



CHESHIRE  
GARDENS TRUST

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# Newsletter

[www.cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk](http://www.cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk)

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- \* Ernest Wilson, plant hunter extraordinaire
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## Some future events:

- \* Visit to Birkenhead Park – 30<sup>th</sup> April
- \* AGM at Arley – 16<sup>th</sup> May – new venue
- \* Talk on roses at Fryer's - 19<sup>th</sup> June
- \* Lane End Cottage Gardens– 17<sup>th</sup> July
- \* Ashton Grange - August



## A distant view of some American Gardens

In early January, The Friends Meeting House in Chester was the starting point for a thoroughly enjoyable morning in the company of Ed Bennis, CGT Chair. Ed, who originates from the East coast of America, took us on a virtual tour of some American gardens – a broad sweep starting with the 17<sup>th</sup> Century and ending in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It was very much a personal journey focusing on gardens that influenced him and, as he said himself, it became a trip down memory lane.

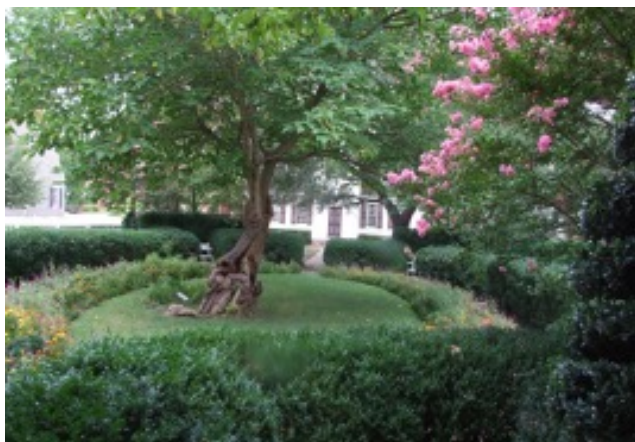
Ed's interest in gardens and landscape was piqued at an early age. He was fascinated by a neighbouring Palladian-style villa – Swan House - near to where he grew up in Atlanta. Its symmetrically laid-out grounds, as well as its party-loving original owners, held a fascination for him. Initially unsure about what to study at the University of Georgia, Ed decided on Landscape Architecture – and the rest, as they say, is history! As part of the course, the students studied plants

in the adjacent Founders memorial garden (see front cover) which became the first garden club in America. A charming, serpentine garden (see below) featuring rhododendrons, azaleas and many of the evergreens popular in this part of the country. A part of the country that is very hot – so, understandably, cool, green spaces are much in demand. Less understandable is the tendency to spray lawns an artificial green colour rather than accept the more natural beige typical of a hot summer!



Ed's first planting was at the William Morris House in Atlanta, working with landscape contractors during the holidays – where he says he learnt more than he did at college – at least in the practical sense. Clearly, it must have been a very successful planting as it featured in the magazine *Better Homes & Gardens*.

Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia might be a tourist hot-spot – a romantic, picture-perfect living-history museum – but it comes highly recommended by Ed. Gardens there have been restored in an authentic and accurate Colonial Revival style – white picket fences, orchards and kitchen gardens all bring a beautiful sense of bucolic charm.



*Orlando Jones garden Williamsburg, described as colonial revival*

Our next stop was Middleton Place in South Carolina, thought to be America's oldest landscaped gardens. Despite following a grand classic style typical of European gardens, the

Middletons brought in plenty of new and innovative ideas – experimental rice plantations, imported water buffalo, the first camellias grown in the US and the introduction of azaleas and other exotic Asian plants.

As well as being President of the United States and writing the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson somehow found time to design and build Monticello. Influenced by Palladio, the house and gardens are now a Unesco World heritage site. Vegetables, fruit, flowers and trees especially feature in the gardens. Jefferson strategically set stones around the place from where one could sit and admire views of the house.



We all know that Frederick Law Olmsted gained inspiration for Central Park when he visited our very own Birkenhead Park. He was also involved with the grand designs for the Vanderbilt's Marble House in Newport, RI – also known as the cottages. The works required 60 stonemasons, a railway line to carry materials and included vineyards, dairies and a formal French-style axis in the grounds – some cottage! Druid Hills (see above) was also designed by Olmsted. A 45-acre park, 2 miles in length it comprised various segments representing different styles – woodland, open spaces, parkland – another example of Olmsted utilising 'English' influence in his style.



*Bonnet House*

In quick succession, we visited Louis Comfort Tiffany's Art Nouveau home (Laurelton Hall), sadly

destroyed by fire in the 1950s; Bonnet House (page 2) where some 30-40 rescued monkeys enjoyed the exotic, tropical gardens; and Longwood gardens. This latter garden was originally a farm owned by Quakers and is now a major horticultural research institute. It also boasts some lovely gardens, one featuring a 600 foot-long flower border – unusual in the US – and another has water features based on the Villa Gamberaia. UK designer Peter Shephard designed the lily pond garden (below).



On to more recent times and a fascinating insight into the work of designers Eckbo, Kiley and Rose. Students at Harvard in the 1930s, they tried to modernise landscape and garden design, which at that time was lagging behind architecture as a discipline. Their intention was to fuse architecture and landscape into a single art form. Between them they were responsible for many modern landscapes and gardens including the Jefferson Memorial Park and New York's Lincoln Centre. Ed described Eckbo as the one who went on to become the 'big garden designer'; Kiley as 'eccentric' and Rose as a 'nutcase' – although the latter's home garden is particularly good.



Recent renovations to MoMa's (Museum of Modern Art – see above) Sculpture Garden in New York brought us into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. A difficult project, it involved removing the existing trees by helicopter and relocating them to

Brooklyn Botanic Garden. The new garden has a limited palate of plants, smooth lines and simple chairs. Sadly, the original trees all died and had to be replaced – but the new ones look as though they've always been there!

