



The AGM at Arley

Inside:

- Congleton Bath House and Physic Garden
- Zdenek Valkoun, Dorothy Clive gardens
- Thomas Mawson in the Lake District
- Bankhead Garden
- The Power of Gardening and Volunteering

Future events (see pages 15/16)

- RHS Tatton Show 17th – 21st July 2024
- CGT Events:
- Norley Bank Farm, Thursday 8th August
- Garden Party, Ashton Grange, 21st August
- Visit to The Palm House, Sefton Park, 12th September

A little rain never hurt anyone



Lord Ashbrook welcoming us to Arley

It is often said that there is no such thing as bad weather – just inappropriate clothing. Well, there was an impressive array of appropriate clothing on show at CGT's AGM – all manner of brollies, waterproofs and wellies.

Despite an extremely wet afternoon we got a very warm welcome from Lord and Lady Ashbrook and the Arley team. It was great to see so many familiar faces – as well as new ones – amid the buzz of conversation. Ed Bennis's montage of slides covering the past 20 years added to the sense of occasion

prompting many nostalgic reminiscences (did we mention that it was CGT's 20th Anniversary ...?).

Lord Ashbrook gave us a potted history of Arley's gardens covering the many changes that have shaped the gardens we see today. It is hard to imagine that during and immediately after WW2, much of the land was given up to market gardening and growing vegetables. But the iconic features remain – the pleached lime and clipped Ilex avenues, the double herbaceous border with its yew buttresses and the Grove – Lord



Smiles on the Double Herbaceous Border with Gordon Baillie



*Top level discussion in the rain
Lord Ashbrook, Peter Hughes and David Cash*

Ashbrooks's personal contribution. And everywhere there are glimpses of his mother's influence on the gardens – examples of her natural creative flair and artistic eye for colour and form can be found throughout.

Lord Ashbrook emphasised the contrast between the main formal gardens and the more naturalistic format of the Grove. He has been cultivating the Grove - his pride and joy - for 45 years, introducing new planting every year. He claims to have enjoyed many happy hours hand-watering newly-planted shrubs – not something required during this rainy spring!

On this note, we all donned waterproofs and headed out to enjoy tours of the garden led by Lord Ashbrook and Head Gardener, Gordon Baillie. While the rain did not dampen our spirits, it didn't encourage dallying

either. However, we did stop to admire the glorious herbaceous border. Much wider than most, the extra depth allows for larger clumps of flowers, giving the whole border a sense of scale and



Tina Theis presenting Barbara Moth with her commemorative gift

grandeur. Boasting mostly purple and blue flowers now – we agreed that blues and purples look especially good in wet weather! Questions were asked about the Yew buttresses and how often they needed to be cut back. Lord Ashbrook explained that the Yew encroaches and needs radical pruning every few years but recovers well.

A whistle-stop tour through the rest of the gardens as the heavens opened – though we were still able to appreciate the magnificent gardens in all their variety of style and design – and it was clear that the trees, shrubs and plants appreciated the rain even if the garden visitors were less enthusiastic.

Over a delicious afternoon tea, we discussed whether the CGT had ever had to cancel an event in the past 20 years due to weather conditions. No-one could recall having done so – clearly we are a hardy bunch – with plenty of appropriate clothing. (By the way, did we mention that it was CGT's 20th Anniversary ...?).

Tina Theis

And of course it was the 20th Anniversary of Cheshire Gardens Trust so, after that lovely afternoon tea, there was an anniversary cake, cut in time honoured fashion by Lady Ashbrook. Then to the business of the afternoon, opened by David Cash. Martin Slack reported on financial matters, Barbara Moth on Research and Recording and Conservation and Planning, Margaret Blowey on Events and Sue Eldridge on the Newsletter. We were also honoured to hear from Peter Hughes, the Chair of the Gardens Trust.

Finally, on behalf of Cheshire Gardens Trust, Tina Theis thanked Barbara Moth for all her hard work over the last twenty years and presented her with a commemorative book.



