



ENGLISH HERITAGE

After the Storms

The winds are a part of the works of God by Nature (Daniel Defoe - 1703)



The storms were perceived either as a personal tragedy, or as a great and wonderful natural event, according to the circumstances of those affected. The ecologist and landscape historian Oliver Rackham pointed out that, in ecological terms, it was not the storm itself which was the catastrophe, but the panic invasion of chain saws which followed. For historic designed landscapes, though the damage was costly, the alarming destruction was often outweighed by the opportunities for renewal.

The Achievements of the English Heritage Grant Schemes for Storm Damage Repair in Historic Parks and Gardens

Violent storms are a rare phenomenon in England. The Great Storm of 16 October 1987 was the greatest natural disaster to hit the south east of England since the terrible storm of 1703. In the south-west, such damage has been recorded

more frequently. Nevertheless, when a second Great Storm struck that region, barely two years later on 25 January 1990, the effect was hardly less shocking. On both occasions there was widespread dismay at the loss of trees and devastation to the

landscape – and nowhere was this more deeply felt than in our fine historic parks and gardens.

English Heritage and the Countryside Commission together set out to turn that devastation into an opportunity for learning and restoration.



Knole, Kent, was at the epicentre of the 1987 storm and sustained massive losses. Nevertheless, groups of damaged trees, with the help of surgery, remain as picturesque features among the new planting. Retaining old wood is important as the park is a reservoir for relict habitats which are home to 30 rare or very rare insects.

The storms offered an opportunity to review future management, and offers of grant were generally conditional upon the necessary historical research and preparation of sound proposals for future management. This planning work was itself grant-aided, in order to encourage the appointment of expert landscape architects and historians with the skills essential to a full appreciation of the landscapes' design and evolution.

Where did the money go?

During the course of these schemes offers of grant totalling more than four million pounds were made. This funding was complemented by the resources of owners and other sources, and was continued for a limited period to ensure a good start to planting and establishment. In total some £10,000,000 was spent in clearance, replanting, ground preparation and restoration, as well as other repairs to garden buildings and features.

Analysis of the uptake of grant has shown that the scheme attracted the full range of storm-damaged sites. In all, more than 280 locations participated, ranging from medieval deer parks through to 20th century gardens, and including landscape parks, woodlands, pleasure grounds, and public parks. Land ownership included private estates where there was some public access, the National Trust, local authorities, and commercial institutions, as well as other trusts and educational bodies. Only about half of these had even considered the possibility of restoration before the storm. In all, 66% of all sites on the Register in the storm damaged counties took part.

