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Evaluating the visitor experience at Hall Place in Bexley, London

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Evaluating the visitor experience at Hall Place in Bexley, London

An Interactive Qualifying Project
submitted to the Faculty of
Worcester Polytechnic Institute
in partial fulfillment of
requirements of the Degree of
Bachelor Science.



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Conclusion	Sean W.
Recommendations	Elizabeth B.

Abstract

Hall Place and Gardens is an historic Tudor property in the London borough of Bexley, operated by the Bexley Heritage Trust. Aiming to provide a more enjoyable visitor experience, the trust was interested in current visitor satisfaction and visitation trends. Implementing a satisfaction survey with a random sample of visitors, an observation study of the house and gardens, and a self-administered visitation survey, the team evaluated the visitor experience at Hall Place. Based on the data, the team made recommendations to the Bexley Heritage Trust on ways to provide a more targeted visitor experience.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank our sponsors at Bexley Heritage Trust, Caroline Worthington and Sarah Humphris, for their help throughout our project. We are thankful for the time they put into helping us achieve the goals of this project. We would also like to thank all the staff and volunteers of Hall Place and Gardens for answering any questions we had and showing us how the property ran. We are grateful to have learned from their experiences at Hall Place.

We would also like to thank our advisors, Wes Mott and Zhikun Hou, for the time they put in to helping us with the project; especially, taking time to answer questions, reviewing our report, and ensuring we had everything necessary for our project.

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Introduction

The Heritage Sector of historic houses has become an integral part of the British economy. Comprising historic houses, monuments, gardens, and ruins, the heritage sector has around 370,000 buildings listed; however, only 10 percent are considered to be of exceptional historic importance (Brine & Feather, 2010). Visitation of heritage sites has been increasing each year, with nearly 75 percent of British adults visiting these sites in 2011. This has increased from 70 percent in 2005, with historic houses drawing the most visitors annually (Davies, Maltobano, Moore, & Moss, 2012). There are large costs associated with the maintenance of these buildings as both tourist attractions and historic artifacts, with historic home owners, mostly being organizations, spending around £139 million a year (Historic Houses Association, 2009). While programs such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, a program that takes profits from the national lottery and uses them to fund heritage sites, and government funding help to offset the costs, the historic house owners must still find ways to generate their own funds. For 300 of the 1500 historic houses in England this is done by regularly opening their property to the public.

Those houses open to the public should be run like a business (Brine & Feather, 2010). As such, many are run by charitable organizations or Trusts. These organizations manage the historic house as an attraction and aim to provide visitors with the heritage experience they desire. In the London borough of Bexley, the Bexley Heritage Trust owns and operates two historic houses; Hall Place and Danson House. The trust's aim is to maintain these properties for the enjoyment and education of all. Just like any other business, the Trust needs to know what visitors to the property want and how to provide it to them.

To provide a more enjoyable visitor experience, Bexley Heritage Trust has developed programs to engage visitors as well as renovate the properties. One example of these programs is a Farmer's Market hosted by Hall Place in spring on the first Sunday of each month. In 2010, Hall Place was renovated. To measure the success of the renovations, the Trust has conducted visitor satisfaction surveys; this survey was performed in the same year of the renovations. These surveys allow the trust to provide a more targeted experience for visitors and will allow the Trust to expand the audience that visits their properties. It has been three years since the 2010 survey and the Trust would like to once

again conduct a similar evaluation of visitor satisfaction. This will allow the Trust to confirm that their current course of action to provide a more enjoyable visit is effective.

Background

The Heritage Sector

The United Kingdom has approximately 370,000 buildings and properties considered of historical and architectural interest. These, along with archaeological sites and monuments, make up the heritage sector. Each building that has been listed as part of the heritage sector is given a grade based on the historic and cultural importance it represents. The grades are broken down into three categories. Grade I buildings, 2.5% of listed buildings, are those buildings to be considered of exceptional historic importance. Grades II* and II are considered particularly noteworthy buildings and buildings of special interest respectively. Additionally, according professors Brine and Feather the heritage sector has become a major economic force in many European countries (Brine and Feather). According to Heritage Counts, a publication produced by the English Heritage Commission detailing heritage statistics, in 2011 there were over 62 million visits to historic attractions. This is an increase of 28% from 2002, indicating there is an increased popularity in visiting heritage sites. The part of the heritage sector that generates the most interest are the Historic Houses, most of which are grade I or II* listed buildings. The Historic House Association (HHA) represents 1,500 of the privately owned historic homes, castles, and gardens, with three hundred of these properties available for the public to visit. Visitation is around 20 million visitors a year, which generates £1.6 - £2 billion annually (Ellis, 2009).

Historic Houses

Historic houses are properties considered to be of special importance to the history of Britain that have been converted into museums in an attempt to show visitors a specific time in British history or the life of a noteworthy individual. At the most fundamental level, the historic house can be thought of as “a dwelling, museumized and presented as a dwelling,” meaning these houses are to be representative of an individual’s home (Young 2007, pg 60). Additionally, most historic houses include an estate. The condition of historic houses is also highly variable, and in many ways depends on how the property was treated before it became an historic house. Some historic houses are left unfurnished, others furnished with period artifacts not native to the house, and still others that have been kept

authentic. In each of these cases the historic house museum provides a different atmosphere to the visitor (Pavoni, 2001). Unlike other museums, historic houses are unique in that they allow the visitor to have direct contact with the history (Pinna, 2001).

The importance of the historic house lies not only in the preservation of a property because of its aesthetic appeal, but to preserve and perpetuate local history, political sentiments, and the collective memory of the community (Pinna, 2001). Additionally the chairman of the International Committee for Historic House Museums, Giovanni Pinna, expresses that historic houses are one of the few ways people retain and distinguish their history and culture in an ever globally oriented society (Pinna 2001). Historic houses are a way for people to understand how their community and culture developed on a more personal level than reading it in a history book, or in a conventional museum.

The many historic houses open to the public are thought of as both tourist destinations and historic buildings. As such many of these buildings require dedicated management. In many cases, this management comes from a charity organization, or a trust that has a significant interest in maintaining the property as a way to educate people on British History (Davies 2007). It is crucial for these organizations to preserve the properties so that they may be recognized as authentic (Brine and Feather). However, the cost to maintain a historic house is large, usually costing the owner £139 million per year (HHA). While these organizations receive support from the government and other organizations, they are required to justify this support by criteria such as visitation numbers or generated income (Davies 2007). As such, many historic houses are trying different ways to attract visitors. There is some debate that this is contrary to the role of the historic house.

Classification of Historic Houses

Historic houses, when made into historic house museums can be classified in two distinct ways. The first classification comes from the authenticity, or accuracy that the historic house exhibits. The second is based on the reasons for the property having become a heritage attraction to begin with.

The classification of historic houses by authenticity, while useful, is general in scope and explains less about the house than the second type of classification. For instance, historian Sherry Butcher-Youngmans classifies historic house museums into three different

sections based on the authenticity of the display (Pinna 2001). Demonstration Based Historic House museums maintain the property in such a way as to recount the life of the owner or the culture surrounding the house by maintaining original objects and layout. Representative historic house museums document a style or lifestyle and in doing so may reconstruct the setting using artifacts that are not original and may be reproductions. Finally, aesthetic historic house museums are where a collection that has nothing to do with either the history of the house or its owners is displayed. While it is argued that the authenticity is what defines the historic house museum, this classification is lacking a description of the aspects of the house a visitor would find appealing (Pavoni, 2001).

Alternatively, a classification system based on the criteria for the historic house was chosen to become an historic house museum. This classification highlights what is important or significant about the house to potential visitors, which is a more useful classification when assessing visitation and the visitor experience. The historian Linda Young (2007) proposes the following model, with three categories and six classifications. The categories are the size, style and period of the house. The classifications are; houses of heroes or other famous or infamous individuals; houses containing a collection of items deemed to be of historic or aesthetic importance; houses with an interior or exterior design of import; houses where important historic moments occurred; houses sentimentally important to the community; and country houses of the wealthy. Britain has a large number houses falling under the last category. This system makes clear why a visitor might want to journey to an historic house and gives insight into what type of experience they might value.

Role of the Historic House Museum

Different groups have different ideas about the role of historic houses. The desire of the intellectuals and the historians is an authentic presentation of the house. It is their belief that the meaning and significance of a historic house is expressed when the curators wish to balance between educating the community and generating an income, and the visitor is predominantly looking to learn and feel a sense of the past (Davies 2007). In essence, the historian want to present history in the most authentic way due to their bias that it is only in this way can one truly understand, appreciate, and learn from the house.

The curators must manage maintaining the property and presenting the museum in a way that will engage all types of visitors, which can mean turning away from pure authenticity. The visitors will want a heritage experience, which, while influenced by the atmosphere of the historic house, is actively created by the visitor. In other words, “what they (visitors) make out of a house museum visit is their own product” (Young 2007).

Hall Place and Gardens

Listed as a Grade I building, Hall Place, shown in Figure 1, is an historic property located in Crayford, a ward of the London Borough of Bexley, 23 miles from the center of London. The northern, Tudor half of the house was built in 1537, by Sir John Champneys, a wealthy merchant and Lord Mayor of London at the time. However, in 1650 the merchant Robert Austin renovated the house, constructing the southern, Jacobean-styled half. By the time renovations had been completed, the house had become one of the larger English Villa’s in the vicinity of London (Gerhold, 2009). In addition to the house, the property contains extensive gardens spanning 65 hectares, which have for the past 11 years received the civic Trust’s Green Flag Award. While visitation to Hall Place used to be free, the cost of admission was recently raised to £7 for Adults, £5 for under 16s/concessions, and £20 for a family; however, admission to the gardens is still free (Hall Place Website).

The house is open to the public throughout the week, drawing around 160,000 visitors a year (Biffa Award). The hours for admission are shown in Table 1. While there are a large number of visitors to the property, according to the survey completed in 2010, nearly 67% are from Bexley.

Table 1: Opening Times for Hall Place and Gardens; Adapted from (Bexley, 2013)

<u>HISTORIC HOUSE</u>	<u>1 APRIL – 31 OCTOBER</u>	<u>1 – NOVEMBER – 31 MARCH</u>
<u>MONDAY TO SATURDAY</u>	<u>10AM – 5PM</u>	<u>10AM-4PM</u>
<u>SUNDAY AND BANK HOLIDAYS</u>	<u>10AM-5PM</u>	<u>11AM-4PM</u>
<u>RIVERSIDE CAFÉ</u>	<u>1 APRIL – 31 OCTOBER</u>	<u>1 – NOVEMBER – 31 MARCH</u>
<u>MONDAY TO SATURDAY</u>	<u>10AM-5PM</u>	<u>10AM-4:30PM</u>
<u>SUNDAY AND BANK HOLIDAYS</u>	<u>10AM-5PM</u>	<u>10AM-4:30PM</u>
<u>GARDENS</u>		
<u>FORMAL GARDENS AND PARKLAND</u>	<u>OPEN EVERY DAY FROM 9AM UNTIL DUSK</u>	
<u>GLASSHOUSE AND NURSERY</u>	<u>OPEN EVERY DAY 9AM –4:30PM IN WINTER</u> <u>9AM – 6PM IN SUMMER</u>	

This trend in visitation is not surprising for Hall Place. Since the property is on the outskirts of London, so much so that it is nearly in Kent, fewer foreign tourists make the trip out to see the property. Additionally, it has been found that most visitors to historic houses are middle class, white adults (Markwell and Ravenscroft, 1997). This fits well with the average demographics of Bexley, where 86.4% of the population is white and nearly 70% are middle class or above. Additionally the average income per week for the borough is 100 pounds greater than the country's average.



Figure 1: Photograph of Hall Place and Gardens

Throughout its existence, Hall Place and the surrounding property have been utilized in many ways. According to the Bexley City Archives (2013), the history of the grounds is thought to date back to at least 1241, when it was owned by the At-Hall family. In 1368, the Shelley Family, distant relatives of the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, bought the property. In 1537, the Shelley Family sold the property to Sir John Champneys, whose family then sold the estate to Robert Austin in 1649. The house remained in the Austin family until 1772 when the property fell to the Dashwoods. For 70 years, starting in 1800, the property was used as a boarding school. In 1870, the house was restored, and subsequently rented to a series of tenants, the last of which was the Countess of Limerick who lived there from 1917 until 1943. During the Lady's tenancy, her son-in-law bought the house and grounds; however, in 1935 he sold the property to the Bexley Council. After the Lady's death, her will requested that all of her possessions be sold at auction to help

pay for the restoration of a nearby church, leaving the house unfurnished (Hall Place Staff Interview). In 1943, the house was requisitioned by American soldiers fighting in World War II to be a station that would intercept, and try to understand, encoded German messages. After the war, the house was used as a high school for girls, a Headquarter for the Libraries and Museums service, and finally in 2000 the property was opened to the public as a museum. The history of Hall Place is rich, and the property, which has stood for over half a millennia, has played a significant part in the history of Britain, and especially Bexley.



Figure 2: Map of Boroughs of London

While the property is large and boasts extensive gardens, Hall Place still requires greater visitation before it can become commercially self-sustainable. Like many historic houses, the cost to maintain the property is large. Between Hall Place and Danson House, the Bexley Heritage Trust spends £1.33 million annually to maintain the properties (Charity Commission). This project aims to assess how Hall Place can improve visitation by evaluating the visitor experience.

Methodology

This project is intended to assess the effectiveness of Bexley Heritage Trust's recent efforts to enhance visitor enjoyment and increase community awareness of Hall Place and Gardens. The information provided to the trust will help them to provide a better visitor experience and implement further changes. The team developed three objectives to assess the visitor experience:

- Conducted site evaluations at similar historic houses in the region;
- Conducted visitor evaluations at Hall Place;
- Presented the results and made recommendations to the Bexley Heritage Trust on how to improve visitor experience and increase visitation.

The figure below shows these objectives along with their respective goals.