Cutting the cake, Lord Ashbrook, Peter Hughes, Christine Hughes, Lady Ashbrook

Sue Eldridge

Photos Peter Robinson, Annie Coombs, Chris Driver, Ed Bennis. *Photograph on front cover, brollies in the rootery*

P.S. Peter and Christine Hughes' beautiful garden, in the Lake District, High Moss, recently appeared in Country Life Magazine <https://thegardenstrust.org/high-moss-featured-in-country-life-magazine/>



Congleton Bath House and Physic Garden



Members of both Trusts near the 'Bacchus shelter'

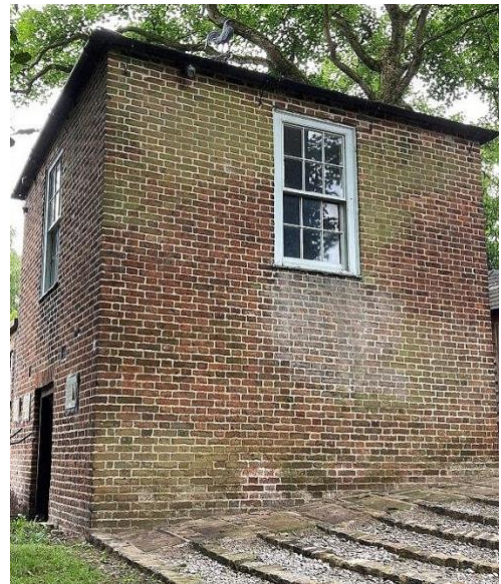
In June, members of the Research & Recording team met in Congleton for a guided tour of this site. The bath house is a two-storey brick building of 1820, one of the rare survivors of the health craze of 200 years ago i.e. to plunge into fresh, cold water. Here, the 6' deep pool occupies the cellar of the house. Now it is dry but in the past, the pool was fed by a stream. The remains of inlet and overflow pipes have been found in the walls. After repeated plunging, one had to climb out and run to the opposite side of the building to relax in the warming room above - no doubt with a bottle or two of claret.

The bath house lies at the top of the quite steeply ascending garden of 'Bradshaw House', built in 1820 by William Lowndes, one of the town's prosperous merchants and landowners. Used for cold bathing until the 1930s, the bath house later deteriorated. The newly formed Congleton Building Preservation Trust was able to acquire the site from the local Council and obtain a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The restoration of the building, a mammoth task for the Trust's volunteers, was completed in 2010.

Near the bath house stands the original garden shelter with a mask of Bacchus, the god of wine, above the entrance. From here, the view ranges downhill across the Physic Garden, developed by volunteers since 2010. It occupies only a part of the original designed landscape garden, and tells the story of plants in medicine, in the kitchen and in the textile industry.



The Physic Garden: looking uphill to the shelter



The Bath House with the entrance to the plunge pool below

There must be hundreds of plants: trees, shrubs and perennials, many in flower. A heaven for plant lovers!

The garden is a community garden, open every day and free to all visitors. Interested?

Then explore the Trust's excellent website:

www.congletonbhpg.co.uk – and go!

Barbara Wright

Photos Barbara Moth and Emma Hill

Zdenek Valkoun, Dorothy Clive Gardens

Nineteenth in our Series of Head Gardeners



Zdenek Valkoun in the Quarry Garden

Dorothy Clive Garden was the idea of Colonel Harry Clive who created the garden in 1939/1940 as a series of walks for his wife Dorothy who had Parkinson's Disease. Even after she died he continued developing the garden throughout the 1940s and 1950s. In 1958 the garden was entrusted to an independent charity, the Willoughbridge Garden Trust, which still manages the now 12 acre garden. We last visited Dorothy Clive Garden as a group in May 2018. Zdenek Valkoun was the Head Gardener and was an excellent guide. It was a very hot day and we visited the glasshouses early while it was still relatively cool. The pond was undergoing a drastic renovation, but now 6 years later

it is looking very good. In 2018, Kathryn Robey had just taken over from Marcus Chilton-Jones as Curator; she and Zdenek have an excellent working relationship.

I visited on a very different day in April 2024. It was dull and overcast but at least it wasn't raining. This time I was here to interview Zdenek, who has



The Magnolia Walk

now been at the garden for 15 years, Head Gardener for 6 years.

