

Roots and Records: Past, Present & Future



Hello! If you haven’t read my first Blog post you can link to it [here](#). These are the musings of the Parks & Gardens UK Data Manager (PGUK).

What is Parks & Gardens UK?

So, if you haven’t already had a look around the [Parks & Gardens UK](#) archive website, I will provide you with an introduction.

This archive is a leading online resource for historic parks, gardens and designed landscapes and is an important National treasure trove of information. The archive provides a wealth of information about the UKs rich history of landscape design that could be lost if this archive is not supported. It is a freely accessible, historical and inspiring archive providing information about the UKs parks, gardens and designed landscapes. The archive has over 10,000 records of historic landscapes sites and over 2,400 biographies of associated people and organisations.

The archive was created to ensure that historic information regarding these historic sites are available for future generations. In September 2016 the Parks & Gardens UK archive found a new home at Hestercombe Gardens Trust, which secured the opportunity to develop and expand the archive with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

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In 2019, a new website for Parks & Gardens UK was launched; a part-time Data Manager and a small team of volunteers were tasked to populate the archive database. This also included the migration of the archive data to a new database and the creation of a new website.

Jumping to 2024, there is still much to do on the archive and the part-time Data Manager and team of volunteers are maintaining, updating and adding to the archive.

My Role at Parks & Gardens UK

Managing and growing this archive is no small feat, and it keeps me on my toes with a variety of responsibilities. I'm constantly switching hats—whether it's expanding, organising, and preserving the collection, collaborating with volunteers, hunting for funding and grant opportunities, or handling the PGUK social media channels, there's always something demanding my attention. My day usually involves navigating through extensive task lists, wrangling countless spreadsheets, and carving out time for reading and research—all while having some music in the background. Right now, it's classic rock fuelling this blog session.

My job also gives me the opportunity to share photographs of gardens I have taken whilst I am out. For instance, during a recent weekend trip to London, I had the chance to stroll through Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens. The experience was wonderful, especially with the beautiful weather. Interestingly, I found myself so immersed in the scenery that I hardly took any photos this time.

Working at Hestercombe Gardens in Somerset is one of the best parts of this job. It is a beautiful place to call my work home and it is great to be able to walk around at different times of the year and see how the gardens change.

2024 and Beyond

There are projects earmarked for the archive but unfortunately we need funding. This is the part of the role, which is the most challenging. Finding the right opportunities for funding or grants to help further develop the PGUK site is difficult, mainly because the archive is already digital. Many of the grants that are available are for digitising archives rather than enhancing digital ones, which is frustrating; but I keep looking.

There are key projects that would further develop the reach of the archive. For example, creating login areas for visitors and volunteers, as well as developing educational resources for schools. These initiatives would not only enhance access to this rich collection of historical information but also ensure its long-term preservation and security.

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A Journey of Learning and Discovery

I am passionate about books and there is nothing quite like diving into a new one. I love reading and sharing my thoughts on the books I discover, whether it is the latest bestseller or a hidden gem that deserves more attention. The PGUK teams’ book reviews can be found on the [Parks & Gardens UK](#) archive website.

- [Eltham Lodge - Where Perfection Meets Convenience](#)
- [Garden Transmissions - Word, Image, Experience, Future](#)
- [The Plant Hunter's Atlas](#)

If you have a book recommendation, I'd love to read and review it. Whether you're an author, publisher, or just a fellow book lover, send me your book and let's connect through the joy of reading.

Thank you for joining me on this journey—I look forward to sharing more insights and stories with you in future posts!

Fiona Baker