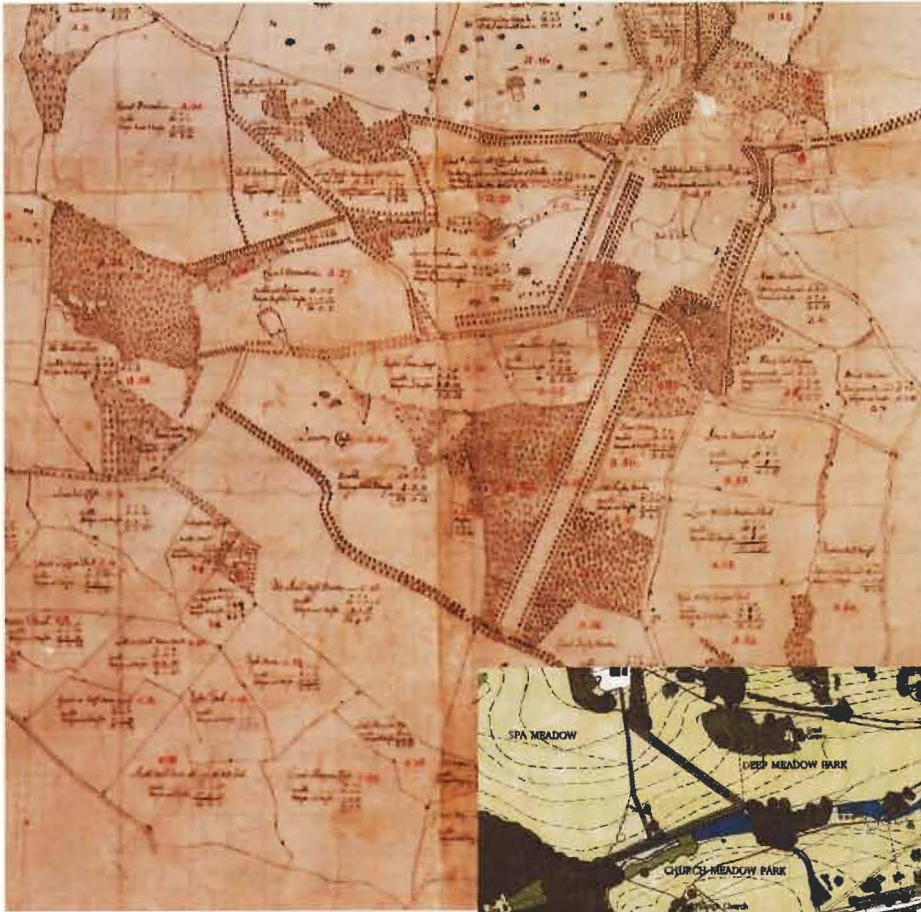
The government's response

On 21 October 1987, Environment Secretary Nicholas Ridley promised that 'the Countryside Commission will have discretion to grant-aid at a higher rate than their present scheme, historic landscapes of great value where the scale of tree loss justifies this.'

At the same time English Heritage was empowered to establish a grant scheme for the restoration of those landscapes designated 'outstanding' on its *Register of historic parks and gardens of special historic interest*, and published guidance on the preparation of restoration schemes specifically for historic parklands. Meanwhile, the Countryside Commission set up *Task Force Trees* with a remit to promote the appropriate replanting of the wider rural landscape, including historic parks. Thus, when the second storm hit the south and west of the country, procedures were already in place. Additional funding was made available and the grant schemes were quickly extended to cover this area too.

Objectives of the Grant Schemes

The first purpose of the funding was to help with the major task of clearance and replanting of damaged vegetation. However, this was only one part of a greater need: namely, to encourage the long-term conservation of our designed landscapes within the context of an overall plan. In many of the great 18th and early 19th century parks, the trees were mature and there had been little planned replacement. Often the original design intentions had been forgotten, obscured by altered boundaries or by natural regeneration. Perhaps the spirit of the place was already compromised by later inappropriate planting, by changes in the pattern of land use, or by new development. Clearly, survival of these places would depend on more than merely replanting trees that were lost or damaged in the storms. Moreover, repair could not be carried out automatically on the basis of like-for-like replacement. A different, more innovative approach was required.



The 1765 field map of Castle Hill, Devon; (left) has become the basis for restoration; (below) of the centre of the park. Current land use for silage production prevents the replanting of every subsidiary avenue; and woodland has been re-arranged to screen modern farm buildings. Following the storm damage grants scheme the Estate have been inspired to restore the lake to the form created around 1770.

Photos: (left) T&C Shipsey, Photographers; (below) Colvin & Moggridge, Landscape Architects



The task of restoration

Why restore?

Historic parks and gardens are a valued part of our inheritance, treasured for their own intrinsic qualities, for their practical contribution to tourism, or for the lessons about the past they offer. The variety of landscapes designed by man tells us about past land uses, about our relationship to places, the urge to improve upon the merely utilitarian, and about the artistic and philosophical search for perfection in the environment. Indeed, the English Landscape tradition has been claimed by Pevsner as our most important contribution to western art. Many surviving parklands are now at a critical point of maturity, particularly where their trees – the dominant part of their fabric – are nearing the end of their lives. Economic changes, especially since the war, have led to neglect. Neglect leads to erosion of distinctive qualities, to loss of that unique 'sense of place'. On the other hand, well-considered renewal will help to secure these significant landscapes for future generations.

The need for an overall strategy

Most designed landscapes date from several periods. They may have been modified through the deliberate application of further designed layers, or sometimes simply through natural changes or misunderstanding. The crucial decisions when restoration is considered involve an understanding of those elements which are most significant to the character of the layout, and which features should therefore be repaired or renewed. Such judgements can only be made in the context of the place's overall structure and development, and are based on:

- their contribution to the whole design

- their intrinsic value as artifacts
- the adequacy of evidence for their authentic reinstatement
- their practicality in relation to modern use

It may be misleading to speak of 'going back to' this or that period. Restoration is not about living in the past – it is about understanding the dynamics of landscape, respecting the ideas that have shaped it, and about the care required to ensure that its history and character are not unnecessarily eroded.