Zdenek grew up in what was then Czechoslovakia, now the Czech Republic, in the Jizera Mountains, 60 miles north of Prague. He still loves mountains and hiking. His early interest in horticulture came from his mother. They lived in a block of flats where his mum looked after the adjoining rockery and Zdenek helped her. He always liked messing about with seeds and plants. He took A levels at Grammar School and went on to university to study Applied Ecology but found it wasn't for him, especially the maths element. He left University and worked in a variety of areas, hospitality, banking and customer services. But he felt that he needed to find his calling and to make a complete change. He left the Czech Republic to come to England at the age of 22.



The new Wedding border

He was lucky in that he was given a temporary home by friends and he repaid their generosity by helping them with their garden, which he loved. As a result he started on the RHS Course levels 2 and 3 at Reaseheath College, working in a factory alongside Level 2, but then finding a job at Bridgemere Garden World while studying for Level 3. He was in sales, looking after alpines, but by

keeping his ears open he learnt a lot. And, of course, he was at Reaseheath and he was inspired by Harry Delaney and Sue Sherwood, his tutors at the time. He enjoyed studying and, after representing Reaseheath College, came second in the North West regional finals of the Young Horticulturalist of the Year. It is a tough, demanding competition and well respected in the industry.

After college Zdenek started as a junior gardener at Dorothy Clive Gardens, when Marcus Chilton-Jones was Curator. It was a dream come true, especially as he lived close by at Stoke on Trent. The learning was diverse, covering most horticultural skills, pruning,



The newly designed main drive

design, use of herbaceous plants, growing under glass, though he admits he is a little weak on edibles. He was a junior gardener for 2/3 years, then craft gardener, then senior gardener and was appointed Head Gardener by Kathryn Robey. He has two gardeners and 30 volunteers working with him, many of whom are very knowledgeable and well qualified. They have thought about taking on an apprentice and may do so in the future.

With a small pool of gardeners and volunteers, Zdenek feels he has to be “garden smart” to keep the garden looking good and to keep improving standards. For example, previously there was a wide border alongside the path leading up to the café, which can be seen in the 2018 Newsletter article. This has been reduced and backed by a yew hedge, making it less labour intensive. There used to be a great deal of tropical planting in the large borders below the café. This has been moved elsewhere and there are now more perennials and fewer annuals in the main borders.



White birches in the winter garden

Like most gardens open to the public, they are trying to extend the seasons of interest with the emphasis on late summer and winter colour. The idea of introducing the winter garden was conceived by Marcus Chilton-Jones and Zdenek helped in establishing it. The Garden team never rests, and different areas are being developed all the time. The winter garden will see a remodelling of its largest border this year; the potager garden has been enriched with 26 different varieties of espalier and cordon apples and pears. Zdenek and Kathryn are working towards introducing raised beds and would generally like to make the potager more accessible

and inclusive to wheelchair users. Wildflowers have been planted in a trial on the Daffodil Walk in 2021 and this has now been extended across a much wider area. It should look stunning later in the year.



Apple cordons in the potager

The quarry garden is known for its rhododendrons and azaleas but, partly because of the climate changes forecast for the future, they are introducing a more diverse range of woody plants, including magnolias, euonymus, Japanese maples and many more.

In the hillside garden a shelter belt has been partially removed and more ornamental trees planted,

opening up the area and giving a far more attractive prospect. There are plenty more changes, some modest, some more dramatic. Zdenek feels his role is to leave the garden better than he found it. He also loves teaching and mentoring, running many of the workshops over the year and being involved in BBC Stoke and BBC Shropshire.

Having walked round the garden with Zdenek you feel the garden is in a safe pair of hands, particularly with Kathryn Robey to back him up. Thanks to Zdenek and Kathryn for allowing me access to write this article and welcoming me to their garden.

Sue Eldridge

Photos Zdenek Valkoun and Sue Eldridge

For further information see the [Dorothy Clive Garden website](#)

Visit to Bankhead Garden, Barnhill near Chester



Sian and Simon introducing us to the garden

The Trust's visit could hardly have been more different in terms of weather from one week before when members were soaked by torrential rain at Arley for the AGM. Well, there was some rain but very little and it did not impact on our first visit to these gardens. The owners of Bankhead, Simon and Sian Preston, have lived there since 2001. There is certainly a history to the site as the main house became the Dower House for the Bolesworth estate, which we visited recently. Originally built in 1864 and called 'Belfield', the name was changed when it was bought by Robert Barbour in 1874. Both the house and nearby stables are the work of Alfred

Waterhouse who was also the architect of Manchester Town Hall, the 19th century Eaton Hall and Strangeways Prison! Bankhead House needed substantial work when they purchased it; modifications were made to the house to provide a stronger link to the main garden at the side of the house.



