

Press Release

Shades of Green

My Life as the National Trust's Head of Gardens

By John Sales. Foreword by Anna Pavord.

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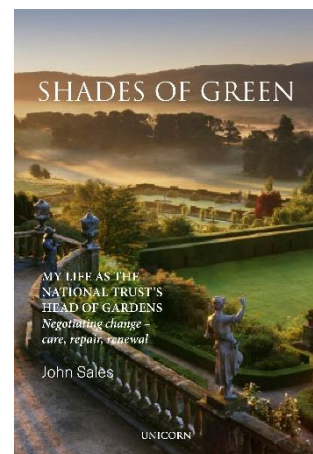


Incorporating lessons learned over a quarter of a century of managing, renewing and caring for the gardens of the National Trust, *Shades of Green* traces the very British way the Trust learned about conserving historic gardens, negotiating change and formulating an overdue national commitment to leading this unique contribution to European culture.

By the time John Sales was appointed in 1971, the National Trust had already acquired an eclectic range of gardens and designed landscape parks, more than any independent organisation ever. The Trust was in the process of taking them in hand and acquiring many more, sometimes with great houses and estates but also in their own right as significant documents of history, important plant collections, unsung works of art and reservoirs of disappearing expertise. Previously there had been little national interest or understanding of the extraordinary richness and diversity of Britain's historic designed landscape. Neither was it recognised that the Trust's assembly of gardens and landscape parks, including those of Lancelot ("Capability") Brown, is the greatest in the world.

John Sales records first-hand the garden's modern history at a crucial time of transition from private to corporate ownership; sometimes smooth, sometimes difficult but always fascinating. From grappling with mass garden visiting of a scale never before envisaged, severe fiscal and staffing constraints and the perceived need to accommodate outdoor events which may or may not bear any relationship to the traditions and historic values of the place, in each case Sales has tried to draw out the specific lessons learned, using fifty different locations throughout the book. Above all shines through the pleasure of relating his story and work with an extraordinary range of people from all walks of life including former owners, expert committees and dedicated staff, not least the gardeners, who have to cope at the sharp end.

John Sales passed his National Diploma in Horticulture while a student gardener at Kew, where his knowledge of plants developed and his interest in garden design and historic gardens was engendered. In 1971 he was appointed gardens adviser to the National Trust. It came in a period of rapid expansion and after two years learning from his predecessor Graham Stuart Thomas, he became Head of Gardens, eventually leading a team of advisers and technical staff responsible for strategic and routine advice in all gardens and parks, covering continuing management, staffing, plant conservation and refurbishment, as well as design, restoration and major renewal. John served as Head of Gardens until 1998. He was awarded the Victoria Medal of Honour, the highest honour given by the Royal Horticultural Society, in 1991, and has since been a Vice-President of the Society, and of the Garden History Society (now the Gardens Trust).



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