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Newsletter

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Some future events:

- * Autumn/winter programme published late July/early August
- * Look out for Ed Bennis' Garden History talks, provisionally Mondays 7th, 21st October 2019, 6th, 10th January, 3rd, 17th February 2020



There is no doubt that Cheshire is home to many of this country's fabulous gardens whether within the grounds of country houses, properties managed by the National Trust or the numerous privately owned gardens of all sizes.

Along with these gardens we must not forget the great contributions our municipal parks have made to the social fabric and the health and welfare of the inhabitants of our cities, towns and villages over the past 150 years. No wonder Cheshire leads the way for the number of tourists who annually visit our many gardens to admire

their diversity.

Hopefully, over the coming decade, one of this country's treasures will be added to the tourist must-see visit lists. Birkenhead Park is in the process of a long term major restoration programme aiming for World Heritage Status, recognition for being the world's first Municipal Park. With this in mind on a bright, warm morning on the last day of April this year, nineteen members from our Trust met up for a guided visit of the park with Simon Sim, the Park Ranger who along with his colleagues manages and looks after

the Park on behalf of Wirral Council.



Simon Sim talking to us at the start of the walk

Our visit with Simon covered the history of the building of the park plus a good walk of over two hours visiting the main features, including the park entrance lodges and notable villas on the perimeter of the park.

The Industrial Revolution brought great wealth to Lancashire and in particular to Liverpool in the early years of the 19th century, in the rapid expansion of factories, docks, warehouses, offices and shops. But with this economic success came a downside. The explosion in the population brought sub-standard housing, overcrowding, poor sanitation, social problems and a high death rate. Birkenhead until the 1820s was very much a rural village, but this changed with the introduction of the first steam powered paddle boat “Etna” which started a reliable regular ferry service between Birkenhead and Liverpool. This encouraged Liverpool residents to look towards Birkenhead, with its cleaner air and prospects of new housing.

Over the next twenty years the population grew from 200 to over 8000 along with a building boom of new houses, factories and shipyards. Birkenhead was very swiftly losing its rural character. By the early 1840s Birkenhead had become a “new” town with a sizeable population that required social facilities from its town leaders.

The solution was the building of Birkenhead Park. A number of factors came together to take it to fruition. The enthusiasm and drive of The Birkenhead Improvement Commissioners, under the chairmanship of Sir William Jackson, resulted in the concept of a public town park as a leisure place for its residents.

Then it was Joseph Paxton, Head Gardener from Chatsworth, who had the vision. His design included lakes and islands; mounds planted with trees and conifers; wide open grassed areas with a network of safe winding paths for pedestrians;

entrance lodges, where the park area was accessed from an outer drive for carriages and later motor vehicles. He also came up with the idea of setting aside plots of land on the park’s perimeter for the construction of villas to help recoup some of the costs of building the park.



The Italian Lodge

But it also needed the integrity and endeavour of Edward Kemp the Park Superintendent, who, not only supervised and saw the construction phase through, but was involved with the park’s development over the many years until his death in 1891. We visited his grave later in the day at nearby Flaybrick Hill Cemetery.

The planning started in 1842, with work on site in 1843, although plans were not finalised until 1845 at which stage Paxton, having completed his commission, then left the completion works in the safe hands of Edward Kemp. The Park was officially opened on the 5th April, 1847 by Lord Morpeth.

Thousands of local residents joined in the celebrations and entertainment provided, all of which was widely reported in the local newspapers and the Illustrated London News, which also included engravings of the day’s festivities (see copy of postcard below).



Places and features visited on our walkabout



From the Visitor Centre, we headed for the Roman inspired Boathouse, with its wonderful mosaic floor (above), and the brightly painted Swiss Bridge (below) situated in the Lower Lake area, both structures designed by Lewis Hornblower.



To the rear of the Boathouse (see page 1) and facing the Visitor Centre is the area of parkland known as Balaclava Field named after the battle in the Crimean War and the courageous “charge” of the Light Brigade. The reason for the name of the field was the presence of two Russian cannons presented from the Crimean War, now no longer in place as they, along with the park railings of the period, were removed and handed in for raw material in 1940 for use in the second World War.



Jackson Memorial

Returning to the perimeter road, we passed the

Jackson Memorial, a granite obelisk erected in memory of John Somerville Jackson, the older brother of William, who was also a member of the Park Commissioners.



We then made our way to the Grand Entrance (above). This is now a Grade II* listed building designed by Lewis Hornblower and consists of two Roman inspired lodges linked with an archway. One of the lodges is now home to HYPE, a charity working with young people in the local communities, improving their lives and providing social and job opportunities. Whilst there we were lucky enough to meet their representative Matthew, who invited us in to view the layout of the interior of one of the lodges together with the adjoining walled courtyard (see below).



Within the park's 125 acres are various sports fields, including the home of the Birkenhead Park Rugby Club founded in 1871. There are also two cricket grounds, Birkenhead Park Cricket Club, founded in 1846 with its Pavilion designed by Lewis Hornblower which is one of the earliest surviving cricket pavilions in the country, and St Mary's Cricket Club founded in 1878.

