



Patron: The Viscount Ashbrook
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Newsletter

www.cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk

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Some future events:

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- ✿ Wollerton Old Hall – Wed 15th June
- ✿ Organic gardening and composting at Hough Garden, Alderley Edge – Sat 30th July



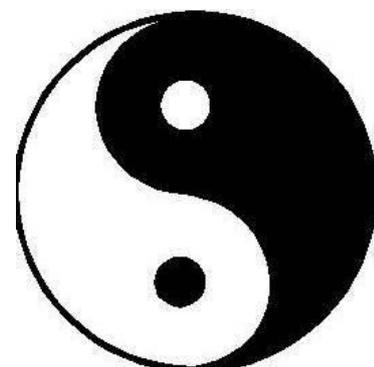
Yin and Yang – the essence of Chinese gardening

It seems we gardeners never tire of hearing about Chinese Gardens and our February lecture proved to be no exception. Forty CGT members and their friends packed into one of Tatton Park's meeting rooms on a bright Saturday morning to listen to professional garden designer, Michèle Martin, talk about "Expanding Small gardens – the Chinese Way".

A perfect combination. We would discover tips on how to make the most of small spaces in our gardens – by taking inspiration from Chinese gardens and gardeners through the centuries. How very 'Yin and Yang'.

This brings us neatly onto one of the fundamental principles behind Chinese gardens – Yin and Yang – and the idea of achieving harmony between disparate elements. Yang represents the masculine and is

depicted as hard, aggressive, bright and strong while Yin is feminine and is heavy, passive, dark and mysterious. When these two come together we have harmony which is represented by heaven and the moon – and this immediately recognizable image ...



But before Michèle went on to describe examples of Yin and Yang in the Chinese garden, she provided us with some background to Chinese culture explaining that as one of the world's longest continuous civilizations, with extended periods of peace and prosperity, it was ideally placed for the arts to flourish and the highest art form was considered to be garden design. In fact, some of the earliest Chinese gardens date from as early as 1000 BC, even though virtually no garden plans exist or survive.

We are all familiar with the Willow pattern found on so much crockery and while the design might have been invented by Spode, it still features the essential elements of a Chinese garden – water, buildings, flowering trees, conifers, bridges and rocks.



Whether the garden in question was an Imperial Court garden or a Scholar's garden, the fundamentals were the same, the difference between the two being one of scale.

The Chinese Imperial garden was all about establishing power and impressing people.

If the garden was fantastic enough, this might trick the gods into thinking the garden was paradise so they would come down to earth and immortalize the emperor.

The scholars might have had less lofty ambitions, but they still included the same features in their gardens such as covered walkways and pavilions – tings – so that the gardens could be enjoyed throughout the year.

The gardens were meant to be seen and enjoyed in all weathers, but mist and cloud were ideal as these would 'cloud' the boundaries, so to speak, and by merging the surrounding mountains with the sky, suggest mysterious and unknown vistas beyond the horizon.

One particularly striking image was a dragon sculpture sitting atop a white wall so that when the weather is misty, the dragon appears to float in thin air.



Michèle then described the typical route one might take through a Chinese garden.

Coming from a busy, bustling outdoor world (Yang), one needs the calming influence of Yin and the first step up and across the threshold is intended to slow one down and offer a first glimpse of the garden – a taste of what's to come. Often one is then led into a second courtyard with distinctive rocks, these typify Yin and Yang with their hard structure, yet soft rounded shapes.

Water is crucial in a Chinese garden and has many functions; its reflective qualities bring in the sky and light, the water itself moves and changes, it is dark and mysterious (Yin), yet full of active life – fish for instance - and therefore Yang. Bridges are important too – they frame the view of the water – the best encapsulate this view as a near circle and demonstrate Yin and Yang in harmony again – Yin the fluid water and Yang the hard stone bridge.

The buildings or tings are important features – not only as somewhere to stop and shelter – but they invariably offer glimpses of what else is to come in the garden.