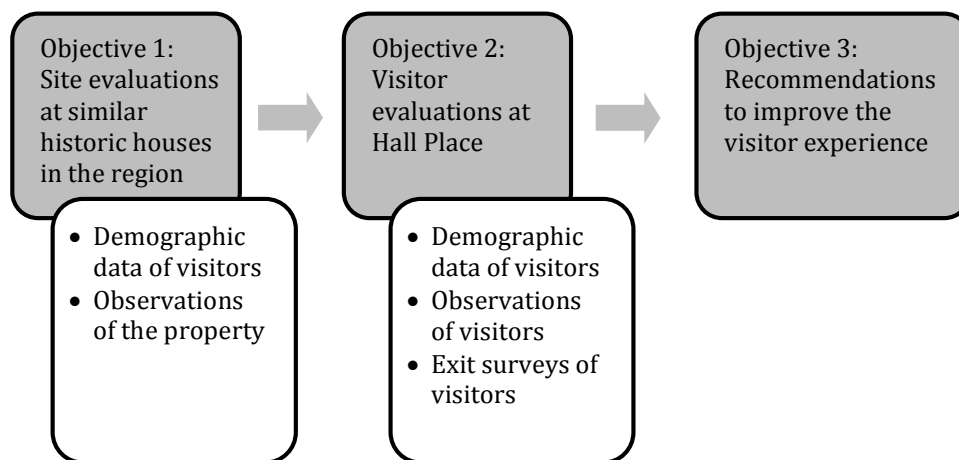


Figure 3: Progression of objectives and tasks to assess the visitor experience

Objective 1: Conduct Site Evaluations at other Historic Houses

Other historic houses were visited to gain information the group could use to compare Hall Place to similar sites. Due to time constraints, it was only possible to visit one other property. The property chosen was Fenton House and Gardens, located in Hampstead and built in the 17th century. A house in Bexley was not chosen because out of the four other houses only two are operated as historic house museums. One of these properties is also run by the Bexley Heritage Trust and the other was built over 300 years after Hall Place. This allowed for a wider background concerning the way historic houses are set up

and run in London. Looking at another house in the area offers a greater understanding of the distinctions between and the status of historic houses in London.

Objective 2: Assess the visitor experience

The group assessed the visitor experience at Hall Place to gauge how to provide a more targeted experience for future visitors to the property.

Observation of house visitors: We observed the reaction of visitors as they traveled through the different rooms and exhibits of Hall Place. In order to accomplish this, we examined three distinct sections of the house: the ground floor, the gallery, and the Beastly Hall art exhibition. At the beginning of every hour, we counted the number of people in each section of the house. This allowed the team to get a better idea of how many people go through the house each day. The following was observed for each subject: the amount of discussion between the subject and other visitors, how much the subject is concentrating on the different parts of the room; the excitement of the subject; how often the subject becomes distracted; and whether or not the subject seems bored (see Appendices E, F, & G).

Observation of garden visitors: We observed the activities and number of visitors to Hall Place gardens. Similarly to the house observations, the gardens were sectioned off into: the nursery, the parkland, and the formal gardens. Every hour, the number of people in each section of the gardens was counted. For each person, the following was observed: average age(s), party size and type, and activity (see Appendix D).

Surveys of visitors: To obtain additional data from the individuals observed at Hall Place and Gardens, the team collected survey data as they prepared to leave the house. This survey included some specific questions from the 2010 survey of Hall Place will be included. The final survey mechanism was developed with the help of the Bexley Heritage Trust staff so that it would better gather the information they wanted (see Appendix A). The survey took five to ten minutes to complete and in total, 201 interviews were completed. This gave a clear picture of what visitors were drawn to and what type of experience they wanted from

visiting Hall Place giving the Bexley Heritage Trust a clearer picture of what to implement at Hall Place.

Garden self-survey: To obtain data from those observed in the gardens at Hall Place, self-surveys were placed at multiple key spots on the property. This allowed for guests who wished to take a survey the convenience of doing it on their own time. This survey targeted the guests who were not surveyed and gathered more data on what the gardens were being used for. This survey (see Appendix C) contained six short questions which asked visitors for their postcode and about their usage of the gardens. This gave a clearer picture of the activities the gardens at Hall Place are being used for.

Results

The data collected during the course of this project was collected with the intent to discern the nature of visitation and visitor satisfaction at Hall Place and Gardens. In analyzing the data the driving questions were those pertaining to the enjoyment of the visitors, who was visiting, which sections of the extensive property visitors were utilizing, and what different sections of the property were being used for. Additionally, while there were tour groups and various events on the grounds, as per the request of the Bexley Heritage Trust, they were not included in this study. The instruments used to collect this data were a visitor satisfaction interview, an observational study of the house and gardens, and a self-administered exit survey.

Experiment Background

Conducted from 6 May, 2013 through 31 May, 2013, the visitor satisfaction interview consisted of four distinct sections: the general survey that all participants were asked, the historic house survey, the gardens survey, and the tea room survey. This was done so participants were only asked questions pertaining to their experience at Hall Place. The general survey was used to gather information about the participant's visitation habits, reasons for visiting, and satisfaction with their visit. The house survey related information regarding the visitor's satisfaction with the house as well as attempted to gauge their overall interest in historic houses. The garden survey collected information about which parts of the garden the participant visited, and what they did in the garden. The tea room survey asked for a general ranking on different criteria such as friendliness of the staff, quality of food, and the value. The information gathered from this survey was used in the synthesis of recommendations to improve visitation to the historic house. During the four weeks of data collection, 87 visitor satisfaction interviews were conducted, resulting in 201 responses. In the gardens, 655 groups, totaling 1801 visitors, were observed; however, in the house only 89 groups were observed, totaling 222 visitors. Additionally, 32 self-administered surveys were collected representing 100 visitors.

Demographic Information

The demographic information collected was different for each of the instruments implemented; however, the data is similar enough such that when simultaneously presented, more comprehensive understanding is facilitated. From both the self-survey and the interview, the postcodes of 110 groups were collected. The results are shown in figure 4 and figure 5 below. Figure 4 shows a choropleth map of visitation by region, where the areas with the greatest visitor density are the greater London area and Kent. The visitors that traveled the furthest were the visitor from Wales and the visitor from Devon. Figure 5 is a more detailed map of the area with the greatest amount of visitation, representing more than 90% of the visitors who provided their postcode. The flag in figure 5 shows the location of Hall Place and Gardens.

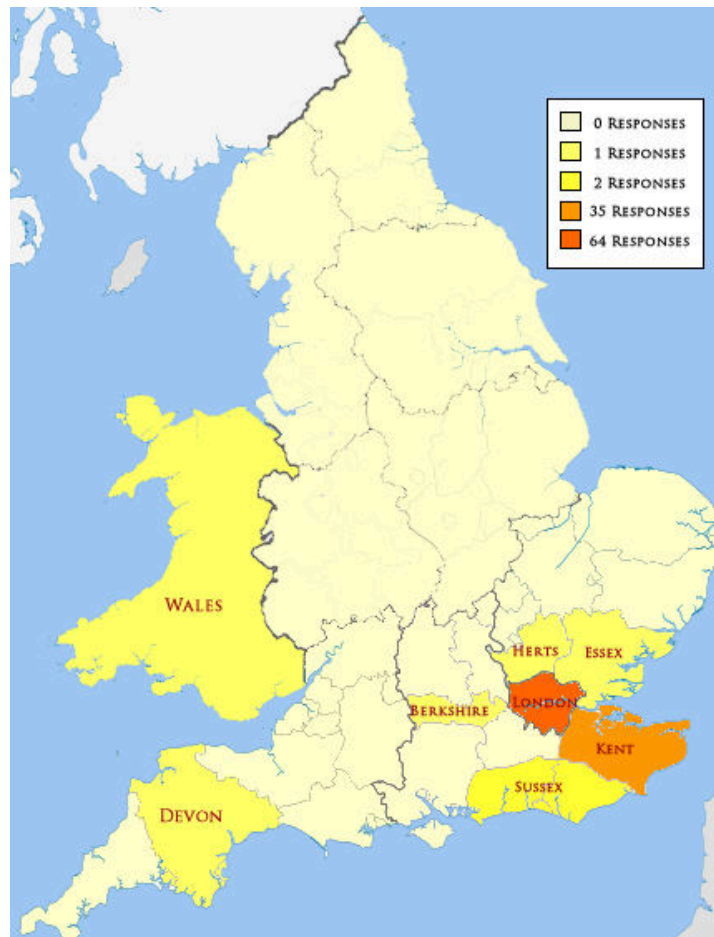


Figure 4: Choropleth Map of Visitation

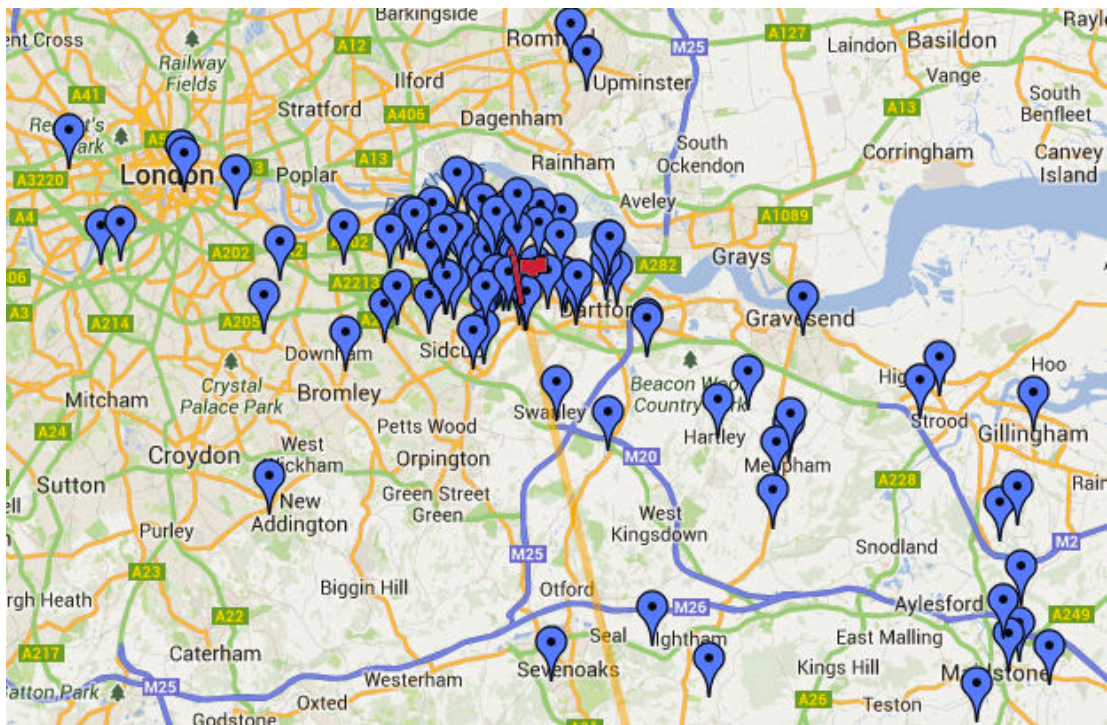


Figure 5: Detail Map of Visitor Postcodes

Visitation to the house was recorded through house observation and the visitor satisfaction interview. Figure 6 shows the male visitation to the house and figure 7 shows the female visitation to the house, based on the observational data. Figures 8 and 9 show the gender and age breakdown of visitors from the visitor satisfaction interview.