During our walk we also viewed the Italian Lodge, designed by John Robertson, built in the popular Italianate style of the period and home to Edward Kemp and his family as free accommodation on his appointment as Park Superintendent. Kemp lived

there until he built his own home at 74 Park Road West in 1859.

The last feature visited was the Eisteddfod Memorial Stone. In 1917 during the First World War, due to Birkenhead having a sizeable Welsh population, there was a break from tradition as the National Eisteddfod came to Birkenhead Park. It was attended by over 8,000 people in the presence of the then Prime Minister, David Lloyd George. The Eisteddfod Memorial Stone is now a permanent reminder of the sacrifice of a whole generation of a hundred years ago.

But what of the future...

Birkenhead Park was the start of the great park movement in Britain which by the early 1850s had spread into the rest of Europe and even to the USA.

It was two American designers Frederick Olmsted and Calvert Vaux who were inspired by the

innovative features used at Paxton's Birkenhead Park to come up with their winning design for a huge new park to be built on a 70 acres site of waste ground in New York. We all now know this as Central Park.

Already Birkenhead Park is listed Grade I on the Historic England's Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest surrounded by a number of Grade II listed buildings. The next stage is the bid for World Heritage status and we wish the Wirral Team the very best of luck for a successful outcome.

Many thanks to Simon Sim for an interesting half-day walk and sharing with us all the many facts and historical stories, which helped us to appreciate the work that has gone on for many years within the Park.

Gordon J Darlington
Photos Jim Jeeves and Sue Eldridge

Everything's coming up roses



On June 19th, a group of 21 members and guests assembled for a talk and demonstration by Kate Brophy (above) in the restaurant at Fryer's Roses. Kate has worked with roses at Fryer's since 1993, so has a wealth of experience that she shared with us.

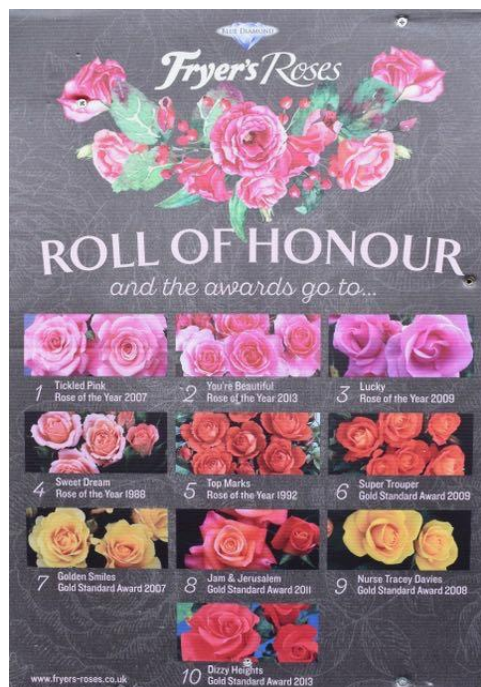
Kate started by giving us a history of Fryer's, and then explained the lengthy process of rose breeding and hybridization. This was followed by refreshments, (excellent scones!) and then a tour of the extensive rose section of the garden centre, where she answered our questions.

Fryer's was started in 1912 by Arthur Fryer on a half-acre site at High Legh, moving to the site near Knutsford in 1923. In 1946 Arthur's sons Frank and Jim joined the business; they were keen to develop the roses. In 1966 Gareth was the next generation to join and he wanted to concentrate

on rose breeding, not just growing. The first rose that was bred by Fryer's was 'Cheshire Life' and many more were to follow!

In 1970 the garden centre opened. Over the years Fryer's attended as many flower shows as possible: Chelsea, Southport, Harrogate and Shrewsbury, winning numerous Gold Medals, including 12 Gold Medals at Chelsea.

Fryer's has also won a number of "Rose of the Year" awards (see below). Kate explained that these awards are decided three years before the award is given to give the winning growers time to build up stocks for sale!



In the 1980s Fryer's grew a million roses a year in its heyday. Gareth Fryer retired in 2011, and the business was sold to the Blue Diamond Group of garden centres. This group also has a long history, starting on Guernsey in 1904 as the Fruit Export Company, exporting tomatoes and grapes to England. The company opened its first garden centre in Jersey in 1989, and others followed on the mainland in subsequent years.



Elizabeth Ashbrook rose, named after Lord Ashbrook's mother

Kate explained the process of hybridization, which from inception to a rose being offered for sale can take 10 years. We were shown how roses are pollinated for breeding, and Kate demonstrated

budding (not grafting) onto a separate rootstock. She explained that a good "buddier" can complete 4,000 in a day, and that in the 1980s there were itinerant budders who started at rose nurseries in Kent in May and gradually moved north over the summer, going on to New Zealand in the winter.

Fryer's no longer breed or grow roses on the site, but roses are brought in as bare root plants and then potted up and grown on. The roses that we saw in the rose section looked at their best, and of course some members went home with purchases.

The afternoon was both interesting and enjoyable; Kate spoke with great insight, and even coped with the noise of low flying aircraft and other diners in the background!