White bark birch trees in front of the house

On arriving at the front of the house, there is a group planting of white bark birch trees; it was simple and stunning so we knew immediately that we were in for a special treat. The Prestons have photos of the garden from the early 1900s and the 1970s which show how the garden has changed through the various ownerships. They have continued to develop the gardens in a sensitive manner, adding new features such as a rose garden and hedges to give identity and structure to the garden. It seems that the planting in the early photos was rather haphazard, adding beds without any clear purpose except to display plants. There was a look of “parks department”

planting; these have been removed and much simplified. Today the garden is a cohesive series of spaces where the plants truly define the layout. As a sloping site, the garden is a series of terraces and outdoor rooms and even includes a Secret Garden. What is outstanding are the long distant views towards the Welsh hills.

Only recently did they discover that the current pond area was at one time a sunken rose garden. Anyone with a pond will know that they need continuous maintenance. Sian said that the pond had been leaking and had several small islands in it so it was drained, silt removed and a new lining installed leaving only one island. To prevent the pond from silting up, they net the area over for autumn and winter which, after several years of doing it, they said is not as daunting as when they first tried. As there is no natural water source, an inlet pipe connects to the roof drainage from the main house and provides the water.



Views across to the Welsh Hills

Sian and Simon are hands-on gardeners doing much of the work themselves. They have the help of Graham, a part-time gardener who they said ‘came with the house’! He started his working life at Bee’s Nurseries and has anecdotes about Mr Bulley and Ness Gardens.



Gathering for tea

The renovation of the pond area is very successful; however, Sian and Simon admit that not everything has worked well. A wildflower meadow was planted but failed simply because the soil was too nutrient-rich. It will be interesting to see if they try again in another area. Asked what their next garden project would be, they were not sure as there was more than enough to keep them busy. As the garden tour came to an end, the all important and appreciated tea and cakes came out along with a few rays of sunshine.

Ed Bennis

Photos Ed Bennis, Beric Bartlett and Sue

Eldridge

More photos available on the [website gallery](#)

Thomas Hayton Mawson in Cumbria - Part 2



Views across the lawn back to the hotel

We have featured Thomas Mawson several times in the CGT Newsletter. In the April 2023 edition Julia Whitfield wrote about the designer and his connection with Cheshire. In October 2023, I wrote about Mawson and his connection with the Lake District and covered Holker Hall, Rydal Hall and Brockhole. This is an appropriate time for Part 2 of Mawson's Lake District connection since Langdale Chase in Windermere has recently reopened following restoration of house and garden.

In 1891 Mrs Edna Howarth commissioned Manchester architect Joseph Patton to design the house on the shores of Lake Windermere. It

was built in Brathay blue stone by Grissenthwaite of Penrith. In the 1890s Thomas Mawson was commissioned to lay out 4.5 acres of the grounds. His firm provided three of the original gardeners, who were joined by five others. Janet Waymark in her book 'Thomas Mawson: Life, gardens and landscapes' writes that *'the landscaping which evolved (at Langdale Chase) was aimed at producing status and amenity, rather than floral display. The oaks which lined the carriage drive in the front were preserved, giving dignity to the house. At the back, a steep drop to the lake was smoothed into a gentler slope, which was planted with rhododendrons and azaleas for spring colour. Steps were made leading down to paths through shrubs, roses and a water garden ...'*

The house became a hotel in 1930, achieving five-star status. Over the last year there has been a massive restoration, seeking to restore the original design of the house and Mawson's garden.

Architects and designers were employed, including garden designer Annie Gifoyle. There is a prominent terrace and balustrade with typical Mawson features, and steps, built in local material, leading down to the lawn. The views from the terrace are stunning, looking across Lake Windermere to the Langdale Pikes.