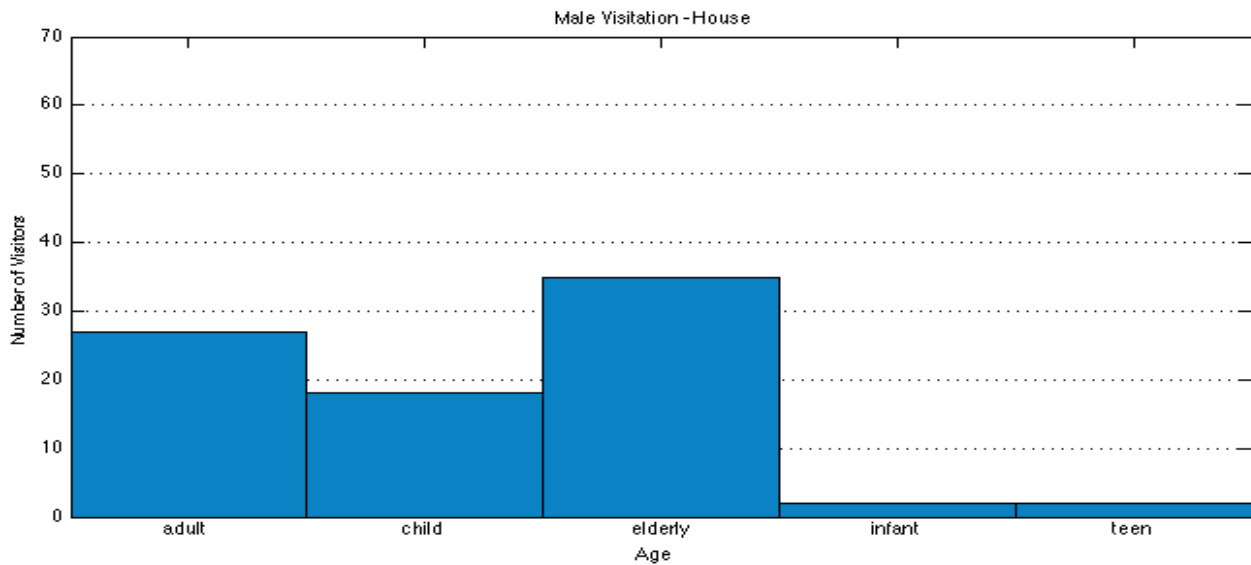


Figure 6: Male Visitation to the House - Based on Observational Study

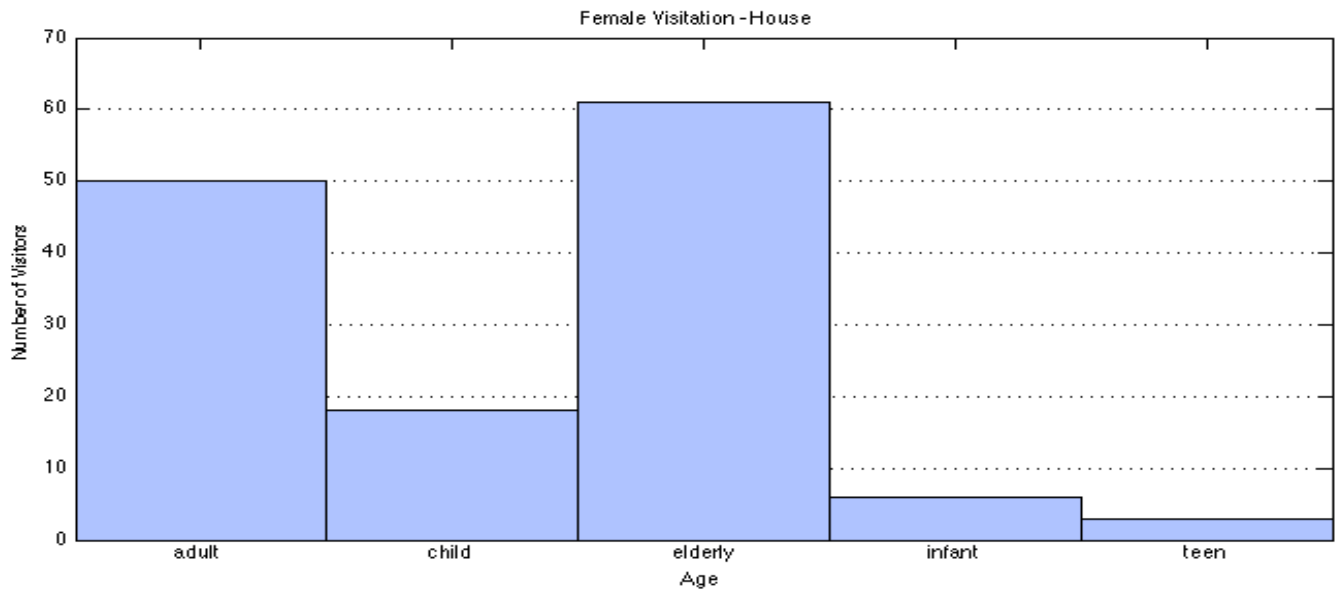


Figure 7: Female Visitation to the House - Based on Observational Study

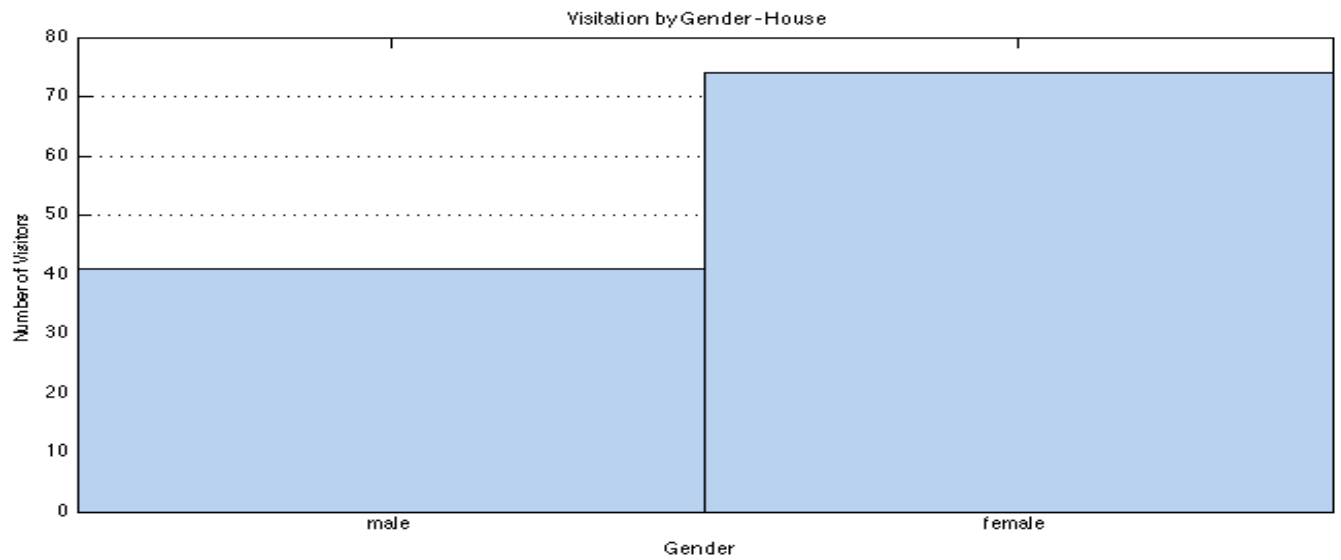


Figure 8: Visitation by Gender to the House - Based on Interview Data

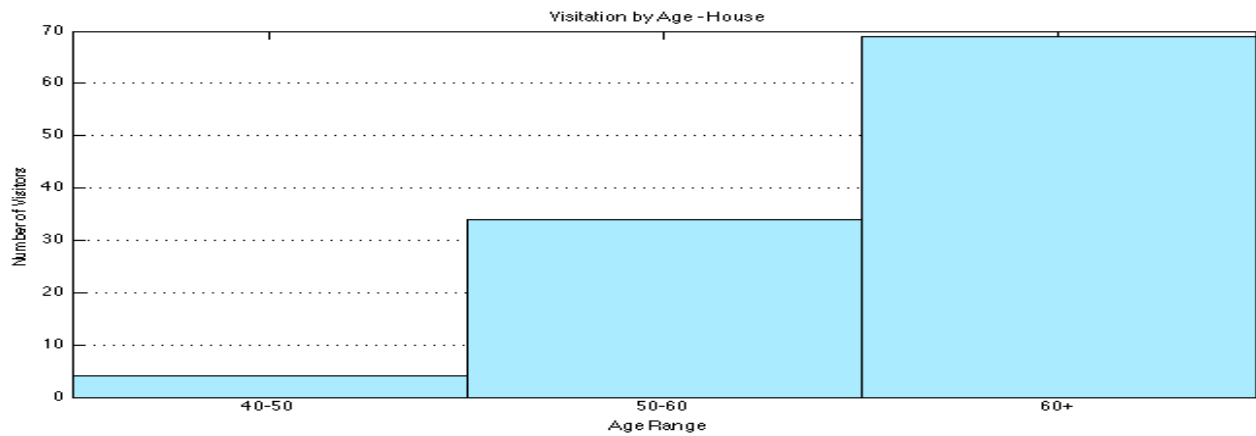


Figure 9: Visitation to the House by Age - Based on Interview Data

Both instruments show more female visitation, with the observational study showing 62% female visitation and the interview showing 64% female visitation. Additionally, each instrument shows the elderly as being the most frequent visitors to the house where elderly is considered anyone over the age of sixty. The group least represented is teenagers, with 5 having been observed in the house over 4 weeks. It should also be noted that many more children visit the house than recorded in the observation study. This is not shown due to the request of the Bexley Heritage Trust that we do not record the planned visitation of school groups. It is important to note party type in relation to the demographics, where party type classifies a group as either family, friends, a couple, as part of an unregulated tour group, or as a single individual. By unregulated it is meant the group did not plan the tour through the Bexley Heritage Trust. It is important to note party type in relation to the demographics. As in figure 10 below, the observation study found that most, 40%, of visitors to the house do so as a family; however, nearly a third of visitors, many of whom were elderly, visited the house as a couple.

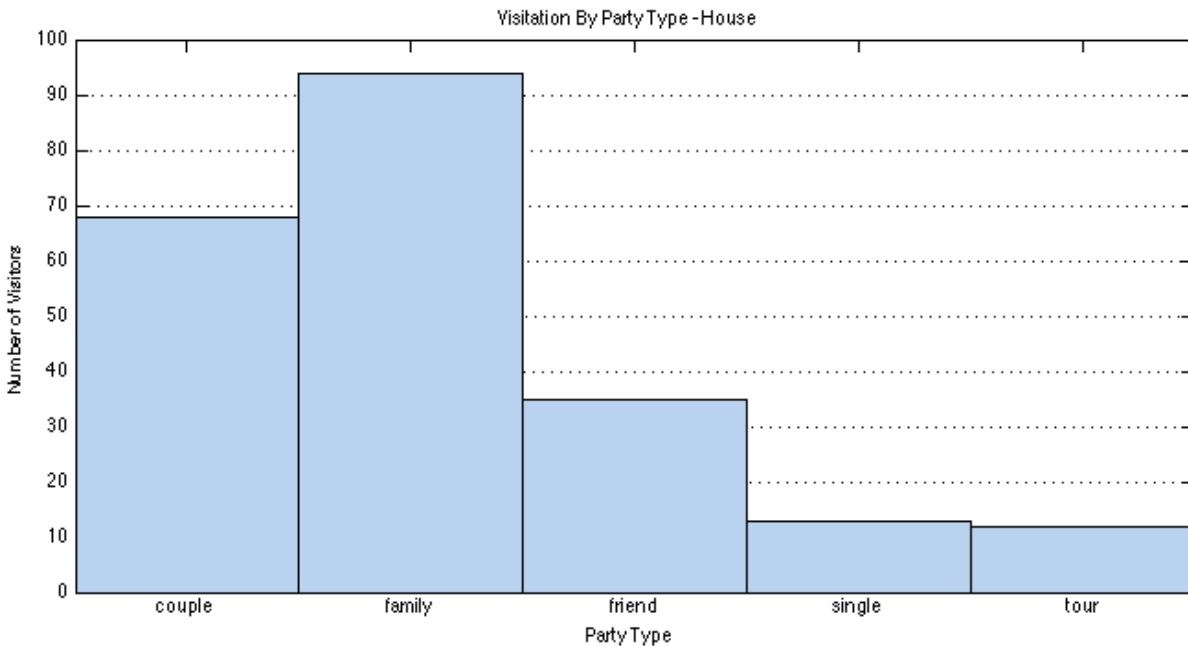


Figure 10: Visitation to the House by Party Type – Based on Observational Studies

Visitation demographics to the gardens are most prominently expressed by the observation study. Figures 11 and 12 show the male and female visitation to the gardens, respectively.