Kate showing us the stocks of roses in the garden centre

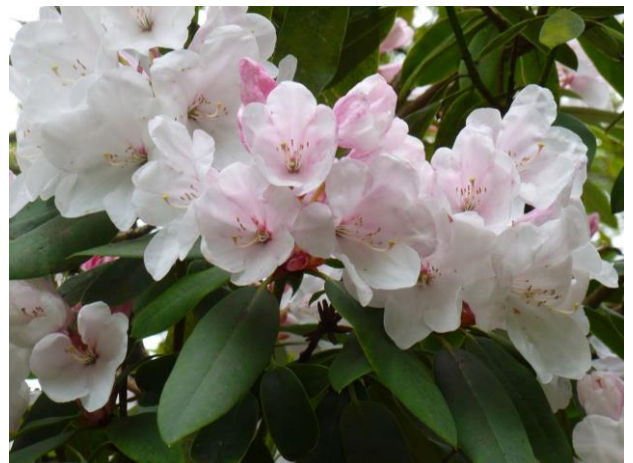
Text and photos Isabel Wright

AGM at Arley Hall and Gardens



On 16th May 2019 we were lucky enough to have the Cheshire Gardens Trust AGM at Arley Hall and Gardens, courtesy of our Patron Lord Ashbrook. It was a slightly cool but sunny afternoon and before the AGM itself, two groups of CGT members explored the lovely gardens, looking at their best in the sunshine. One group went with Lord Ashbrook, owner of Arley, to

explore the Grove, which was looking lovely with rhododendrons and other spring shrubs in full bloom. The birds were singing and the trees sparkling in the filtered sunlight. We couldn't have had a better guide than Lord Ashbrook, who developed much of the planting in the Grove and



Rhododendrons in the Grove at Arley

who has become an expert on rhododendrons. The other group went with Gordon Baillie, Head Gardener at Arley, to explore the main garden. It was early for the herbaceous borders, but the foliage and alliums were looking very good. At the far end of the gardens deciduous azaleas and other shrubs were vibrant in the Rootery. And the walled garden, with white tulips round the central pond, was looking very graceful (see below)



Then on to the buffet, provided by the Gardener's Kitchen, and an opportunity to catch up with fellow members. There were 47 members in all as well as guests from Ness Botanic Gardens.

This was followed by the AGM itself introduced by our Chairman Ed Bennis. He thanked Lord and Lady Ashbrook for hosting the AGM and to Lord Ashbrook and Gordon Baillie for taking the tours round the gardens, which had been very much appreciated. He reported on the activities of the Trust over the year and particularly the Strategic Review of "Blue Sky Thinking". He pleaded for more members to come forward to join the Council of Management and the constituent groups.

Joy Uings presented the Trustees' Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31st January 2019 and reported that finances were in a healthy



Deciduous azaleas in The Rootery

position. Joy will step down from her role as company secretary and the Trust is looking for a new volunteer. Joy has been in this role since the start of the Trust.

Elections were held. In line with the rules, Sue Bartlett and Christine Wilcox-Baker stood down from the Council of Management. Christine, who had served on the Council for ten years, was unable to continue. Nick Lightfoot, Gardens and Collections Manager at Ness Botanic Gardens, had been nominated and he was duly elected, while Sue was re-elected.

But perhaps the star of the show was Emma Rhodes, a part time student on the RHS course at Ness. A primary teacher for 28 years, she was successful in gaining a travel bursary from CGT/Ness and used it for travelling to Cornwall, visiting the Eden Project and The Lost Gardens of Heligan. See page 9 for a full report of her project.

Ed gave thanks to Emma for her excellent report and to all involved in putting the AGM together and to all at Arley Hall and Gardens for providing us with an excellent venue for our AGM.

Text and photos Sue Eldridge

Graham Richardson, Grappenhall Heys Walled Garden,

Fifth in our Head Gardener series



Grappenhall Heys Walled Garden is quite unique, owned and run by Grappenhall and Thelwall Parish Council. The Garden Manager is Graham Richardson. He grew up in Liverpool. When he left school he didn't want to go to college, but he was interested in smallholding. He had managed to get some work experience on an organic farm, more or less for bed and board. He then had an opportunity for a position with Henry Doubleday Research Association (now known as Garden Organics) www.gardenorganic.co.uk.



Graham moved to Essex, a huge shock for a boy from Huyton, Liverpool in the early 1980s. It involved living in a caravan and looking after the organic garden. There wasn't exactly a lot to do round there, especially on an allowance of £12 a week. But it was the opportunity to be involved in the organic movement. He worked for Lawrence D. Hills, founder of Henry Doubleday Research Association, which now has a site in Coventry, Ryton Organic Gardens. At the time this was possibly considered rather eccentric, but is now at the forefront of the organic developments.

But it was only seasonal work and Graham moved back to Liverpool and started looking at how to further his career. Jobs in organic gardening were limited and it was suggested that amenity horticulture, parks and gardens would provide a better background for him. He had kept in touch with his biology teacher at school, our own Ruth Brown, who was establishing horticultural courses at Knowsley Community College. Graham enrolled on City and Guilds courses there and started applying for work experience opportunities.