The last stop on our American tour found us back in Atlanta at the Botanical Garden (see below). Ed admitted to not being a fan of botanic gardens – generally 'boring, tedious and not well-managed'. Atlanta's is an exception to the rule – it has raised walkways, is fun and beautifully designed with plants, rather than a ragbag of botanical collections.



And last but not least, Ed allowed us glimpses of his own delightful garden in Cheadle – see below. bringing that distant view of America a bit closer to home. It was a delightful couple of hours spent in Ed's company, which made us all want to book tickets to America immediately. Thank you Ed.



Ed Bennis is the Chair of CGT and has been involved in the Trust from the beginning. A landscape architect with an MA in Historic Conservation, he was Head of Landscape Architecture at Manchester Metropolitan University. Research into historic parks and gardens resulted in nearly 20 years' involvement in EU projects related to gardens and tourism.

**Tina Theis**  
**Photos Ed Bennis**

## James Russell – 20<sup>th</sup> Century garden designer



On the 9<sup>th</sup> February 2019 forty Cheshire Gardens Trust members and guests attended a talk by Emma Hill at St Peter's Rooms in Prestbury. Emma has done a huge amount of research on James Russell, 20<sup>th</sup> century garden designer and used it for the basis of her dissertation for her Masters of Horticulture qualification.

She started off by giving a brief description of her own career. She is currently head gardener at Hare Hill and Little Moreton Hall. She started her career at Oxburgh Hall in Norfolk (below), with its Victorian parterres and herbaceous borders. She moved to Dunham Massey where she was assistant head gardener, helping with the development of the winter garden.



She has been working at Hare Hill for 8 years. When she arrived she realised there were a lot of problems. The gardens were very wet and shady and there were symptoms of the *Phytophthora* disease affecting the rhododendrons, signature Hare Hill shrubs. Dealing with this involved removing a large amount of rhododendrons and

everything within 2 metres around them. With the aid of the garden team she has also been busy restoring paths, sorting out the culverts and dredging the ponds with the aid of heavy horses. The garden is now being reinstated as James Russell intended it, including the white herbaceous borders in the walled garden and the signature *Rhododendron* planting in various parts of the garden.



*View from the garden at Hare Hill to rhododendrons*

When Emma started looking at what could be done in the garden she realised that James Russell could be important and wanted to find a context, so she explored garden history, from the 11<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, looking at its relevance for the current day. Garden design from the 1950s, 60s and 70s is at the greatest risk of being lost. All these periods are relevant to garden design today and Emma had to think carefully about what should be retained at Hare Hill.

Emma then went on to talk about **James Russell** (1920 – 1996). He was born into a military family and was educated at Eton. He was due to study botany at Cambridge University, but the war intervened. He joined the forces but was invalided out in 1942. After WW2 he revived Sunningdale Nursery which was owned by his father. He spent 7-8 years working at the nursery and employed Graham Stuart Thomas who was a botanist and expert on roses. James Russell's main interests were rhododendrons, magnolias, hydrangeas and tree peonies.

He started his first garden design commission in 1950 at Seaton Delaval (see page 5), Northumberland, which was owned by Lord Hastings. Russell was at Eton with his son Edward Astley. Between them, they spent the equivalent of £33,000 on plants alone. All plants were bought from Sunningdale Nursery. There was a lot of discussion about where the plants should be sourced. It was suggested that the box for the parterre should be purchased from the north of the country and that *Ilex* (holly) could not be



*Seaton Delaval*

grown north of the river Trent. The *Ilex* was planted and still grows to this day! Emma discussed the correspondence between James Russell and Lord Hastings, giving us a fascinating insight into the design process and the difficulties of dealing with owners. In 2007 Seaton Delaval (above) was given to the National Trust and it opened to the public in 2010.

Russell worked on 450 gardens during his working life. As part of Emma's research she explored the archive on his work in York. This included links with Cheshire gardens as follows:

Arley Hall 1964 – 1966

Capesthorpe 1955 – 1970

Cholmondeley 1960 – 1985

Rode Hall 1962 – 1966



*Pyrus salicifolia at Eaton Hall*

Eaton Hall 1964 – 1990

Hare Hill 1960 – 1977

At Eaton Hall, Russell worked on the garden design, with the wives of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Dukes, before Arabella Lennox Boyd was involved in redeveloping the gardens, and some of his signature planting can still be seen. At Capesthorpe, Emma described how a very relaxed visit from Russell could lead to the immediate submission of a bill.

In 1968 Russell was invited to move to Castle Howard to completely remodel the garden. He sold Sunningdale Nursery and moved, with his sister and all his plants, to Castle Howard. Russell was to spend the last twenty years of his life there, developing the rose garden and establishing the Yorkshire arboretum with plants from the Sunningdale nursery. Emma suggested a visit to Castle Howard in May to see the rhododendrons.



If anyone is interested in viewing James Russell's files, they are in the archives at the Borthwick Institute at York University <https://borthcat.york.ac.uk>. If you contact them first, they will get them out for you.

Thank you to Emma Hill for an interesting, informative and enthusiastic talk.

**Carolyn Yardley**  
**Photos Emma Hill**

## The National Garden Scheme, a national treasure



We can sometimes take the National Garden Scheme (NGS) for granted, providing as it does such a wealth of gardens to visit over the summer. But there is a more serious purpose behind it. I was inspired to delve a little deeper by a talk at Reaseheath College given by John Weston who, with his wife Susan, is County Coordinator for the NGS scheme in Staffordshire and West Midlands. They open their own garden for NGS – Birch Trees in Eccleshall (see page 6).

