



Playground at a 1970s housing estate by Andrews Sherlock & Partners, London.
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also appears to be true for post-war playgrounds: in order to meet current health and safety standards, play equipment and surfaces have generally been removed and replaced. Like parks and other elements of the urban public realm they are also at an increased risk of redevelopment. ■

FURTHER READING

- Benjamin, Joe 1974. *Grounds for Play*. London: Bedford Square Press of the National Council of Social Service
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- Lady Allen of Hurtwood 1962. *Design for Play*. London: Housing Centre Trust
- Lady Allen of Hurtwood 1968. *Planning for Play*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press
- Lefaiivre, Liane and Roode, Ingeborg (eds) 2002. *Aldo van Eyk: the Playground and the City*. Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum

The pleasures of simple play.
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Beyond the playground: the adventure continues

Linden Groves

Landscape historian specialising in children's play

Peering over parapets, squinting at sundials, mock battles, sketching, tag and leap frog, sailing boats, den building, hoop rolling, kite flying, botanising, star gazing, bathing, ponies, dogs, traps, go-carts, bicycles, fishing, harvesting and the occasional homemade see-saw or swing ... generations of children have enjoyed mooching in gardens.

Historically, this mooching has usually taken a simple form, with often fairly improvised activities. So how in the past few decades have we contrived to make the issue of young people in old gardens such a complicated and fraught one?

A garden may have enchanted generation after generation as a family home, but apparently things change once it becomes a Visitor Attraction, as these new 'public children' are somehow different and need something special.

I worked for many years as a conservation officer with the Garden History Society (GHS); as a statutory consultee in the planning system we saw a steady flow of applications for playgrounds in parks and gardens.

Some were of dubious virtue with only fleeting appeal, consisting of predictable equipment, safety surfacing and a fence. Many were highly damaging



to the heritage asset in which they sat as they obstructed views, created bright visual distractions, confused readings of the historic design, caused honeypots of noise and activity or necessitated the altering of historic features.

We were prompted to produce a *Planning Conservation Advice Note on Play Facilities* that recommended ways to mitigate the detrimental effects of playgrounds in historic landscapes. A bespoke site-specific approach is usually the key and the adoption of this has been gratifying, although we now see an unfortunate rivalry for ‘Garden with the Most Expensive, Unique and Site-Specific Destination Playground’.

Inevitably, the best mitigation is to have no playground at all – the landscapes don’t have to accommodate intrusive modern features, and the children are left undistracted to focus on the historic location. Out of this principle came *Beyond the Playground*, a call-to-arms that I wrote for the Garden History Society to encourage historic garden managers and other professionals to consider fresh approaches to children at their sites.

Since its publication in 2010 *Beyond the Playground* has been hungrily received by well over a thousand garden managers, owners, visitor staff, landscape architects, education officers and play professionals from heritage organisations, local authorities, schools and individually owned gardens.

So what’s changed? Personally, a business running traditional play sessions in historic settings grew out of a frustration at hearing ‘we love *Beyond the Playground* but don’t want to deal with actual children ourselves because they’re simply too shouty and snotty and we can’t remember what to say to them’ (or words to that effect).

More broadly, and arguably led by the National Trust’s ‘50 Things to do Before You’re 11¾’ campaign, many sites have remembered that there is much value in the simple pleasures of the past, such as nature, freedom, space, and their marketing has acknowledged and encouraged this.

But I am not so easily satisfied, and am concerned that we are now using generic natural play as a catch-all solution for child engagement. If we have grown out of the lazy use of tokenistic equipment, have we developed a quick-win obsession with ‘nature’ instead, where every site trumpets an increasingly tired offering of fallen tree trunks and den building?

We need to appreciate that the places we are talking about are not merely the Outdoors, rather they are Historic Parks and Gardens – cultural



assets with complex stories to tell about our culture and our past. Children love tales about our ancestors so why have we excluded that from our new approach to historic garden visiting?

So how do we refine this new enthusiasm for children at our sites into something more intelligent and sophisticated? Here are three suggestions:

- Does research into a site’s past reveal any play activities? If so, re-enable these! (eg if Edwardian residents had a makeshift see-saw in the woodland, put it back, or if they enjoyed digging on the banks of a river, leave a little bucket and spade there)
- If not, look to the site’s past for elements with potential for children’s amusement that could appropriately be reinstated. (eg if garden staff used a horse-drawn lawnmower, bring it back and leave it on a quiet corner of the lawn for imaginary rides)
- If you cannot find suitable precedent in the past, but are convinced there is a justification for specifically providing for children’s play at your site, then consider some light-touch play opportunities with a relevance to the site rather than a dedicated playground. (eg a swing from a woodland tree, or chickens roaming the kitchen garden, or an empty statue plinth that children can pose on ... all spread out so as to have minimum impact on the landscape but maximum interest for the children).

In other words, we must employ the same skills dictated by good conservation practice – looking

Bank rolling at
Wrest Park,
Bedfordshire.
© Linden Groves

for site-specific solutions that are rooted in the significance and values of a place – to offer our child visitors an experience that whether low-key or high-octane is appropriate to the landscape in which they find themselves. ■

To learn more about opportunities for children's play sessions in historic environments visit www.outdoorchildren.co.uk and www.hahahopscotch.co.uk.

Diary of a Georgian childhood

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Early 19th-century children's dairies can be very rewarding, though at times frustrating documents for the historian to work with. Often kept as an exercise, rather than through choice, diary entries tend to be brief, often mundane, but, when viewed as a whole, they provide a fascinating insight into the daily life of children in the past. The diaries of Mary Glynne, kept from 1824–31 and now deposited in the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, are no exception. As a child, Mary was a regular visitor to Audley End in Essex, and from the pages of her journal we catch a glimpse not only of her life, but also the lives of her cousins, the Braybrooke children. These insights into childhood at Audley End in the 1820s have proved invaluable when putting together the new nursery exhibition in the house, which opened to visitors in April 2014.

Mary was born on 6 January 1812 at Hawarden Castle, North Wales, the youngest of four children of Sir Stephen Glynne, Baronet, and his wife, Mary, second daughter of Richard Griffin, 2nd Baron Braybrooke. Her early life was marked by tragedy



The new nursery exhibition at Audley End allows these young visitors to step back into the Georgian childhood world of Mary and Catherine Glynne.

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Mary Glynne with her siblings Catherine, Henry and Stephen at Audley End, drawn by Edwin Upton Eddis. Source: Mrs Gladstone, by Mary Gladstone Drew (1920)

with the death of her father in Nice when she was only three years old. Sir Stephen had travelled with his wife to the south of France in the vain hope of curing his consumption (TB). The children were left at Audley End in the care of their grandfather, Lord Braybrooke, and devoted aunts Catherine and Caroline.

Hawarden Castle perhaps brought back too many painful memories for the widowed Lady Glynne for she spent little time there, preferring to stay at Audley End or Billingbear with her parents, or visit other relations around the country. As a result, young Mary, her sister Catherine and brothers Stephen and Henry got to know the Braybrooke family well.

Mary was particularly close to her grandfather, old Lord Braybrooke, noting on many occasions in her diary, 'Rode with Grandpapa' or 'Dined with Grandpapa'. When he died in 1825 both sisters were distraught, Catherine writing to her brother Stephen, 'It is melancholy not to see dear Grandpapa and you cannot think how dull the house looks without him'.

Mary and Catherine were inseparable, and many of the diary entries record them riding together in the grounds of Audley End, or out for a drive in the chaise with Mama or Aunt Jane (Jane Cornwallis, wife of the 3rd Lord Braybrooke). Catherine, the