He was lucky enough to gain an assistant gardener post at Ness Botanic Gardens, which involved working in every area of the garden. He was there at an historic time. Miss Bulley was still there; she was the daughter of the famous Arthur K Bulley, who established Ness Botanic Gardens and supported many well known planthunters. There were also well known gardeners there, such as Hugh McAllister, Deputy Director at Ness until retirement, and an expert on *Sorbus*, ivies and birch. Graham spent two years at Ness and possibly wishes he could have stayed a bit longer. But in the meantime Ruth Brown was developing the horticulture department at Knowsley on Lord Derby's land, almost a country estate in the middle of an urban area. Ruth recruited Graham as a technician and he stayed there for twenty years. Initially his responsibility was to maintain the plant

collections for the use of students and generally look after the land. He was given the opportunity to gain RHS qualifications at Reaseheath College on a part time basis. This was followed by a Certificate in Education at Liverpool John Moores University which allowed him to lecture at the college for ten years. Teaching wasn't his first love but it stood him in good stead when he applied for the Grappenhall Heys job.



Path, woodland area and pond at Grappenhall Heys

Near the end of Graham's time at Knowsley it was becoming obvious that the horticultural courses were coming to an end. So he started looking around. There were some interesting jobs that he was tempted by but then the Grappenhall Heys job came up, which suited him perfectly.

Grappenhall Heys was created by a wealthy Warrington banker, Thomas Parr, around 1830 when he built a new house and estate for his family. The land nearest the house was designated as parkland to give a suitable setting for the mansion. The landscape that existed at the time was incorporated into the estate and many of the woodland areas, ponds and avenues that formed the parkland remain in place today. The estate was at its height from 1875-1899 and this is considered to be the most significant period for the design and productivity of the garden.



Espaliers in the walled kitchen garden

The house survived World Wars I and 2, housing WRNS in WW2. The house was demolished in 1975 but the four acre walled garden remained as a local amenity. English Partnerships renovated much of the garden as part of their development of the area, working closely with local organisations. Grappenhall and Thelwall Parish Council took ownership of the gardens in 2005 and with the help of the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Friends of Grappenhall Heys Walled Garden, has developed a beautiful garden, a popular visitors attraction and a resource for horticulture, education and enjoyment.

The garden consists of a fully functioning kitchen garden, including an orchard, and ornamental pleasure garden. It includes eight fully refurbished Victorian glasshouses, incorporating a café/community centre and education area. There are woodland areas, three ponds and some lovely herbaceous borders. English Heritage carried out restoration works and the ponds and sandstone walls were rebuilt. New paths, gates, archways and ornamental fencing were created based on original features. The garden had started opening to the public on a part time basis, mostly maintained by outside contractors. Warrington Organic and Wildlife Gardening Society (WOWGS) had allotments in the kitchen garden, but it was always the aim to take on a full-time gardener. It was the ideal opportunity. Graham was successful with his application and started in March 2007. By that stage much of the restoration had been done and the allotments returned to the garden, some of the allotment holders staying on as volunteers. But

the glasshouses still needed restoration and Graham was involved in the development, a steep learning curve. An architect was bought on board and a working group put together a bid for £1 million. An outreach officer was appointed to develop the community part of the bid, involved a National Trust expert and the Walled Kitchen Garden Network (featured in the last edition of the newsletter). The bid was successful and the glasshouses restored.



Graham Richardson and Kate Fitch in one of the restored greenhouses

Kate Fitch, Community Outreach Officer, was funded by the bid and is now permanent. She works with a whole range of groups, including schools, adults and the community. Graham, Kate and around 12 volunteers are “the team”.

So Graham really is a manager/gardener, working with part time staff and volunteers, contracting out the café and reporting to the Parish Council. The community area turns into a café for visitors on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. No mean balancing act, keeping everyone happy. For the future, Graham doesn't see himself leaving any time soon. He may reduce the growing areas in the walled garden, possibly introduce more cut flowers and develop the woodland garden. We wish him and his team all the best for the future.

With thanks to Graham Richardson for his time and to the Parish Council for allowing this to happen and providing information on the history and development of the garden. Further information on the Grappenhall Heys website <http://www.ghwalledgarden.org.uk>.

Text and photos Sue Eldridge



Inside one of the restored greenhouses

Did you know James Russell? Garden designer James Russell worked in around 300-400 gardens across the UK between 1950-1990 and there is an extensive archive of letters between him and his clients held in the Borthwick Institute in York. Through my research into Russell for the MHort award I have found many people who knew him and have stories and insights of the man himself. Working with the National Trust I am carrying out a recording project with the aims of creating an archive for further research, and linking gardens he worked in. Please get in touch if you knew him, or if you know one of the gardens where he worked. emmahill@nationaltrust.org.uk Emma Hill, Hare Hill Gardens

Emma Rhodes' Ness/CGT Bursary Project

The Lost Gardens of Heligan and the Eden Project

As a primary school teacher of 28 years, running a nurture room in a mainstream school, supporting children with social, emotional and special educational needs, we all caught the gardening bug. It all started with a bean.... The children were given a bean to grow for homework. At the weekly drop-in session for family members, I mentioned that I would like to grow more plants with the children and the parents said they'd help me.



