

**Cliveden (National Trust), Cliveden Road, Taplow, Buckinghamshire,
SL1 8NS**



On **Wednesday 15th June 2022**, we were off on the second coach outing of the year to Cliveden Gardens and Bledlow Manor Gardens. This outing was originally planned for 2020 and had been postponed twice due to Covid and re-arranged by Georgina. This time it went ahead but sadly without its organiser who was not well enough to come. Regrettably several members of the Committee were also unwell, and Madelaine stepped into the breach keeping us in order and shepherding us on and off the coach at the right times.

We arrived at Cliveden Gardens after a trouble-free journey and had 3 hours to explore. It was a beautiful Summer's Day and there was plenty to look at and admire. Looking over the South Terrace we could see the extensive parterre laid out beneath us. Sadly, the alliums which had filled it were now finished and we were told that the gardeners were having a lot of trouble with rabbits eating the young plants. In the distance was a view of the Thames and those who walked down to the river were able to take advantage of a boat trip between the two locks. Very tempting on such a lovely hot day. There were so many red kites flying overhead and the boatman warned that they are now becoming like seagulls and pinching food from picnickers' hands but with the added advantage, to them, of large sharp talons. After climbing back up the hill the rose garden was not to be missed and the herbaceous border, just coming into full flower, was interesting particularly looking at the way the plants were supported with woven twigs.

Cliveden is situated on a wooded plateau with sweeping views of the River Thames. The current house and gardens were crafted by Sir Charles Barry in 1849, transforming the estate into the Landscape Style. The garden, showcasing the Italian style typical of the nineteenth century Mixed Style, features a balustrade that was imported from Rome's Villa Borghese in 1896. In 1959, Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe designed a Rose Garden for Lord Astor.

Exploring Cliveden's gardens at a leisurely pace truly pays off. They offer more than stately grandeur; they're an intricate tapestry, revealing 350 years of evolving design through the landscape, plants, and pathways. Visitors encounter striking juxtapositions: classic Italianate terraces, the drama of nineteenth-century landscaping, twentieth-century elegance, and ancient woodlands that reflect centuries of stewardship.

The Parterre & South Terrace exemplify refined landscape design, featuring an extensive geometric parterre situated atop a terrace with views over the Thames. The proportions are remarkably ambitious by English standards, evoking the grandeur of French formal gardens. Seasonal bedding plants are organized in sweeping patterns, highlighted by meticulously clipped topiary and well-defined gravel walkways. The primary axial view toward the river is recognized as one of the most historically significant

vistas in the Thames Valley. This area serves as a valuable resource for examining axial planning principles, methods of terrace construction, and the relationship between house and landscape.

Currently (2022) undergoing restoration, the Long Garden presents significant interest from a design history perspective. It was established as a formal 19th-century garden and later reimagined by Norah Lindsay for Nancy Astor in the 1930s. The area is distinguished by statuary, carefully maintained hedges, and a sequence of rhythmically arranged compartments. The National Trust is working to restore Lindsay's design intent, incorporating more naturalistic plantings within the formal layout and replacing artificial grass paths with stone. The site offers a rare, dynamic case study of twentieth-century garden design being authentically revitalized.

The Water Garden stands out from other areas by offering a picturesque, playful setting that subtly incorporates theatrical elements. It is characterized by bridges, islands, meandering pathways, and reflective water features. A diverse combination of bamboos, acers, and moisture-tolerant shrubs creates a quasi-Oriental ambiance, echoing Victorian and Edwardian interpretations of East Asian Garden aesthetics. The garden provides opportunities to investigate late 19th-century preferences for exoticism and constructed landscape scenes.

Encompassing more than 300 acres, the estate's woodlands and riverbank serve as a natural boundary for its formal centre. The area features an extensive network of paths, including sections that trace former carriage routes. Notable landmarks include the Duke of Sutherland's statue, the Blenheim Pavilion, and a riverside walk leading to the boathouse. The woodlands offer a tranquil, shaded setting that provides a sense of wilderness in contrast to the estate's structured gardens. This site presents opportunities for examining estate movement patterns, land management methodologies, and the interplay between decorative and utilitarian landscapes.

A small yet elegantly designed rose garden is organized around a circular layout with radiating walkways. Contemporary rose cultivars have been selected for their aromatic qualities and frequent blooming. The Rose Garden exemplifies the National Trust's approach to harmonizing heritage preservation with modern horticultural techniques.

The maze provides a contemporary interpretation of the original Victorian design, constructed from yew hedges with distinct geometric patterns and a strong feeling of enclosure. This feature offers valuable insights into Victorian leisure practices and estate recreation.

