



## *The Garden at Fetcham Park*

*Designed by George London*

The house at Fetcham Park was built between 1700 and 1705, after which the attention of the owner, Arthur Moore, turned to creating a grand garden to complement the house.

He seems to have chosen the site to build his country seat because of the beautiful views it offered across the River Mole northwards towards the Thames and eastwards over Box Hill. It also offered him the opportunity to create a fashionable water garden in the style of Fontainebleau. These attributes outweighed the major disadvantages of the proximity of the house to the church and the bordering open fields farmed by the villagers.

He chose the most renowned garden designer of the time, George London, who had been royal gardener to William III and Mary II and had created gardens at the grandest houses in England. Arthur Moore chose three of the most fashionable men of the time to create his country seat – William Talman, the architect to design the house, Louis Laguerre, to paint the murals and George London to create his gardens. Largely forgotten, unlike his successor, Capability Brown, the legacy and contribution of George London to English Gardening deserves to be reappraised.

## GEORGE LONDON (1650 – 1714)



Map showing the nursery at Brompton Park

George London was born in 1650 in humble circumstances. His place of birth is unknown. He was apprenticed to John Rose who became royal gardener to Charles II. In his turn George London became royal gardener to William III and Mary II. But his career was more impressive than that. He started working for the Bishop of London and then began designing gardens for members of the nobility, including Viscount Weymouth at Longleat.

Together with other gardeners to the aristocracy he started a nursery at Brompton Park in London on the site of the South Kensington museums and the Royal Albert Hall. This would grow to be the biggest nursery in Europe at 100 acres in size and after his first partners retired or died he went into partnership with Henry Wise. They formed one of the most successful partnerships in gardening history, supplying vast numbers of trees and plants to gardens around the country.

### *George London's Style of Formal Garden*

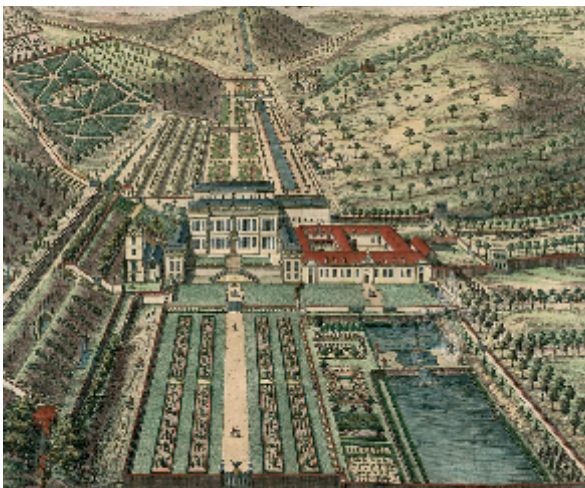
George London perfected the style of formal gardens that was popular at that time. The old English knot gardens were replaced by formal gardens influenced by the grand gardens of André Le Nôtre, at Versailles and Fontainebleau for the French King Louis XIV and the popular but more modest Dutch gardens. They combined to form a style more suited to the English stately homes and palaces.

The English aristocracy spent more of their time on their country estates than their French counterparts and the resulting gardens were more practical. They included formal fruit and vegetable gardens as part of their design, and had avenues of trees leading out into the deer parks which usually surrounded their country houses and provided sport and meat in the winter months.



André Le Nôtre

The garden at Fontainebleau with parterres and water gardens



The garden at Dyrham Park

### *The First Truly National Garden Designer*

George London was the first truly national garden designer with clients all over the country in addition to the royal gardens. The number of his gardens is unknown, but included Chatsworth, Blenheim, Dyrham Park and Castle Howard among others.

He was said by Switzer his apprentice to give "directions once or twice a year in most of the ...Gardens of England." (Unusually, one of the directions he gave for the gardener at Fetcham Park survives). He would visit all the gardens once or twice a year riding 50 to 60 miles a day on horseback. His northern and western journeys took about 5 to 6 weeks and his southern and eastern journeys only a few days. Improvements in the roads and in communications over the previous fifty years had made this possible for the first time.



## THE GARDEN AT FETCHAM PARK

The garden designed by George London was begun around 1708. In 1710 he is known to have visited the garden and listed the work that still needed to be completed. The garden was finished by 1716 when it was visited by Celia Fiennes, an English gentlewoman, who visited many English houses and gardens on horseback and recorded her visits in a diary.

Some contemporary letters and documents survive with information about the garden, together with later plans. George London's plan itself, although referred to, does not survive. Fetcham Park was probably George London's last completed garden as he died in January 1714.