Windows are noteworthy, their decorated shapes and outlines are intriguing and emphasise, disguise or partially conceal the view of the garden, tempting one to go and investigate further.



In addition, the shapes of the tings themselves are significant too – their steeply sloped roofs deflect bad ambience and energy away.

Michèle described how we all might use some of these characteristics of Chinese gardens to make the most of our own small spaces:

Use zig-zag paths – they give you different views of the garden and don't take up much space. Let secondary paths diverge away from the main path – offering possibilities of who knows what ...

If you have space for a bridge over water, make it small so you have to look at your feet, this will slow you down to allow you to appreciate what surrounds you.

Bridges can disguise the end of a garden and make you think it goes on beyond the actual boundary ... even if there is nothing there.

Eyesores beyond your garden boundary? Rather than attempt to screen them, try a focal point elsewhere. And remember, trees make your eyes travel upwards.

Incorporate lots of stopping places – to sit, stand and stare – something to look at or look through, windows, doors, stones and sculptures. And remember, windows and doors can be all shapes and sizes.

Re-think the lawn – the Chinese felt that ‘grass was for barbarians’. Rather, use water.

And what about some of our other senses? Michèle reminded us that poetry and music are also very

important in Chinese culture and gardens and to demonstrate, she performed an impressive, impromptu rendition of Chinese opera.

Gardens in Cheshire will never be or sound the same! Michèle’s fascinating and entertaining talk was followed by a lively question and discussion session – always the sign of a good lecture.

Tina Theis

Michèle Martin is a professional garden designer, lecturer and horticulturalist. She advised the BBC on Chelsea flower show in 2010, where she worked with Carol Klein & Chris Beardshaw. She was BBC Radio Merseyside’s gardening expert and is a judge at Southport Flower Show. As well as advising clients and designing new gardens Michèle runs courses on garden design and growing vegetables.

For more information contact Michèle at Outside Influence Garden Design www.outsideinfluence.co.uk.

Domains of taste and pleasure

On 22nd January 2011 an eager group assembled in Wilmslow Library to hear a talk given by CGT Chairman Ed Bennis on the topic of **Villa Gardens**.

After explaining how the word ‘picturesque’ now differs in meaning from its usage in the 18th and 19th centuries, he took us back to Roman times when there was a total distinction between the town and country house.

Town houses (the *villa urbana*) had very stylised gardens but the country house (*villa rustica*) had more extensive surroundings with room to grow vegetables and house animals.

The House of the Faun, a reconstruction of a Pompeian house and garden is a series of indoor and outdoor spaces, with walls, internal courtyards and flower beds in enclosures.

Hadrian’s villa in Tivoli showed the importance of connecting the views from the house to the surrounding landscape as a ‘borrowed space’.

Later gardens in Italy obeyed the recommendation of Alberti that ‘the villa should provide views to enjoy all of the Pleasures and Convenience of Air, Sun and the Prospects’.

The Villa d’Este (right) sits high above its gardens which rise to the entrance of the house. The main access takes the visitor on a long journey through a series of ‘rooms’ and scenes gradually ascending to the house itself.

Another 16th Century Italian garden, the Villa Lante has a similar journey through a succession of different areas, some with water and woodland from the

entrance at the far end of the garden to the house itself.



Villas became popular again in the mid-19th century in Britain. The 19th century was a great age of gardening and homemaking with a policy of ‘more is better’; everything was ornamented, decorated, and gardens were filled with seasonal planting. This applied inside the homes as well – rooms were decorated with ‘busy’, often floral, wallpapers and door panels were elaborately painted.

The Great Exhibition of 1851 showed a tension between art and nature; at the same time, people were concerned about questions such as ‘What is Beauty?’ and ‘the nature of taste’. In the 1850s, a family with an income of £150 p.a. could afford a part-time maid, while an income of £250 p.a. allowed for a full-time maid. Homes were decorated to indicate

the gentility and the wealth of the owners, hence the elaborate drawing-rooms.