Once a strategy is in place it is possible to estimate costs of work, decide on priorities, and plan a programme of operations.

Competing options

Much of the task of a restoration plan is in giving due weight to all the resources of the landscape and to all of its uses, particularly those which ensure its economic well-being. While our great parks were laid out for their visual and symbolic qualities, they were also designed for practical use – normally grazing and wood pasture – and it is their continued use, in a traditional or modified manner, which will dictate their continued well-being and appearance. Gardens and pleasure grounds, on the other hand, may be purely ornamental and will therefore depend on income from other parts of an estate, or from visitors, to remain viable.

The current reduction in farm income has led those who manage them to consider a range of alternative uses from intensive agriculture to intensive amenity. These may be at odds with each other, and may also conflict with conservation of the historical character, or demand significant alterations to the landscape design and layout. Typical examples are:

Agriculture: conversion of parkland to arable, intrusion of farm buildings, fencing across parkland, loss of trees through ploughing, non-replacement, and windblow

Forestry: conifer plantations are normally a poor substitute for a traditional belt of broadleaf woodland

Nature Conservation: retention of dead wood in formal areas, views of water edges hidden by marginal vegetation

Shooting: game cover may block the transparency of woodland edge or copse and replace traditional varieties of shrubs and trees grown at their edges

Recreation: ground compaction, erosion, golf, playgrounds or model railways

Visitor facilities: siting of car parks, restaurants, lavatories, and tawdry design

Neglect: lack of maintenance can result in the growth of scrub and the development of secondary woodland with the loss of open water, views

and vistas, paths and drives

A good plan, while highlighting the most valuable areas which must be protected, will also plot those areas best able to accommodate change, and find ways to mitigate unwanted effects.

The practical achievements

Was anything saved?

Already, there has been a significant measure of success: research has shown that, without the impetus of the storm damage grant schemes, only a small minority (less than 18%) of the restoration plans are at all likely to have been produced. A handful of sites were at a critical stage of neglect when the storms struck and without grant aid would have been lost altogether. The grants have enabled more than twice the amount of practical repair work than would otherwise have been possible. Moreover, in the absence of a plan, clearance and replanting are unlikely to have been wholly appropriate to the sites' historic character.



Castle Hill, Devon. Earl Clinton designed a grand vista terminating on a triumphal arch to the south, and a sham castle to the north. In the nineteenth century trees grew up to obscure the view (above). Many were damaged in the 1990 storm and, under restoration a bold decision was made to re-open the vista (below).

Revealing forgotten vistas

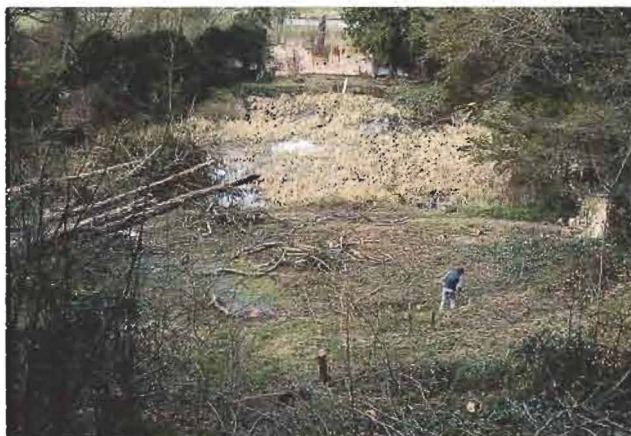
At first the damage seemed catastrophic, but even the clearance brought opportunities. There was the immediate matter of recording field archaeology. Overgrown paths were reopened. Where woodland was over-mature there was a chance to diversify the age structure by replanting or encouraging natural regeneration.

By and large, clearance proved to be a far more expensive job than replanting, and it also provided the most immediately dramatic examples of restoration. Often it was found that later tree and shrub planting had been placed with no reference to an earlier layout, or that Rhododendron or scrub had encroached unchecked across a view. The decision to remove even more trees can be painful and contentious, but the re-opening of former visual links has been one of the most satisfying operations. Without grant aid this would probably never have happened.

New planting

Replanting has gone far beyond like-for-like replacement, either because the plan has shown the damaged planting to have been unsuitable, or because repair was needed to the whole feature, for example an avenue, clump or woodland belt.