Fruit garden



Pond and canal



A parterre.

Parterres are edged garden beds constructed on a level surface, typically arranged in a symmetrical design which may contain flowers.

### *What the garden was like*

The house and gardens sat in a park of about 100 acres which was uphill from the River Mole. The gardens themselves appear to have been designed, unlike most of his other gardens, in two separate areas to make the most of the views from the house and park and are integrated within the parkland setting.

The first area of the garden was to the south of the house where the ground rises steeply. A long avenue of trees of about a quarter of a mile was planted up this slope. This led past a first wooded garden with a gravel path and summer house to formal fruit and vegetable gardens and a vineyard. These may have been terraced as a fishpond was located at each end of them. The path then led on to a second summer house and seats on the summit with views east across the River Mole to Box Hill.

The second main area of the garden was behind the house at the foot of the hill where extensive water and formal gardens were laid out. This land was not originally level, but the style of formal gardens at the time, parterres, required level ground.

A major engineering feat was carried out to level a surface some 60 by 200 metres which had two canals cut through the middle of it. An oval basin sat at the head of the canal nearest to the house with a fountain and a device at the other end which blew water. To fill these canals and power the fountain using water pressure, water was piped up three quarters of a mile from the Mill Pond on the River Mole. It was brought in lead pipes to the top of the garden on the south of the house and was stored in reservoirs and ponds.

The parterres sat on terraces each side of the canals. The parterres around the upper canal closest to the house were formal probably with low yew hedges, some being filled by flowers and some by grass patterns. Around the lower canal were more formal gardens but filled with statues, with a large stone figure in the central space and small brass statues in beds around it.

From the east end of the canals a walk led to a glade carefully positioned to give what Celia Fiennes said was "agreeable to the walks to give the view quite to Hampton town."



### ***Fetcham Park – a Precursor of the Landscape Movement?***



View from the garden

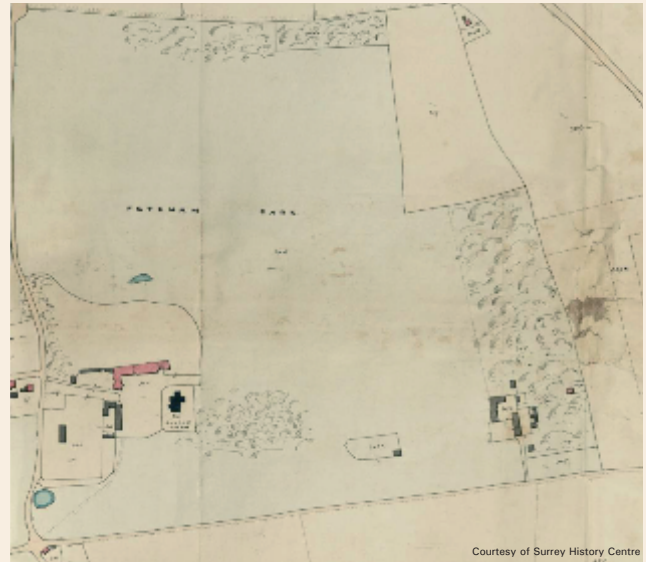
Only a few years after George London's death in 1714, and the completion of the garden, the formal style of gardening perfected by George London began to go out of style. By the time that Fetcham Park was sold, after Arthur Moore's death in 1730, a garden by George London was no longer a selling point.

George London himself foresaw the trend to more naturalistic and less formal gardens and his later gardens, particularly Fetcham Park, reflected this. The garden there was a part of the park instead of being separate from it and the views from the garden out over the surrounding countryside were an important feature. It could be argued that the garden was a precursor of the later landscape movement led by Capability Brown. Unlike him George London has been largely forgotten, but his legacy and contribution to English Gardening deserve a reappraisal.

### ***The Destruction of the Garden***

The garden probably survived at Fetcham Park until around the 1760s when the now old fashioned parterres were removed, followed soon after by the formal fruit and vegetable gardens. The basin and canals are shown in a map of 1777 and probably were largely filled in by the early 1800s when the park became more important for deer hunting, although a remnant of the basin is still visible in the 1839 Tithe Map. The water supply system to the farm and south side of the garden continued to operate until the Mill burned down in 1917, although the house was supplied with mains water years before.

Little is now left of George London's garden apart from the Dell behind the graveyard of St Mary's Church and some old lime and yew trees in the gardens of the houses in what were once part of Fetcham Park.



Courtesy of Surrey History Centre

The 1839 Tithe Map



**FETCHAM PARK** A Grade II\* listed house, full of character and history.

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