Views from the terrace across Lake Windermere



The bridge by Mawson with waterside planting

At the entrance to the hotel is a woodland area with spring flowering shrubs and masses of bulbs amongst mature trees. Opposite the hotel entrance are flowering cherries and much of the planting around the hotel is designed for all year round display. In the main garden yew trees provide an architectural backdrop for planting of shrubs and herbaceous perennials. *Cercidiphyllum japonica* is repeated across the site, along with *Cornus mas* and the rambling rose 'Lady of the Lake'. Planting includes *Agapanthus*, *Salvia*, *Euphorbia*, many scented shrubs and roses, *Philadelphus*, *Cistus* and *Daphne*, as well as rhododendrons and azaleas. The lawn with its well established trees and shrubs leading down to the lake is beautiful. Water trickles across the site, with waterside planting and a bridge designed by Mawson (left).



Steps leading down from the house

Nearer to the house, slate steps and edging have been restored in local stone and slate; planting is new and will take time to bulk out. It will be good to see how it has all matured after a few years.

Unfortunately you can only visit the garden if you are a hotel guest and have a guided tour with the head gardener if you are an overnight guest. But you can get a taste by going for lunch or afternoon tea on the terrace or in the conservatory, which is what we did.

Not far from Langdale Chase is Holehird Garden, a 10 acre fellside garden now managed by the Lakeland Horticultural Society. It has wonderful views over Lake Windermere and the Lakeland Fells. It has a walled garden with herbaceous borders and island beds, spring bulbs, autumn colours, collections of rhododendrons, hydrangeas, alpines and six National Plant Collections. It is entirely managed by volunteers.

The house was built by John Macmillan Dunlop, a manufacturer of mill machines, with both Gothic and Arts and Crafts influences. William Grimble Groves, owner of the largest brewery in Manchester, moved here with his family in 1897. He commissioned Mawson to extend the range of greenhouses to house his collection of orchids. Sadly these were demolished before the Society took over, so virtually nothing can be seen of Mawson's work. But the walled garden still exists and is well used and the balustrading and steps below the hall are reminiscent of Mawson's work.



Acers and rhododendrons in the large rockery



Lakeland Gardens Nursery

A part of the Mawson history has recently been revived at the Lakeland Gardens Nursery in the centre of Windermere. Thomas Mawson bought what is now home to Lakeland Gardens Nursery in 1885, a year after his honeymoon in the Lake District. He had decided, along with his two brothers, to open a nursery and garden design business of his own in Windermere. The Lakeland Nursery soon became a thriving business, servicing the many wealthy industrialists who were building homes in the newly popular Lake District. Thomas would create designs for the gardens, and his brothers would provide the plants from the nursery.

The Mawson's Lakeland Nursery continued to thrive, handed down through the generations, on the same site in Windermere until 1978 when it finally changed hands. The garden centre that took over Mawson's place closed in the 1980s, the site then being used as a depot for plant storage by the local council, and then car storage for Rayrigg Motors in the early 1990s.

Later in 2020, when the site became available, Sam Westcott, owner of Lakeland Gardens, took the opportunity to restore the neglected and downtrodden nursery, bringing life and a thriving garden business back to the place where Thomas Mawson had begun his hugely successful and fulfilling



Community Centre, once Thomas Mawson's home

business venture 135 years earlier. Opposite the garden is a community centre, once home to Thomas Mawson and his brothers.

There are many more properties in the Lake District where Mawson designed the gardens, but most are in private hands and are not open to the public. If anyone knows of any and is able to photograph and provide a short history, please contact the editor.

Text and photos Sue Eldridge

see [The Visit Cumbria website on Thomas Mawson](#)

RHS Urban Show held at Depot Mayfield, Manchester

This early Spring Garden Show held in Manchester from 18th April, 2024 for four days was the first RHS Show to be held entirely undercover in an old Railway Warehouse, close to Piccadilly Station and next to the recently constructed Mayfield Park.

The Warehouse, originally built in 1910 as the Railway Yard for Mayfield Station, was more recently used by Royal Mail as a Distribution Centre until its closure in the 1980s. The Warehouse, along with the surrounding area, lay dormant for almost thirty years until 2019, when the site was incorporated into the

£1 billion regeneration scheme associated with the "Mayfield" area. Whilst retaining its industrial heritage with exposed brickwork, iron pillars, concrete flooring and heavy structural metalwork supporting the underground vaulting, it now provides a huge capacity venue for cultural events.