The rise of suburban architecture was illustrated with generously sized semi-detached houses where the entrances were on different sides of the building rather than symmetrically at the front. The 'invisible fence' (i.e. one made of wire) became popular, allowing for borrowed landscape giving the illusion of gardens being more extensive than the reality. A carriage drive with an area of grass at the front of the house helped to create a feeling of spaciousness.



19. View of the entrance front of Fortis Green; from Loudon's *Gardener's Magazine*, 16 (1840), 56

Several books were published advising on how to create a new garden – Edward Kemp's How to Lay

Out a Garden and Joshua Major's The Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening among them.

The many villas around Birkenhead Park demonstrated some of these principles. The 'borrowed' landscape of the park gave an impression of spaciousness.

In some cases gardens were actually shared, or an impression was given by use of the 'invisible' fence. The gardens had both pleasure and functional uses and contained various utilitarian buildings including pigsties.

The pleasure garden often featured a raised walkway if not an actual terrace, reminiscent of the earlier Italian gardens and giving a feeling of an elevated house.

The herbaceous border was positioned at some distance from the house as out-of-season it did not look attractive. Rose bushes were used as hedging creating outdoor rooms and statues, urns and monuments etc were used enthusiastically.

The great ages of the villa garden could be said to be the Roman period, the medieval Italian era and the years of the Victorian and Edwardian reigns.

Ed illustrated, both verbally and visually, how the developing ideas for villa gardens were linked by certain enduring principles, realised differently according to circumstances.

Jacqui Jaffé

Spring in Full Bloom – The Daffodil Walk at Whitegate



As their website says, "if you love daffodils, beautiful countryside and a lovely day out, then come along for a guided Daffodil Walk near the village of Whitegate in the heart of the Vale Royal, Cheshire".

This is no Cheshire Garden, it is a Cheshire Farm, Foxwist Green Farm, and its only crop is Daffodils.

Len Tomlinson, his father and grandfather before him, have been growing daffodils here for over 100 years, both as a commercial business and for their own enjoyment. With a collection of over 600 varieties including historical and specialised varieties there is a spectacular display from the end of February through to May.

Years ago when it became commercially nonviable, Len decided to open up the farm and raise money for Macmillan Cancer Support and allow others to enjoy what he and his family had enjoyed for years. There are informative guided walks with Len or you can stroll around at your leisure. Either way you finish off with a cup of tea and homemade cake!

A quick look at the 1847 tithe map on the Cheshire Archives and Local Studies website (<http://maps.cheshire.gov.uk/tithemaps/>) shows that there has been a Tomlinson on this land for more than 160 years. At that time the land was

owned by Thomas, Baron Delamere of Vale Royal and John Tomlinson was farming it as tenant. In the late 1800s part of the farm land slipped due to the salt working and a large lake was formed. The daffodil fields are surrounded by old trees and hedges making Foxwist Green Farm a haven for wildlife.



Daffodils are everywhere and there are examples of many different cultivars. Historic examples from the 19th century are grown – a genetic pool of rare breeds which can be supplied to daffodil seedsmen throughout the country.

Strangely, although all daffodils are poisonous, they are a natural source of galantamine, an alkaloid used in the treatment of Alzheimer's disease. Len's daffodils are sent away for galantamine extraction.

Unfortunately it is a bit late in the season now for daffodils and Sunday 17th April was the final day for booked tours. But it is worth remembering for next year.

Their website is www.daffodilwalks.com.

Freyda Taylor and Joan Lowe

[If you are interested in old daffodils, why not check out the website of Kate and Duncan Donald – www.croft16daffodils.co.uk. Their collection – which includes daffodils bred, before 1875, by Manchester businessman Edward Leeds – was officially designated the National Collection of pre-1930 daffodils in 2010. An article appeared in a recent edition of the RHS journal The Garden.]

Investigating a garden...what do you get out of it?

