In search of Oxfordshire’s hidden gardens

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Now a group of volunteers, led by the Oxfordshire Gardens Trust, is determined to fill in the missing stories supported by a grant of almost £50,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

Future development, neglect or lack of funding threatens the existence of many walled kitchen gardens and the two-year project aims to create a detailed website, exhibition and booklet to draw attention to the gardens and promote their future conservation.

At present, some 55 historic parks and gardens in the county are listed by English Heritage but initial research by the Oxfordshire Gardens Trust has revealed that there are, or could have been, more than 300 walled kitchen gardens of historical interest in the past.

Little is known about most of these so the project’s volunteers will be set to work tracking down historical details. In order to carry this out the volunteers, drawn from local communities throughout the county, will be trained in surveying, recording and publishing records. They will be supported by specialist consultants in historic landscapes. English Heritage has already confirmed its support for the project and is in fact currently preparing national guidelines that will assist in the task.

Once the information has been gathered and collated it will be published on a dedicated website which will allow the volunteer researchers to update it on an ongoing basis. The records gathered will be accessible at a range of sites, including the Oxfordshire Historic Environment Record, Parks and Gardens UK and the new English Heritage Gateway.

An A4 leaflet and 24-page glossy brochure will be produced and a mobile exhibition with details of the project’s findings will tour libraries or town halls in Oxfordshire.

Stuart McLeod, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South East England said: “Making more people aware of these walled gardens and the stories behind them will assist in their conservation. This project is serving a valuable purpose while at the same time providing members of local communities with a range of new skills.”

For Oxfordshire Gardens Trust Joanna Matthews said: “We are delighted to have been awarded this substantial grant. It will allow the OGT and our volunteers to develop new skills as we undertake this important study. Surprisingly little is known about the walled gardens in Oxfordshire - across the country for that matter. We hope that this project will stimulate further studies and encourage better conservation of these fascinating places.”

Notes to editors

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported more than 33,000 projects, allocating over £4.7billion across the UK, with over £462million granted in the South East alone.

Further information

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