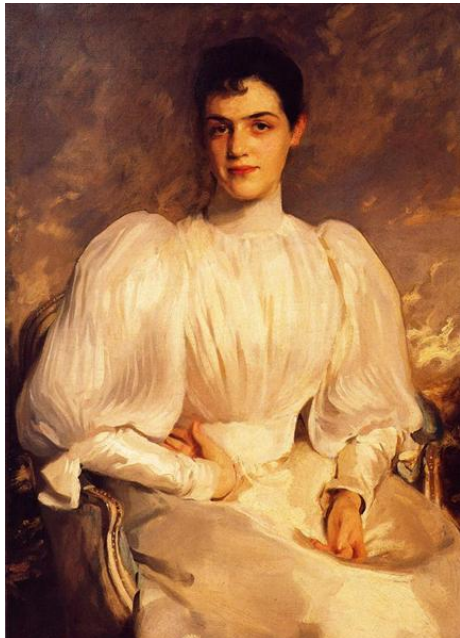
The NGS story began in 1859 when William Rathbone's wife was terminally ill. William employed Mary Robinson to nurse her at



*John and Susan Weston's garden Birch Trese*

home. After his wife's death he then employed Mary to work with people in Liverpool who could not afford to pay for nursing, looking after them at home. He then worked with Florence Nightingale to develop the service which would become district nursing. 1887 was Queen Victoria's Jubilee and a grant was given to establish Queen Victoria's Jubilee Institute for Nursing, later the Queen's Nursing Institute (QNI), still going today. This established training for district nurses and became their professional body.

Elsie Wragg (below) came from a very philanthropic family and became a member of the QNI Council. Following the death of Queen



*portrait of Elsie Wragg, John Singer Sargent*

Alexandra a memorial fund for district nurses was set up and Elsie Wragg suggested that private gardens should be opened to raise funds. Many grand houses and gardens volunteered and the National Garden Scheme opened in 1927 with over 600 gardens, all listed in Country Life magazine. 164,000 people attended, paying a shilling each and raising over £8,000. Gardens included Sandringham, Bleinheim Palace and

Sissinghurst. In Staffordshire gardens included Maer Hall, home of Josiah Wedgwood II, and Shugborough Hall (now National Trust) – see below, and in Cheshire Arley Hall and Gardens was one of the first to open. In the early days many of the houses and gardens were very grand; now they are mainly a lot more modest.



The Queens Nursing Institute formed a sub-committee led by Elsie Wragg and recruited volunteer county organisers. This structure lasted for fifty years. By 1932 there were too many gardens for listing in a magazine so the first National Garden Scheme Guide was published, listing over 1000 gardens. During the war the emphasis was on Dig for Victory, growing food for the nation, so the scheme more or less closed. After the war the National Trust played an increasing role, opening estates which owners had surrendered to the Exchequer. The National Health Service was launched in 1948 and took on much of the responsibility for district nursing. But QNI continued to fund training and support for retired nurses.

In 1949 the NGS guide became The Yellow Book and introduced the distinctive yellow colour for publicity. In 1980 NGS became independent from QNI enabling it to support a wider range of medical and other charities. In 2018 NGS donated an amazing £3.1 million to nursing and health charities, such as Macmillan Cancer Support, Marie Curie, Maggie's, Parkinsons UK, MS Society and Perennial, the Gardeners' Royal Benevolent Society. In 1988 NGS gave nearly £85,000 to the National Trust to help repair the damage and replant trees after the hurricane of 1987.

The National Garden Scheme now opens 3,800 gardens, with 600 new or returning gardens each year. All are listed on the website. None of this would be possible, of course, without the county teams. The Cheshire and Wirral group is coordinated by County Organiser Janet Bashforth. In 2018 they raised just over £127,000 for charity, a fantastic achievement. It has 8 new gardens in

2019, including Combermere Abbey. Others include:

**The MacIntyre New Routes Orchard and Garden** in Warrington (13<sup>th</sup> July 11am-3pm) This is a community garden which employs people with disabilities and special needs. It has many different areas including an orchard and herb bed.

**Wirral St John's Hospice**, Higher Bebington (29<sup>th</sup>/30<sup>th</sup> June 11.30am-4.30pm) is a garden designed and maintained by the patients and local brownies. It has a variety of borders and a wild flower area.

**Hall Lane Farm**, Daresbury (19<sup>th</sup> May 1-5pm) is a garden originally designed by Arabella Lennox Boyd.



**Ashton Grange** (above) near Chester (30<sup>th</sup> June 2-5pm) an extensive garden with wildflower meadow, woodland, and extensive borders and shrubbery.

2002 was the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year for NGS. Juliet Hill a previous organiser of the Cheshire group remarks that this cheered garden owners up after the disappointment caused by foot and mouth disease. Many of the gardens open that year are open again in 2019, such as Bolesworth Castle, Tatton Park, Poulton Hall, Arley, Hill Top Avenue,

Bluebell Cottage.

To the south, in Staffordshire, two very familiar gardens to us are the **Dorothy Clive Garden** (open for NGS on 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> October 10am - 4pm) and **Trentham Gardens** (open Weds 12<sup>th</sup> June 5.30-7.30), with a tour from one of the garden team). Other nearby gardens are:

**Brooklyn** (30<sup>th</sup> June 12-5pm). A cottage garden in the picturesque old village of Endon, near Stoke-on-Trent, with roses, geraniums and astrantia.

**High Trees** Longton Park near Stoke-on-Trent. (5<sup>th</sup> June 1-4pm). A delightful, secluded inspirational garden with intensively planted mixed herbaceous borders and bulbs in spring.

