICTORIAN PATH 1837 - 1901

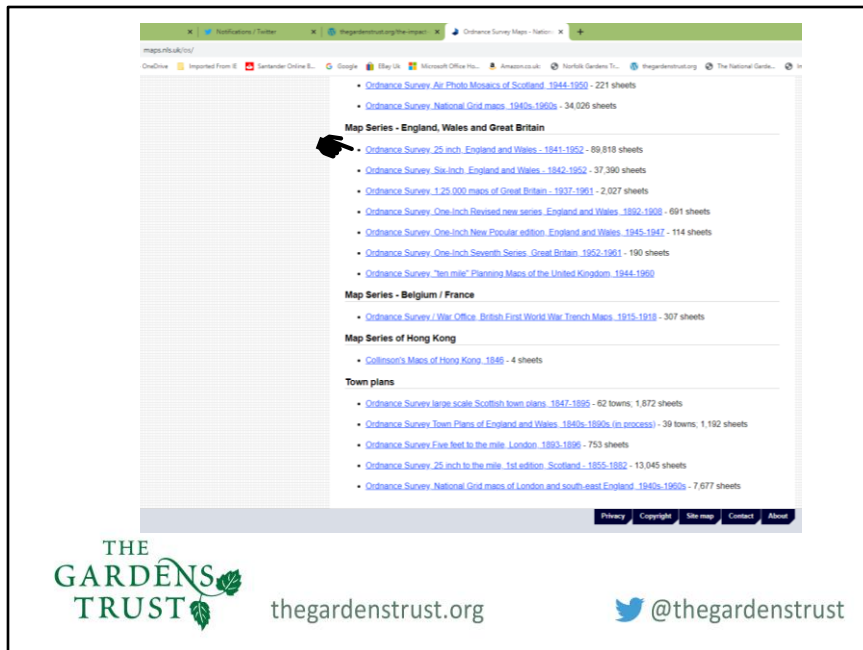
The American Garden. The earthworks of four large mounds surmounted by mature trees arranged symmetrically in a square around a central mound supporting a statue known as the Hawkwing Parry, forming the centrepiece for the garden. This was approached almost from the four cardinal points of the compass by four symmetrically placed paths that were connected by a circular path around the base of the central mound. Traces of these paths were seen as cropmarks and slight earthworks and mapped as part of the English Heritage Wixom Park Environs survey. The garden is dominated today by the Atlas cedars planted after 1917.

Sources
 Light detection and ranging (lidar) airborne survey
 LIDAR TLO935 DTM 05-APR-2009 © English Heritage
 Vertical aerial photograph reference number
 RAF CPE/UK2159 4319 13-JUN-1947

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Read all about it!

Heritage portal called OASIS created by Historic England is currently used by archaeologists but will become an important source for garden and designed landscape historians, information is being added all the time.



The next step is to look for old OS maps which can be done for free on the National Library of Scotland website: <https://maps.nls.uk/os/>

Scroll down to find the English 25-inch and Six-inch maps which are the most useful for garden historians

National Library of Scotland
Làrach-lìn na Leabharlainn na h-Alba

Map images

Maps Home > OS 25 inch England and Wales, 1841-1952

Ordnance Survey Maps - 25 inch England and Wales, 1841-1952


The most detailed topographic mapping covering most parts of England and Wales from the 1840s to the 1950s.

Browse the maps:

- As [individual sheets using a zoomable map of England and Wales](#)
- As a [seamless zoomable overlay layer \(1890s-1920s\)](#) on modern satellite images and OS maps
- As a [seamless zoomable layer \(1890s-1920s\) side-by-side](#) with modern satellite images and OS maps
- [By county - text lists](#)

See also:

- [Guide to abbreviations](#) - alphabetical list of standard OS abbreviations
- [Specimens of the stamps used for trees and vegetation](#) (1886)
- [Conventional signs and writing](#) - OS Symbols and Lettering (ca. 1923)
- [List of counties](#), with their dates of survey, publication, and changes of meridian
- Further information:
 - [Background, coverage, surveying, county meridians and sheet numbering](#)
 - [Map content, printing, colouring and references](#)