It's odd that I have been doing this for years, and never really asked myself this question.

I always thought it should be done because our parks and gardens are so important to us. In part they provide us with our identity, add to our culture but most of all they give us pleasure. That is something we must not undervalue.

There is also a sense of fun, pleasure and reward when you start to uncover things long forgotten, or never really understood why something has happened. You suddenly make links to changes in a garden due to marriages, divorces, inheritances or changing economics or even taste.

There is a real sense of discovery and achievement when you unearth new information, or at least something that was forgotten, sometimes for centuries.

Some years ago I found out that the beech trees at Alderley Edge (beech is not native here) were introduced to the area by the owner whose wife was homesick for her native Wiltshire where beech was indigenous.

Little things add up and give reason and meaning to our parks and gardens.

While there is a great sense of personal achievement as you 'dig' into archives of maps, letters and family history, there is also a broader value and that is how this information can be used.

We have seen the loss or degradation of many parks and, in these economically tight days, there is new

pressure on our historic landscapes. Right now Burton Manor by Thomas Mawson and the Cadbury Factory by Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe face uncertain futures, possible loss.

There are many others that will be threatened with future development due to housing and employment pressures.

It is the type of information that CGT volunteers have amassed on sites around the county that could be the saviour of some of these gardens in future years.

Most planning officers are familiar with issues about historic buildings, but very few have any understanding about our parks and gardens.

Part of the role of CGT is to inform those authorities of the value and importance of the landscape. This information is essential when determining whether a planning proposal can be approved.

But if the information is not there, then there is little we can do to argue our position.

The work of volunteers has real and applicable value; it is more than academic exercise.

There is another side which is not so obvious.

There is great social interaction where the volunteers debate and help each other, often over tea and cakes.

You see places behind the scenes and meet people – owners, gardeners, other investigators.

Then there is that sense of discovery and ownership of something rare and valuable...information!

Ed Bennis

Landscape Gardening in Ormerod's History of Cheshire

An Introduction to Ormerod, some extracts from his History and biographies of key designers.

George Ormerod (1785-1830) was born in Manchester and educated at King's School, Chester. He became interested in the history of Cheshire about 1808 and, to facilitate his research, he moved to Chorlton House, near Chester, in 1811.

He made tours of the county and claimed to have visited every township at least once (not always commenting favourably on them), and borrowing material from county houses. His History of Cheshire was published in three volumes between 1816 and 1819. The History was revised and reissued in 1882 by Thomas Helsby.

He was not interested in domestic architecture or gardening, but he sometimes noted examples of the landscaping work which was being carried out at the time under the Picturesque movement. This is important where estates have been broken up, or documents destroyed, as it can be the only record.

Abbeyfield, Sandbach

Owner: John Ford

The house which derives its appropriate designation from a field nearly contiguous, which once formed part of the possessions of the Abbey of Dieulacres, has been wholly rebuilt by the present proprietor, and the grounds adjacent laid out under the direction of Webb.

Backford Hall, Chester

Owner: Maj. Gen. Birkenhead Glegg

The grounds from the contiguity of the turnpike road are very confined, but most judiciously laid out by Webb, the tower of the parish church grouping remarkably well with the plantations, and the boundaries being successfully concealed.

Bradwall Hall, Sandbach

Owner: Dr. John Latham

The hall of Bradwall was a large building of brick finished with gables, at the end of an avenue of firs and evergreens. It has been enlarged and modernized by the present proprietor, and the grounds laid out under the direction of Webb.

High Legh (East Hall), Lymm

Owner: George Legh

The grounds have been laid out under the direction of Repton.

Oulton Park, Tarporley

Owner: Sir John Grey-Egerton

The magnificent trees which now adorn the park and pleasure grounds were, with the exception of the oaks and a few others, planted about a hundred and twenty years ago, under the superintendence of the celebrated landscape gardener, William Emes, and his pupil Webb.