An overview of the Show



A display for a small outdoor space

The principal aim of the RHS Urban Show was to present cutting edge designs and inspirational ideas to urban gardeners with smaller gardens. It wanted to show that gardening in small spaces, or being involved in community gardening, helps to boost and improve biodiversity in urban areas and especially in the densely built inner cities.

In addition to horticultural displays, there was botanical art, talks on a variety of horticultural subjects and the inevitable retail outlets.

The main feature garden, the 'Urban Forest' was designed by Nathan Webster, last year's RHS 'Young

Designer of the Year' and constructed by Wright Landscapes of Pickmere. This highlighted sustainability, by utilising natural materials in a modern environment.

Although I enjoyed the coffee and croissants on offer, I consider that the RHS missed a wonderful opportunity by not highlighting more environmentally friendly designs for limited space gardens and encouraging the use of the variety of plant material now available from our nursery growers.

Overall, a good start, ideal location, but it needs a fresh review if it is to be of greater interest to urban gardeners and professionals employed in the various sectors of our industry.

Gordon J Darlington

Photos Gordon Darlington and Sue Eldridge

The Power of Gardening and Volunteering



Winding path through Maggie's garden

In hindsight, applying for a job in a garden, and confessing at interview that I knew nothing about gardening was a risk. Fortunately, I was given the opportunity to tell my story and I got the job.

I began by explaining that about a year previously, I started to understand the power of a garden on a person's wellbeing.

My Mum's breast cancer had come back with a vengeance and although I tried to look after her at home, the care required was complex, so Mum was admitted to a nursing home. Despite the regular medical interventions and the poor prognosis, the daily visits to see Mum were joyful and full of laughter. She had many visitors from family and friends and usually opted to chat to people in her room; however on one particularly sunny day I convinced her that we should go and sit outside.

The garden had a profound effect on

both of us. My normally chatty Mum was calm and quiet, and I followed her lead. We sat in silence taking in the sights, sounds and smells around us. The garden was small but had clearly been designed with a wheelchair user in mind, as the paths were easy to navigate, and the flowers and foliage were at the right height for somebody in a wheelchair to enjoy. There was a small water feature and the gentle babbling sound added to the calm.

It was a beautiful day, and the garden was in full bloom. I particularly remember the fragrant roses, as Mum was able to hold them gently and inhale the delicious scent. She commented on the light breeze on her face, the sounds of the birds, and the gentle hum of hard-working bumble bees. It was joyful. I don't remember how long we sat there, but when we got back to her room, one of the nurses commented that she had seen us in the garden and on how peaceful we both looked. Sadly, we didn't get the opportunity to visit the garden again as Mum lost her courageous battle with cancer before we had the chance. It remains a cherished memory.



Strelitzia in the greenhouse



Unusual plant in the greenhouse

A few months later, I was lucky enough to be invited to a talk by Marcus Chilton-Jones about the future of RHS Bridgewater which was organised by the Cheshire Gardens Trust. I thoroughly enjoyed it. I loved hearing about the challenges they faced because of the high levels of arsenic in the soil. Seasoned gardeners will be aware of the reasons and the remedies, but for this novice it was a topic I associate with the perfect murder in Agatha Christie films, so to hear it discussed as a modern-day challenge was fascinating. However, it was the talk about 'social prescribing' that was to continue my conversion to gardening.

Marcus talked about the work being done with the communities around the Salford based site, and the focus on reaching and engaging

with people who could benefit from ‘the healing power of nature and gardening at RHS Garden Bridgewater.’ He explained how people are referred to them from a range of professionals such as doctors and social workers. Having researched this further on their website, I discovered that they have professionals employed at the gardens to help those people to improve their physical, social, and mental health.

I was so inspired that when I got home, I did some research to see how I could get involved in gardening despite knowing nothing about the subject. An interesting challenge!

I decided that a voluntary opportunity could be a good route and discovered that the Maggie’s Centre in Didsbury had volunteering opportunities in their garden. Although I’d never visited, I was aware of the work done at the centre as I live close by. They offer professional support to cancer patients, their friends and relatives in an environment that is calm and inviting. It is designed to feel more like a home than a hospital with the people, the building and the garden all playing their part.

