



Historic Landscapes Past, Present & Future

Discovery Day at Hampton Court: 2 Oct 2023

Celebrating 40 years of the Register of Historic Parks & Gardens



Nicola Andrews, Palaces Group Director



Mike Fitt OBE, Chairman of The Royal Parks Guild

Introduction

The delegates entered the Hampton Court grounds through the impressive ornamental gates to walk along the main drive with a direct view of the Palace in front of them. Then accessing the beautiful Garden Room to be greeted by Guild members and supporters before settling down for the day ahead.

Delegates were welcomed by **Mike Fitt** on behalf of The Royal Parks Guild and **Nicola Andrews**, Palaces Group Director, on behalf of Historic Royal Palaces (HRP), host of the event – with

both outlining the exciting day ahead. Mike explained that the Discovery Days, an initiative of the Royal Parks Guild, had grown from small steps taken some 12 years ago to this year's event with over 200 people present. Each year being ambitious and different. He noted that the event now involves over 25 organizations taking part and contributing to the day!

Nicola outlined the scope, responsibilities and territories managed by HRP. She emphasized the ongoing threats to heritage landscape spaces and the critical need for people who are passionate about their stewardship – she made a 'call to action' for people and the planet.



Florence Akanbi-Guei – Kew Apprentice

Dr Terry Gough MVO, former Head of Gardens & Estates at HRP, gave an excellent summary of the evolution of the Hampton Court Palace Gardens through some 500 years of history. He described the rich tapestry of landscape across the Hampton Court and Home Park estate – a heady responsibility to respect, maintain and enhance this precious heritage. Terry referred to a “kaleidoscope of changes” across the garden areas which still represent many different layers of history needing careful management and understanding. The Conservation Management Plans have been critical in steering the right course, particularly in these later years.

Todd Longstaffe-Gowan, Gardens Advisor to HRP, took us on a journey through the careful and precise restoration of the King's Privy Garden which is situated between the South Front of the Palace and the River Thames. The project was researched and implemented in the early 1990s and re-opened to public access in 1995. It has proved to be a great success in the processes of archaeology/garden restoration and much appreciated and praised by visitors.

Von-luc Thomas-Jones – Tipping Point (from London Wildlife Trust)



What does AI know about the sector? Interactive moment.

At the comfort break there was opportunity for an “**interactive moment**” – with ‘response’ stickers placed on display panels by delegates. Several questions were asked

- Would a **National Natural Service** be a good idea to enfold all young people in environmental issues?
90% said yes; 10% said no; plus stickers comments.
- Do you know about the Register of **Historic Parks & Gardens sometime known as Listed Landscapes**?
60% = yes; 40% = no; these percentages seemed to match those people working in a landscape on the register or not.
- How much did you **know about gardening/horticulture at secondary school**?
This showed a wide spread of involvement [83 participants] from 13% = who said they knew nothing through, 27% who had some understanding through parks and playground visits to 54% actively involved in gardening through school plots, etc. and only 5% admitting to having studied or received careers advice at school.

Mike introduced the AI generated list of careers related to horticulture and landscape management via a small slip of paper placed on each seat, describing a variety of professional/working opportunities in the ever-widening environmental field. This amounted to over 80 different opportunities of horticulture/land management career related streams. There was a healthy debate as people discussed the different opportunities with Mike noting that even the design of some computer games has people who know about plants, as he had spotted a *Primula Vulgaris* and *Quercus Robur* in one virtual gaming world.

Ruth Lin Wong Holmes, Vice Chair of the Guild then hosted the Panel Discussion introducing:

Jane Pelly [Head of Landscape, Royal Parks] who talked about their apprenticeship scheme bringing in diversity to the organisation and how nature in historic landscapes thrives.

Billy Knowles [Director of YES supporting New to Nature for the National Heritage Lottery] spoke about how the New to Nature programme had created paid work positions in organisations such as the Royal Parks and National Trust, this being a great success in encouraging new people into the sector.

Tom Young [Nuffield Scholar and Worshipful Company of Gardeners, also green roof expert] was asked about registered roof gardens (like the Kensington Roof Garden) and why they are so important to the future of nature in urban areas. He also talked about the policy and technical issues of installing and maintaining them.

Emma McNamara [Horticulture Specialist for the National Trust] expanded on their sustainability policies and strategies with the issues of implementing change. It was noted that the National Trust has a wide and diverse range of opportunities for horticulturists.

There was a lively discussion, amongst delegates, about the theme of the day with insights about the organisation they work for and how they were tackling the climate change emergency, equity, equality, diversity inclusion and justice alongside caring for historic landscapes.