By its very nature replanting cannot have an instant impact, and may take at least ten or twenty years to make its mark, let alone to reach maturity. Nevertheless, there has been evident satisfaction for visitors in watching the processes of restoration, which have already led to improved 'legibility' and interpretation of design. Better access arrangements have been another benefit, sometimes hand in hand with clearance of paths. Where planting has been done on a grand scale, scenic improvements will steadily become apparent as plants grow and contribute to the wider landscape.



Downton Moot, Salisbury. An early eighteenth century garden overlies the earthworks of a medieval castle. It is thus a Scheduled Ancient Monument as well as a Registered Garden. It was damaged by both the storms of 1987 and 1990. The photographs show the trilobate pool in October 1987 and after restoration in 1991.



*Downton Moot, Salisbury,
restoration plan 1992.
© Land Use Consultants*



Trees have grown up around the bastion at the edge of this eighteenth century garden at Goldney House, Bristol (above). From here Thomas Goldney watched his trading ships returning along the Avon Gorge. This view is now largely obscured. Frequently, it is a hard decision to cut down trees, but a plan can at least identify trees which could be removed at the end of their natural life.



Avenues often present tricky problems: can they be perpetuated without accepting temporary losses? Different management techniques can be applied depending on differing circumstances. Where the avenue is relatively short compared to the extent of the section damaged the best decision may be to clear-fell and replant. Where there is room, and the canopy is not too heavy, there may be the possibility of 'gapping up' with young trees. At Melbury Park, Dorset; (right) the existing avenue was wide enough to allow for the planting of a secondary avenue within it to eventually replace the outer lines. At Brockenhurst Park; (below), partially uprooted trees were re-erected and then pollarded after the 1987 storms. Today they are thriving and in themselves are living survivors of the Great Storm.





Humphry Repton presented his proposals to his clients in a neatly bound 'Red Book'. At Luscombe, Devon, his watercolours showing the scene; 'before' (top) and; 'after' (centre) made the improvements hard to resist.
 © Luscombe Estate



His landscape (below) survives remarkably well – much as he proposed it in 1799.



Awareness and understanding

An appreciative response to conservation

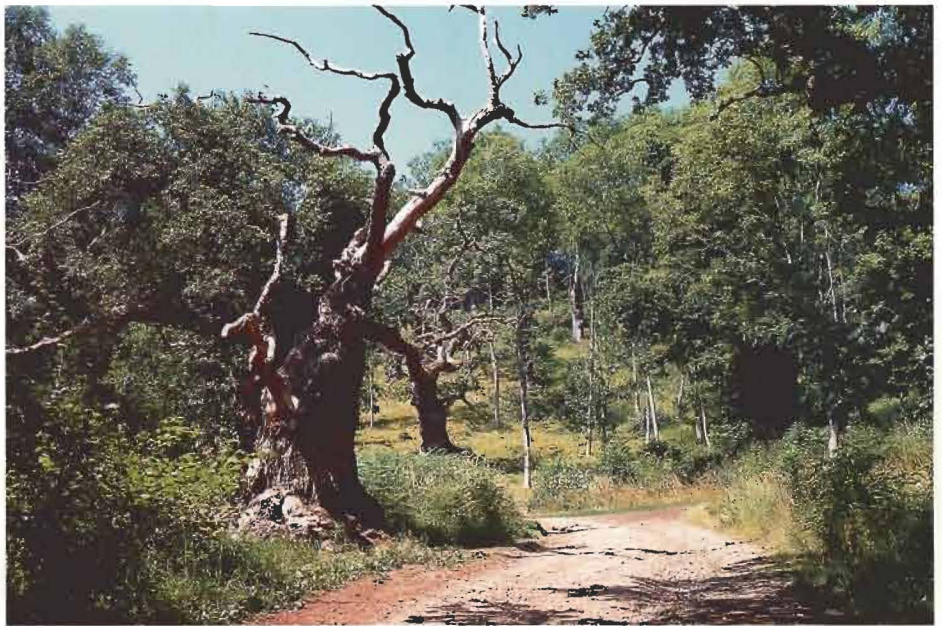
Ten years on, there has been an increased awareness and a marked change of attitude in favour of an historically informed approach to conservation. This shift of climate has spread through other public agencies and local authorities. Among owners and managers of historic landscapes, there is now an overwhelming enthusiasm for carefully considered work which has now taken root. Recognition of the historic integrity of a landscape, where it is significant, has become an element in its own right to be considered within the management and future development of estates.