I applied and to my great delight, got called for interview. I confessed straight away that I knew nothing about gardening but that I had experienced at first hand the healing power of a garden and wanted to be a part of it. They listened, took a leap of faith and offered me the role. My gardening journey was about to begin.



Cornus kousa at the entrance

I now find myself in the enviable position of working in a garden designed by Dan Pearson OBE no less, under the expert and patient guidance of the head gardener, Kathryn. I volunteer there twice a week and am slowly learning the names of the flowers and plants. I don’t yet have enough gardening experience to know whether having a favourite plant is like having a favourite child – definitely not something to say out loud, but I shall risk that etiquette by admitting that the magnificent *Cornus kousa* near the entrance to the garden (left) and the *Strelitzia* ‘bird of paradise’ plant in the greenhouse are my current favourites.

I am also taking much more interest in my own small garden which is slowly transforming from slightly neglected to visibly improving and have started to gain the approval, not only of my lovely neighbours, many of whom are avid gardeners, but also

my regular visitor, the robin who comes to inspect my daily progress. He definitely made eye contact with me the other day which I took to mean ‘you seem to be getting slightly better at this and thanks for all the worms.’

Mum would smile if she knew about my blossoming interest in gardening as she had been telling me for years that I would enjoy it. She was, of course, right.

Text and photos Joanne Goddard, a guest at the talk by Marcus Chilton-Jones

In loving memory of Dinah Goddard.

RHS Heritage Catalogue

A new [RHS Heritage Catalogue](#), makes the full records of their historic archive, art, ephemera, object and photographic collections freely available online for the first time.

The catalogue will continue to grow, with new records being added all the time. Researchers with a particular interest can now find a broad range of materials across the collections with one quick search. For example, a search for ‘Gertrude Jekyll’ yields 191 artworks, 12 photographs, and 101 items from the archive. Searching for ‘RHS Chelsea’, meanwhile, brings up 22 artworks, 187 photographs, 4 objects, and 89 archive results.

Visit to Plantagogo Specialist Nursery



CGT Members gathered for the tour

On 13 June Cheshire Gardens Trust visited Plantagogo, a specialist nursery situated in the rather pleasant Cheshire countryside close to Crewe. It is probably not a nursery you know about unless you are a fan of Heuchera, Heucherella and Tiarella. Not open to the general public, we organised a visit to the nursery where we met the owners, Vicky and Richard Fox.

Vicky was the main guide although Richard was always present and ready to answer questions during the tour. We began with an overview of the nursery from Vicky. They originally bought a farm but then decided to give up on farming and instead established the nursery in 1990. Vicki has been in horticulture all her life and was very enthusiastic about their work although I could not imagine how they got through their workload. They sell mainly at shows and on-line, the latter really taking off during the COVID pandemic.

They hold a National Collection in all 3 genera of plants and have so many gold medals from showing that I did not try to count them. In 2023 every medal was gold.

After the introductory talk we decided to dodge the rain and go out to the first of the growing tunnels. The first tunnel housed all the plants which were for sale. Needless to say, several of us eventually returned there to make our selections.

Another tunnel housed the National Collections, including rarer varieties, along with some auriculas (the

nursery also grows some hardy perennials). The next tunnel also housed part of the National Collection as well as all

the plants which are being prepared for shows. These were waiting to be weeded, repotted and generally prepared for showing and members were very interested in this task, asking several questions (or keeping inside out of the rain!).

All the tunnels were interesting but the next one was particularly so as this was where the plant breeding took place. The nursery makes use of micropropagation to produce many hundreds of plants. This is much faster than propagation from cuttings but the plant material has to be sent away to another organisation to carry out this specialised work. The new plants



Vicky Fox showing us an amazing display in one of the polytunnels



Plants ready for potting on



are eventually returned to the nursery where they are nurtured (see left). Again, much interest was shown in the methods used for growing-on these small plants. Peat-free compost is used although this has not been without problems and Vicky and Richard are constantly trialling new brands. Currently 'Jiffy' is proving to be a good growing medium as long as this remains consistent. It used to cost £5 a bag but is now £13! All their pots have to be recyclable and both of these demands are driven by the RHS. If they don't comply, they cannot attend RHS shows or work as mentors with other nurseries. Use is made of nematodes in August and late September/early October to counter vine weevil.