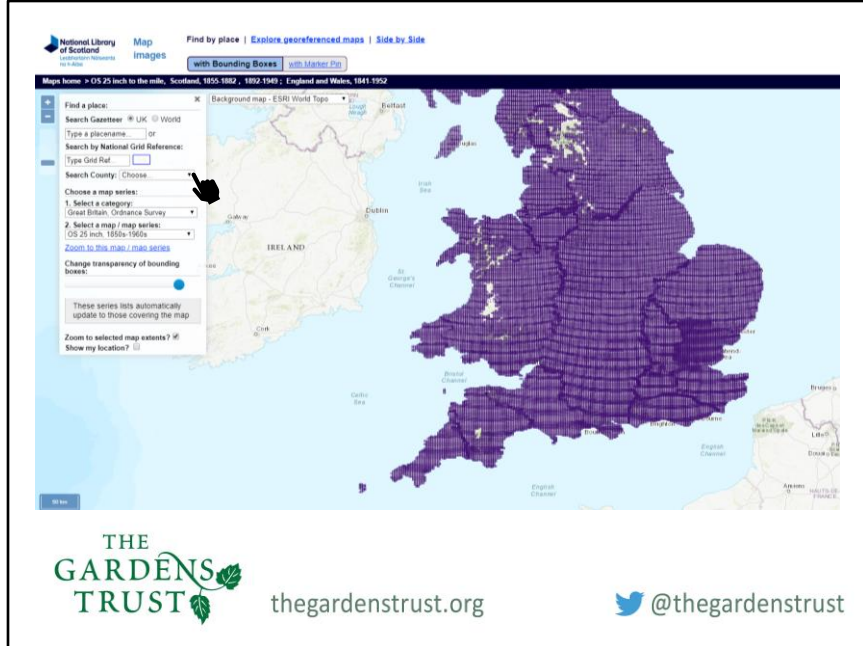
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You have the choice to look at individual maps or the 'seamless zoomable overlay' layer.

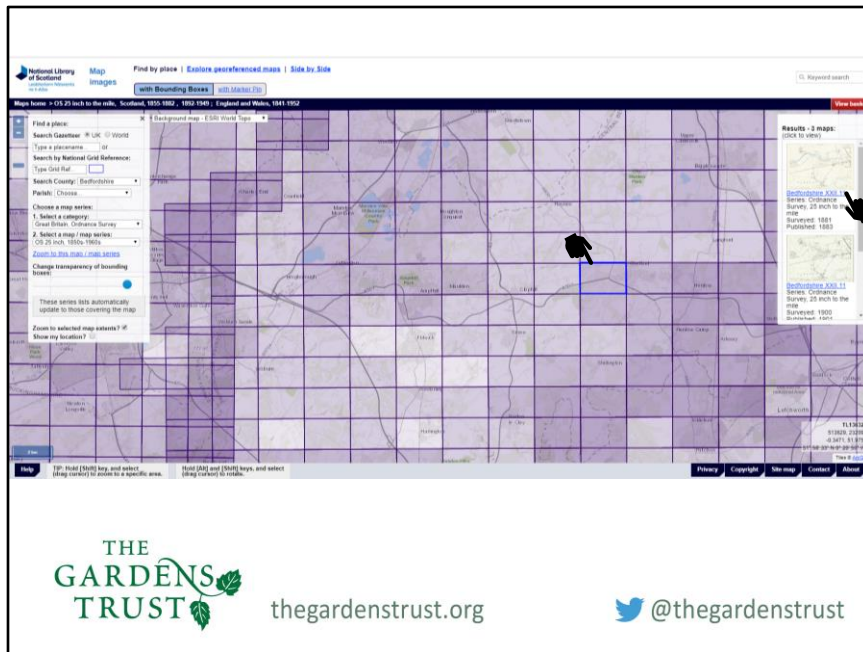
The latter is useful because sites you want to research inevitably lie on more than one sheet.

However, single sheets will tell you which date they are and may have more than one edition, and therefore can show you how the landscape has changed over time.