Sam Hickmott - National Trust Head Gardener

Questions from the floor asked why there were few people of colour in senior positions in the sector and what could be done about this. The panel acknowledged that it was a systemic issue that they want to see tackled promptly as there is great benefit in having everyone involved in dealing with climate change and the biodiversity issues arising due to habitat loss, whilst, at the same time, addressing issues of inclusion, equity and diversity.

School pupils who attended the event tours in the afternoon and had sessions with the Tree Council





Afternoon session

Lunch was provided at the Tiltyard Cafe by Company of Cooks, whose staff had volunteered to cook and serve the food and drinks for the day. The café hosted the career displays and networking opportunities, with people catching up with those they knew or making new connections.

Garden Tours, made up of 10 groups, led by a flag bearer, were guided on a variety of routes through different parts of the gardens to three places of interest each. This was out of the 9 different interesting locations including the working Shire Horses, hedge planting demonstration, Privy Garden archaeology 'station', Great Vine greenhouse, Magic Garden Play area, Kitchen Garden 'Pollinating London Together' display, Glasshouses with exotic plant collections and the mesmerising 'Force for Nature' interactive installation. At each location there were very helpful interpretations/explanations from experts in their field.

With everyone returning to the Garden Room, **Richard Pollard** of The Tree Council, gave a brief report of the school children's activities, including a 2 minutes summary video of the day. This was related to the '**Force for Nature**' schools activities held in the Clore Learning Centre and on-site activities earlier in the day, enjoyed by pupils from 3 visiting schools, 50 schoolchildren in all. Richard also introduced a short video clip featuring the environmentalist and broadcaster, Chris Packham with a strong message of encouragement for all the delegates.

Sara Lom CEO of The Tree Council introduced 3 speakers in the **Emerging Talent** session. Each person outlined how they were able to seize opportunities to progress into the horticultural/environmental world without necessarily having previous experience; The three highly motivated and captivating presenters were

- **Sam Hickmott** – National Trust Head Gardener – youngest person holding that position to date!

- **Florence Akanbi-Guei** – Kew Apprentice – career changer
- **Von-luc Thomas-Jones** – trainee, London Wildlife Trust.

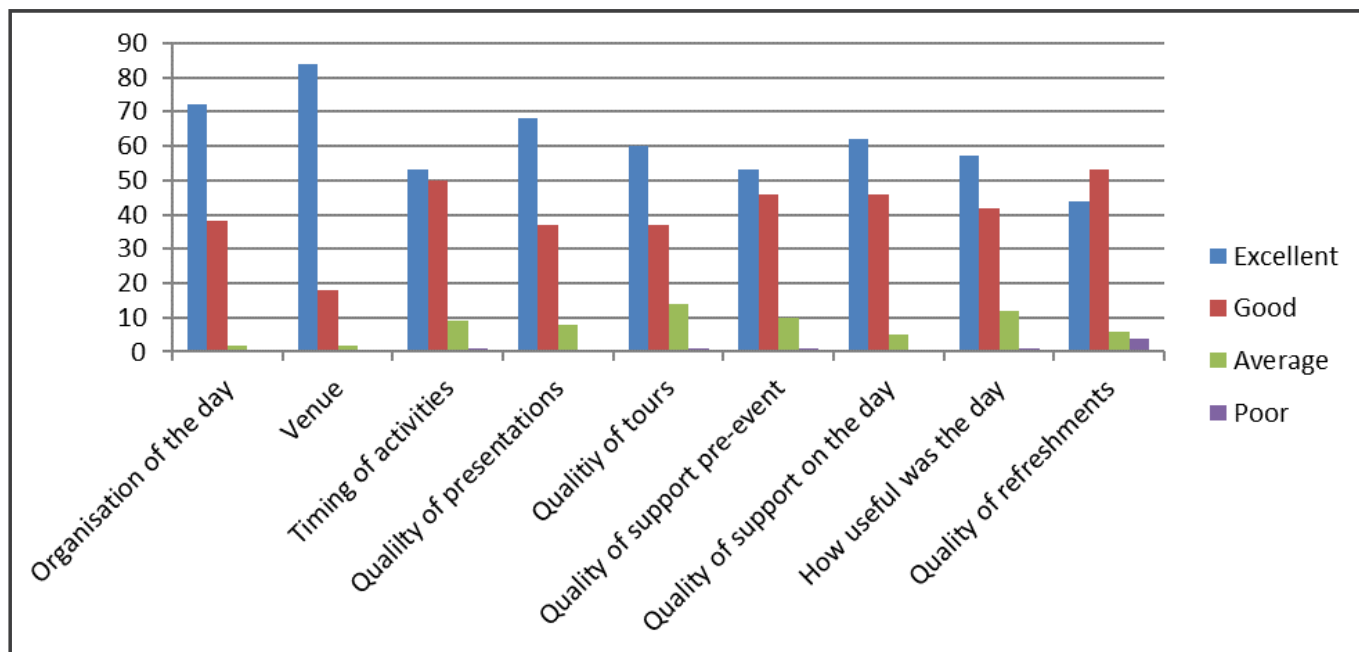
They had all taken different routes into the horticultural/environmental field, with them emphasising the importance of being passionate about your chosen subject, staying determined to succeed and sometimes, seizing unexpected opportunities.