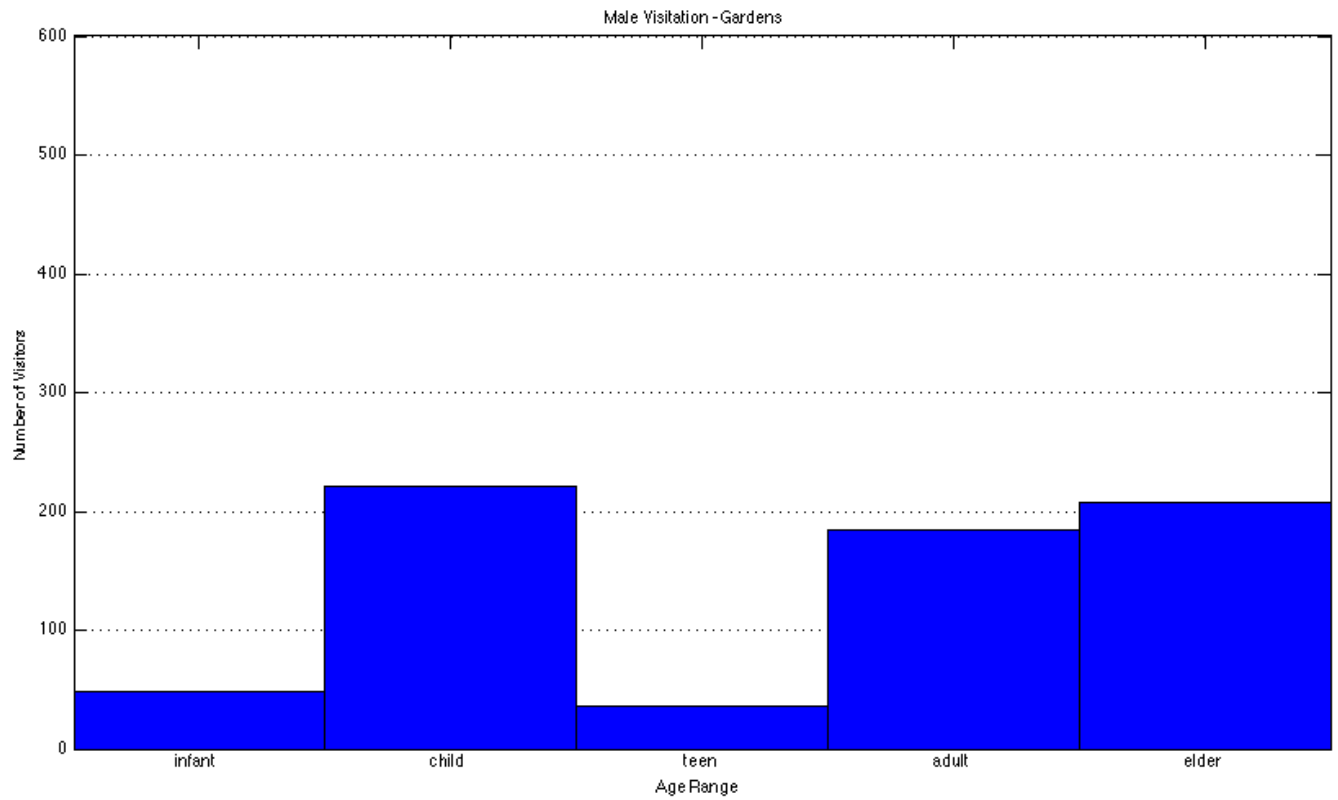


Figure 11: Male Visitation to the Gardens

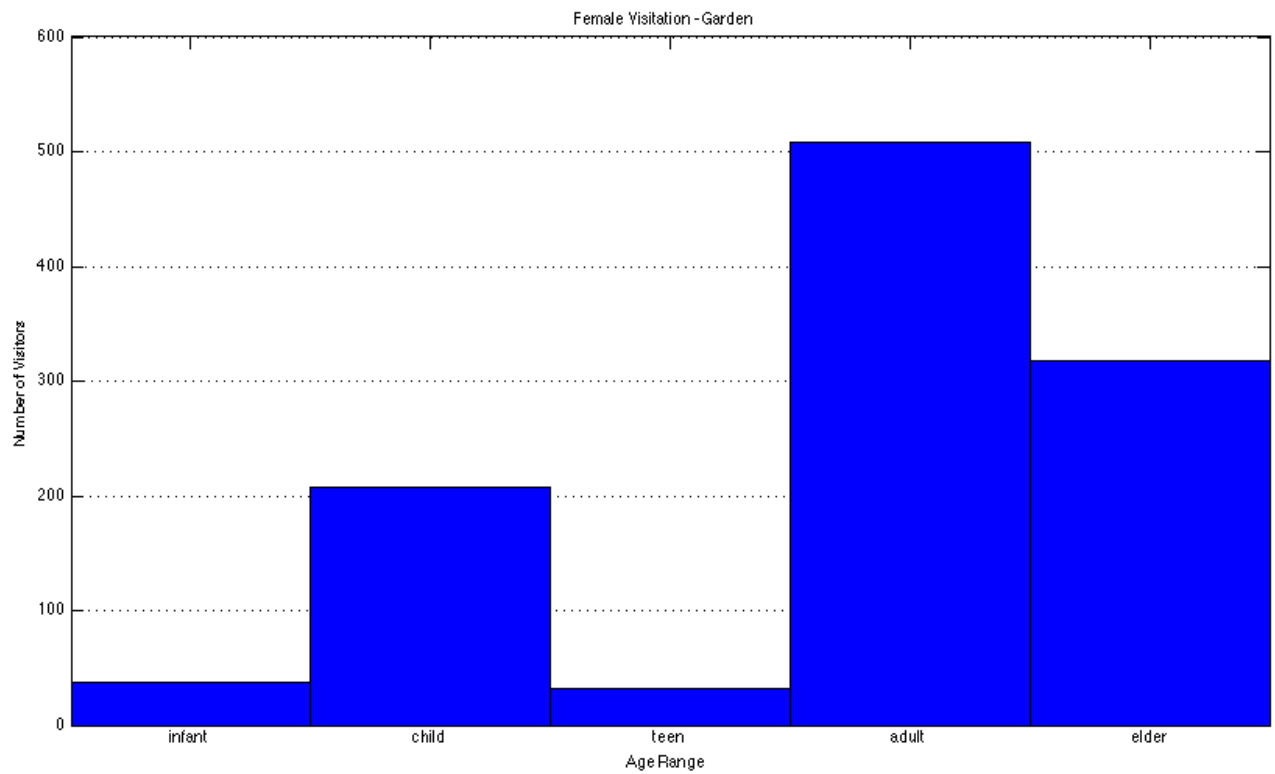


Figure 12: Female Visitation to the Garden

Of the visitors to the garden, 61% were female, and the group with the greatest representation is adult females, followed by elderly females. Children of both genders have a nearly equal representation. An easy assumption to make is that the majority of visitors to the gardens are mothers taking their children to the park. The results from the observation study which show garden visitation by party type helps to corroborate this assumption, with over half of all groups falling into the family category. Somewhat surprising is “friends” being the second most represented group, which is different from the house where couples are the group with the second greatest representation. Most groups classified as friends were comprised of the elderly.

Visitation Information

Each instrument was used to collect information relating to visitation. This type of information pertains to why people visit, what they do while visiting, when they visit (i.e. time of day and weather), and how often they visit. All three instruments provide insight on the first two questions; however, the visitor satisfaction interview provides the most insightful data given the nature of the instrument. The observation studies best answer what people do while visiting and when they visit. The interview and the self-survey best answer how often people visit.

Why Visit Hall Place and Gardens?

According to the interview, the most predominant reasons for coming to the Hall Place and gardens were because it was local and they had been visiting for years, they wanted to take their children out for a day in the park, or they were interested in history and architecture. Most of the participants out for a day in the park did not visit the house, nor did a great number of the locals since they had visited the house previously. The impression gathered from the interviewing was that nearly everyone enjoyed visiting the house, with only 14 negative comments (shown in Appendix H), 9 of which related to the tea room. The negative comments about the tea room concern cold coffee or slow service. However, most of those interviewed that had a problem with the Tea Room were still fond of the grounds.

What Did Visitors Enjoy?

Since those that travel to Hall Place to visit the house intend to tour the house, there was no data on the activity of such visitors. Instead, the interview questioned which part of the house was liked the most, and the observation study tried to discern the manner in which the visitor was engaged by their experience. The observation study ranked from 1 to 5, with 1 being no expression of a trait and 5 being complete expression of a trait, the concentration, excitement, conversation, boredom, and distraction of a visitor. The average concentration of a visitor is around 4, the average excitement 3.25, and the amount of discussion was generally a 3 with a few rooms such as the Great Hall, and portions of the Beastly Hall with levels of discussion averaging 4 or 5. The average expression for boredom was about 1.25 and the average expression of distraction about 2.5. Much of the distraction observed was from parents trying to look after their children. We suggest that, should this observation study be done again, it is with more samples and closer examination. Figure 13 shows the breakdown of visitors' favorite parts of the house as gathered by the interview. Most visitors, 38%, said that their favorite part of the house is the Great Hall, followed by the interactive gallery.

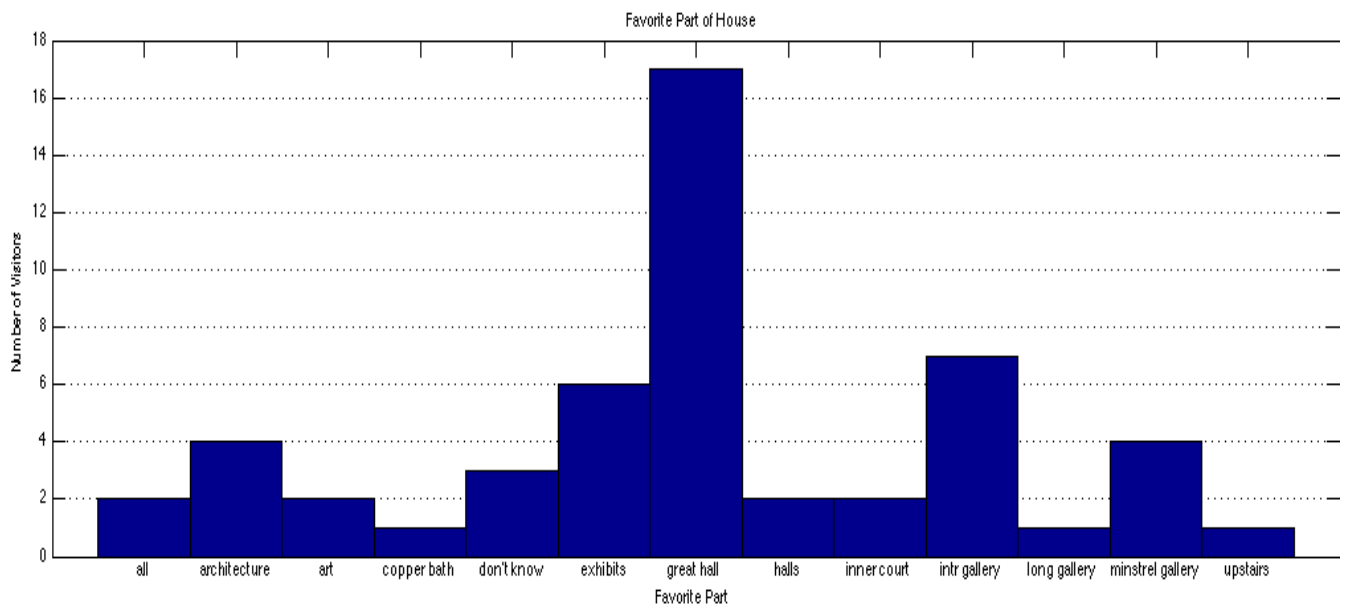


Figure 13: Visitors' Favorite Part of the House

Four main activities take place in the gardens: walking, relaxing, enjoying the scenery, and playing. Walking in this instance is classified as the continued movement through the gardens, but it does discount that the individual walking is not also enjoying

the scenery. In figures 14 - 17 show the results of the observation study for the gardens overall, the nursery, park, and formal gardens respectively.