By now our hour was up and it was time to make our own selections before returning to the office block where refreshments awaited. In all, an extremely interesting – and colourful – tour.

If you were unable to join us and would like to see more of their plants, you can find them online at www.plantagogo.com.

Julia Whitfield, photos Jackie Cawte and Julia Whitfield

Forthcoming Events

Cheshire Gardens Trust Events

Thursday 8th August 2pm, a visit to Norley Bank Farm near Frodsham,

Wednesday 21st August, A garden party for CGT Members and friends at Ashton Grange, Grange Road, Ashton Hayes, Chester, the home of our Treasurer Martin Slack and his wife Kate.

Thursday 12th September 11 am, Visit to The Palm House, Sefton Park

Talks planned for the autumn/winter

Monday 21st October – Donny Billington, Head Gardener at Walton Park. To be held at Marthall Hall.

Monday 3rd March 2025 – Emily Chandler, Head Gardener at Dunham. To be held at Marthall Hall

All the details and booking arrangements will be emailed or mailed to members. Also see the [CGT Website Events page](#)



Donny Billington (centre) winning a gold medal at Chelsea,

The Gardens Trust Events

A History of Gardens Online talks: Part 2 17C Gardens, a series of 5 starting on Tuesday 10th September 10 -11.30 am

Study Trip to Suffolk 10 to 12 September. Two and a half days of garden visits, good food and great garden-loving company. Book early to ensure your place!

For further information see [The Gardens Trust Events](#) page

National Garden Scheme

Many of the NGS open gardens have now finished, but a few are open in late summer, going into autumn



A new garden, **2 Ashcroft Cottages (left)**, Wettehall, Winsford, CW7 4DQ, 27/28 July, 3/4 August, 7/8 Sept.

A beautiful $\frac{3}{4}$ acre garden with large herbaceous borders, mature shrubs and grasses and a large wildlife pond with waterfall

Lane End Cottage Garden, Old Cherry Lane, Lymm, WA13 0TA 10/11 August, also open on other weekends

Lovell Quinta Arboretum, Swettenham, CW12 2LF 13th October, also open throughout the year.

Further information from the [NGS website](#) or in the leaflets that can often be found at garden centres.

Planthunters Fairs in Cheshire or nearby are:

Weds 31st July **Cholmondeley Castle Gardens**, Malpas SY14 8ET

Sun 11th August **Capesthorpe Hall**, Macclesfield, SK11 9JY

Sun -Mon 25/26 August **Dorothy Clive Garden**, Market Drayton, TF9 4EU

Sun 1st September **Ness Botanic Gardens**, Wirral, CH64 4AY

For further information see [Planthunters Fairs website](#)

RHS Flower Shows on the Move

Three popular RHS Flower Shows will move to new locations from 2025 in an attempt to reach new audiences and inspire more people to get gardening. After 2024, the Tatton Park will return to the Cheshire site every 3 years. In 2025 it will go to Wentworth Woodhouse, South Yorkshire and in 2026 to Sandringham in Norfolk. In two year's time the Hampton Court Show will become a biennial event, with the 2026 show taking place at Badminton Estate in Gloucestershire. The RHS Urban Show which took place in Manchester in April will move to a new location in 2026.

Rex Dibley



Rex Dibley showing us round the grounds in 2017

Some of you may remember visiting Dibley's Nursery in 2017 and being entertained by Rex Dibley who gave us a tour of the nursery and grounds. Sadly Rex died in April 2024, at the age of 91.

Rex Dibley started the Nursery in 1976 as a hobby and named it after the local village 'Efenechtyd'. For some reason this name gave people some difficulty and was eventually changed to the slightly more pronounceable 'Dibleys'. His son Gareth joined him in the business in

1984 after graduating from Reading University with a degree in Horticulture. Soon after, Rex retired from teaching to devote more time to the business. Gareth's sister Lynne and younger brother Paul have also joined the business, making it a true family affair.

Copy date for October Newsletter is 30th September 2024

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