**The Old Dairy House, Trentham** (see below) (26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> May, 12 noon - 4.30pm). Grade II listed house (not open) designed by Sir Charles Barry, with 2 acre garden in parkland setting.



There are plenty more gardens to find in the local NGS booklets and online <https://www.ngs.org.uk>

With grateful thanks for information and photos to John and Susan Weston, Janet Bashworth and Juliet Hill.

**Sue Eldridge**

## Plant hunter extraordinaire: the fascinating story of Ernest 'Chinese' Wilson



Our annual Spring Lecture has become something of an institution and our Events Team did not let us down this year, maintaining the excellence with a talk from Simon Gulliver.

Simon has had a fascinating career encompassing both computing and horticulture, but his interest in Ernest Wilson began during his first term at Pershore College. There Roy Lancaster gave a talk about the Ernest Wilson Memorial Garden in Chipping Campden – where Wilson was born in 1876.

Not that he stayed there long. His railway signalman father moved the family to Birmingham by the time young Ernest was 5. Perhaps Ernest was introduced to horticulture by his father who, later in his life, is recorded in the census as a Florist.

By the age of 15 Ernest was working as a gardener and attending evening classes to study botany. He worked for a while at Hewitt's nursery outside Birmingham (as in *Thalictrum delavayi* 'Hewitt's Double') where he did very well – leaving with an outstanding reference. An extant wages book shows that he earned 2s 6d a day rising to 3s 6d as he was promoted.



Ernest Wilson (centre) at Birmingham Botanical Gardens, photo Roy Biggs

His next job was at Birmingham Botanical Gardens which at that time were run by William Bradley Latham. It couldn't be better for the young and ambitious Wilson. Latham had a vast knowledge of plants: he had worked at Kew, the Jardin des Plantes in Paris and at Chatsworth; he was keen on orchids and had even succeeded in his effort to hybridise a tree fern – an almost impossible feat.

Under Latham's guidance, Wilson continued to move quickly in his career. He was there for three and a half years and before leaving in 1897 he had won both the Queen's Award for Botany and the W. J. Morley Prize for Botany. It is amazing to realize that he had done all this before the age of 21.

Leaving Birmingham, he went to work at Kew, staying there for about a year before taking a junior fulltime position as botanist. His energy and enthusiasm for his work meant that his network included some of the greatest horticulturists and botanists of the day and he was in the perfect position to be chosen for a new venture.

Plant hunting had been going on for hundreds of years. Russia, America, Australia and South Africa were all important sources of new plants, but at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century China was still mostly unexplored by botanists. Some plants had made their way out, but others were known only by

repute. One such was the Dove Tree (aka Handkerchief Tree) *Davidia involucrata*– see below. Augustine Henry (1857-1930) had been one of only a few western botanists working in China, sending back to Kew thousands of specimens. But he was worried. The Chinese were cutting down forests to make charcoal and Henry was concerned that plants would be lost, so he sent back a plea for help.

A triumvirate of Sir William Thiselton-Dyer (Director of Kew Gardens), Charles Sprague Sargent (botanist and director of Harvard's Arnold Arboretum) and Harry Veitch of James Veitch & Son nursery were involved in Wilson's first trip to China. The Veitch family had introduced many plants collected by an army of plant hunters. In 1899 Ernest Wilson was chosen to go plant-hunting in China. He was only 23.

Veitch had plenty of advice for the young man, including to travel in a sedan-chair rather than on foot to make sure he was seen as an important person. He also wanted to be sure Wilson understood the nursery's requirements, which was to bring back plants for commercial use.



*Davidia involucrata* (Dove tree) at Arley Hall and Gardens

The Dove Tree was top of the list for everyone and Wilson was led to where one was known to be, only to find it had been felled to build a cabin. 'I didn't sleep well that night' he re-called with typical British understatement and sang-froid.

Nevertheless, seeds of the Dove Tree were found along with specimens of many other plants. This first of Wilson's visits to China resulted in thousands of specimens and photographs. He came back with *Acer griseum*, the Chinese Gooseberry (Kiwi fruit), *Liriodendron chinense* and *Aconitum carmichaeli* among many others. Unfortunately, Veitch decided the Dove Tree was not going to be a commercial success as gardeners were not going to wait the thirty years it took for it to flower!

Arriving back in England in 1902, Wilson took time





*Acer griseum*

out to get married, but the following year he set out on his second trip (1903-1905), coming back with *Meconopsis integrifolia*; *Acer henryi*; *Lilium sargentiae*; *Rosa moyesii*; *Berberis wilsoniae*; *Viburnum davidii*; *Primula pulverulenta* (see below); *Cypripedium flavum* and *Cypripedium tibeticum*.



*Primula pulverulenta* at Bodnant

Back in the UK, he again turned his attention to family matters and daughter Muriel Primrose was born in 1906. The same year Hortus Veitchii was published and in the five pages of text devoted to Wilson's travels in China it was recorded that the two visits resulted in the following being sent to Veitch & Sons:

*"... some 25,000 dried specimens, representing some 5,000 species ... seeds of 1,800 species, some 30,000 bulbs of new and rare species of Lilium, and living roots and rhizomes of various herbs and shrubs"*

Sargent, in America, wanted Wilson to travel to China again. But Wilson had learned a thing or two and wanted to make sure it was financially worth his while. His payment for his third trip was four times the sum he had previously received. And so, off he went again. His third expedition

(1907-1909) resulted in the introduction of *Cornus kousa chinensis* (below); *Magnolia sieboldii*; *Ceratostigma willmottianum* and *Sorbus sargentiana*. One new species was named for Wilson – *Sinowilsonia henryi* – a plant related to the Witch Hazel, though less interesting. He travelled home on the Trans-Siberian Railway – a dreadful journey.