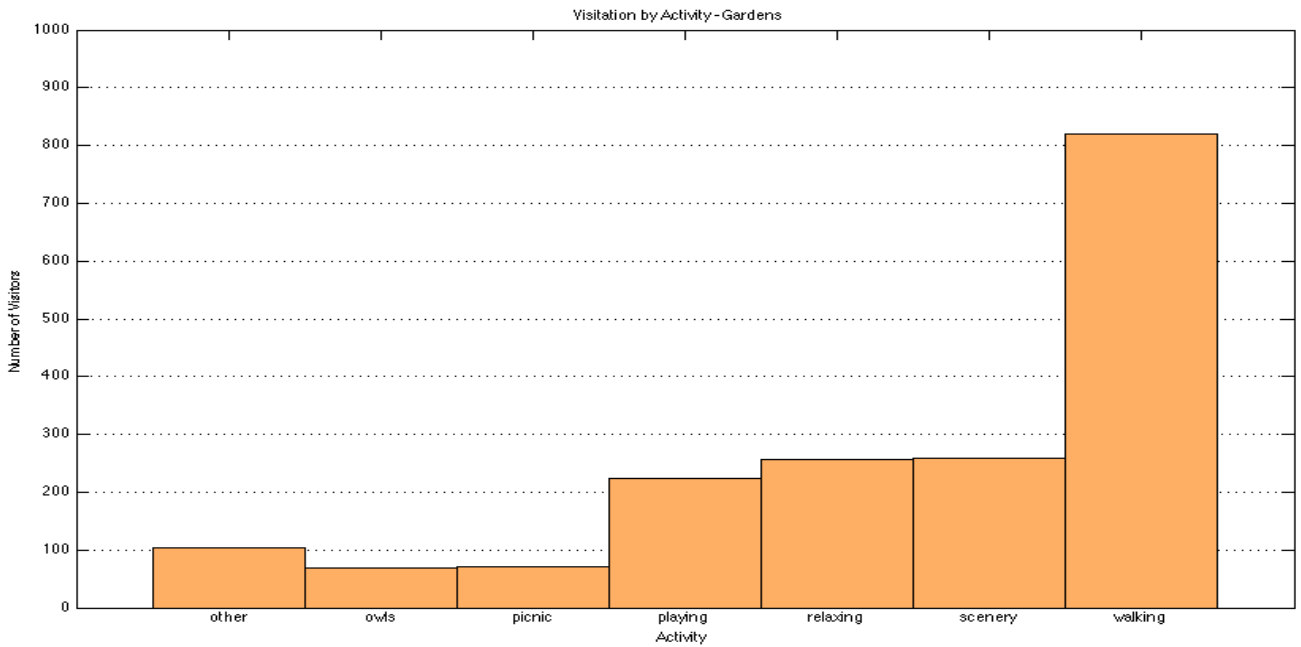


Figure 14: Visitation to the Gardens by Activity

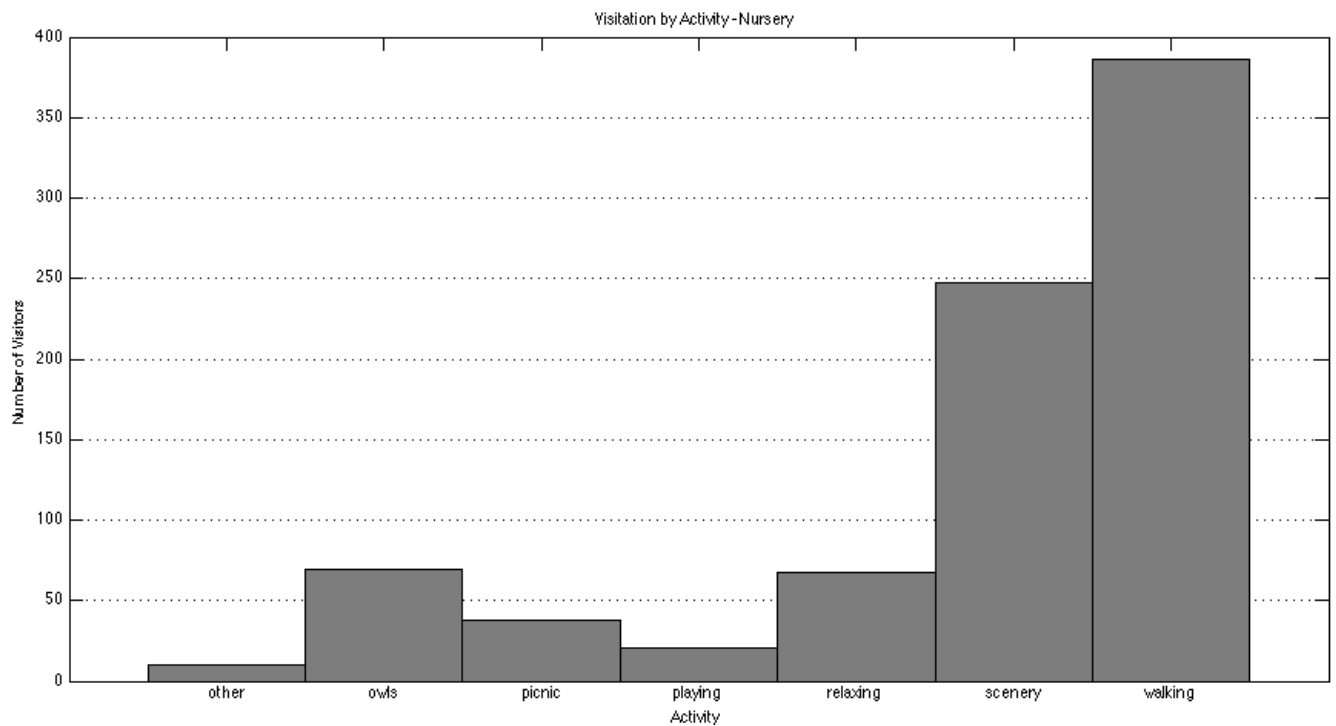


Figure 15: Visitation to the Nursery by Activity

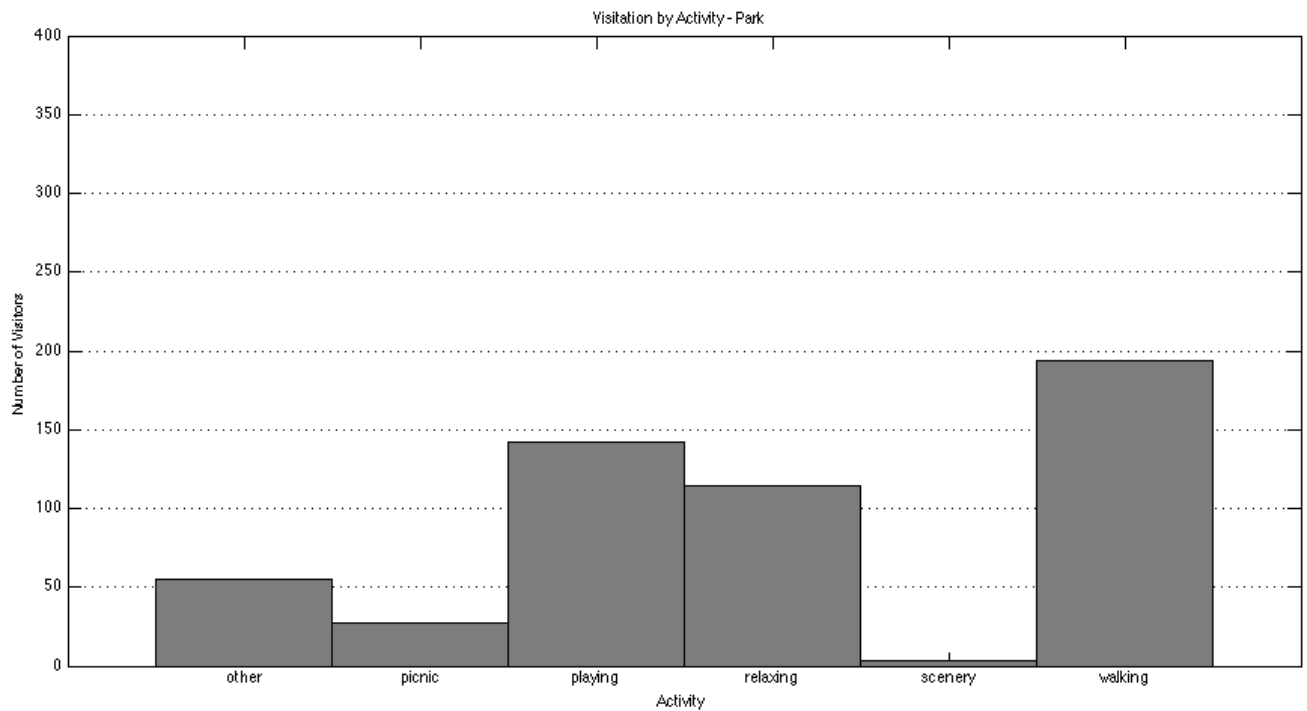


Figure 16: Visitation to the Park by Activity

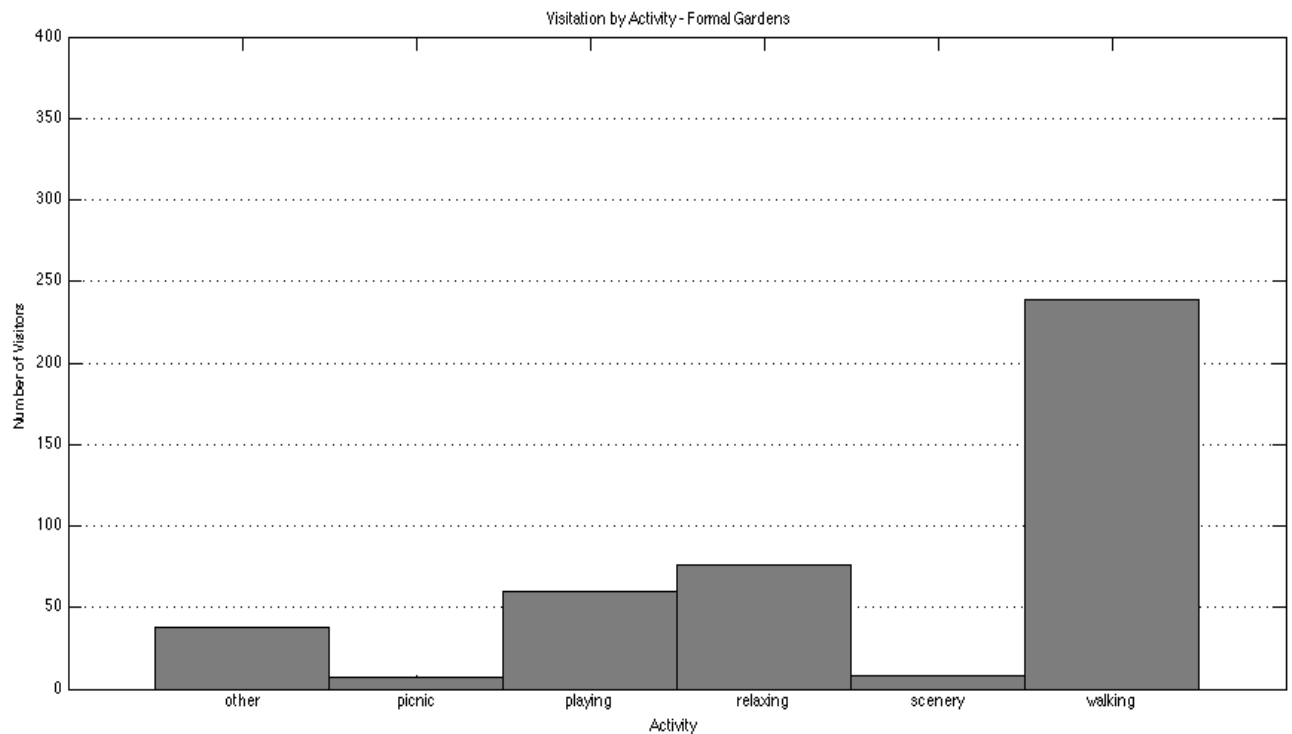


Figure 17: Visitation to the Formal Gardens by Activity

The most prevalent activity observed was walking, with nearly 45% engaging in this activity. In the nursery, the enjoyment of scenery was observed much more so than in either of the remaining areas. This is most likely due to the displays within the greenhouse

and the small, well-manicured, alcoves along the fence. In the park a substantial number of visitors, nearly 150, were playing. Much of the time this play involved children playing football, which is not allowed within the gardens. The nursery was the most visited section of the gardens with 45% of visitors observed there, followed by 30% in the park, and 25% in the formal gardens. The self-administered survey had similar results to the ones shown above. Figure 18 below, taken from the interview, shows that more than half, 54%, of visitors will visit all parts of the garden, and that about 90% will visit the nursery. It should be noted that most visitors did not recognize the distinction between the parts of the garden.

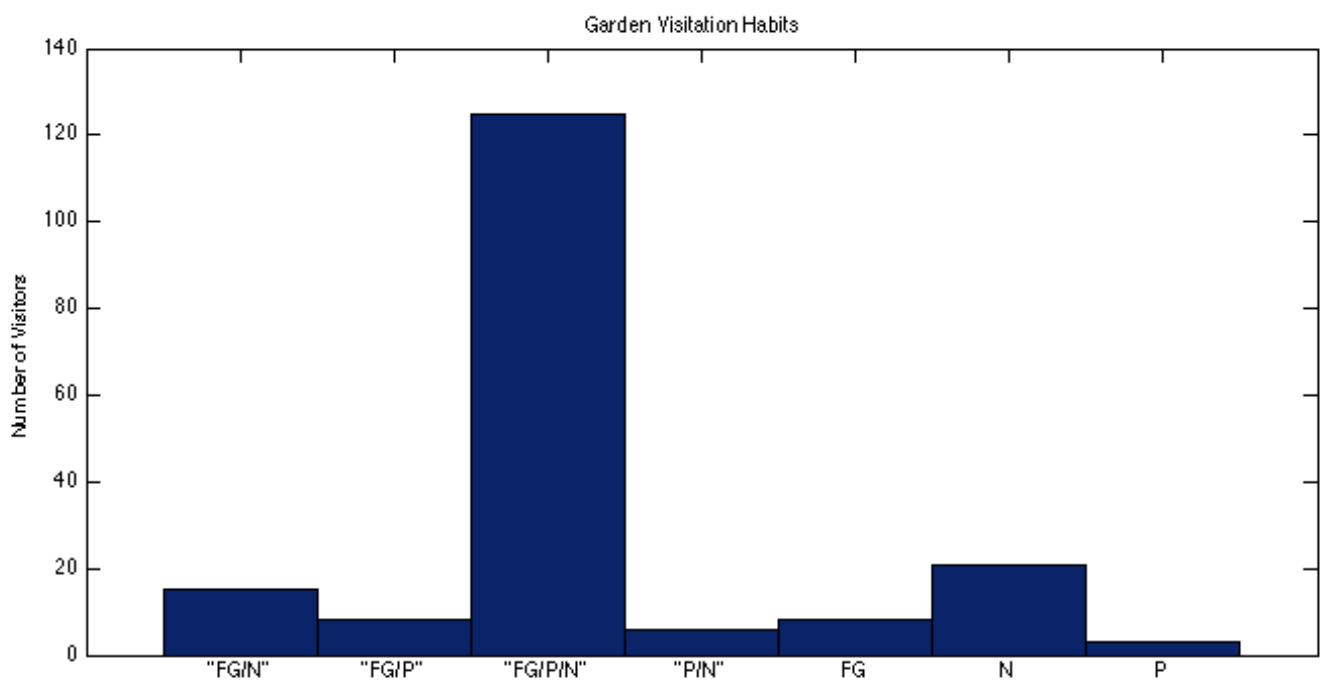


Figure 18: Visitation to the Gardens

When Did Visitors Come?

Figure 19 below shows the average visitation per time of day. Since the house does not open until 10:00 no results were recorded before that time. Results were recorded after 15:00, but there were not enough data points to trust the results from that time. Additionally, most of these observations were done while the weather was overcast or raining. However, the figure below still shows that the time where the greatest number of visitors in the garden is at 14:00, when there was an average of 42 visitors throughout the gardens.

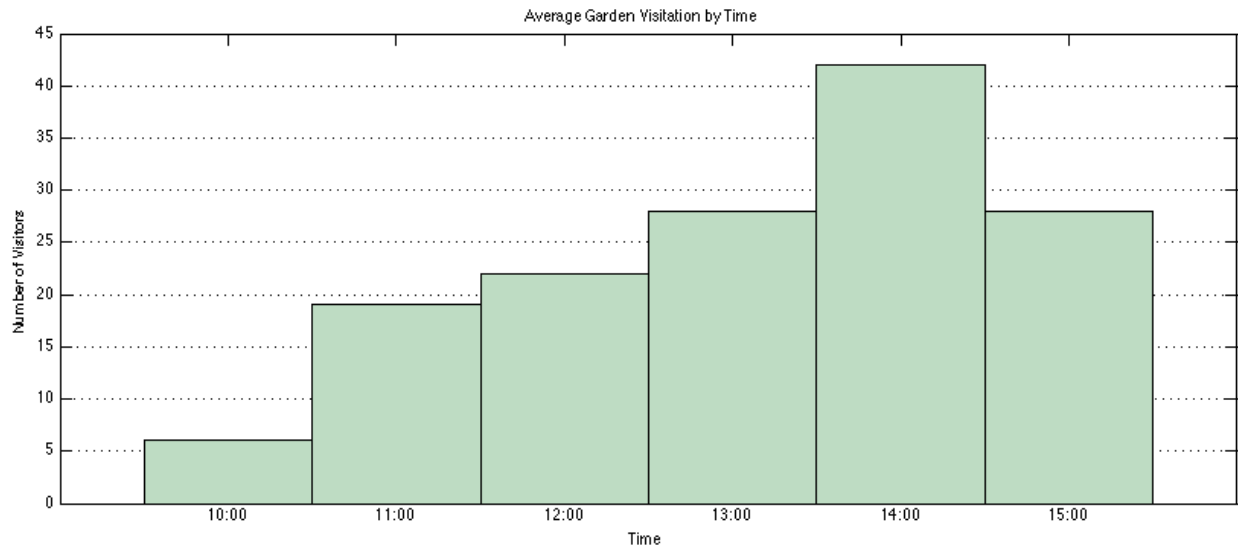


Figure 19: Average Visitation to the Gardens by Time of Day

In addition to time of day, the weather also had a large impact on visitation. Figures 20 and 21 show the visitation to the gardens and house respectively based on the weather. A comparison of the two figures shows that visitation to the garden is incredibly dependent on the weather whereas visitation to the house is not. In the gardens, on a sunny day, an average of 140 people will visit between 10:00 and 15:00, but on a cloudy day, the type of weather with the next highest visitation, an average of only 70 people will visit, a difference of 50%. However, the difference between the two most popular types of weather is less than 25%. Were this to be done once again, the data should be collected for an equal number of days with each type of weather. This data is slightly skewed given it was overcast for that nearly three of the four weeks data was collected.