The park is enclosed by a wall and contains 315 acres which maintains 300 head of deer and other cattle: it adjoins to the southern side of the Forest of Delamere, and like that possesses some undulation of surface, gradually subsiding into the flat part of Cheshire in the South. The grounds were laid out by Eames and Webb as his pupil. (Thomas Helsby adds: 'and subsequently by Gilpin').

Poole Hall, Nantwich

Owner: William Massey

Poole Hall, the residence of Mr Massey, has been lately rebuilt, and the grounds laid out under the direction of Webb.

Somerford Hall, Congleton

Owner: C.W.J. Shakerley

Somerford Hall, a spacious brick built mansion stands in a park well timbered, and bounded on the north by the stream of the Dane. On the south side was formerly a large artificial lake, which burst its dam a few years ago, and the site has been recently planted over.

A large portion of Somerford Hall was built by the present proprietor about 1800, from designs by Mr Robinson of Middleton in Lancashire. The grounds were laid out by Mr Davenport and Mr Webb.

Somerford Booths Hall, Congleton

Owner: Clement Swettenham

Somerford Booths is situated on the right bank of the Dane. The ancient residence of the Swettenhams which occupies a delightful elevation near the river is finished with bay windows and gables, in the style of the seventeenth century, and is now undergoing improvements in the gothic style from the designs of Mr Webb.

(John Webb presumably worked on the grounds at the same time.)

Tatton Park, Knutsford

Owner: Wilbraham Egerton.

Tatton Park is from ten to eleven miles in circumference, and it is situated immediately north of Knutsford. It is well wooded; and contained until lately, two lakes or meres, one of which, on account of its proximity to the house, has been recently drained, under the direction of Webb.

Biographies

William Emes (1729/30-1803). First noticed in 1756 when he was appointed head gardener at Keddleston Hall, Derbyshire. He left in 1760 and moved to Mackworth, developing his practice as a landscape gardener. He sometimes provided a plan and then left his client to undertake the work, or on occasions he would supervise the work for many years. Also associated with Peover, Eaton & Cholmondely.

John Davenport, an architect and garden designer from Shropshire, who worked in Wales and the borders in the 1790s. Designed Nanteos, Clytha and Daylesford.

William Sawtrey Gilpin (1762-1843). Son of Samuel Gilpin R.A., and nephew of the Rev. William Gilpin, populariser of the Picturesque movement. Creator of the romantic gardens at Scotney Castle in Kent.

Humphry Repton (1752-1818). The last great English designer of the eighteenth century. He set up as a landscape gardener in 1788. Best known for his *Red*

Books with explanatory text and watercolours with overlaps to show 'before' and 'after' views. His schemes were not always accepted. Also produced designs for Tatton, Rode and Aston.

John Webb (1754-1828). Landscape designer also trained as an architect. He studied under William Emes and acted as his foreman, later establishing his own practice. He worked mainly in the Midlands and the North of England, often modifying existing landscapes. Also associated with Eaton, Tabley, Crewe, Arden and Peover.

John Davies

Cheshire Archaeology Day

Winsford,
9 April 2011

Cheshire Gardens Trust was very pleased to be invited to attend the Cheshire Archaeology Day with a table-top display of our recent work.

Organised by Cheshire Archaeology Planning Advisory Service – a combined service run for both Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester councils – this was the first meeting following a break of two years.

It was supported by Chester Archaeological Society, Cheshire Local History Association, Middlewich Town Council and an audience of about 360 keen amateur and professional archaeologists.

The opening speaker was Simon Ward, Principal Archaeologist with the Historic Environment Team at Cheshire West and Chester Council talking on ***Understanding and Restoring Chester's Walls.***

It was quite fascinating to see the interior of the section of wall near Eastgate that collapsed in 2008 and where the Roman wall had already fallen in antiquity.

While repairing the wall, archaeologists could learn more about its construction, record its history and attempt to assess the sections where problems might arise in the future.

