



Draft MINUTES 20th Annual General

Held on Wednesday 8th May 2025 at 3.00pm
at Whitby Park, in Theatre Porto,
Stanney Lane, Ellesmere Port CH65 6QY

The papers for this meeting had been circulated to Members by email or post, as required. These papers comprised the AGM Notice & Agenda, the Minutes of the 19th AGM and the Directors' & Trustees' Report and Financial Statement for the year ended 31st January 2025.

Pre-Meeting Talk on Whitby Park and Thomas Hayton Mawson

Prior to the meeting, Barbara Moth, a member of CGT'S Planning and Research & Recording Groups, explained how the venue choice for the AGM was prompted by a recently completed research report on Whitby Park which is thought to be Thomas Mawson's last design. Mawson (1861-1933) was a very significant landscape designer working in the UK, the Hague, USA and Canada. Many of his designs, such as Grappenhall Hall, have either been lost or have declined. In Cheshire both Thornton Manor (for Lord Leverhulme) and Burton Manor are currently on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register.

Whitby Hall was built in the style of Pugin in the 1860's and the grounds still contain lines of oaks and hawthorns pre-dating the public park. The Hall was bought by Ellesmere Port UDC in 1931 and in 1933 Mawson's plans for a public park were accepted but deferred for fundraising and later by WWII. Details are in the Council's Minutes and Mawson's original report in his archives, including a signed plan. Post war, elements of the design were gradually constructed, but not the grand approach. However, it is commendable that the Council has since continued to respect Mawson's intentions and a Heritage Lottery grant was obtained in 1997 to construct the enhanced entrance route. A comment from the floor noted that Mawson's axis within the park have been extended into the layout of surrounding housing offering views of the park.

Our AGM venue within the park, Theatre Porto which opened in 2022, attests to Ellesmere Port Council's continuing aim to value and enhance this appreciated public park. Unfortunately this is not always the case and Barbara drew the meeting's attention to Grade II* Grosvenor Park by Edwards Kemp in Chester, where long term permission has been granted for a giant observation wheel. And most recently, the locally significant Verdin Park, Northwich is at risk from a proposal for permanent hospital car parking., examples of Councils looking to public parks for revenue. Many designed landscapes are exposed to ill-advised proposals and, as the Government is currently in consultation on whether to remove the Gardens Trust as a statutory consultee for registered sites. it was stressed to members that this would reduce the weight of the planning responses from County Gardens Trust and expose these sites still further.

An article on Mawson by Julia Whitfield (another R&R Group member) can be found in Newsletter no 78 April 2023 and the Group's full report on Whitby Park can be downloaded from the Parks & Gardens/Public Parks tab on CGT's Website. <https://www.cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk/default.asp?Cheshires-Public-Parks>

CGT AGM MEETING

1.0 Welcome and Introduction

On behalf of the Council of Management, David Cash welcomed all members and their guests and thanked Barbara for her introduction to Thomas Mawson and the development of Whitby Park. The risks to landscapes in Cheshire cannot be underestimated and the work of the Research & Recording Group has been significant in supporting CGT'S responses on important planning applications.

2.0 Attendance and Apologies

2.1 Twenty five members and guests were in attendance.

The total membership at April 2025 was 138, down from 152 in April 2024.

2.2 Apologies had been received from twenty five members

3.0 Minutes of the 19th AGM held at Olympia, Arley Hall on 22nd May 2024

3.1 The Minutes had been circulated by email or by post prior to 17th April 2025.

No amendments to the minutes were required.

The Minutes were duly proposed as an accurate record of the meeting by Margaret Blowey, seconded by Barbara Moth and accepted by the meeting.

4.0 Matters Arising No matters arising were raised.

5.0 Annual Report – Key Points

5.1 David Cash reminded members that Barbara Moth had been presented with the Gardens Trust Volunteer of the Year Award at their Volunteer Celebration held at Sheffield Botanical Gardens in July 2024. Our thanks and proud congratulations to Barbara.

David also offered grateful thanks to Crispin Spencer for his invaluable contributions as Membership Secretary over eight years. He was pleased to announce that Martin Slack would be running Membership, which will sit well as part of his role as Treasurer.

David warmly thanked the Events Group for organising the AGM and all members of the individual Groups for their contributions throughout the year.

5.2 Events Group

Margaret Blowey thanked Jackie Cawte, Gordon Darlington, Janet Horne, Julia Whitfield and Carolyn Yardley for their ideas and support over the past year. All events have been well attended, especially the talks by Marcus Chilton Jones and Emma Hill. Members of neighbouring Gardens Trusts occasionally join us for events. The team is already planning future events which will include a visit to Queens Park, Crewe.