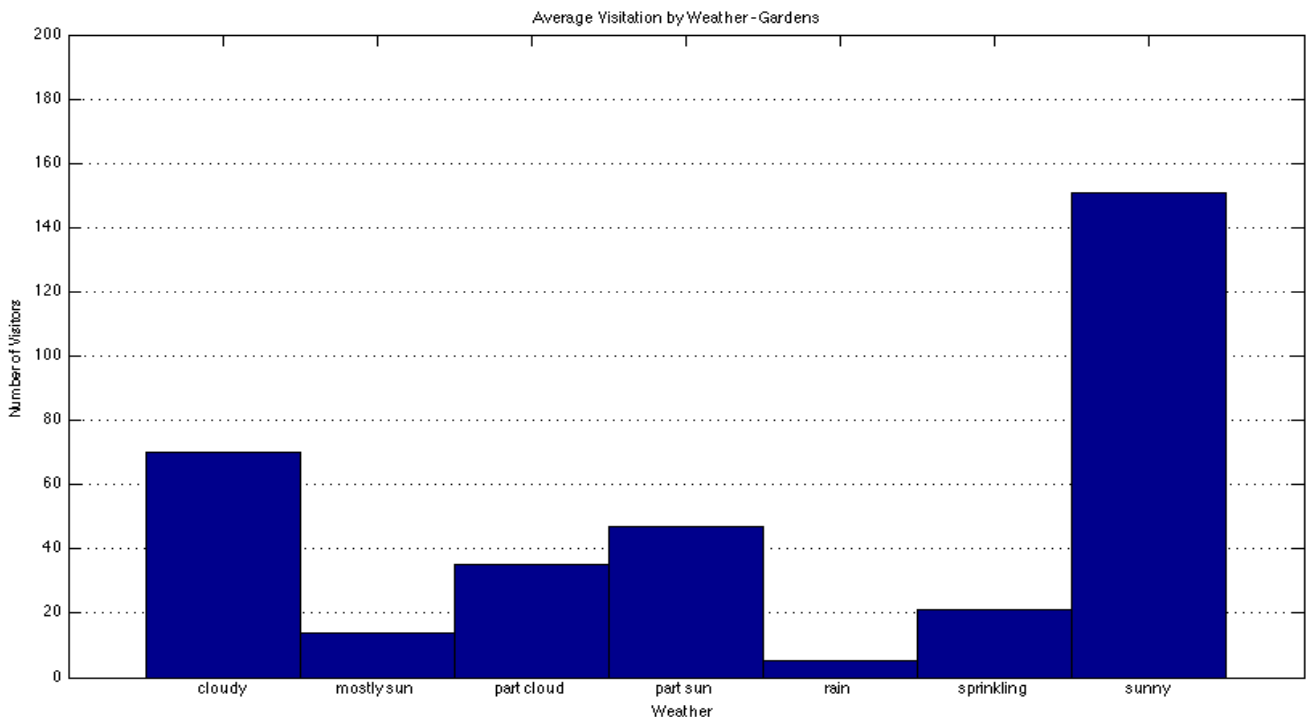


Figure 20: Average Visitation to the Gardens by Weather

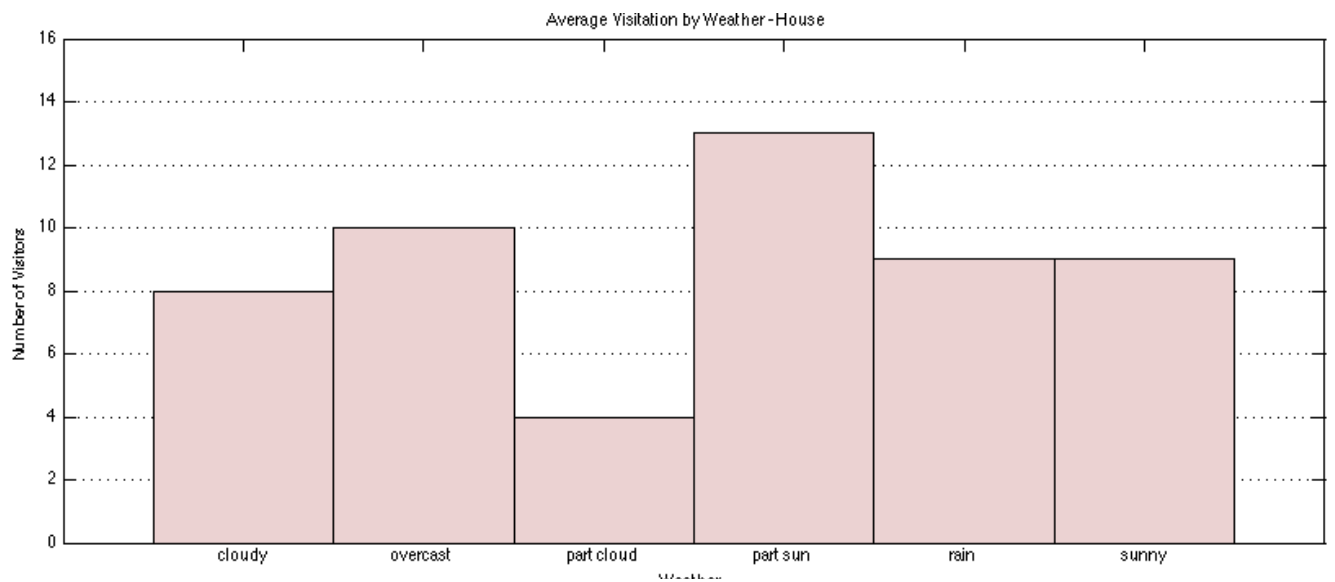


Figure 21: Average Visitation to the House by Weather

How Often Did Visitors Come?

The interview and the self-administered survey contributed to the collection of the data presented on how often visitors travel to Hall Place. Figure 22 below shows that nearly everyone interviewed would recommend Hall Place to a friend, and many of those interviewed stated that they had done so already. Only 4 people, 2% of those interviewed, responded that they would not recommend Hall Place.

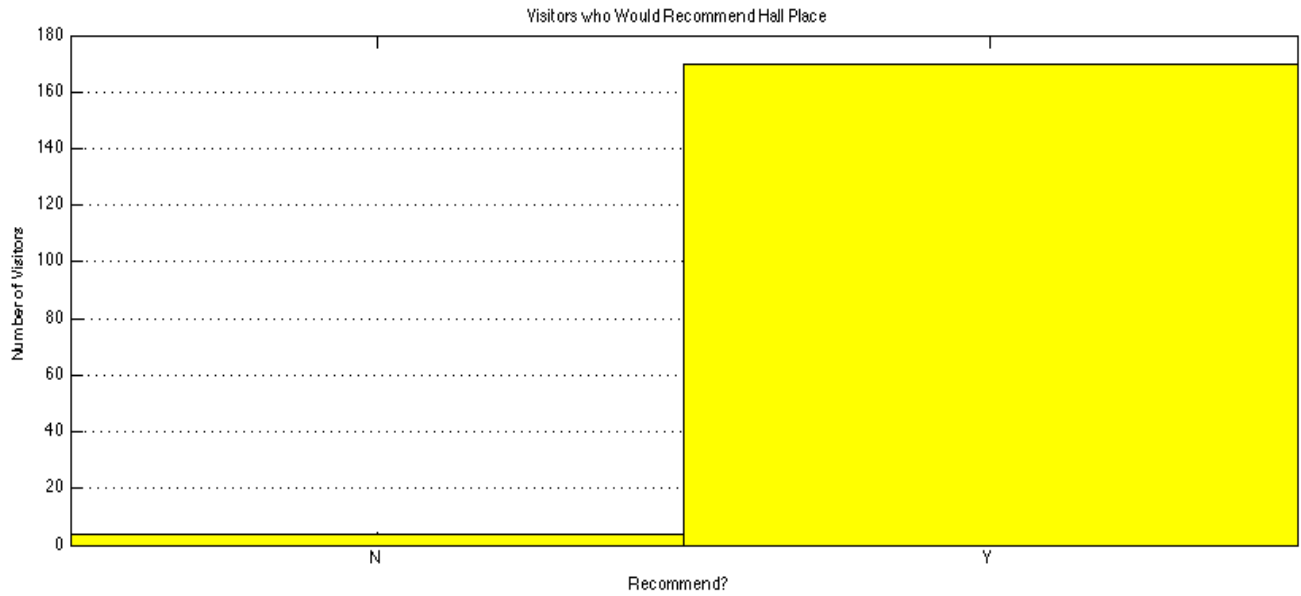


Figure 22: Number of Visitors that Would Recommend Hall Place

Figure 23 shows how first time visitors found out about Hall Place. Of the twenty interviewed that happened to be first-time visitors, 50% learned about Hall Place from the internet. Most of the ones in the "other" category learned about Hall Place through the national trust. This figure only includes the data about visitors that had visited the house, due to the small number of participants who were visiting the gardens for the first time.

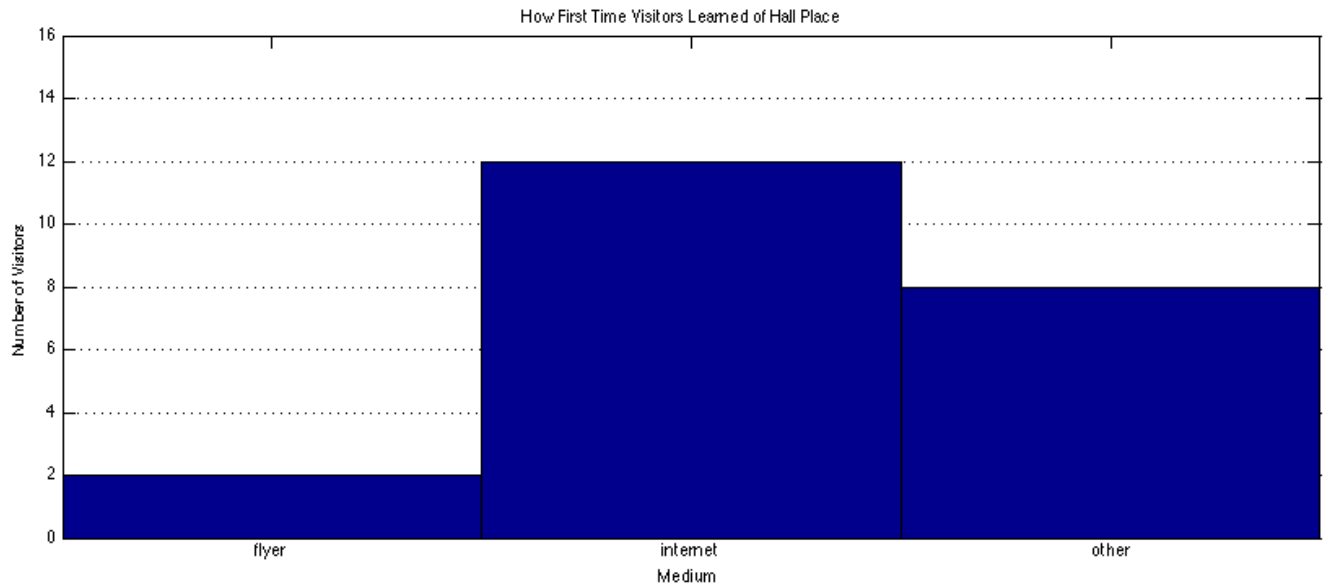


Figure 23: How New Visitors to the House Learned about Hall Place

Of the 220 people interviewed, 80% were return visitors to Hall Place and Gardens. Figure 4 shows the breakdown of the frequency they return. The group with the greatest representation, 24%, is those who visit monthly. Furthermore, nearly 50% of all participants visit more than once a year.

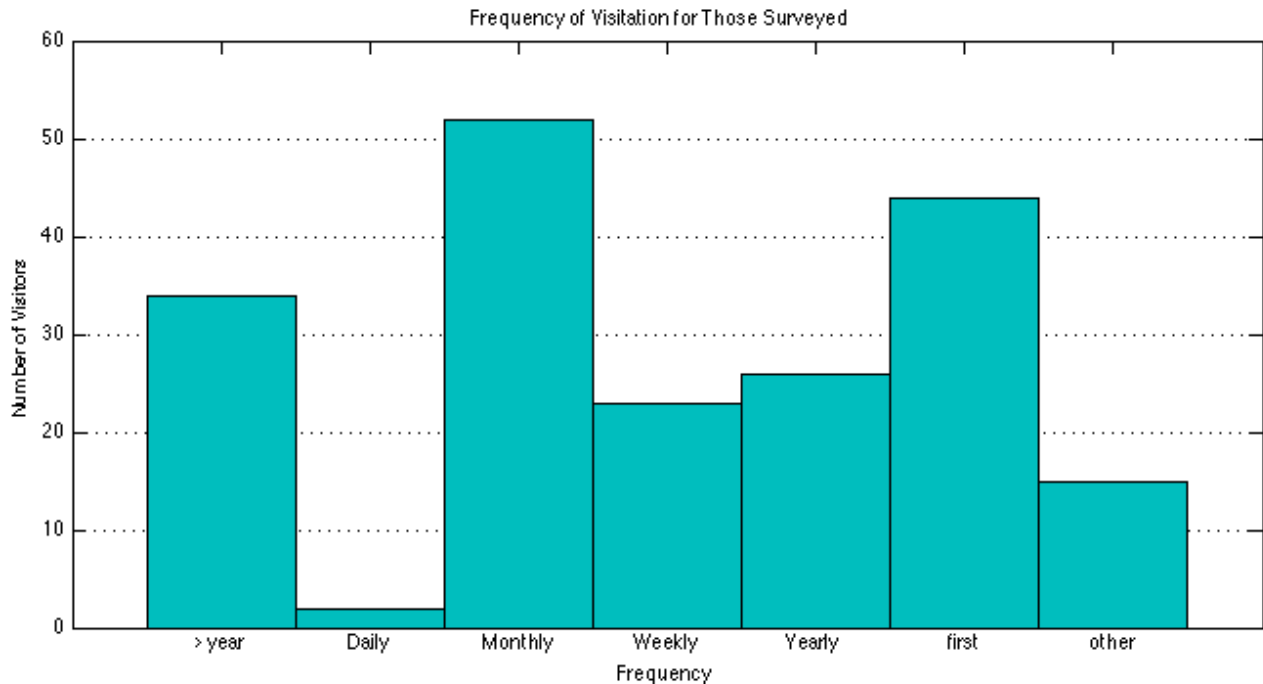


Figure 24: Frequency of Visitation

General Information

In addition to assessing visitor satisfaction and visitation of Hall Place and Gardens, The Bexley Heritage Trust requested information about the visitors’ experiences in the tea room, visitors’ use of the toilet, and whether or not visitors knew the distinction between Bexley Heritage Trust and the Bexley Council. All data was collected with the visitor satisfaction interview. Those visitors who had visited the tea room were asked to rate the following from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent): the friendliness of the staff, the efficiency of the staff, the variety of food and drink for adults, the variety of food for children, and the value. Given that there were almost no responses to the question about the variety of food for children, it is not presented. Figures 25 - 28 show the results of the tea room survey.