Ian Miller of Oxford Archaeology North gave the next talk on ***Murgatroyd's of Middlewich: the last wild brine pump in the North West.***

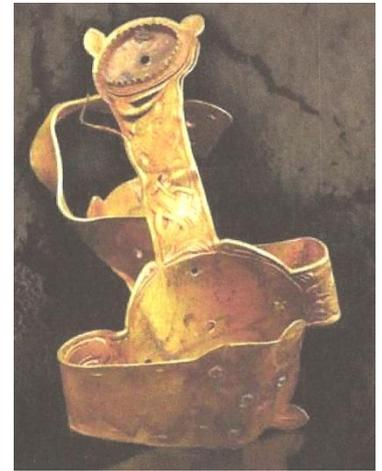
Salt extraction and production has been such an important industry in this area for two hundred years. Now thanks to the initiatives of Middlewich Town Council it is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and the future of the pump house, the original shaft and pumps have been secured.

Kevin Leahy, who is National Adviser, Early Medieval Metalwork for the Portable Antiquities Scheme, gave the third talk entitled ***Swords and Crosses: Looking at the Staffordshire Hoard.***

Kevin had prepared the first catalogue of the

Staffordshire Hoard, a remarkable collection of mainly sword fittings and crosses.

Most finds are gold and many are beautifully inlaid with garnets, probably the property of the highest nobility. But who collected it and why was it put into the ground? While the hoard answers some questions, many more are raised by these finds.



Don Garner Project Officer (Archaeology), Habitats and Hillforts with Cheshire West and Chester Council gave the fourth talk of the day entitled ***Prehistoric Promontories: Recent Work on the Hillforts of the Cheshire Ridge.*** Because many have remained poorly understood, investigations are being made into six of Cheshire's late prehistoric hillforts like Beeston and Eddisbury. For a greater understanding of the monuments new landscape imaging techniques such as Lydar are used. This technique was demonstrated during the lunch break.

The final talk of the day, ***Policing the Past – Protecting the future: Tackling crime and anti-social behaviour in the historic environment*** was given by Chief Inspector Mark Harrison of the Heritage Crime Initiative, English Heritage. These heritage crimes include theft of priceless artefacts, arson, vandalism and graffiti. Organisations are at last coming together with the Police, CPS, English Heritage and local authorities to improve heritage crime prevention and enforcement. One might ask, is it a heritage crime for a Planning Department to allow a new building to destroy a designed landscape?

Maria Luczak and Freyda Taylor represented CGT and enjoyed the talks and meeting the visitors to our display. People showed a great deal of interest in the research and recording of designed landscapes currently being done by CGT. Just mention the word "research" to an archaeologist and his heart starts to beat faster!

You will be interested to note that our display boards are always available to any member for a local society

meeting or a plant fair. Displaying them and talking to visitors about the Trust helps to get the aims of the Trust into the public eye.

If you would like to volunteer to use the boards for such a display, contact Tina Theis on 0161 442 0657 or email tina@tinatheis.com.

The next outing for the display boards with CGT members manning them is the Reaseheath College Open Day on Sunday May 15th. There we will be next to the Horticulture Department's exhibit and we will have some interesting information on the historic landscape of the Reaseheath Campus.

Freyda Taylor

Will gardens survive the recession?

Is there a garden near you that is free to enter? Have you ever thought about how it is paid for? Vicarage Botanical Gardens in Carrington is a five-acre oasis of peace and tranquillity.

There is no charge to enter, with the owners relying upon the takings from the café and garden centre and anything placed in the donation box.

Many people use the gardens without spending or donating. This is causing concern in these money-straitened times. The gardens have been there for more than a quarter of a century and it would be a severe loss to the area if they were to close.

Meandering paths take the visitor around the different areas of garden. There are several areas of water and the occasional more formal part contrasts with the general woodland feel.