Overcoming the problems

Conflicts between conservation and other competing land uses must be addressed. In many cases it has proved possible to resolve an apparent clash of interests. It has emerged, for example, that there is much in common between the protection of historic value and nature conservation. While the latter may favour rich ground layers, dense wetland vegetation, and the retention of dead wood, there are normally areas within even a fairly formal design where such management may be appropriate. Both approaches mitigate against the impact of over-intensive agriculture or amenity uses. Other sorts of problems may not be amenable to instant answers, but have been moderated through long-term management changes, such as gradual conversion of conifer plantation to deciduous woodland. Where a full restoration has not been financially possible, the plans have located and recorded historic elements so that they may at least be protected for the foreseeable future.

The value of outside advice

Almost invariably, these projects have benefited from a professionally prepared plan. When we are familiar with a place we will often accept its appearance without question. There is a natural tendency, however, for an original design concept to become blurred with time, and so the need arises for objective and skilled re-



At Ashton Court, Bristol research for the restoration plan revealed an area of ancient wood pasture. These pollard oaks are more than 500 years old and are now subject to careful management to conserve them.

appraisal. There is always a risk that outside interference will seem irrelevant or even impertinent to those who have a long personal involvement with a place, but often the possibilities for restoration which have emerged have far exceeded expectations, and managers have found that a well-produced plan, like a *Repton Red Book*, is an invaluable reference.

Loss of historical evidence

Given the rarity of such storms, it is understandable that some initial mistakes were made. Where tree clearance was done hastily without an initial ground survey, there were losses of information such as location of trees in formal plantings, the precise characteristics or age of the plant, and particularities such as method of planting. Wholesale clearance with heavy machinery also disturbs field archaeology, which can often reveal the lines of walks and rides, the hollows where trees once stood, or even the boundary or cultivation marks of the earlier agricultural scene which was overlain by 'improvement'. Good landscape restoration works to a slower time-scale than disaster management.

An enhanced expertise

The opportunity to prepare plans expanded both knowledge of landscape design history and the

capacity to tackle conservation problems. Before the storms this was a relatively unexplored area. Now, more than 180 restoration plans have been prepared, many by consultants who have developed a specialist expertise. There is now a better understanding of:

- archive sources and research
- the work of specific designers
- field surveys and archaeology
- assessing historical value
- tackling management decisions
- costs of implementation
- an appreciation of the values of wildlife habitats in parkland

This enables comparisons to be made and is contributing to a marked rise in professional standards. Gradually this information has been disseminated through articles, lectures and training courses, besides being available to increase the educational value and enjoyment for visitors at particular sites.

