

## Case study for Heritage Counts 2015

Theme demonstrated by case study:	Successful restoration of an historic garden placed on the 2009 Heritage at Risk Register
Name of project/group:	Swiss Garden Restoration Project – Shuttleworth Trust
Location:	Old Warden, Bedfordshire.
Duration (if applicable):	On-going

### Short description of project.

The Swiss Garden, a unique environment of national importance, was placed on the Heritage at Risk Register in 2009. It is a rare surviving example of a Regency landscape. Its 3.7 hectares consists of buildings, ornament, trees, shrubberies, ponds, mounds and hollows, contrived to create an illusory sense of Alpine enchantment. The garden was devised c.1830 by Lord Robert Ongley, added to in the 1870s by Joseph Shuttleworth, and saved from dereliction in the 1970s.

In 2010 Christopher Garrand, an architect, was appointed and brought together a collaborative and successful multi-disciplinary team. A £2.8M Heritage Lottery Fund grant, plus additional funding from the Central Bedfordshire Council and the Shuttleworth Trust was secured in November 2012, facilitating extensive historic research into the objects and buildings within the garden, and thus informing an extensive Conservation Management Plan (CMP).

Out of the CMP was the client's brief: "to recapture the spirit of the Garden c.1890, whilst acknowledging the survival of its underlying Regency structure and fabric". Key to this vision was the conservation of 38 buildings, structures and garden ornaments (six listed Grade II\* and seven Grade II), by three accredited conservation companies, and the training of volunteers and garden staff to maintain these structures, and the garden as a whole.

Dealing with objects, buildings, interiors, and an extensive range of natural and artificial, materials and environments - the expert services of conservators, architects, landscape architects, historians, gardeners, heritage skills and general contractors, were combined to produce a project showcasing collaborative working and preserving a unique collection.

### What would have happened without this project/group?

A lack of investment and decline led in 2009, to the Garden being placed on the EH Heritage at Risk Register, spurring an ambitious £3.6M project "to reveal a secret garden".

Christopher Garrand, the appointed architect, was first introduced to the garden as a child and was fundamental in the design and implementation of this ambitious project. Without such an intervention, it is highly likely this unique environment would have been lost.

How did the project achieve its objectives?

Conservation works were let as three separate contracts, run in parallel with an emphasis placed on collaboration. The first - Pulhamite rockwork and garden ornaments - began on site in April 2013, followed in August by ironwork and in November by interiors and structures.

Simon Swann Associates undertook the conservation of the 'Pulhamite rockwork' and garden ornament. This included various Grade II and II\* objects and structures, such as the Grotto & Fernery and its approaches, Underpass, Eagle Redoubt, Pond Cascade, and Punt Harbour.

Conservation of ironwork was undertaken by Eura Conservation Ltd, and included the Grotto & Fernery, three Grade II\* footbridges, two Grade II Rose Bowers, Floral Arches, and historic gates and screens.

Crick Smith UoL undertook architectural paint research and the conservation of decorative surfaces, including the interior and 'Rustic' decorative surfaces of the Grade II\* Swiss Cottage and Indian Kiosk.

The holistic, multi-disciplinary nature of the overall project meant that structures and objects had to be understood in terms of their role in a designed landscape and not just their individual histories or fabric. Close working with the project and landscape architects influenced decisions on conservation, including the justified renewal and restoration of fabric in relation to key views and vistas. Otherwise the emphasis was on conservative repair supplemented by beneficial interventions such as removing damaging past attempts at restoration, disfiguring paint layers, and protecting vulnerable wall finishes. Inclusive design was an integral part of the wider project, with subtle interventions and enhanced interpretation being used to improve access, understanding and readability.

What difference has it made? Main outcomes and outputs.

The Swiss Garden project encompassed a wide and varied range of conservation activities; research and analysis, preventive and interventive conservation treatments, and the development of many new techniques and practices. Drawing on the skills of accredited heritage professionals and conservators, the project provided six conservation apprenticeships, funded by the HLF training bursary scheme: four trainee stone-plaster conservators with Simon Swann Associates and two graduate conservators with Crick Smith UoL. The work undertaken by Eura Conservation Ltd also provided evidence for two ongoing ICON CTQ submissions.

Visitor numbers to the garden have increased substantially following the reopening on 31 July 2014, numbers within the first month following the restoration project exceeding that of the year before it closed.

Local and national press ran several stories both during and following the project, and a new website was launched (<http://www.shuttleworth.org/the-swiss-garden/>), which documents the restoration and provided visitor and events information.

What were the main lessons learnt or challenges? Would anything be done differently?

The complexity of the project demanded delicate decisions to be taken in close collaboration with all members of the multidisciplinary team, all in the context of the CMP. These included deciding on where layers of previous work were to be removed, what was to stay, and where enhancement was justified.

The architect, main contractor, client team, and three specialist conservation teams worked together to design and specify effective conservation solutions and methodologies. These involved a range of traditional materials and construction techniques, including thatch, masonry and timber repairs, lime-based mortars and plasters, cast and 'real' wrought ironwork, leadwork, gilding, traditional fine painting, and bespoke handmade glass. The result is testimony to team working and client confidence.

Due to the fragility of much of what makes these particular objects and structures special, it was acknowledged that conservation is not a one-off activity and long term survival depends on maintenance and management. Hence the integration within the project of a fully-resourced maintenance plan, designed for use by staff, volunteers and supporters.

What is the future for the case study?

To supplement the provision of a 10 year maintenance and management plan — a condition of the Heritage Lottery Grant — handover of the collection included a day long training session for Garden staff and volunteers, structured and delivered by the architect and key conservators. This introduced the client to the basics of preventive conservation and maintenance, explaining the use of condition checklists and other tools provided to aid the preservation of structures within the collection.

As part of a much larger project to secure the future for the Swiss Garden (which includes raising its profile, sourcing new revenue and providing for on-going training and greater public inclusion by way of volunteering, school and community events), development and delivery of the conservation element of the project contributed to social sustainability. 'Hard-hat' behind the scenes tours were run for the general public and school groups. The project and its outcomes has to date been disseminated via a wide variety of articles in the national and specialist press, and new technical developments and research have been the subjects of several peer reviewed papers delivered at national conferences and lectures. SPAB repair courses, study days, and project talks to various interest groups have been - and continue to be - delivered.

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