As part of the nurture room provision and with parental support, the children created their own allotment, digging a new small plot each week until there were twelve beds. The children lifted and moved the turf. The benefits were astonishing and immediate. Behaviour, well-being and attitudes towards work improved as the children could 'earn' daily time outside if they worked hard in class. The children chose what they wanted to grow, were taught to use tools safely, learnt how to nurture plants, to deal with disappointment if something didn't work, to problem solve and to be patient.

I decided to visit The Lost gardens of Heligan and The Eden Project in Cornwall. The first to see the productive gardens and the 'Giant's Head sculpture' (see next column) and the latter to learn more about the community projects. As a volunteer myself, helping in the gardens in Marie Curie Hospice and at a National Trust property, Speke Hall, I was also interested in their volunteer programmes. The story behind The Lost Gardens of Heligan was very poignant. Gardeners who worked there, scratched their names on the wall in the 'Thunderbox' room before going to war,

never to return. The gardens became overgrown and undiscovered until 25 years ago. The restoration project has been a massive undertaking.



I met Katie Kingett (see below), head of the productive gardens. There are a series of walled gardens and nine gardeners and two volunteers who tend them. The gardens are vast and include many glasshouses containing heritage varieties of fruit. There is a pineapple pit heated by manure and cold frames. The gardeners use hand tools, grow mostly heritage varieties of fruit and vegetables and use gardening methods such as double digging. The plots are 45ft by 100ft and are worked on a 6 crop rotation. Flowers and produce are also grown within manicured parterres in another linked garden. The methods used are authentic to replicate the work of the gardeners who would have originally worked there. It is labour intensive, like the garden in school but on a huge scale. Some of the fruit trees such as the peach trees have to be hand pollinated using small brushes.





Emma at Heligan

At Heligan, there is no designated education officer but Children's University workbooks have been written and schools often visit. The garden opens earlier at set times for people who have been prescribed visits by their GPs either for fitness or mental health benefits. A group of children with special educational needs have visited the gardens, kitchens and livestock areas to make connections with what they eat.

I have had similar success in school where the children have tasted new foods that they have grown and used them in recipes such as soups and salads. This has been of benefit to all of the children, particularly those on the Autistic Spectrum who will often want to eat a limited and familiar diet.

At Heligan, I also learnt about jobs conducted in winter which will help in my school, such as cleaning, ground preparation and writing labels as well as learning which crops can be sown earlier under glass. I also saw the 'Mud Maid' and 'The Giant's Head' sculptures which could be replicated by children as a fun art project.

During my visit to the Eden Project, I met Peter Lefort who works with Community Projects. There are over 150 volunteers at Eden helping in a variety of roles. There is an education base which caters for the large number of educational visits which take place.

Around Eden there are lots of labelled displays which would appeal to children, such as orangutans being like forest gardeners. There is a vast area with activities for children to participate in. Like Heligan, the gardens open at certain times for people to visit who have been prescribed exercise for well-being by their GPs. There is a walking group for people who have C.O.P.D.

Community camps are 3 day events run twice a year all expenses paid, for people who are championing community work in their local area.

Workshops, practical activities and the opportunity to network are available. This supports existing community projects or offers support to set up new initiatives. There is a programme supporting grandparents looking after under 5's called Deep Roots New Shoots, where they can meet other carers and support each other. This resonated with me as in school there is a Friday drop-in session in the nurture room where parents and family members meet to celebrate successes of their children and support one another. Grandparents often visit. The generations in families supporting each other is essential to well-being.

There is a nationwide initiative called The Big Lunch programme, where people are encouraged to connect with one another and with their neighbours. In 2017, 9.3 million people took part. The community team produce packs with advice and encouragement. It can be as simple as having a cup of tea and a sandwich with a neighbour, to hosting a street party. The community team also offer advice and encouragement to organisations supporting prisoners to work in horticulture as part of their rehabilitation.



Inside one of the biodomes at the Eden Project

It was wonderful to spend time in glorious Cornwall and to meet professionals in Heligan and Eden who are bringing such joy and encouragement to peoples' lives through the power of plants.

Many thanks for giving me this wonderful opportunity and for the ideas to support my future work through horticulture.

**Text and photos Emma Rhodes,
Primary School Teacher and RHS student
at Ness Botanic Gardens
Eden photo Fiona Harrison**

Colourful Keukenhof



If you've never been to Keukenhof (above) at Lisse in the Netherlands, as we hadn't, I'd thoroughly recommend a visit if you have the chance.

I'd heard a little about the famous tulip displays but had no real concept of just how many there would be. Our trip was primarily planned as a treat for my Mum – with a large amount of self-interest thrown in! We had non date specific tickets and struck lucky with a sunny and pleasantly warm day.

After an unusually warm spell, around Easter, lots of the tulips in the nearby bulb fields had been cut earlier than usual. It was therefore with some trepidation that we set off to see if we could find any to view. We spotted some colourful 'stripes' in the distance and navigated our way towards them. We came across a grower advertising 50 stems for six euro's and ventured in to ask about purchasing bulbs. "You're too early they're not ready until August/September" said the very personable young chap (probably thinking we knew nothing)! He furnished me with his business card so that I can order from his website later in the year.

