

Tributes paid to passionate and committed Painshill Park gardener Kath Clark who died on 5th September 2013 by Beth Duffell



Painshill Park joint principal gardener Kath Clark died on 5 September 2013

Tributes have been paid to a gardener who "made it her mission" to research and source original species of flowers and plants to grow from seed at Painshill Park in Cobham. Kath Clark, 57, was joint principal gardener at the park and died on Thursday 5th September 2013. Staff at the park, off Portsmouth Road, said they are stunned by the tragic news and have remembered the many contributions she made to the important visitor attraction. They highlighted her passion for her role, which included travelling overseas to locate plants and also sharing her skills with work experience students. Letters and messages of condolence have flooded into the park from the UK and across the globe, sent in by organisations and respected admirers of Kath's work.

Kath was awarded the Gold Medal from the Royal Horticultural Society, which she received on behalf of Painshill for the **John Bartram** display at Hampton Court Flower Show in 2007. Michael Gove, chief executive of the park, said Kath had left a lasting legacy on the restoration and landscape at Painshill. He told the *Surrey Advertiser*: "It is with immense sadness that everyone at Painshill learnt that Kath Clark, joint principal gardener at Painshill, passed away peacefully at Kingston Hospital.

"Her contribution to the development of the plantings at Painshill was outstanding and her knowledge, passion, love and commitment to the landscape garden will be sadly missed." After starting out at Painshill as a student, Kath joined the landscape team in 2002. Her desire for authenticity helped to set Painshill apart from other gardens as she was certain that if the planting beds were filled with modern varieties and cultivars, Painshill would lose entirely the look and feel of an 18th century landscape garden.

Mr Gove added: “She made it her mission to research and source original species of flowers and plants to grow from seed and plant out in the appropriate manner. “All plants had to pass the scrutiny of Kath – everything that is planted at Painshill would have been available to Charles Hamilton in the 18th century. “One of Hamilton’s main sources of ‘exotic’ plants for Painshill was North America, where he received seed boxes from **John Bartram** in Pennsylvania. “It was this history trail that Kath followed and she travelled to the east coast of North America to locate plants of the right provenance.” Kath was instrumental in researching, collecting and propagating the North American trees and shrubs which formed the basis of the **John Bartram** Heritage Collection, which was awarded national collection status by Plant Heritage in May 2006. Staff were rightly proud of her achievements but said Kath was modest in accepting the many comments of congratulations. Mr Gove said: “Not only was Kath’s interest in gardens and planting, but she spent many hours researching and organising the archives of Painshill. “Kath quickly became passionate about the stories and visual records which she was finding – hence she created the Living Memories Campaign. “With the help of her colleague Cherrill Sands, she mounted an exhibition on August 24th that documented what has happened to the park since its creation by Charles Hamilton between 1738 and 1773, and this was a great success and her last project.”

Even as Kath dedicated her time to her role as principal gardener at Painshill, she still found time to continue her studies for a PHD in horticulture, building upon her recent achievement of a MA in garden history. Mr Gove added: “Kath was at her happiest in her potting shed or sharing her knowledge and passion with others including work experience students and volunteers. “Not only will she be missed by those who knew and loved her but it is a great loss of specialist knowledge to so many within the landscape and conservation sector.”

This article was taken from **SurryLive** 17 September 2013 by Beth Duffell