Benjamin Haycock -
Tree Council Ambassador

Closing the event Mike thanked everyone who had made the day possible which included the host – Historic Royal Palaces, sponsors, supporters and volunteers. This final flourish was accompanied by **Tree Council Ambassador Benjamin Haycock** who took to the stage and pounded out his 'Singing Force for Nature' anthem, with much applaud from the audience. It was a fitting end to the day and lifted the spirits further before people prepared to depart.

As people left they were free to collect a 'goodie bag' on condition of offering completed **feedback forms** – which are a vital part of the whole event..... and with high expectations for another inspirational Discovery Day in 2024.



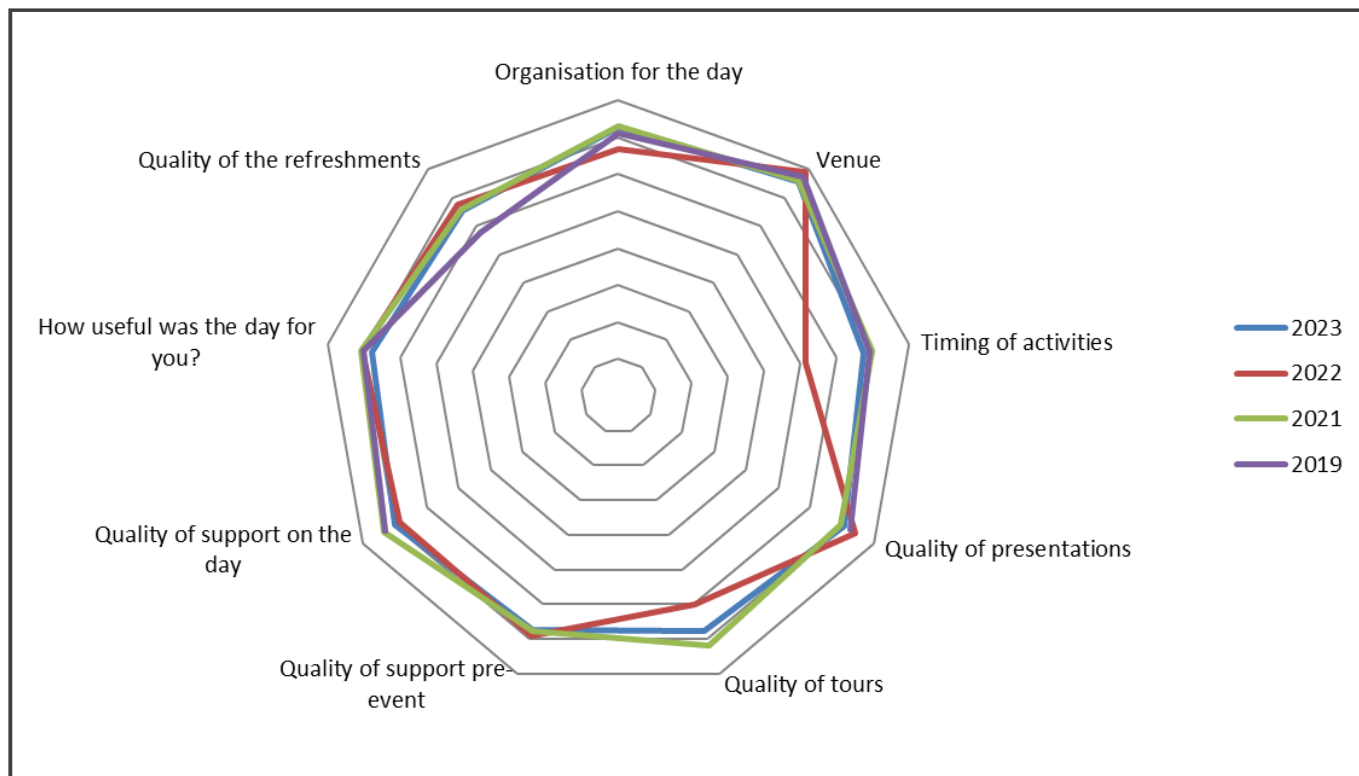
Feedback from 2023 Discovery Day at Hampton Court Palace.

Feedback Comments

“great day loved seeing behind the scenes with HRP team”

“lovely lunch and careers section was useful”

“being autistic I found it hard to network but loved the day”



Report comparing feedback from past discovery days.

Reported by Richard Flenley & Ruth Lin Wong Holmes – 24 October 2023

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