Happily he also invited us to walk down through his cut fields to the area still blooming (see below). It was an amazing sight to behold and a wonderful experience. Many photos later we then travelled further and chanced upon another huge expanse of



blooms in a variety of different colours – fab.

That was a great start to our tulip hunting and got us well in the mood for our subsequent visit to the wonderful experience of Keukenhof.

Arriving at 9.15am the coach and car parks were already filling up. We'd decided that we knew it would likely be busy and we would just be patient. There were thousands of visitors but they were well-mannered and patient and the 32 hectare site comfortably accommodated us all.

Everywhere you looked there were fantastic displays. Apparently there are around 3,000 varieties of tulip and we felt we'd seen a good percentage of them. The different growers take sections of the park and showcase their wares. Our worries that some displays may be 'over' were needless as the beds are regularly re-planted. An absolute feast for the eyes it far surpassed any expectations we had - seas of colour everywhere we looked.



Tulips with grape hyacinths (Muscari)

In addition to the tulips many other plants were on display – outside there were huge beds of narcissi, brightly coloured azaleas and great swathes of grape hyacinths bordering rivers of tulips under the mature trees. In the various pavilions were lilies, hydrangeas, hostas, orchids, amaryllis and many other varieties. This being Keukenhof's 70th year many exhibits in the pavilions had 1970's themes including psychedelic print backdrops, groovy mannequins, VW Beetles and camper vans filled and overflowing with flowers – all great fun.

An exhibition about the history and cultivation of tulips and a small petting zoo added to the offer and our day was rounded off by my having a



Flower power at Keukenhof

parakeet on my head. We met a couple, who we don't think were anything to do with the organisers, who were wandering through one of the pavilions – the lady with two pet parakeets. They were keen to share them with other visitors including us!

All in all a fantastic, beautiful, happy and

memorable experience. Viva Keukenhof!

Keukenhof is open from March to May each year (in 2020 it will be 21st March – 10th May) - you can find out more information at:

<https://keukenhof.nl/en/>

Text and photos Christine Wilcox-Baker



Lady with a parakeet

Let order prevail



CGT member Rupert Wilcox-Baker finds respite in the formality of Villandry (above).

There are a few of us heretics that consider Great Dixter to be an overgrown mess and regard the Piet Oudolf style as simply a paddock gone to seed. We garden apostates who seek order in a world of 'free form' garden fashion, need look no further than Villandry. The Chateau, near Tours in the valley of the Loire, was built in 1536 and originally boasted a renaissance garden. In the 19th century this was torn up in favour of a garden in the English style. Edwardian era photographs of the Villandry 'Parc a l'anglaise' show what might be any uninspiring English country house garden of the period.

We owe the current gardens of Villandry to Joachim Carvallo and Ann (née Coleman) his wife. Her significant inheritance allowed them to pursue their joint 'hobbies' of collecting Spanish art and

restoring Villandry's formal gardens. They acquired the Chateau and the estate in 1906 and immediately set about removing the forced informality of the picturesque and reinstating the rigours of the Middle Ages.



For those of us seeking relief from elaborate herbaceous borders and paths brushed by ornamental grasses then Villandry is a revelation. Subdivided into regularly shaped gardens, the overall site is terraced and visitors are encouraged to start at the highest point to admire the panorama of the entire estate. 'Spectacular' hardly does justice to the scene below. Order and symmetry prevail for the planting and the paths are in straight lines and gloriously free from any growing thing. Each garden is made up of different geometric patterns many in low box hedging with often single colour planting within.

Love may be experienced in the Ornamental Garden. Love passionate, tender, flighty and tragic are all available. Four parterre gardens depict in symbolic arrangements these aspects of l'amour. For example, the hedging shaped like blades and daggers represents tragic love with red flowers for the colour of blood.

Most famous is the vegetable garden. Here vegetables are grown not only for eating but just as much for their beauty. Perfect rows of lettuces compete with equally perfect rows of brightly coloured brassicas to grab our attention. Twenty beds, symmetrically placed in a vast square space, make up the vegetable garden. The planting changes with the seasons but the regimentation is a constant.

There is much else to see at Villandry - gardens linked to the sun, water and herbs - a maze and woodland walks. The chateau, open to visitors, is still the family home of the Carvallo's and is decorated in an eclectic style with an eye to the past but very much with the family's taste



prevailing.

No short article can do justice to what is rightly one of the most famous gardens of France. The gardens are open every single day of the year for a remarkably modest €7 in summer and €5 in winter. More details

at <https://www.chateauvillandry.fr/en/>

Text and photos Rupert Wilcox-Baker

Tom Stuart-Smith at Arley Garden Festival



Drawing of walled garden at RHS Bridgewater, Tom Stuart-Smith

Saturday, 22 June was a warm, sunny day – perfect for attending Arley's annual garden festival. The event seems to become more popular year by year, and is certainly my favourite, possibly because of its manageable size. This year, as well as the nurseries, crafts, garden tours and gardeners' question time, there was a special talk by Tom Stuart-Smith, garden designer. Needless to say, we had booked tickets.