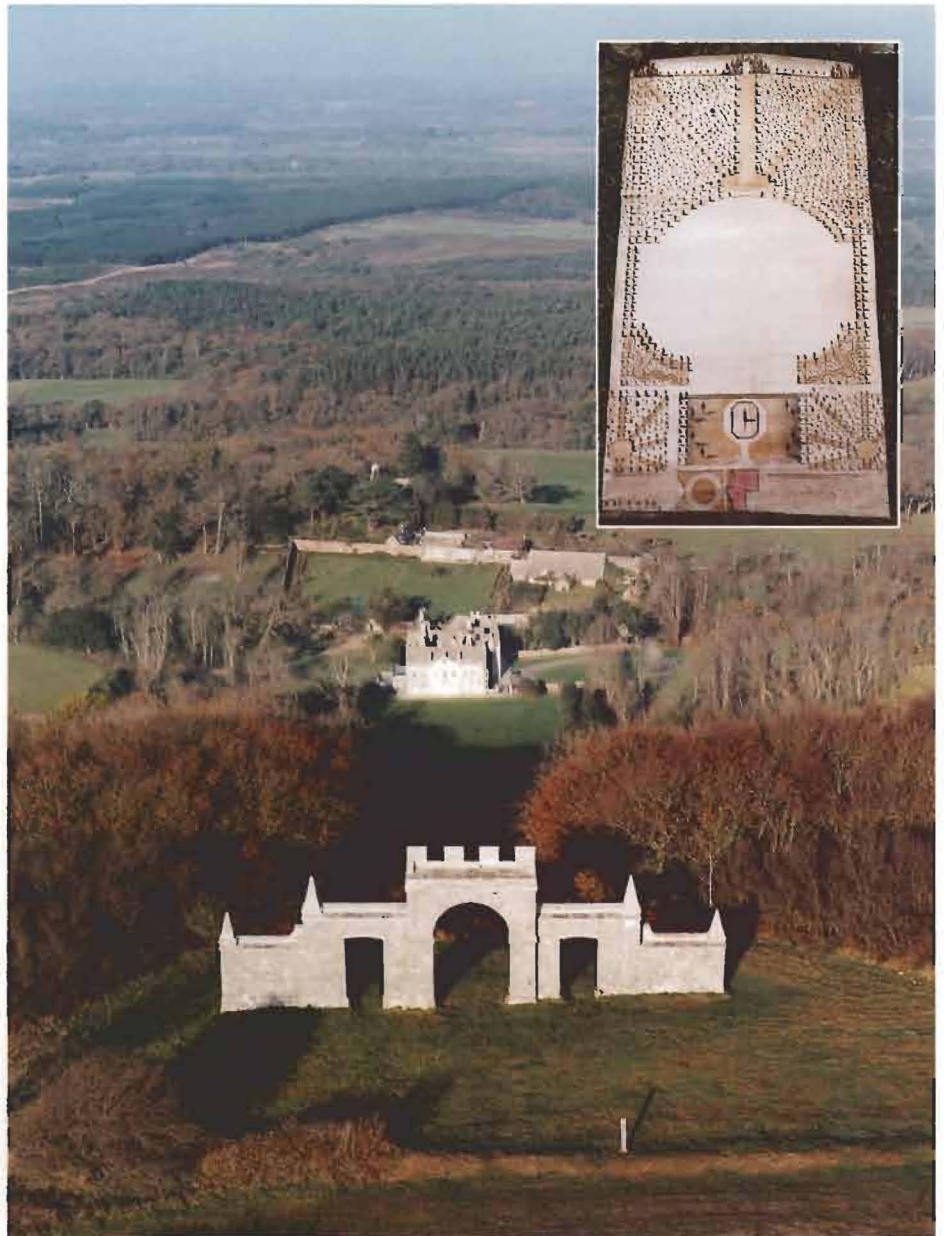
Encouragement for further public funding

The financial information gathered from the schemes has helped in estimating the probable costs of repairing and restoring historic parks and gardens across the whole country. This in turn was used to prepare the ground for English Heritage's Gardens' grant scheme.

Results of research have accelerated the current up-dating of the *Register of historic parks and gardens* and have brought to light additional sites. Meanwhile, the success of the storm damage schemes was a significant factor in the inclusion of historic landscapes as a category within the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, and has resulted in a working partnership between English Heritage and the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency, as agents of the Ministry of Agriculture Farming and Fisheries (MAFF).

The future

The storm damage schemes brought to our attention the neglect that many significant, designed, historic landscapes suffer – often through a lack of recognition and appreciation of the original structure of planting and layout. Significantly more repair work was undertaken than would otherwise be possible, and the balance has been tipped in favour of conservation. Inevitably, the extent of repair has been limited by the availability of matching resources, but the schemes have encouraged the diversion of other resources into restoration. Even where positive new work has been wanting the programme has in some cases helped to arrest further irreversible decay.



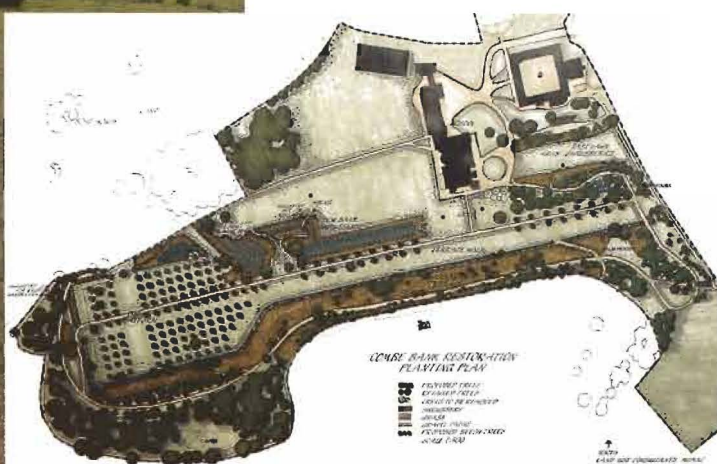
Creech Grange, Dorset. Before the storm, the register had recorded only a nineteenth century park. Further research uncovered a layout of 1740 by an unknown designer.
© Sillson Photography, Wareham



Blaise Castle, Bristol. This landscape by Humphry Repton (and others) has been a public municipal park for more than 50 years. The woodland was already seriously decaying when it was hit by the 1990 storm. Over the years, the edge of the wood had lost the loose and open character illustrated by Repton in 1796. New management proposals, prepared under the grant scheme, will help to recover this outline, along with replanting, thinning of aged trees, and revealing the view to the woodman's cottage.