There are plants not often found – these Himalayan poppies and handkerchief tree among them



Why not pay a visit. The gardens are open every day except Thursday and can be found on the A6144 Manchester Road at Carrington.

www.vicaragebotanicalgardens.co.uk

Oh, and don't forget to show your appreciation: have a coffee, buy a plant, make a donation.

Joy Uings

Is there a little-known garden near you? Is it under threat?

Why not share it with other members. Send details to the editor. See back page for details.



In Newsletter Issue 29 of January 2011, Gordon Darlington remarked on an unidentified plant seen at our visit to Foxhill Arboretum last Autumn.

A suggestion comes from the Horticulture Department at Reaseheath College – *Hippophae rhamnoides*, the sea buckthorn.

Others say the fruits should be more orange than red if it is sea buckthorn.

If you have any other suggestion, write to or email Joy Uings, Newsletter editor at the address on back page.

CGT – the Arley connection gathers strength

Arley Hall and Gardens have played a central role in Cheshire Gardens Trust's success. It was there the fledgling steering committee had its first meeting. It played host to the Trust's launch in 2004. It is where the Council of Management meets and it was at Arley that this year's AGM and Spring Lecture was held. In June, the Trust will play a role in the Arley Garden Festival.

The Arley Garden Festival 2011 will be held on Saturday and Sunday, 25-26 June. In addition to the usual draws – floral marquee, plant nurseries, gardeners' questions, garden tours, etc. there will be two Cheshire Gardens Trust attractions.

The first will be a display garden, with a design based on the Caldwell Nurseries logo. Although it was anticipated that this could be provided without dipping into the Trust's funds, this has not been possible.



CGT members enjoy a tour of Arley Gardens before the AGM. Photo courtesy Kath Gee

A total cost of £200 is expected. Members attending the AGM and Spring Lecture very

generously donated £100.26 towards this sum. Any other members wishing to add to this, should send their donation to the Treasurer at 26 Sandford Road, Sale, M33 2PS.

And – of course – everyone should come along to view the finished garden.

The second attraction is a Photographic Competition.

We are looking for photographs representing Gardens in Cheshire open to the public that you have taken in 2011.

There are two categories – under-16 and over-16. Prizes include a family season ticket to Arley, a family day out at Stockley Farm, free membership of the Cheshire Gardens Trust and more

The entry fee is £5 for over-16s and £2 for under-16s and entrants are limited to one photograph per person.

Photographs should be submitted as a 10"x8" print.

Original, un-enhanced photographs only please – your photograph should represent the scene as you saw it.

The closing date for entries is Monday 6 June 2011. You can download an application form from the Arley Gardens website

(www.arleyhallandgardens.com/pdf/Photographic%20Competition.pdf) or contact Tina Theis (0161 442 0657)

For a (slightly) more prestigious photographic competition, why not enter the International Garden Photographer of the Year. There is a new category for 2011, called 'Breathing Spaces'. Judges will be looking for photographs which capture the spirit of outdoor places – whether those are gardens or countryside landscapes. The category will be a celebration of the natural world as a place for people to relax, have fun and find inspiration.

More information is available at www.igpoty.com. Access to a computer is essential as entry is on-line only. In addition to *Breathing Spaces*, there are categories *The Beauty of Plants*; *Beautiful Gardens*; *Wildlife Havens*; *Fragile Landscapes*; *Trees, woods and forests*; *The Bountiful Earth*; *Greening the City*; and *4 Seasons*. So why not get snapping now – or visit the website to see some stunning photos from previous competitions.

Ann Brooks' book '[A Veritable Eden](#) The Manchester Botanic Garden: A History' was launched at the Portico Library on 24 March. A book signing followed a reading.

This is a beautifully produced book, easy to read, loads of illustrations, fascinating by-ways and plenty of references for the scholar.

Ask at your local bookshop or available on Amazon at discounted prices.