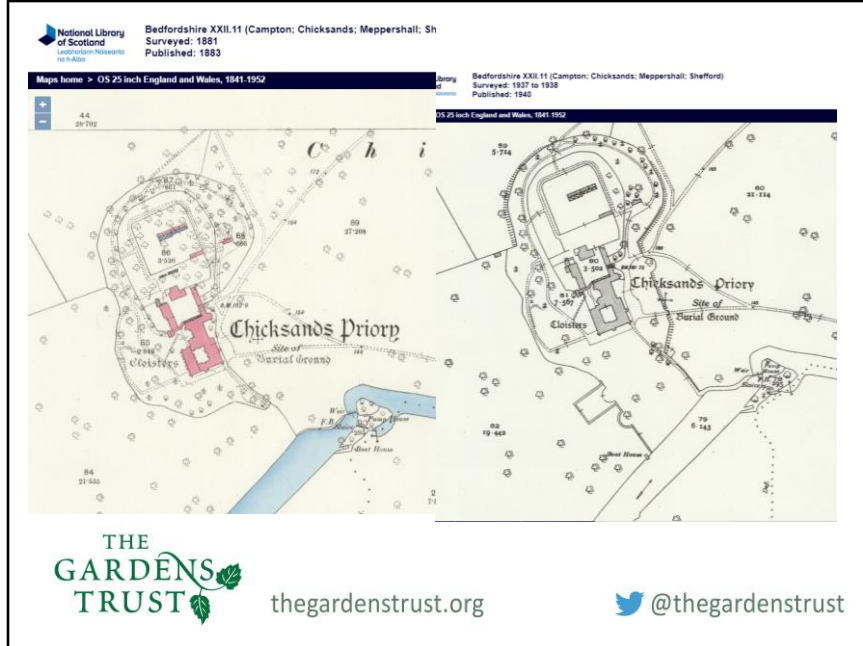
For both options mentioned on the last slide, you can enter the county you are looking by selecting an option from the drop-down menu.

If you have the National Grid Reference from the Historic England Register of Parks and Gardens you can use that instead . . .

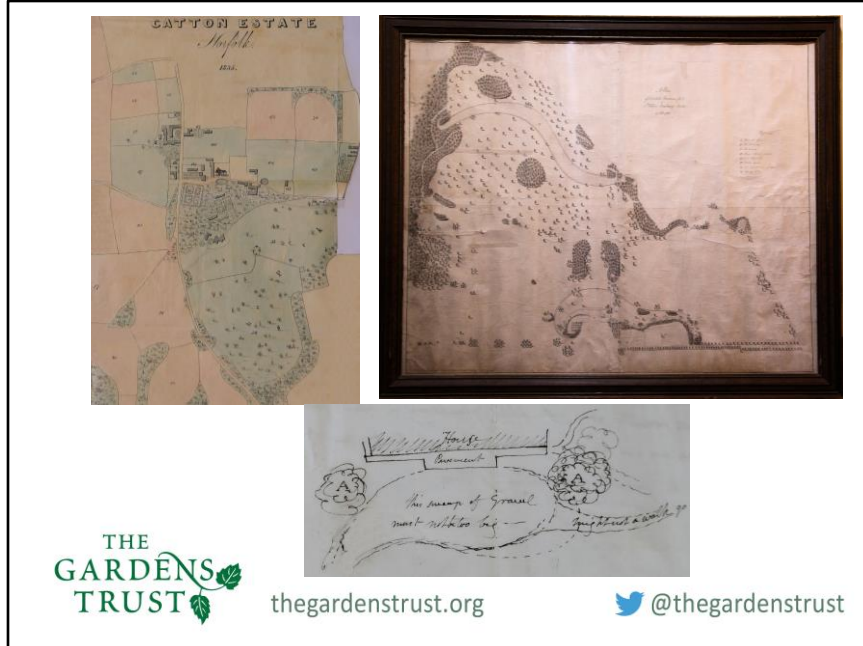


This shows that Bedfordshire county was selected in the single sheets option and a particular sheet has been selected (framed in blue).

On the right you can see that three different editions of the 25-inch map are available to view, the oldest published in 1883.



Comparing maps over time – incredibly useful – compare these two 1-25-inch maps of Chicksands Priory from 1881 and late 1930s – what changes have occurred in the intervening years and during WW2?



