



The Belvedere at Claremont, Surrey

John Phibbs invites you to join him on Zoom for 'How to Read a Designed Landscape'

'Point Blank & Pollards' – Saturday 6th March at 2.00 pm

'Horses & Hedges' – Saturday 12th March at 2.00 pm

'Farms & Follies' – Saturday 19th March at 2.00 pm

'Vallies & Varlets; – Sunday 28th March at 5.00 pm

Spring is coming but Covid is still with us and so it seemed to me this would be a good time to think about those things which the pre-Covid era allowed little time for – the luxury of looking, observing and working out why things look the way they do. And this is the perfect time, when the leaves are off the trees and the sun casts long low shadows over the irregularities of the ground, when a landscape designed in the English style is most easy to read.

So, what is this 'reading' and why do I give it so much importance? These are the two questions that I shall address in this series of four Zooms.

As for the first, there is a language in the shape and size and choice of trees, and in the form of the ground, from which you may learn of the deep past of the countryside and of the ways in which its structure has been modified over time to make a pleasing landscape for a great house.

Then there is the great house itself and its relationship with the landscape, both as a physical presence and as the centre of a web of rural production and connection.

After that come the distinguishing features of the place: rivers, the sea, mountains and hills, quarries and ancient woods, villages, towns and cities, windmills and farms and church towers – and then there are the horses, the people, the livestock all of whom make their mark and as I walk, day after day, all these elements knit together to form a narrative that captures the place, its geography, and the will of its inhabitants.

As for why I place such a high value on reading a landscape: once I understand a place it speaks to me. Just so, I may enjoy the birdsong when I walk to the woods, but if I identify the birds, then their song will tell me what they are doing, then they will sing to me and the woods fill out with my knowledge of their intention; and once or twice – first at the deer park at Moccas and a second time at Croome Court - I knew a kind of ecstasy, as though I were attended by ghosts. As I walked through the landscape I knew with absolute certainty what I was going to find next – I was reading the same landscape, walking the same path, and I believe that I was seeing exactly the same things as the original designer, 250 years ago.

The talks are free and to sign up you just need to write to me at:

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