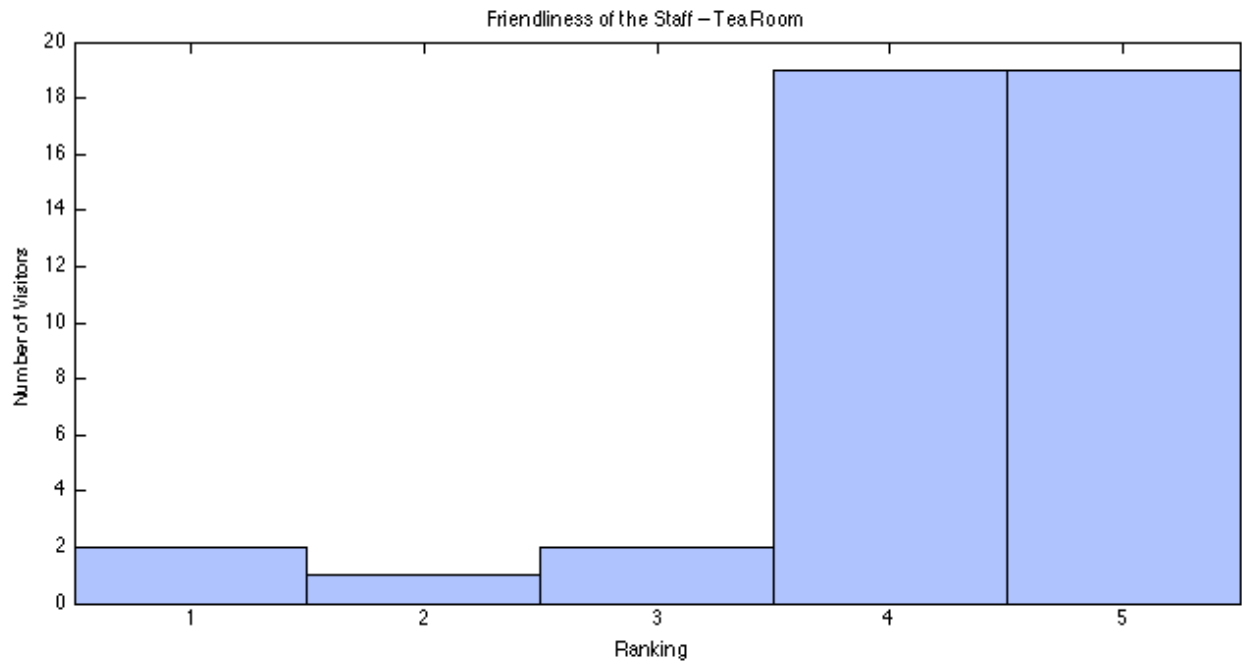


Figure 25: Friendliness of the Staff - Tea room

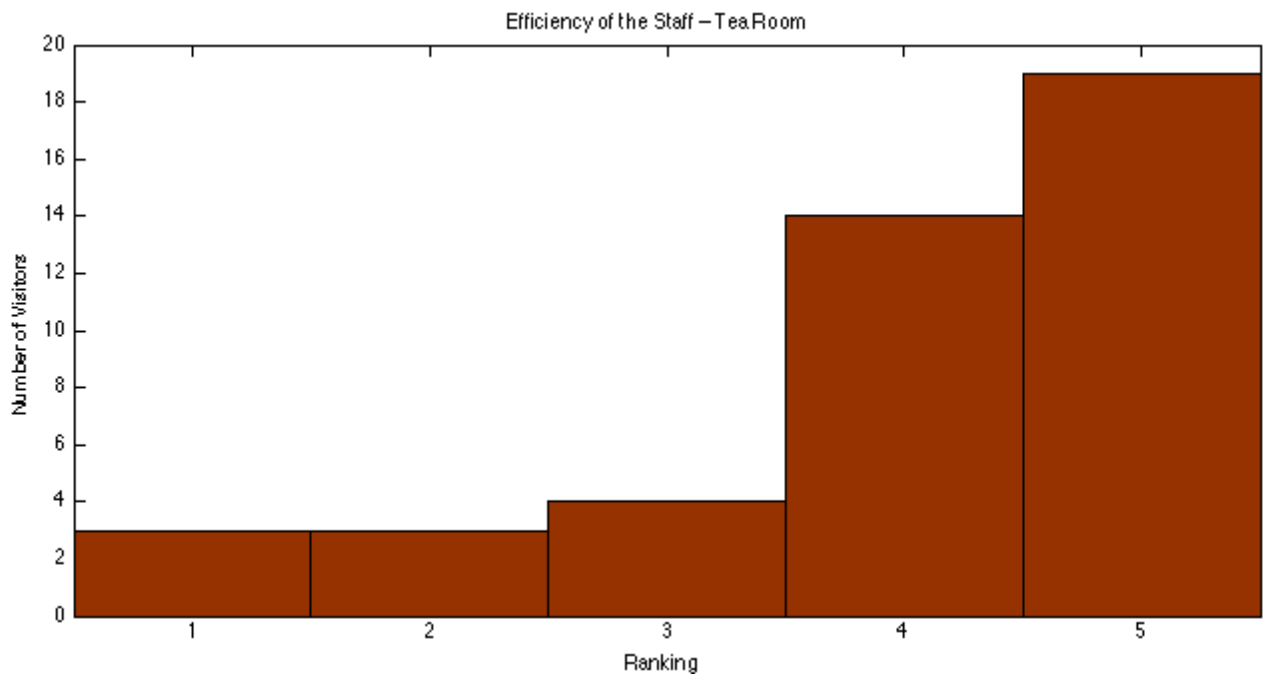


Figure 26: Efficiency of the Staff - Tea room

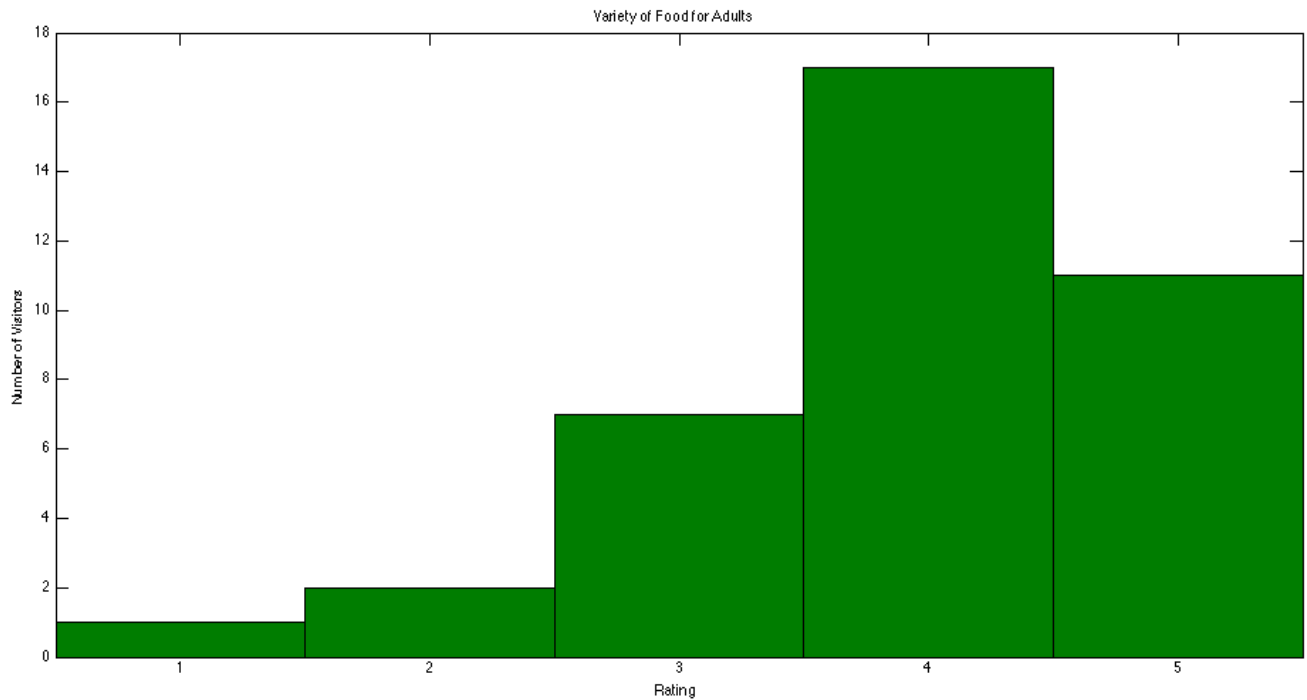


Figure 27: Variety of Food for Adults - Tea room

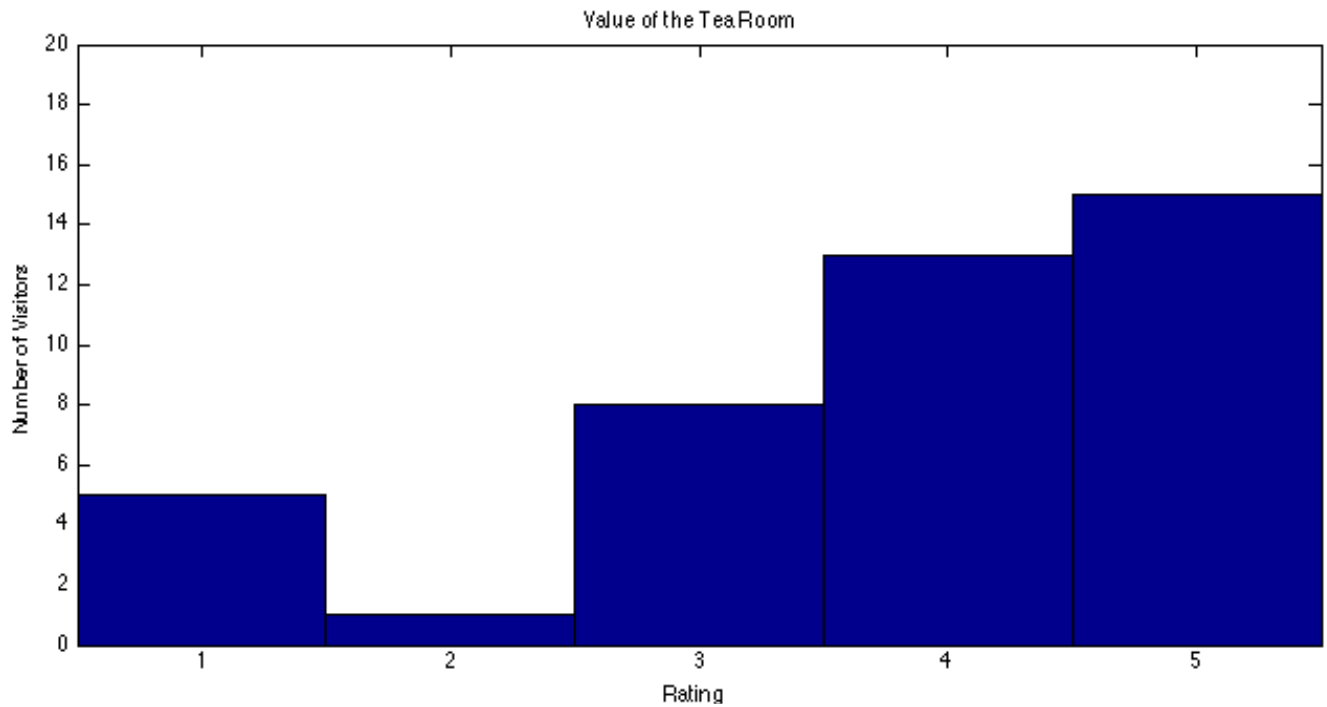


Figure 28: Value of the Tea room

More than 80% of visitors had a satisfactory experience across all categories, and more than 50% had either an above average or excellent experience across all categories. As per some of the comments received during the interview, there are times when hot beverages are served cold or lukewarm, and some visitors would prefer a greater selection of coffee.

The Bexley Heritage Trust wished to know about the use of the toilets because they are a large expense. As such, the figure below shows the number of visitors that only visited the gardens who used the toilets. Over the course of four weeks, nearly 70% of visitors who visit the gardens use the toilet.