Earlier maps exist, both hand-drawn and printed. Printed ones could be available online with a quick Google image search or, for example, on a local historical society website. Another good source is a sales catalogue, often accompanied by description of the lands around the property. (Top Left: 1835 Sales Catalogue for Catton Park, private collection)

Hand-drawn maps and plans tend to be in county archives or in private family collections. They might not correlate closely to an Ordnance Survey map but often contain facts not found elsewhere. The map-maker or owner had a purpose for their map or plan, and it may depict what was important to them.

A plan could also be an indication of proposed alterations – which may have not been implemented and so other sources should be checked to establish if the changes were made. (Top Right: Capability Brown's 1765 plan for Langley, the owner spent a fortune standing for an election and lost, meaning there were no funds left for Brown's works. Private collection)

Some plans are in the form of very basic sketches but can still tell us something we didn't know. (Humphry Repton sketch in a letter, bottom. Private collection)



OS Drawings, British Library

The Ordnance Survey started surveying the southern counties in 1795 as a response to the threat of invasion by Napoleon's armies.

Gradually more and more counties were surveyed, and impressive hand-drawn maps complete with shaded contours were produced. The British Library hold 351 of these drawings and they can be viewed online:

<http://gallery.bl.uk/viewall/default.aspx?e=Ordnance%20Survey%20Drawings>.

They are in alphabetical order and titled after the main town they show, so it is a question of going through them to find the one you want.

The First Edition OS maps were not published until later in the 1870s and the landscape could have changed in the intervening years.



1815, William Hyett, OS Drawing, British Library

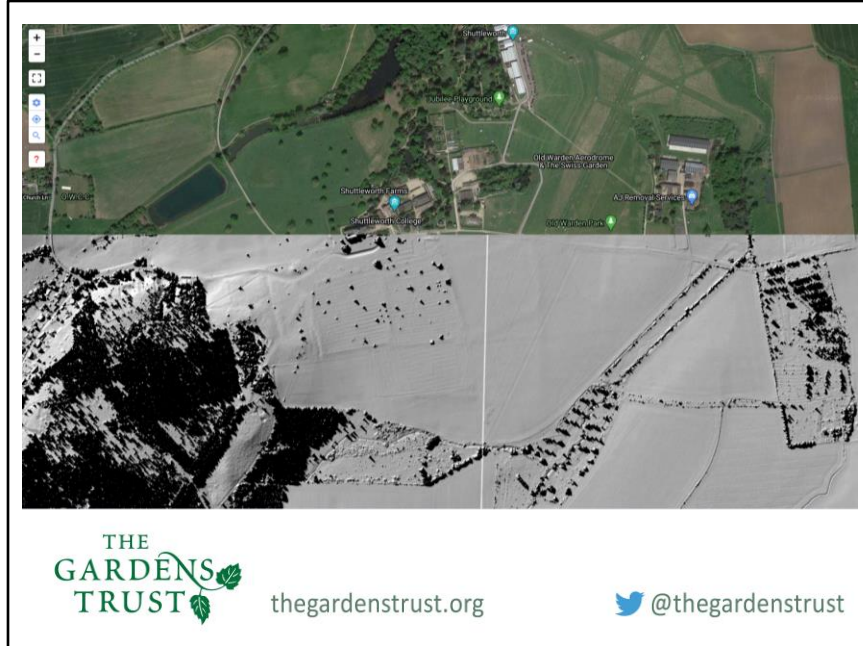


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OS Drawing, British Library detail of Woburn Park on Woburn Sheet Shelf Number:
[OSD 232](#)