A fourth expedition (1910-1911) provided the world with the Regal Lily (*Lilium regale*) and Wilson with a near-death experience. He was caught in a landslide after collecting the lily and his leg was broken in two places – he was lucky not to lose it, but it resulted in one leg shorter than the other giving him his "lily limp", which also kept him out of the First World War.

Once home he catalogued his collections in *Plantae Wilsonianae*, published by the Arnold Arboretum and edited by Sargent. Then he was off again – this time to Japan (1914-1915). Two years later (1917-1919) the destinations were Japan, Korea and Taiwan and for once he took his long-suffering wife and daughter with him. There followed a 2-year tour of Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand and in 1921 he went to Africa: though it is China for which he will be forever remembered.

Like other plant hunters, he died before his time, though unlike others, not while he was in the field. Aged 54, he and his wife were killed in a car accident in Boston, USA. However, he wanted to be buried on British territory and so his body was taken to Mount Royal Cemetery in Canada, a place he had helped design.

If you want to learn more, Hortus Veitchii and *Plantae Wilsonianae* can both be found on the internet. *Sinowilsonia henryi* can be purchased from Burncoose Nurseries and also Larch Cottage Nurseries in Cumbria. With so many plants introduced by Wilson, we can each have our own patch of garden dedicated to him. How many of his introductions do you already have?

**Joy Uings**

**Photos Roy Biggs, Sue Eldridge, internet public domain**

# Inspiration and Planning at Bramham Park

Bramham Park, between Leeds and Wetherby, is one of those places passed on the A1 but never visited so the opportunity to combine a Gardens Trust training day (12<sup>th</sup> March 2019) with a tour was too good to miss. Arriving to a warm welcome we gathered in a large salon with burning log fires overlooking the garden.



*Looking at the cascade*

David Lambert, former Garden History Society Conservation Officer, set the scene describing landscape as a national property in which everyone has an interest and saying that “We forget at our peril that landscape is not a given”. He recounted early campaigns to save places like Petworth Park, recent losses including Frederick Gibberd’s water garden in Harlow and Silvia Crowe’s landscape at the Commonwealth Institute, and the ‘scale of wrongheadedness’ affecting current cases such as the proposed Holocaust Memorial in Victoria Park Gardens in Westminster, a proposal that is simply in the wrong place. The setting of registered landscapes was discussed and ‘eventification’, the intensive use of parks for profit, e.g. Grosvenor Park. David said that he thought that things are worse today due to staff and financial cuts, and development pressure but that it was amazing what has been achieved - from raising awareness through centenary celebrations to the battalions of volunteers giving huge support to planners with an expertise they do not have.

Chris Mayes, Historic England Landscape Architect for the North of England, talked about registered landscapes and evaluating their significance. He emphasised that the most important aspect of heritage is understanding. If people understand it, they value it and what follows is wanting to care for it. You enhance value by explaining history, e.g. of a public park, and create a circle of protection – understanding, valuing, caring – leading to an increase of enjoyment and so on.

Then followed a brisk walk through the landscape looking at restored allees, cleared woodland spaces to be planted with wild flowers, water

features – restored and awaiting restoration, eyecatchers and pavilions, and views from the park considering prospective and imagined planning applications – industrial scale buildings, wind turbines, housing and golf courses.



*The Round House*

Margie Hoffnung, the Gardens Trust Conservation Officer spoke about the Trust’s increasing workload - 1,720 applications received last year – a figure that will be exceeded in 2019, as well as an increase in pre application consultations. Val Hepworth, Chair of Yorkshire Gardens Trust described how they undertake conservation and planning across 20+ Local Authorities. Three recent cases were described, just a sample of the sort of cases County Gardens Trusts volunteers tackle.

In his closing remarks Nick Lane Fox invited participants to explore the landscape further if they wished. This seemed a better option than sitting in a traffic jam on the M62, so in evening light I took Nick’s recommendation to walk to the obelisk (below). With red kites and hares for company I walked the park, a totally magical experience in an amazing landscape, a fitting end to a packed and excellent day.



(A fuller version reporting this event has been sent to CoM and Research and Recorders)

**Barbara Moth**

**Photos Jane Winter and Barbara Moth**

# Adrian Lovatt, Cogshall Grange

## Fourth in our Head Gardener series



Cheshire Gardens Trust visited Cogshall Grange in July 2015 (above) but this time I was there to interview the head gardener, Adrian Lovatt. I met Adrian at Cogshall on a cold January morning when the team was cutting back the herbaceous plants, helpfully leaving some of the grasses for me to photograph (see below).



Adrian has an impeccable background for a head gardener. His father, George Lovatt, was originally a gardener at Betton House near Market Drayton. He went to the Scilly Isles for his honeymoon and ended up as a gardener at Tresco Abbey Gardens. Adrian was subsequently born there. His father returned to Shropshire as head gardener at Dorothy Clive gardens in the early years of its development. It was little more than a field site and his father created many of the main features, including the woodland *Rhododendron* collection, the pond, scree and slope planting above. It was major landscaping work and Adrian as a youngster loved it, getting involved at every opportunity; but he knew he couldn't stay and needed to establish his own path.

He studied for A levels and wanted to be a scientist. He took a plant biology degree at Royal Holloway College and Bedford New College,

University of London, one of only four centres in the UK offering a botany degree (botany is no longer available as a degree subject!). He was able to study a wide range of subjects but left not quite sure what he wanted to do next. He had an interest in gardening but realised he didn't have the practical knowledge needed. He had been working at Bridgemere Garden World during the holidays and continued there for a while. He learnt about rose budding and then went into the retail side of the business in the late 80s and 90s, when Bridgemere was at the forefront of the retail garden centre industry.