Suggestions for future events are always welcome. Please contact team members or email ideas to this address:-

events@cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk

5.3 Research & Recording Group

In addition to the references in her pre-meeting presentation, Barbara Moth pointed out that the group was continuing research under difficult circumstances due to the temporary closure of the Cheshire Archives & Local Studies office, prior to reopening in Chester with a second office in Crewe. In the meantime, it was proposed to focus on producing more short reports. Another future aim for the Group is to use their reports

to pressure planners to add more of the important non-designated sites to Cheshire's Local Lists. Approximately 400 sites in Cheshire have been identified of which, 200 have been researched. Recently CGT has been asked by Styal Parish Council to help identify non-designated sites for inclusion in the Styal Neighbourhood Plan.

New researchers are always welcome and CGT Members were invited to join the R&R Group on site at South Park, Macclesfield for their next meeting on 21.05.25 for a taster of the research role.

research@cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk

5.4 ***Planning & Conservation Group***

The uncertain future of the Gardens Trust as statutory planning consultee, as mentioned in Barbara Moth's address, and the immanent restructure of Cheshire Councils, mean that even more vigilance is required on planning applications affecting designed landscapes. Volunteers were always required to assist with planning issues and Trust members were urged to be observant in their own areas and pass on concerns to the group. The sale of historic properties continues to rise, the most recent on the market being Wicksted Hall, Whitchurch.

planning@cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk

5.5 ***Newsletter***

As mentioned by editor, Sue Eldridge, in her report, her last Newsletter will be January 2026. Members were asked to urgently consider taking on this role, individually or as part of a Newsletter group. A handover period would be arranged with Sue to simplify the process so if members can help in any way, please contact Sue at the address below or any Council of Management member directly at info@cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk

Newsletter articles are still required, including volunteers to write Events reports. All ideas are welcome and Sue can be contacted directly or via this email address:-

newsletter@cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk

The Trust's grateful thanks were offered to Sue, to proof-reader and printer Freyda Taylor and to Gwyneth Owen for online circulation.

5.6 ***Looking Forward***

David Cash stated that the immediate and urgent concern relating to CGT's future was the membership of the Council of Management due to the resignation of himself, Margaret Blowey, Gordon Darlington and Peter Young. Sue Bartlett and Martin Slack would continue their three-year membership and he was very pleased to announce that Jackie Cawte had generously offered her services. As a member of the Events and Research & Recording Groups, Jackie's contributions to CoM would be most welcome.

The required CoM membership had been reduced to four. David emphasised that the number of meetings would be streamlined to 3 to 4 per year, at a venue(s) convenient to members. Meetings on Zoom could also be arranged if necessary. He asked members present to consider offering themselves for election to ensure the continuation of Cheshire Gardens Trust.

6.0 Financial Review and Accounts

- 6.1 Martin Slack drew the attention of the meeting to the Financial Review and Statements from page 8 of the Annual Report. Events were the largest expenditure and there had been no change in membership fees. Although income increased over the year with a small profit of £25, income from subscriptions fell. Membership subscriptions have not been raised and continue to broadly cover running costs. Events constituted the largest expenditure, including the celebratory AGM in CGT's 20th year held at Arley Hall.
- 6.2 However, the Trust still carries £16,000 of assets which, as a charity, is not acceptable. Various ways to use these assets were still under consideration. John Edmondson commented from the floor that the offer of travel bursaries to PhD students has proved successful in Wales. Travel bursaries had been offered to students studying horticulture but this had been unsuccessful for various reasons. It was thought that offering bursaries to students at a higher academic level could be more successful. John was thanked for his suggestion.
- 6.3 There were no questions from the floor and Martin was thanked for his valuable contribution as Treasurer.

7.0 Elections to the Council of Management

- 7.1 Two volunteers from the floor were forthcoming; Jackie Cawte, member of the Events and Research & Recording Groups and new CGT member, Alison Moore. Sue Bartlett and Martin Slack were both able to continue to stand and this was approved by the meeting. All were thanked for offering to serve on CoM.
- 7.2 The meeting was told that anyone can attend Council meetings to contribute on particular topics or just to find out how the meetings work. There are approximately four meetings per year, face to face or occasionally via zoom. Members can find out when and where meetings are held by checking the calendar on the website or by contacting current CoM members.

8.0 Any Other Business

- 8.1 Peter Young spoke from the floor on the subject of recruitment, particularly of younger members. He stressed the importance of advertising in the press and via social media and also suggested taking advantage of our contacts with head gardeners through Sue Eldridge's interviews for the Newsletter.
Barbara Wright also proposed that more use should be made of circulating CGT leaflets via libraries and colleges, etc and displaying posters in various venues to reach a wider group of people. Peter and Barbara were thanked for their useful comments which would certainly be discussed at CoM.
- 8.2 Gordon Darlington addressed the meeting with his personal thoughts about how difficult he found standing down from Council of Management after eight years. On behalf of CoM members and everyone he thanked David Cash for being a superb 'stand in' Chair.

11.0 Thanks

No further business was raised so David Cash closed the meeting at 4.00pm with thanks to all members and their guests for their attendance and contributions.