1815, William Hyett surveyor

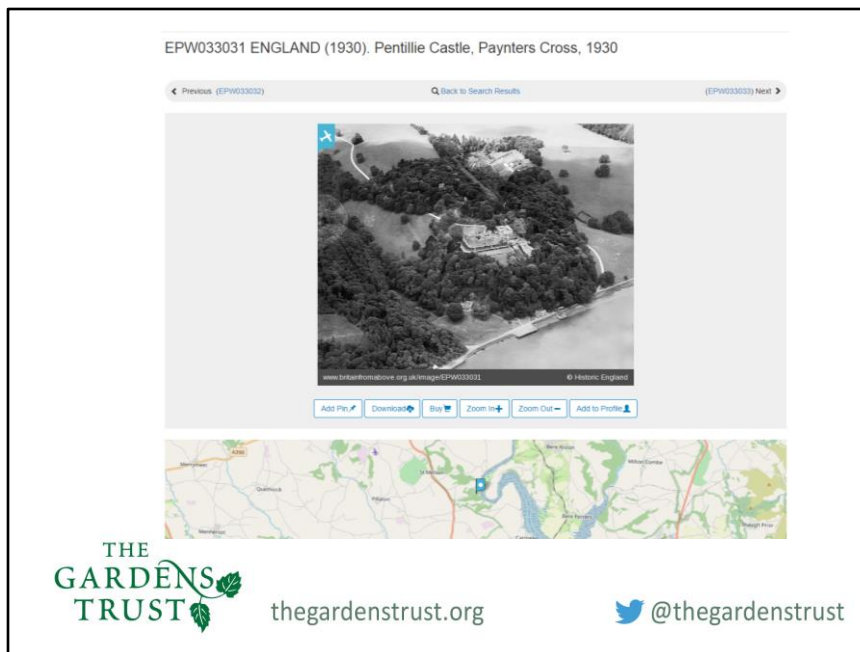


Lidar

LIDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) is similar to RADAR and uses millions of laser pulse readings from aerial surveys. It has the ability to show the contours of the land that often are not visible on the ground. Old field boundaries, road and pathways, water features can be detected on various free-to-use sites online, this is one of them: <https://www.lidarfinder.com/>

As this is a relatively new surveying technique, the whole of the country is not yet available, but it is worth having a look.

Shown above on Lidar Finder is Shuttleworth College site in Old Warden Park – ridge and furrow, that existed before the park was established, showing up nicely south of the main house.



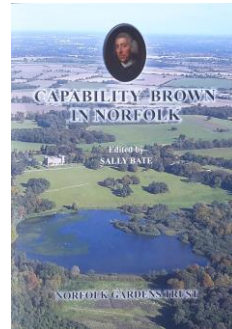
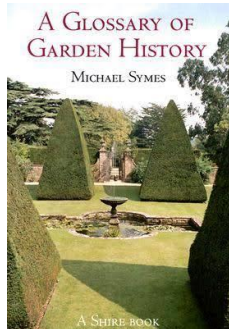
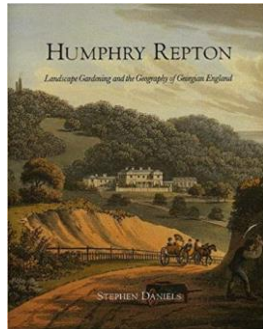
Old photographs can be very useful from the mid-1800s onwards. Online collections of these are available to view.

<https://www.britainfromabove.org.uk/> Britain from Above is a resource run by Historic England that makes available a large collection of old aerial photos – this shows Pentillie in West Cornwall with a location map underneath.

Other photographs can be found at the Francis Frith Collection
<https://www.francisfrith.com/uk/>

Local historical societies may have websites and old photograph/local history groups on Facebook can be a good source. You could contact them and put out a plea for material. Twitter and Instagram can throw up people with knowledge and images - it is amazing how quickly a query can be answered via social media!

gardeners and scientists, covering every conceivable aspect of gardening. Often specific gardens were mentioned too.