Combe Bank, Kent. A remarkable example of an early eighteenth century shrubbery with formal terrace walk and 'platform'. The trees on the platform were already lost, but evidence for the design survived as a 1773 plan and their positions could be traced to slight depressions in the ground. The feature is now replanted with the cedar and beech thought to have been used originally. The site is now a school, and former pupils donated the trees. Plan © Land Use Consultants



Completing the work that has been started

There is still much to be done. For those places which participated in the schemes, an on-going commitment is demanded in terms of active management. This will involve a continued search for resources, together with monitoring progress against the proposed targets. A good plan needs to be kept up to date in the light of changing circumstances; photographs and other documents can be kept as an active archive. Some schemes, where desirable restoration work was identified but was not a direct result of storm damage, have continued with their programmes of work (prepared through the scheme) with funding from the Countryside Stewardship scheme.

The remaining needs

Not all the owners of storm-damaged historic landscapes were in a position to take up the offer of a grant, furthermore there are a thousand or more sites recognised to be of historic importance and located mainly in the northern half of the country, which were not hit by the storms. The grant schemes brought to light the alarming scale of decay, the general lack of resources available to reverse it, and

the overwhelming need for carefully considered programmes of repair.

Many places are reaching their practical limit in terms of rescue for conservation; tree cover is often mature or even post-mature, and needs continuous management if it is to have a healthy mixed-age structure; lakes are over-silted; garden buildings and ha-ha walls are in critical states of repair, and there are also archive collections which require care and protection.

The resources available for restoration work are relatively small. Some work continues under a modest English Heritage Garden Grants scheme. At other sites restoration schemes are initiated and supported under the umbrella of the Countryside Stewardship scheme, funded by MAFF, and administered by the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency. The advent of funding through the Heritage Lottery Fund has, in some cases, opened up new prospects of support for restoration schemes. For all such schemes, research and the preparation of a programme of proposals is considered as a pre-requisite to any work on the ground. This approach, developed through the storm damage programme has

been established as good practice and is now accepted by government agencies, local authorities and practitioners.

New approaches – new prospects

In part of the prevailing rural scene the emphasis is shifting away from intensive food production towards amenity uses. Parks, in any case, seldom occupy top grade agricultural land, and this new atmosphere must at least ward off the threat of further loss through ploughing.