The talk took place in the hall and we were crammed into the room, such was the popularity of the speaker. His topic was walled gardens but first he gave a short personal history which included the fact that he had initially visited Arley in the 1980s when he was a student in Manchester. He is currently designer at RHS Garden

Bridgewater. He went on to give us a tour of gardens around the country he had worked on or designed, many of which contained elements of Islamic garden design, or Paradise Gardens.

One garden in Dorset I found fascinating. It was close to the sea with a 200 foot drop from the garden to the beach. Within the garden was a pool placed in such a way as to make use of the 200 foot drop and the view of the sea, so making it appear to be an infinity pool.

In Wiltshire, Stuart-Smith worked on a walled garden which contained a swimming pool. This had to be retained so he again made use of different levels to hide it. The swimming pool area became the lowest level and this was hidden by the higher surrounding garden and the planting.

He has also worked on gardens abroad, one of which I recognised as being included in Monty Don's series on Paradise Gardens. This was Le Jardin Secret in Marrakech. He kept to the design of an Islamic garden with 4 quarters, rills and fountains but the second section of the garden was designed as a Christian paradise, based on the Biblical record.

In 2015, CGT paid a visit to Cogshall Grange, a particularly attractive and interesting garden in Cheshire which he designed.

Many of these gardens are shown on Stuart-

Smith's website: <http://www.tomstuartsmith.co.uk>

Currently he is involved with the redevelopment of the walled garden at RHS Bridgewater, due to open next year. Again there is evidence of the Islamic garden influence. We were shown a photograph taken by a drone which showed the amazing progress made within the walls to date. The drawing of the design for the garden was done by Tom Stuart-Smith and has been taken from the RHS Bridgewater website:

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/bridgewater>

Closer to home, he has been asked to design the memorial garden planned for Arley and we were shown the drawings relating to this new development.

After the talk, we resumed our exploration of the various nurseries at the festival and also admired the floral arrangements in the hall. All in all it was a very pleasant way to spend a Saturday.

Julia Whitfield

Bouts Violas, Millichope Park, Shropshire



Ever since reading about Bouts Violas in the RHS magazine (The Garden, May 2014) I have aspired to visit the Wildegoose Nursery situated in the walled garden of Millichope Park, Shropshire. We finally made it on May 5th, the NGS spring opening of the park and walled garden. The park, set in the Corve Valley, one of the loveliest and most unspoilt parts of the Shropshire Hills, includes magnificent trees, a lake, ice house, temple, obelisk and bluebell glades (see above).

Laura and Jack Willgoss, owners of the nursery, acquired the Bouts Collection of violas in 2011, and use of the then derelict walled garden at Millichope Park in which to grow them. In addition to propagating the violas three times a year they set about the restoration of the walled garden. Heritage Lottery Funding was obtained to restore the unusual curved iron glasshouse, a project for which volunteers salvaged small panes of the original glass.

Much of the planting in the walled garden is very recent and is largely herbaceous set within compartments of establishing hornbeam hedges. There are working areas and vegetable beds but nothing so far on the warm brick walls whose

courses follow the contours of the sloping site.

The nursery sells an increasing range of herbaceous plants, including new varieties sourced abroad, but it is the violas that are the speciality. Many years ago I purchased my first perennial viola, a luscious clear purple, from a small nursery in Macclesfield that has since closed. Despite mistreatment and neglect this viola appears every year flowering over a long period and providing scented flowers to bring indoors. Bouts violas come in shades from darkest purple, almost black, through lilac, blue and gold to palest lemon, and every combination in between. Most are scented and hardy. Spoilt for choice I chose Violas Jupiter, Etain and Irish Molly. The violas are displayed in pots in the nursery (see below) but many would make good subjects for the front of border – if you are prepared to get on your knees to enjoy the scent!

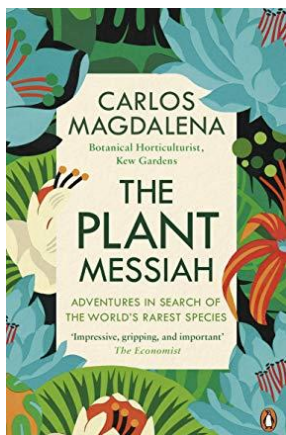


I recommend a visit to Millichope Park, but failing that the nursery does mail order – see <http://www.wildegoosenursery.co.uk/>

Also see article by Roy Lancaster on Wildegoose Nursery in RHS 'The Garden' magazine July 2019.

Text and photos Barbara Moth

The Plant Messiah – book review



Just hours after hearing about Ernest Wilson at the Spring Lecture, I was still full of the fascinating things I had learned and wittered on about it at length to my son. I never expect him to listen to me, but this time he did and the following week he presented me with my Mother's Day gift – a book called *The Plant Messiah*, by Carlos Magdalena. The words "Adventures in Search of the World's Rarest Species" had caught his eye. If I was interested in plant hunting, no doubt I would be interested in this.

A lot has changed in the century since Wilson was able to travel the world finding new species for cultivation. Today, countries are wary of plant hunters and permits and bureaucracy are the first obstacles to be overcome before worrying about such everyday matters as difficult terrain and dangerous animals.