By sheer chance he had the opportunity to join Yorkshire TV gardening presenters Alan Mason and Marylyn Webb, developing a garden in France, a 14th Century Manoir at Port de Roche. They created a garden that the French listed in their top 200 gardens. This was followed by a year's work experience with the National Trust at Powis Castle (below) working with the renowned head gardener and plantsman Jimmy Hancock.



These experiences stood him in good stead when he applied for and was accepted onto the 3 year Diploma course at The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. This involved 9 months each year gaining experience in all areas of the gardens. For the other three months he was undertaking lectures and projects, meeting an astonishing range of people, leading experts in their field. He also met his future wife, Jane, a botanical horticulturalist and cycadologist in the Palm House.

At the end of the three year Diploma, Adrian turned down the opportunity to work on Michael Heseltine's garden and went to work as Head Gardener for Sir Mark and Lady Arabella Lennox Boyd at Gresgarth Hall in Lancashire. Arabella wanted someone who knew their plants. She was an excellent plantswoman and very hands on, so took a lot of responsibility for the design and

planting. Adrian learnt about managing a team and interacting with owners. He was there for two years, before moving to Godinton Hall in Kent. There has been an estate at Godinton for 600 years. There are twelve acres of garden, surrounded by ancient parkland. Sir Reginald Blomfield developed the formal garden in 1898. In the 1990s the Godinton Park Preservation Trust was established and the garden was restored, opening to the public for the first time.



Adrian might have stayed, but there were rumours afoot of an exciting new project in Cornwall. This was the Eden Project and Adrian couldn't resist being involved in such an exciting venture from the beginning. In 2000 he and his wife moved to Cornwall, Jane in the tropical Biome, Adrian as outdoor planting supervisor, with a team of 7-8 people. It was very hard work, working in the extreme conditions of a disused China clay quarry, especially when it rained for 104 days. It was tough in other ways as well, with intense pressure at times. Adrian was promoted to Assistant Temperate Curator, in charge of three teams. Being responsible for Eden's specialist collections Adrian developed an interest in the flora of Chile, which gave him the opportunity to travel on two plant hunting trips to Chile, as well as Mexico, California and Spain. He was at Eden for eight years during a period of intense change as the cutting-edge attraction garden matured and helped transform the local economy.

But eventually Adrian wanted to get back to traditional gardening, so he went back to Powis Castle but this time as head gardener for two years. In the meantime the owners at Cogshall Grange in Cheshire were developing their house and garden and were looking for a head gardener. They spent five years restoring the grade II\* listed late Georgian country house, with a contemporary extension. A completely new garden was required to link the house with the surrounding historic parkland and so Tom Stuart-Smith, renowned



garden designer, was bought in. He used modern and classic planting to develop the historic walled garden and more formal areas round the house. The walled garden is particularly distinctive with its central reflective pool, cloud pruned hornbeams (see above) and prairie style perennials and grasses. Contractors completed this first phase of planting. Adrian was recruited as head gardener for the second phase, working with Tom Stuart-Smith on the woodland areas, orchard and wildflower area.



Adrian has a team of two to help him. Initially these were Tom Lees, now head gardener at Tirley Garth and Hannah Lancaster, now a full-time mother of two. More recently Trevor Jones, a former Cholmondeley Castle trainee and Sarah Reed, a recent RHS qualified career changer (see above). Adrian loves the garden, which has gained a reputation as an innovative, inspirational garden, but is not sure what will happen next. The owners of Cogshall Grange are moving to a new house in February and the property is up for sale. The team of gardeners is being kept on to keep the gardens in good shape but once new owners move in it will depend on them as to what happens to the gardens. Certainly, Adrian has had a long and interesting career and we wish him and his team well in any new venture.

Thank you to Adrian for giving up his time to talk to me and to the owners of Cogshall Grange for allowing me to do so and see their stunning garden.

**Sue Eldridge**  
**Photos Sue Eldridge and Adrian Lovatt**

# The Walled Kitchen Garden Network

For those of you who have not come across the Walled Kitchen Garden Network I do encourage you to explore their website, ([www.walledgardens.net](http://www.walledgardens.net)). One of the key figures behind the establishment of the Network is Susan Campbell, a national authority and author of a number of books on the walled kitchen garden. There is no membership fee and the Network is a loose association of individuals - walled garden owners and managers, head gardeners, nursery owners, glass house manufacturers, academics and garden enthusiasts. There is minimal infrastructure with volunteers managing the website which acts as an information exchange advertising vacancies for head gardeners, sale notices for derelict walled gardens and details of the weekend forums. There is financial support from small grants from trusts and donations from individuals and suppliers.

Together with fellow CGT member Sue Bourne I have attended the last three of these Forums, held annually in early autumn - 2016 in Scotland, 2017 in Sussex and 2018 in Northern Ireland. All three have been interesting and enjoyable providing privileged access to public and private walled gardens in convivial company. Below is an account of the 2016 Forum.



The venue was Dumfries House (above) designed in 1754 by the Adam brothers for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Dumfries. There was extensive media coverage in 2005 when, faced with death duties and failure of negotiations with the National Trust for Scotland, the house and its contents were put up for sale by the 7<sup>th</sup> Marquess of Bute. It is said that the furniture was en route down the M6 to Sotheby's when The Prince of Wales came to the rescue. A charitable trust, chaired by the Prince, was established and a package of funding totalling £45m from a range of agencies was brought together to ensure that the house, its contents and 2000 acres could be saved for the nation. 10 years on the role

of the Prince and the Prince's Trust is evident across the Estate.