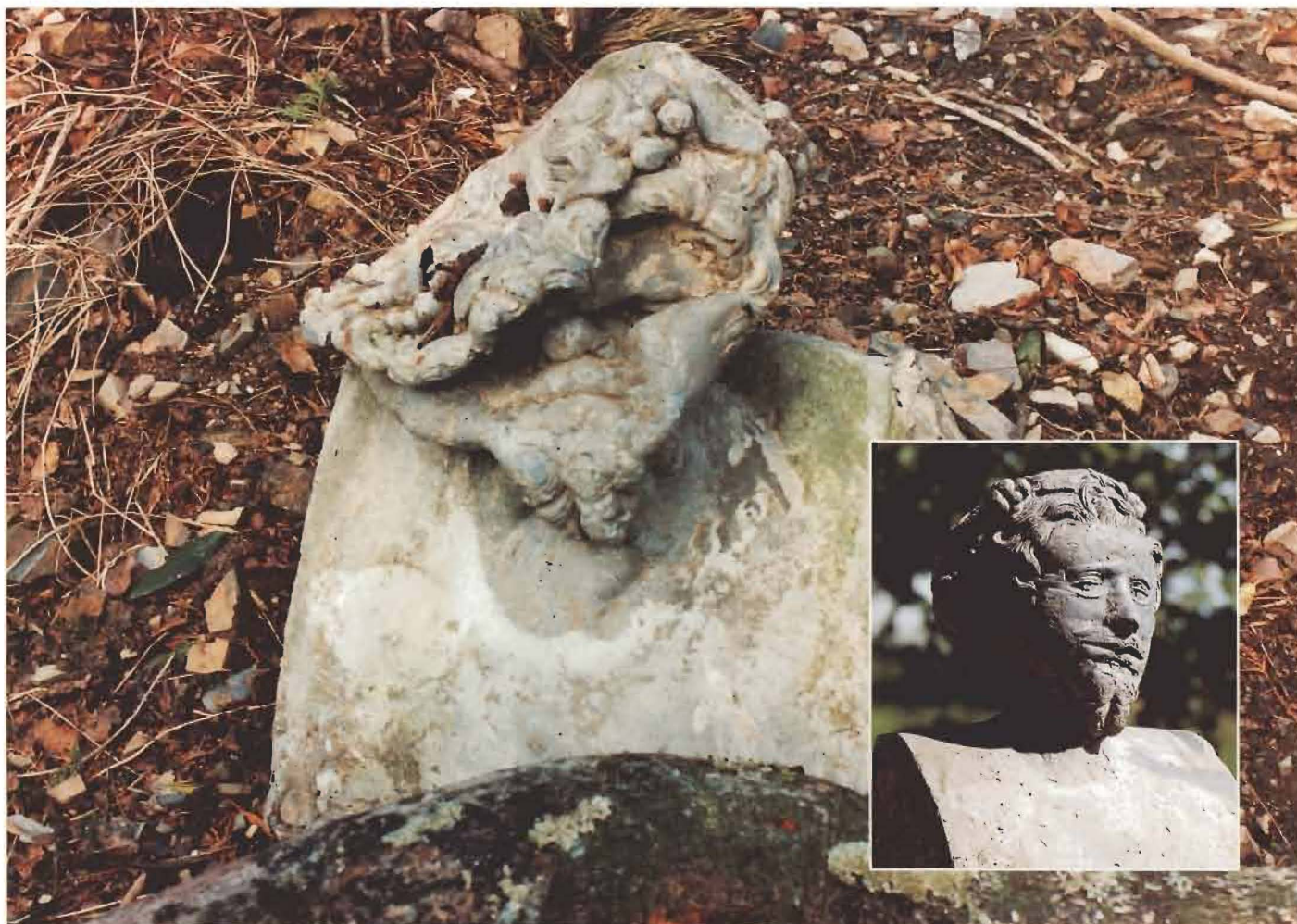
There is promising evidence to show that public imagination can be captured by ambitious and well thought-out restoration work. This suggests an opportunity to improve financial viability through increased tourism and special events.

The public purse is severely restrained, and the limited available resources will have to be carefully targeted where they can be of maximum benefit. The present emphasis is therefore on the search for both sponsorship, and for new economic initiatives. Future direction of available funding and advice, through liaison between the different public sector agencies and authorities, will also be vital to secure the maximum benefit possible.

All of the schemes featured in this publication were grant aided either by English Heritage or Task Force Trees, a unit of the Countryside Commission; and all are sites on the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens of special historic interest. This Register is a descriptive list of over 1200 historic gardens, parks and designed ornamental landscapes of national importance, which is published as county volumes by English Heritage through the National Heritage Act, 1983.

Further information

Gardens and Landscape (Room 405), English Heritage, 429 Oxford Street, London W1R 2HD. Tel: 0171 973 3000



*(Above) Leaden face of Bacchus, October 1987 and after restoration
(Front cover) The Theatre, Larmer Tree Grounds, Rushmore Park, Wiltshire*

Photographs not otherwise credited were taken by English Heritage photographers

The Gardens and Landscape Team at English Heritage provide advice and guidelines, set and monitor quality and standards, and direct policy on a wide range of issues relating to the care and conservation of historic parks and gardens and historic landscapes.



ENGLISH HERITAGE

English Heritage produces a wide range of free and priced publications giving information and guidance on a wide range of conservation topics relating to our work. For further information contact English Heritage Customer Services, telephone 0171 973 3434

Produced by: English Heritage, 23 Savile Row, London W1X 1AB October 1997

Product code XH20065

If you require an alternative accessible version of this document (for instance in audio, Braille or large print) please contact our Customer

Services Department:

Telephone: 0870 333 1181

Fax: 01793 414926

Textphone: 0800 015 0516

E-mail: customers@english-heritage.org.uk