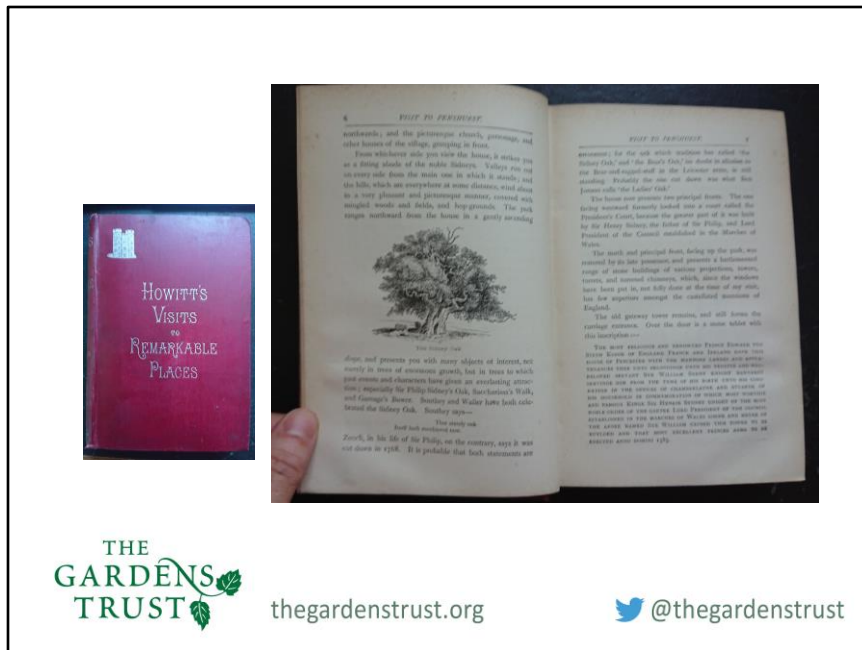


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There are lots of books to give a good starting point, although garden history is a young subject so it's unlikely that they'll include a great deal on your specific site.

These are just examples of the kind of book you might find useful.



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Books written in the past are great. The Victorians loved travelling and there are lots of books detailing their journeys and what they saw – these can be really useful.

A lot of these historic books can be found online now as e-books, it is worth trying putting the name of an old book into Google and see if a Google-scanned version is available.

This book from the 1890s for example includes a visit to Penshurst, the famous Kent garden, and it talks about the trees there.



You can order most titles from your local library. Older books, especially if they are now considered antiquarian, might be in the 'not-for-loan' section of a larger library or your county record office.

You can, of course, buy a book if you know it has information you are looking for (new or pre-loved). This 'reader's copy' was £2.29 (+ P&P) on eBay and as you can see it is a very 'pre-loved' copy that the book seller was delighted to be relieved off! A great image of Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens and saving a fair amount on purchasing a digital file and permission to reproduce from an image archive.

RHS Lindley Library in London also holds a big collection of modern as well as historic books see next slide at: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/education-learning/libraries-at-rhs>

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Visit the libraries

Our libraries are friendly and welcoming and open to everyone, including gardeners, researchers and students

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RHS Libraries events

Visit our libraries in London and the RHS Gardens and enjoy the events and exhibitions showcasing our collections.

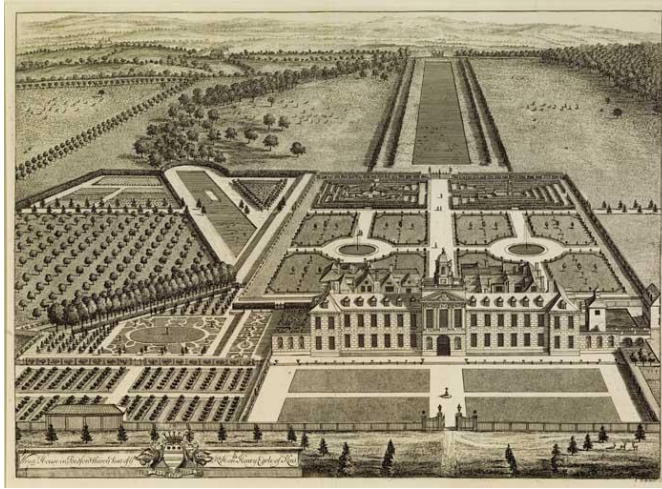
Seniors

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The Lindley Upper Reading Room has a huge collection of garden history, design and plant books. You can visit without an appointment and read copies there. It is also a lending library and you can register and borrow books in the normal way. There are smaller libraries at RHS Wisley and RHS Harlow Carr.

The heritage book collections, magazines, engravings and original documents, are in the Research Room which can only be accessed by booking an appointment in advance and telling the library what you would like to see.

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/education-learning/libraries-at-rhs/visit-the-libraries>



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Primary sources

Hunting down primary sources traditionally involves a visit to a local record office or archive, but increasingly a lot of material has been digitised and is online.

Drawings or paintings are a gift, but they need to be treated with care as they can present an aspirational rather than realistic view or use a bit of artistic licence.