The Forum programme began on Saturday morning in Dumfries House. The theme for the day was the engagement of the community. There were presentations on Dumfries House and gardens, East Ayrshire; Bedford Park Walled Garden, Romford; Bohemia Walled Garden, Hastings and Amisfield Walled Garden, East Lothian. All four walled gardens engaged volunteers and contributed to their communities but the one with perhaps the greatest scale and impact is Dumfries House (<https://dumfries-house.org.uk>).



*Pierburg and Kauffman Education Garden at Dumfries House*

After lunch there was a tour of the Dumfries House gardens led by Head Gardener, Brian Core who had only taken up the post seven months earlier having previously been Head Gardener at Threave for the National Trust for Scotland. He explained the role of the Prince of Wales in the restoration of the house, gardens and estate and its significance to the local community.

The Dumfries Estate is located in an area of deprivation and high unemployment due to the decline of the Ayrshire coalfield. The focus of the initiatives across the site has been education, training and employment to contribute to regeneration and stimulate the local economy. Projects have included an education garden, delivering sessions on growing food and healthy eating to local primary schools; a traditional skills training centre aimed at young people and the unemployed and an experimental beef and dairy farm researching sustainable farming methods. Many of the projects have been funded by sponsorship secured by the Prince of Wales and The Prince's Trust has been fundamental in providing training opportunities and employment

targeted at the local community. Jobs created on the estate rose from 8 in 2007 to 140 in 2016. The Head Gardener went on to explain the challenges in restoring and developing the gardens so quickly. The pressure to deliver to a very tight timescale, to meet the requirements to open to the public and ensure visitor satisfaction, generate income and meet the timescales of the Prince, sponsors and funding bodies had created issues. Despite the challenges, the progress in ten years was remarkable and the contribution to the local community and economy was significant.

The following day the delegates set off to visit three further walled gardens in Dumfries and Galloway one open to the public and two operating as commercial plant nurseries.

### **Cally Gardens, Gatehouse of Fleet**



Cally Gardens, a specialist nursery set within a walled garden, was built between 1765 and 1770 as the kitchen garden for Cally House, now the Cally Palace Hotel. The garden is over a hectare with 15ft walls. It was originally subdivided by heated walls and had a vinery, peach house, orange and camellia houses and pineapple pits. Of the original buildings, the gardener's cottage and lean-to vinery remain, backing onto potting sheds, fruit store, mushroom house and boiler house. The kitchen garden was cultivated to provide food during the 2nd World War by evacuees from Glasgow. Then, following a spell as a tree nursery for the Forestry Commission, it became a market garden. By 1987 the garden had become rundown and faced an uncertain future when it was purchased by Michael Wickenden. He developed a reputation as a significant plant hunter and for propagating and supplying interesting plants found on his travels. When we visited he was trekking in Myanmar, Burma on a plant hunting expedition, where very sadly he died only days after our visit. The garden was subsequently put up for sale. The new owner Kevin Hughes is reported to be restoring the buildings that had fallen into disrepair and re-establishing the nursery business supported by volunteers (see vinery and bothy buildings above).

### **Threave Gardens**

Threave House and Garden is owned and run by the National Trust for Scotland. The house was designed by Peddie and Kinnear in the Scottish Baronial style for the Gordon family in 1872.



*Ceramic rhubarb forcers in the walled kitchen garden at Threave*  
It is set in extensive grounds with established gardens, including a walled kitchen garden, rose garden and rockery. The walled garden and stable block were probably built at the same time as the house. The former retains the original overall layout and continues to be actively worked as a kitchen garden. Threave is known for horticultural training. It is the base for the Trust's School of Heritage Gardening and has students studying for RHS Certificates in Practical Horticulture under the guidance of Michael Lawrie, who succeeded Brian Core as Head Gardener.



*Willow sculpture in the walled kitchen garden at Threave*

### **Ellenbank Nursery, Kirkcubright**

Ellenbank Nursery is owned and run by Elizabeth MacGreggor who specialises in violas and cottage garden plants. The nursery is located in a half acre walled garden dating from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. The garden is a narrow rectangle orientated northeast southwest with a semicircular end to the north wall. This wall has an internal southwest facing aspect. It is 16ft in height, made of stone lined with brick and has a fireplace that heated the space between the inner and outer walls. It was likely that fruit was originally grown against this wall.

**Moira Stevenson**

**Photos Moira Stevenson and Alan Robinson**

## Plans in the pipeline

Since January we have been notified of twelve planning applications and one planning appeal relating to historic parks and gardens in Cheshire East, and three Neighbourhood Development Plans. We have submitted comments on the following planning applications:

18/3672M **Tatton\* Bluebell Village**, Land East of Manchester Road, Knutsford

19/0314M **Quarry Bank**

Replacement of existing temporary cafe with a permanent cafe building

19/0015N & 19/0016N

**The Walled Garden, Nantwich**

Erection of 6 x 2 bed dwellings with restoration of listed structures and creation of new vehicular & pedestrian accesses

19/0838C **The Lovell Quinta Arboretum**

Engineering operations for the installation of pathway

19/0810M & 19/0811 Stable Block, **Toft Hall** Conversion of vacant stable block to

form three residential units.

Due to lack of resource we have been unable to submit additional comments on:

19/0732M: 14 industrial units at Parkgate, Knutsford - SE of **Tatton Park\***

One case, **Combermere Abbey\***, is the subject of ongoing discussions.