An Historic Environment Research Conference is to be held in Cambridge on 21 May. Entitled *Designing with Water*, it includes lectures on the use of water in 16th, 17th and 18th century gardens, and on gardens in Staffordshire and Hertfordshire. Cost is £39. Details from Dr. Susan Oosthuizen, Historic Environment Research Conferences, c/o McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, Department of Archaeology, University of Cambridge, Downing Street, Cambridge, CB2 3ER. e-mail: smo23@cam.ac.uk; tel: (office hours only) 0758 3151685



Spring has definitely sprung this year, and with late April temperatures reminiscent of June, it is hoped that bluebells will survive the heat to be around throughout May.

Combermere Abbey will be holding a 2-mile bluebell walk on Sunday 15 May (1 p.m. to 5 p.m., but be there for 4 at the latest).

Enjoy the ancient bluebell woods, and leave time to visit the restored Walled Gardens with its fruit tree maze. Adults £5, Children under 15 £2, free for babies in carriers, but not suitable for pushchairs etc.

Arley Gardens will be hosting bluebell walks on 1 & 2 May and 7 & 8 May in an area not usually open to the public. But for this you need to book. Details on their web-sites.

If the prolonged frost during the winter has left you with gaps in your borders, or you are just looking for something new and unusual, why not subscribe to the Plant Hunters Fairs newsletters to get all the info about dates and locations.

To make sure you never miss an event they will even e-mail you a reminder. To subscribe, visit www.planthuntersfairs.co.uk. Or follow them on Twitter @plantfairs.

Upcoming Fairs are at Adlington Hall on 29 May and Stonyford Cottage Gardens on 30 May.

This year's AGT Conference is being hosted by Oxfordshire Gardens Trust and will be held 2-4 September. Based at Worcester College in the heart of Oxford, visits will be to Blenheim, Heythrop, Rousham and Shotover.

Full residential cost is £360. Details and booking form can be found on the AGT website – www.gardenstrusts.org.uk (along with details of other Gardens Trusts' events) or Oxfordshire GT's website – www.ogt.org.uk. Or telephone the conference organiser on 01608 811818.

The Didsbury Open Gardens charity event will take place on Sunday, 12 June. This will be the fourth year for this special community event which to date has raised more than £20,000 for St Ann's Hospice and other charities and attracted over 1,000 visitors last year.

This year money raised will go St Ann's Hospice and the organisers are hoping to exceed the £25,000 target.

Each year new gardens are expected to open alongside favourites from the previous year. To add to the enjoyment there are plans to involve local school children in making and exhibiting mosaics in one of the gardens. There is live music to enjoy, sculpture exhibitions, cream teas and some wonderful garden designs and planting schemes to explore.

This is an afternoon not to be missed so remember to put the date in the calendar and look out for more details in early May in local shops and the Didsbury library or visit the web site for updates and news at www.didsburyopengardens.org.

The Horse Chestnut is under attack on two fronts. The Leaf Miner caterpillar feeds within the leaves, leaving tunnels on the upper surface and causing early leaf fall. It can be best treated by a single soil drench of the product Admire. Bleeding Canker/Root Rot is a bacterial disease. Branches and trunks start oozing a red or black tarry substance, usually developing from ground level upwards. It is particularly serious in mature trees as it can make branches brittle and liable to drop. Good results have been achieved using a Phosphite based treatment.

Look out for any Horse Chestnuts in your garden or vicinity which are affected and get professional assistance.

Maria found this link from Herefordshire whilst surfing the net. She thought "what a great idea" and that other CGT members might find it of interest – www.yearintheorchard.org. Let us know of your favourite sites.

For those who don't mind a longer journey to find something new in the way of gardens, why not visit Lowther Castle & Gardens at Penrith in Cumbria, where a restoration project is on-going with funding from the soon-to-be-defunct NWDA. You will find castle ruins, a late 17th-century garden layout, with some areas restored, some abandoned and some new. It is also home to red squirrels, bats, buzzards and ravens. The gardens opened in April for the first time in 70 years.

If you go, take some photos and share your experience with other members. www.lowthercastle.org.