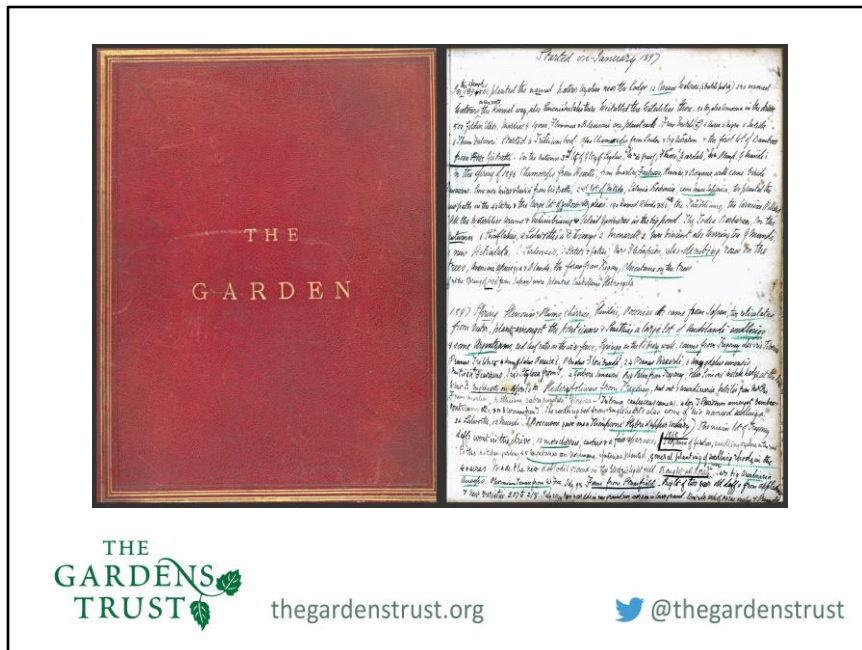
Wrest Park circa 1704 by Kip and Knyff – intricate Renaissance Gardens – did they really exist (Yes!) or was this more of an idyllic view of what someone wanted the garden to look like? Is the evidence there on the ground or can it be found in intervening illustrations and accounts.



Some primary sources have been photographed and digitised online – this is Capability Brown’s only accounts book that is known to have survived. It was digitised by the RHS and you can view it here: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/education-learning/libraries-at-rhs/collections/library-online/capability-brown-account-book>

Accounts books and those kind of estate papers are very useful, although the handwriting can be hard to decipher. They are likely to itemise exactly how much money was spent buying a certain number of trees on a certain date, or how many men were required to dig a particular pond. From that information you can extrapolate what existed and when it was created.

Account books and estate papers are mostly likely to be found in your local record office, unless they still reside with the original property and/or family.



Diaries and letters are also invaluable. If a site is lucky enough to have them, there is a good chance they will be held in the local archive. You might find, for example, the 18th century lady of the house writing to her sister and describing her day spent in her garden.

This image relates to Caerhays in Cornwall from <https://thediary.caerhays.co.uk/>: 'In 1897 my great grandfather, J C Williams, started writing comments in his garden diary. The leather-bound book entitled 'The Garden' has a page for each day of the year. It initially records JC's work in daffodil hybridisation and, after 1902, it records the arrival of vast numbers of new plants from China which were totally unknown in Western Europe. These were collected by the great plant hunters, Ernest Wilson and George Forrest, whom JC had sponsored and paid for on their various Chinese expeditions up to 1932.'



J T Brooks's Garden Notebook for Flitwick Manor, 1838 plans, picture and text. The hand-drawn and numbered plan at the beginning of the book describes walks for different seasons around the gardens along with the plants that were grown there. The key shown above tells us all the different garden structures and features which are numbered on the plan, the majority of which there are no traces of today.

If only all gardens and parks had a methodical note-maker like this, in their history?

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We hope that you can while away some happy hours researching sites that are important to you.

Make a note of where you found information so that you can find it again or credit it correctly if your research is destined for a publication or exhibition.

There are undoubtedly people in your County Garden Trust who can answer any questions if you get stuck or have problems using the sources mentioned here.

We are here too and if we can't answer your question, we can probably think of someone who can!

Happy researching 😊

Sally