Local authorities only have a statutory duty to consult the Gardens Trust on planning applications affecting Parks and Gardens on Historic England's Register of Parks and Gardens i.e. those marked with an asterisk. If you have any queries, or concerns about a historic park or garden near you, please contact Sue Bartlett, Conservation and Planning Coordinator who will share your message with the small Conservation and Planning group. [planning@cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk](mailto:planning@cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk)

If you wish to see Cheshire Gardens Trust responses on these cases, please see website below and use planning number in search criteria

<http://planning.cheshireeast.gov.uk/ApplicationSearch.aspx>

**Barbara Moth**

## Snippets

In February the **CGT Research and Recording** group had a very useful training session on maps of the county conducted by Jonathan Pepler at the Cheshire Record Office. Among the very interesting estate maps was Fenna's estate survey conducted for the Tollemarche family between 1795 and 1798. A small book accompanied the estate map with illustration of properties identified on the map (see below).



**Moira Stevenson**  
Images Courtesy of Cheshire Archives and Local Studies

### Message from the Membership

**Secretary.** CGT members who do not pay their annual subscription by standing order should by

now have received a membership renewal reminder by post. Please ensure that your renewal form reaches the membership secretary by the 30th of April. If unsure please email [crispin.spencer1@gmail.com](mailto:crispin.spencer1@gmail.com)

### National Lottery Heritage Fund

A letter, signed by Dr Jim Bartos, Chairman of the Gardens Trust, and many others, appeared in The Times on 29<sup>th</sup> March, along with an article. The letter said:

“The National Lottery Heritage Fund has been giving grants for the restoration of thousands of our public parks since 1996. In so doing it has miraculously challenged inner-city blight and urban dereliction. It has changed lives and it has acquired an unrivalled hard-copy archive of these parks, their history and design. This archive cost £50 million to create and was a complete and unique record of 25 years of endeavour but the NLHF has just destroyed it, claiming the high costs of storage and difficulties with copyright. These claims are not robust”. For further information see the news item on The Gardens Trust website:

<http://thegardenstrust.org/historic-record-of-parks-destroyed/>

# Events

## Open gardens

**Oxton** Conservation Area, Birkenhead, Wirral  
Sunday 12th May 2018 10am to 5pm, £6 in advance or £8 on the day

**Heatons**, Heaton Moor, Stockport, SK4 3DJ  
Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> May 12 noon to 5pm, £5 for two adults, accompanied children free

**Tilston and Stretton**, near Malpas, Cheshire, SY14 7JA, Saturday 8th and Sunday 9th June  
11.00am to 5.00pm

New for 2019, includes Stretton Old Hall, featured in Gardeners World

**Culcheth**, Warrington, WA3 5EB,  
Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> July  
1pm-5pm, £6 on the day, £5 in advance

At time of going to press, Wilmslow and Lower Peover and Plumley were unconfirmed

## Combermere Abbey open afternoons

Tuesdays 14<sup>th</sup> May, 25<sup>th</sup> June (supporting NGS),  
13<sup>th</sup> August, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1pm-5pm, adults £5,  
children under 16 £2

<https://combermereabbey.co.uk>

## Planthunters fairs



### May Sun 12 Adlington Hall (above)

Macclesfield SK10 4LF 10am-4pm

Sun 19 **Abbeywood Gardens** Delamere, CW8 2HS 10am-4pm

June Sat & Sun 1 & 2 **Hodnet Hall Market**

Drayton TF9 3NN 10am-5pm

Sun 9 **Norton Priory** Runcorn, WA7 1BD  
10am-4pm

Fri & Sat 28 & 29 **Henbury Hall** Macclesfield  
SK11 9PJ 10am-5pm

Sun 30 **Cholmondeley Castle**, Malpas, SY14 8AH 10am-5pm

July Sun 7 **Signall Walled Garden** Eccleshall  
ST21 6NF 10am-4pm

August Sun 18 **Abbeywood Gardens**

Delamere, CW8 2HS 10am-4pm

Sun & Mon 25 & 26 **Dorothy Clive Garden** TF9 4EU 10am-5pm

Sept Sun 1 **Ness Botanic Gardens** Wirral,  
CH64 4AY 10am-4pm

[www.planthuntersfairs.co.uk](http://www.planthuntersfairs.co.uk)

## Bluebells in Cheshire

In late April/early May, you'll still have a chance to sample some of the bluebell woods in Cheshire.

On Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> April 2pm-5pm Tushingam Hall, near Whitchurch, SY13 4QP is opening its doors in aid of The Hospice of the Good Shepherd, £5 entry includes tea and scone.

Other gardens with a good display of bluebells are:

Adlington Hall, open Sundays from 5th May (except 26<sup>th</sup> May) 2-5pm gardens £6

Bluebell Cottage Gardens and Nurseries, Dutton, WA4 4HP £4, RHS members free open Wednesday – Sunday 10-5

Dunham Massey, near Altrincham, WA14 4SJ, gardens open every day 10.30-5, £8.95, National Trust Members free

Framley, Neston, Cheshire, CH64 2US open May 6<sup>th</sup>, 10.30-4 £4, National Gardens Scheme

Rode Hall, Scholars Green, ST7 3QP, Wednesdays and Bank Holiday Mondays, gardens and tearoom 11am- 5pm, £5

## James Prescott Joule



Gordon Cooke, potter, teacher, designer and CGT member has produced this beautiful pavement, to commemorate 200 years since the birth of James Prescott Joule, physicist. It was sponsored by the friends of Worthington Park, the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the mayoral fund and a private benefactor. It was designed and made by Gordon last summer and opened on 12th April 2019. Joule lived in Wardle Rd, Sale for most of his life and his formula (Joule's Law) is still used today.

**Copy date for July newsletter is 30<sup>th</sup> June**

Contributions to the Newsletter are very welcome. If you want to comment on articles in this edition or would like to contribute one for the next, please contact the Newsletter Editor, 148 Chester Road, Hazel Grove, Stockport SK7 6HE or email [sue\\_eldridge@hotmail.com](mailto:sue_eldridge@hotmail.com)