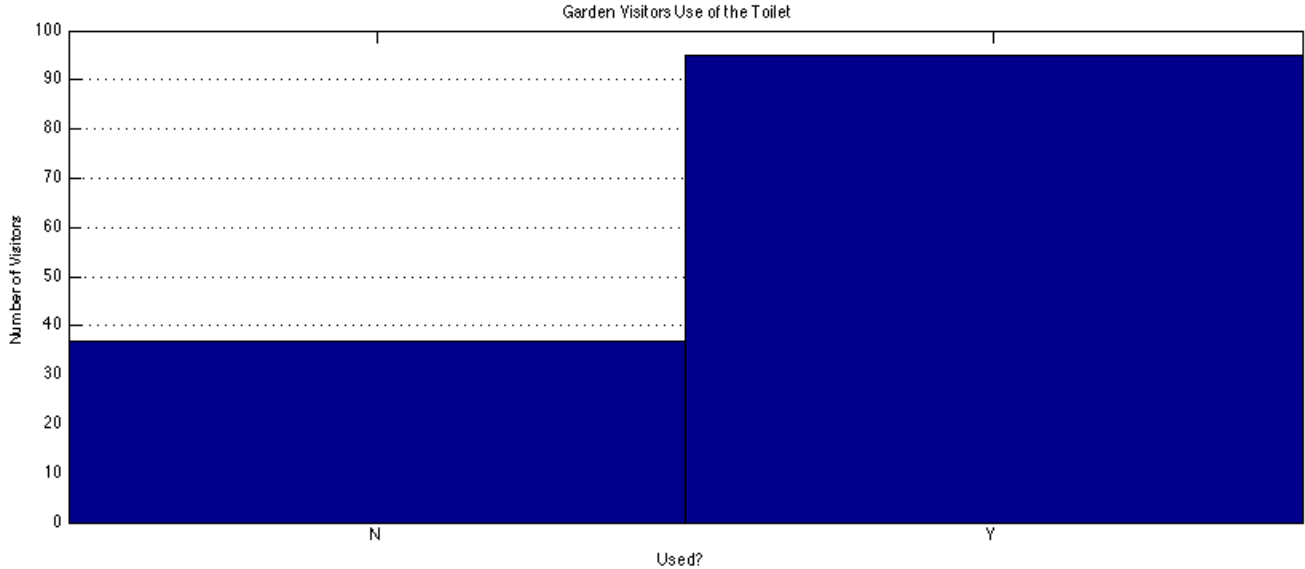


Figure 29: Toilet Usage

The interview revealed that only about 11% of the visitors to Hall Place know that the Bexley Heritage Trust manages the property, while nearly 67% believe that the Bexley Council runs the property. This is an important issue to the Bexley Heritage Trust because they want visitors to know that the building, while owned by the council, is managed and funded by the Bexley Heritage Trust.

Recommendations

We used the data collected from the surveys and observations at Hall Place to develop a number of recommendations to improve the visitor experience. These suggestions include:

- Reintroducing a plant sale
- Selling duck feed
- Relocating donation bins
- Introducing new signage for the gardens.

Many visitors go to the gardens at Hall Place to find inspiration for their gardens at home. Visitors are highly impressed by the flowers and some expressed interest in buying plants grown at Hall Place. As it is not possible to have a plant sale in operation whenever the property is open, we suggest having a monthly sale. This could coincide with the farmer's market on the first Sunday of each month.

Currently visitors to Hall Place are not allowed to feed the ducks or other wildlife, but this does not stop them from doing so. Because so many people were observed feeding the ducks, we suggest that duck food be sold in the visitor center. This could bring in extra revenue from the visitors to the gardens and would regulate what the ducks are being fed. It also could become an activity that people go to Hall Place specifically to do.

Currently there are a few donation bins scattered around the property. These tend not to be very visible and are easily missed by people walking by, especially the bin located in the nursery. Having these moved to more popular locations, such as on the path by the main entrance to the gardens, could increase the number of donations collected.

In order to increase visitation to the house, we suggest adding signs scattered throughout the gardens. These signs could contain short historic facts or pictures from inside the house. Reading these in the gardens could increase interest in seeing the house and pull in more of the visitors using only the gardens. This would have the added bonus of increasing awareness of Bexley Heritage Trust, as the signs could easily be branded with the Bexley Heritage Trust logo.

We hope that these suggestions can help the Bexley Heritage Trust increase the visitor experience at Hall Place and make the property a more successful and well known place.

Conclusion

Overall, visitors are satisfied when visiting the property, particularly with the quality and variety of the gardens. Furthermore, visitors to the house had a genuine interest in the exhibits and the architecture. Visitors are still satisfied with their experience at Hall Place and Gardens, even with the recent changes. However, there are a much greater number of visitors interested in the gardens than in the house. This presents some difficulty to the Bexley Heritage Trust since they need to generate enough revenue to continue to provide the same quality of experience to visitors, and none is generated by the gardens. This could be alleviated if the gardens were utilized in a way that would draw visitors to the house. Additionally, even though most visitors to the property are local, the majority of visitors still believe the Bexley Council runs Hall Place and Gardens. Tea Room customers had an enjoyable experience, with a few comments requesting more variety in the coffee served. Overall, this project was important in assuring the Bexley Heritage Trust that their current efforts to provide an enjoyable experience were working and to show them how visitors were experiencing the property. The information collected will allow the Trust to take steps on improving visitation to the house, and provide more opportunities to the visitors to the garden. This project will help to ensure that the Bexley Heritage Trust continues to provide an enjoyable and educational experience to the citizens of Bexley, London, and the UK.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Hall Place Visitor Satisfaction Survey

Hello, we are University Students working at Hall Place on a project to assess visitor satisfaction. Would you please take a few minutes to answer some questions about your visit? Your responses will be kept anonymous.

General Survey:

Before we begin the survey, could I please get your age and post code for our research purposes?

Why did you choose to visit Hall Place today?

Is this your first visit?

If no, how often do you visit?

If no, would you return to Hall Place?

If yes, how did you hear about Hall Place?

Would you recommend Hall Place to a friend?

Have you visited the [house, gardens, tea room]? (*go to survey*)

Who do you think runs Hall Place and Gardens?

Of the following facilities, which have you used?

Benches, help desk, toilets

House Survey:

Which part of the house was your favorite?

Is there anything specific you like about historic houses in general?

Return to general survey

Garden Survey:

Of the following, which part of the gardens did you use today?

Formal gardens park nursery

What did you do while in the gardens today?

Return to general survey

Tea Room Survey:

Please rank the following on a scale from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent)

Friendliness of staff:

Efficiency:

Quality of food/drink:

Variety of food for children:

Variety of food for adults:

Value:

Return to general survey

Appendix B: Survey Form

Date:	Time:	Weather:	Location:
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Observations:

Gender: M F	Ethnicity: White Asian Hispanic Other (write in)
Party Size:	Party Type: Family Friends Single Age:
Comments:	

General:

Post code:	First Visit: Y N
Frequency: N/A Daily Weekly Bi-monthly Monthly Other	Hear about prop: internet friend/family advertisement exhibit flyer (name place seen) other
Recommend: Y N	Who runs prop: BHT Bexley Council don't know other
Visited: House Gardens Tea Room	Facilities: toilet benches help desk gift shop

House:

Favorite Part: beastly hall gardens room (name) other	HH interest: history art gardens other
---	---

Garden:

Which Part: formal park nursery	Activity: walking picnic playing relaxing other
--	--

Tea Room:

Friendliness: 1 2 3 4 5	Efficiency: 1 2 3 4 5	Quality: 1 2 3 4 5
Variety (kid) : 1 2 3 4 5	Variety (adult) : 1 2 3 4 5	Value: 1 2 3 4 5

Appendix C: Garden Self-Survey



As you enjoy Hall Place and Gardens, we ask that you please take two minutes to answer a few short questions about your visit.

Your answers will help Bexley Heritage Trust (the charity that maintains Hall Place) to understand how and why people visit.

1. **What is your post code?** _____

2. **How many people are in your party?** _____

3. **What do you use the gardens for?**

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Picnic | <input type="checkbox"/> Playing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Walking | <input type="checkbox"/> Enjoy scenery |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | |

4. **How often do you come to the gardens?**

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> First time | <input type="checkbox"/> Daily |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Weekly | <input type="checkbox"/> Monthly |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yearly | <input type="checkbox"/> Less Frequently |

5. **What is your favourite part of the gardens?**

- Formal Gardens (topiaries, rose garden, sunken gardens)
- Nursery (glasshouse, orchard, model gardens)
- Parkland

6. **When did you last visit the historic house?**

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Within the last month | <input type="checkbox"/> Within the last year |
| <input type="checkbox"/> More than a year | <input type="checkbox"/> Have not been in the house |

If you have any questions please email us: info@hallplace.org.uk

Appendix D: Garden Observation Form

Garden Observation

Location: _____ Date & Time: _____ Weather: _____

Activities:	Picnic Relaxing	Playing Walking	Other	Age Range:	Infant Teen	Child Adult	Elderly
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Size	Party Type	Activity	Age-M	Age-F

Appendix E: House – Ground Level Observation Form

House Observation - Ground

Location: **Ground Floor**

Date & Time: _____

Weather: _____

Room: **HG** - Halcot Gallery **IC** - Inner Court **IG** - Interactive Gallery **Age Range:** Infant Child Elderly
GH - Great Hall **TP** - Tudor Parlour **TK** - Tudor Kitchen Teen Adult

Room	Size	Party Type	Age-M	Age-F	Concentration	Discussion	Excitement	Boredom	Distraction

Appendix F: House - Gallery Observation Form

House Observation - Gallery

Location: **First Floor**

Date & Time: _____

Weather: _____

Room: **GC** - Great Chamber **MIG** - Minstrel's Gallery
LG - Long Gallery **MG** - Museum Galleries

Age Range: Infant Child Elderly
 Teen Adult

Room	Size	Party Type	Age-M	Age-F	Concentration	Discussion	Excitement	Boredom	Distraction
LG	4	Family	adult	child	3	2	4	2	1
					1	3	5	3	4
			adult	child	4	2	4	3	2
					2	5	3	1	4

Appendix G: House – Exhibition Observation Form

House Observation - Exhibition

Location: **Beastly Hall**

Date & Time: _____

Weather: _____

Room: PC - Peacock Room	AG - Attacked Gull	SF - Sleeping Fox	Age Range: Infant Child Elderly
HB - Hanging Bugs	CR - Chimera Room		

Room	Size	Party Type	Age-M	Age-F	Concentration	Discussion	Excitement	Boredom	Distraction

Appendix H: Visitor Comments

Positive

- (gardens) all very beautiful
- Wanted to all meet up somewhere nice and have lunch
- Good meeting place to see sister
- Came with granddaughter – good place to enjoy while parents are gone for the week
- Lovely and historic place to visit
- National trust members, read about Hall Place on website and friend recommended it also
- Came with grandchildren, good place for them to run around
- Kids can run around, lots of history
- Just to get out with the kids, would visit again
- Wanted to spend the day together somewhere nice, take advantage of half day
- Half term, would recommend garden
- Looked interesting while driving by, haven't visited in 15 years
- Daughters wanted to visit
- Knew house was interesting, man used to work for bexley council
- Come every year to see flowers
- Been trying to visit for the past couple of days, today worked in schedule
- Come regularly to see blossoms, local
- Just loves to come, feed geese, mother and young son
- Kids come weekly, tell everyone to visit, beautiful flowers
- Enjoy surroundings, house different each time, got leaflets
- Local, favorite place, 50th anniversary ceremony, love azaleas paneled wall and rose gardens
- Local, like info in the house
- Childhood memories, came with wife and kids to walk around
- Came to feed ducks and take child out for air
- Came because they love the gardens
- Been here so many times, always interesting to see
- Thought beastly hall was interesting, appreciated the receptionists, stonework is brilliant, information plaques are good
- Really enjoyed the grounds, been before son recommended
- Local, interesting place
- Likes the architecture
- Came to walk and its beautiful here
- Came to admire property, like exhibition of old technology
- Like coming to the house
- Like to come to see owls
- Came for birthday visit
- Lived there all lives, visit often, recommend all the time, very interested in history

Neutral

- Saw house with school visit
- Would have bought plants had they been available
- Look around, wanted a place to stop and have lunch on their way to another place; will visit gardens and tea room
- Sister was surveyed in past
- Came for day out; haven't visited in a while
- Just passing by, decided to stop
- Live close, came to see changes in house
- Had lunch at restaurant next door
- Wanted to get out of the house and have lunch, decided to go for a walk after eating
- Had the day to be with grandson, decided to go feed ducks and have lunch, hadn't been in the house in years till today
- Came to see gardens
- On way to red house, topiary society member
- Husband used to work as volunteer
- Belong to historic group
- Came to get out of house, had lunch in glass house
- Daughter came to visit, had lunch in tea room
- Affiliated with National Trust, read about it in book
- Waiting for a ride, visits every couple years
- Belong to National Trust, come for walks
- Came to walk around and have lunch at tea room
- Very local, come to get granddaughter to sleep, visited before charge to enter
- Red House recommended coming
- On holiday and were in the area
- Came to get outside/fresh air
- Walking in the area, live very close
- Came with club, have visited previously
- Have lunch, see flowers
- Came to get exercise, live 3 mi away
- Daughter doing a photography project
- Driver for charity, heard through work
- Somewhere to come visit
- National Trust members, would return
- Came out for lunch
- Came for tea room
- Often visit for walks, going to lunch in restaurant
- Local, been coming since a child
- Brought grandson to feed ducks, members of national trust, husband was former grounds manager
- Live locally, came because of sunshine, used to come more when kids were younger
- Came just to look around
- Since it was raining, wanted to get out of the house, used to have shop in visitor center, never in the summer

Negative

- (tea) poor service, dirty table
- Half term, wouldn't recommend house
- Coffee isn't as good as it once was
- Tea room too expensive
- Very against tea room, cakes are stale, too expensive
- Got cold hot chocolate
- Visited long ago as a child, did not like how things had changed, thought it was better then, disliked the exhibit
- Would not recommend since the addition of the entrance fee
- Lack of variety in coffee
- Coffee took too long
- Didn't know where new tea room was
- Tea room ran out of sausages
- Accidentally came here, meant to go to Danson house, would not return
- Thought sad how glass house never changed