Carlos grew up in Asturias, an area along the coast of northern Spain, the youngest of five children. A bit of a Gerald Durrell, he collected a range of animals as a child, until his parents said there was simply no more room for them. But he learned horticulture from his mother. By the time he left school he was really knowledgeable about plants.

And yet, as an adult, he went from one job to another until, aged 28, he moved to London. One

day his explorations of the Capital took him to Kew Gardens and he knew he had found his spiritual home. With no appropriate qualifications, he nevertheless blagged his way onto the staff there and was soon showing his particular skill – working out how to get seeds not only to germinate but grow into healthy adults.

Carlos manages to combine botany, horticulture and ecology. He is passionate about plants and about spreading knowledge about plants. His stories of finding the last remaining plant of its kind and of figuring out how to propagate them – saving them from extinction and eventually re-introducing them into their original home – are riveting. The demands of population growth have seen the loss of habitats. When the last remaining plant of its kind dies, so do the creatures which depended upon it – some plants have a single pollinator; the death of plants can be the death of ecosystems.

The book is not only the story of how individual plants have been saved, but also about the need for local knowledge. The last surviving tree, carefully fenced around, but then neglected until it almost died from the growth of weeds around it. Carlos has gone around the world passing on his knowledge of propagation and nurturing of plants: Mauritius and Rodriguez islands, South America, Australia. All the time looking for new plants or seeking out those in danger of extinction. He has a particular love of water-lilies and the story of the one that grew in only one place – a hot spring – is worth the price of the book on its own.

I cannot recommend this book enough. Whether your particular interest is in botany and how plants are designed and reproduce or horticulture and how plants can be encouraged to grow or ecology and the importance of ecosystems, you will find something to fascinate you.

Joy Uings

The Gardens Trust's Historic Landscape Project supporting volunteers

It's been great to welcome so many members of County Gardens Trusts to the HLP's events, but we'd really love to meet more of you!

Volunteers from the CGTs have a vital role to play in the research, recording, history and conservation of our heritage. Increasingly, CGTs are an important and respected voice offering

authoritative advice on historic designed landscapes in the modern world. And of course, they also provide a vibrant social group for people interested in parks and gardens, with a busy schedule of events and garden visits.

For those of you who haven't yet come across us, the HLP is an initiative from the Gardens Trust,

part-funded by Historic England, which offers support to CGTs in all their endeavours and helps their volunteers to play a greater role in the conservation of our historic designed landscapes.

To this end, we run a varied programme of training opportunities for CGT volunteers, on topics including:

- * responding to planning applications (currently running in Yorkshire, with a repeat in the south-east in 2020)
- * research and recording
- * understanding significance
- * the public parks funding crisis . . . and more.

We also hold regular networking days: regional Members' Meet-Ups (this season in Essex, Cheshire, Bristol and the West Midlands); and our national, annual, Historic Landscapes Assembly, where all those interested in conservation and historic designed landscapes can come together to discuss key issues on our horizons. All our events are friendly and informal and suitable for those with no prior knowledge. Most are free to attend.

We can provide one-to-one support with planning work, ways to take your CGT forward into the



All rewed up to save our parks, at our Public Parks Crisis training day in Abington Park, Northamptonshire, 2018

future, and help to build links with other CGTs or relevant organisations. Please do get in touch to find out more. We welcome *all* CGT volunteers to our events, whatever your experience or area of interest. Join our emailing group, to receive occasional updates and news of upcoming events. Simply email me at tamsinmcmillan@thegardenstrust.org to sign up.

For further information on HLP, Research Hub, events and online discussion see the Gardens Trust website <http://thegardenstrust.org>

Thank you, and I hope to meet you soon!

**Tamsin McMillan, Historic Landscape
Project Officer, The Gardens Trust**

Forthcoming events in Cheshire and further afield

National Garden Scheme

Sun 21st July, 11am-4pm, Maggie's Manchester M20 4QL

Sun 28th July, 11am-4pm, Stonyford Cottage, Oakmere, Cheshire, CW8 2TF

Sat/Sun 10th/11th August, 11am-5pm, Laskey Farm, Thelwall, Warrington WA4 2TF

Sun 11th August, 11am-5pm, Gresgarth Hall, Caton, Lancaster, Lancashire LA2 9NB

Sun 28th August, 11am-5pm, Croxteth Park Walled Garden LI2 0HB 11.30-5pm

Sun 8th September 12 noon-5pm Sefton Park September Gardens L8 3SD

Planthunters Fairs

Sun 18 August, 10am-4pm, Abbeywood Gardens Delamere, CW8 2HS

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

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

Eaton Hall open day Sunday 25th August 10.30 to 5pm

Combermere Abbey open afternoons 13th August, 3rd September 1pm-5pm

Don't forget to look at our website www.cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk for further info, including links to neighbouring GTs.

Dear CGT Member, we are continuously looking at ways to improve, save costs and protect the environment. It takes a lot of time and money to post out paper copies of this newsletter. If you currently receive a paper copy by mail and would be prepared to receive your copy by email please contact the newsletter editor. Thank you

Copy date for October newsletter is 30th September

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 newsletter@cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk