



Summer 2026

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Welcome



Welcome to the summer edition of the Newsletter. Our Events Team put together an excellent programme of events over the past three months, and you can read reports on all of them in the coming pages. The last took place on Monday, 29th June, at Crewe Hill, and was very well attended, with more than 40 people enjoying the magnificent gardens and excellent refreshments. Our thanks go to our hosts Michael and Inger Trevor-Barnston, and to their head gardener Tristan Salmon, who does such an extraordinary job in caring for this very special place.

We have some more excellent visits and talks planned for the coming months, including a Garden Party at the home of David and Carys Cash, on Wednesday, 5th August. I very much hope that the weather will be kind to us and that many of our new members will be able to join us. If anyone would like to help with planning visits and talks for 2027, the next meeting of the Events Team will be held at 12:15 on 7th September at the Egerton Arms in Chelford. Everyone is welcome, so bring your ideas for the places you would like to visit next year and enjoy lunch with the group. So that we have an idea of numbers, please email me at: newsletter@cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk

One of the articles I particularly enjoyed working on for this edition of the Newsletter was the piece on the artwork of Mary Delany. It was the exhibition at Dunham Massey that first sparked the idea, and coincidentally, I discovered a Royal Family connection whilst on a short break with Tatton Garden Society. On a particularly sweltering day at Kew Gardens, during the second hottest week of the year, my friend Janet, who was exploring the grounds and glasshouses with me, suggested that we take the opportunity to look around Kew Palace. It seemed like a pleasantly cool option in the late afternoon, and during a self-guided tour, we came across a portrait of Mary Delany. It was a painting commissioned by King George III for the bedchamber of Queen Charlotte, who was a patron of Mrs Delany. You can read more on pages 12 and 13.



Rosa 'Mary Delany'

To coincide with the exhibition, *Rosa 'Mary Delany'* was planted over the entrance archway to the Rose Garden at Dunham Massey. The rose was bred by David Austin and introduced in 2002 as *Rosa 'Mortimer Sackler'*, but was renamed in 2022.

My thanks go to all contributors for their articles in this Newsletter, and I hope you enjoy reading them.

Best wishes

Alison

A Spring Visit to Rode Hall



A sea of bluebells

Rode Hall is a Georgian country house, the seat of the Wilbraham family, and currently occupied by the 9th Baronet, Sir Randle Baker Wilbraham and his wife, Lady Amanda Baker Wilbraham.

It was a perfect spring day for our visit, which was booked to coincide with one of their annual Bluebell Walk Events. Before exploring the gardens, however, we had a tour of the hall, followed by refreshments in the tearoom.

Our guides for the tour were Claire and Neil. Claire began by describing the exterior of the house and how it had changed over the centuries. We then split into two groups, so that we all had the opportunity to view the impressive family portraits and furniture. Much of the furniture was made by Gillows of Lancaster, and we admired a bespoke fitted sideboard in the dining room, as well as many other fine pieces. The porcelain collection is also extensive, and includes a Derby botanical service decorated by William Billingsley, together with numerous pieces from some other leading English factories in the second half of the eighteenth century. Photographs were not permitted inside the house, but more information and images of the collections can be found on the Rode Hall website: [Rode Hall Collections](#)

The formal gardens and parkland are listed as Grade II on the National Register of Historic Parks and Gardens, and we were free to explore these at our leisure. It was in 1790 that landscape gardener Humphry Repton (1752 – 1818) produced a 'Red Book' containing two watercolour illustrations, a sketch and written instructions. Several blank pages were left at the end to record the progress of the landscaping work. It was some years later, in 1803, that Randle Wilbraham III implemented some of Repton's proposals, employing John Webb, a partner of William Eames.



A Glimpse of Rode Pool and The Boathouse

Webb constructed a new driveway, created two artificial lakes: Rode Pool, which is one mile long, and the smaller Stew Pond, which you pass on the way to the obelisk and also the old and new boathouses. In April, the blue skies and bluebells were a delight. After taking in the view, you have to retrace your steps and divert past the Stew Pond to stroll past what can only be described as a sea of blue on the path to the Old Wood.



Magnificent rhododendrons

A key feature on the map is the Walled Kitchen Garden, which dates from the early part of the eighteenth century. A variety of vegetables and fruit are grown here, much of which is used for jams and chutneys in the tearoom. Traces of the flues within the heated garden wall supporting the espaliered fruits are visible, and one has been restored. In late summer, there is also an impressive array of flowers grown for cutting. Many of these are dried and can be purchased from the shop. More information on the Kitchen Garden can be found here: [Rode Hall Kitchen Garden](#)

One of the highlights of the circular route around the Old Wood at this time of year is the magnificent rhododendrons and azaleas. The route also passes Sugar Pool, the Grotto and Wild Garden, although reaching these requires a short detour from the main path. We all received a map as we arrived at Rode Hall, and it was invaluable in ensuring that we didn't miss any of the attractions. The image to the left shows one of the most impressive rhododendrons in full bloom.



The Head Gardener's Cottage



Wood Nymph statue in The Rose Garden

From inside the house, we had caught a glimpse of the Rose Garden and Terraces, which were designed by William Nesfield in 1860. It was too early for any of the roses to be in bloom, but the bronze statue of a wood nymph by David Williams Ellis was surrounded by the last of the tulips and a sea of forget-me-nots.

The statue was commissioned by Sir Richard Baker Wilbraham to replace the Nesfield Urn that was damaged in 1980.

With thanks to our hosts at Rode Hall and to Carolyn Yardley on our Events Team for organizing the visit.

Words and photos: Alison Moore

An Inspiring Day at Chester Zoo



In November 2023, Cheshire Gardens Trust's first in-person talk following the lockdown period was given by Phil Esseen, Curator of Botany and Horticulture at Chester Zoo. The presentation proved so engaging and informative that it inspired plans for another visit to see the zoo's horticultural work first-hand. This took place on 21st May, almost 20 years after our first visit in October 2006. You can read about that first visit here:

[CGT Newsletter January 2007](#)

On arrival, members were welcomed by Christopher Ryan, Gardens Team Manager, who led the first part of the tour. Due to the popularity of the event and limits on group size, participants had been divided into two groups. Both groups enjoyed guided tours led by Christopher and Richard Hewitt, Plant Nursery Team Manager, with morning and afternoon sessions allowing everyone time to explore the zoo independently and, of course, enjoy the wildlife.

Christopher began by explaining the structure and management of the horticultural team and outlined how the zoo's approach to horticulture has evolved over recent decades. During the 1980s, the focus had shifted significantly towards greater integration between horticulture and animal conservation. Formal gardens gradually gave way to more naturalistic planting schemes designed to create suitable habitats for wildlife while also promoting plant conservation and education. Today, the impact of climate change is an increasingly important consideration, with particular attention being given to developing planting schemes that can withstand periods of drought.

As we toured the site, Christopher demonstrated how former formal garden areas had been transformed into landscapes dominated by shrubs, herbaceous perennials and grasses. These changes have enhanced biodiversity and created environments more closely aligned with the natural habitats of the zoo's animals. He noted that this approach reflects the original vision of the zoo's founder, George Mottershead, who famously sought to create "a zoo without bars".

As we continued our walk, we passed The Oakfield, and admired the bedding displays, which are perhaps an exception to this new approach. This building was originally George Mottershead's family home and is now a Grade II Listed wedding venue. Nearby stands one of the oldest trees on the site, a magnificent Himalayan cedar, *Cedrus deodara*.



Cedrus deodara

The final part of the visit took place in the plant nursery, where Richard Hewitt introduced us to the zoo's remarkable conservation collections. The tropical nursery houses five National Collections of

plants threatened with extinction. Among these are the fascinating *Nepenthes*, or tropical pitcher plants. These carnivorous plants display an extraordinary range of forms and adaptations, each evolved to attract different prey species. One particularly unusual species has developed a relationship with tree shrews, which use the pitchers as a toilet, providing valuable nutrients for the plant.



Tropical pitcher plant



One of the beautiful orchids

We were also shown the extensive collection of Pleurothallidinae orchids, comprising more than 1,400 plants. Native to South America, many of these delicate and beautiful orchids are now threatened in the wild, making the zoo's conservation work especially important. Several specimens were in flower during our visit, allowing us to appreciate their remarkable diversity and intricate beauty. In addition, the nursery contains three National Collections of cacti from Chile, Peru and Mexico. Alongside these are numerous succulents, including species from Madagascar equipped with formidable spines that protect them from grazing animals such as lemurs.

Richard concluded by describing the zoo's extensive conservation work, both in the UK and overseas. This involves collaboration with other botanic gardens, conservation organisations and wildlife charities. Earlier this year, Chester Zoo became the first zoo in the UK to be BGCI accredited for its extensive work in plant conservation, research, and sustainability. See [Botanic Gardens Conservation International](#)

The visit proved to be both enjoyable and highly informative. Although many members had visited Chester Zoo before, the expertise of our guides, together with the excellent interpretation throughout the site, offered fresh insights into the zoo's important horticultural and conservation work. There was also ample opportunity to enjoy the zoo's impressive collection of animals, and earlier Christopher had particularly recommended a visit to the Heart of Africa, which opened in 2025. Here, extensive grassland planting reflects the character of the African savannah.

Our thanks go to Event Team member Carolyn Yardley for organising such an interesting, enjoyable and educational day.

Words: Margaret Blowey

Photos: Alison Moore

A New Chapter for Barbara Wright



Members of the Research and Recording Group gathered at Grappenhall Heys Walled Garden on 19th June to wish Barbara Wright farewell before her move to York. Her new home will be in a retirement village run by the Joseph Rowntree Trust, and she is looking forward to living closer to her son and his family.

Barbara grew up in Berlin during the Second World War, and only began her formal education at the age of seven. After completing the German equivalent of A Levels, the Abitur, she studied English Literature and Education at the University of Hamburg. During one of the summer breaks, she took a part-time job at a hotel in the Lake District and met her future husband, Andrew. After they married in the early 1960s, they travelled extensively throughout Europe and beyond before eventually settling in the UK. Barbara taught at William Hulme's Grammar School whilst raising their two children, and in 1996, she enrolled on a 3-year course studying Garden and Landscape History at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU). Barbara credits this course with sparking her lasting interest in the subject, and it was here that she became acquainted with historian Gaye Smith, who was a member of the Yorkshire Gardens Trust. Gaye introduced her to the Trust's activities and helped her develop the research skills that would later prove so valuable.

Cheshire Gardens Trust was officially launched on 29 April 2004 at Arley Hall, with Ed Bennis as Chair and Barbara as Vice-Chair. [MMU Reports CGT Launch](#). In those early days, Barbara painstakingly worked through every site identified in a report commissioned by English Heritage, compiling a folder for each one with plans, references, and supporting information, all organised by borough. Before the internet made research so much more accessible, this represented a considerable amount of work, but provided a comprehensive starter pack for researchers. In autumn 2004, she led the first meeting of the Research and Recording Group.

Barbara was always keen for the Research and Recording Group to feature in the Newsletter, encouraging new volunteers and raising awareness of their work. Her enthusiasm was infectious and inspired many members to become involved. In the [January 2007 Newsletter](#), she reported that four members had volunteered to research twenty sites in the Congleton area, where much of her own early work was centred. A few years later, the format of the 'recording form' was revised, and completed reports began to be distributed to interested parties, including Cheshire Archives. Barbara went on to complete a remarkable forty full reports, together with many short reports. Her meticulous research has made a lasting contribution to the Trust's work, providing valuable evidence for planning consultations and helping to protect and inform the future management of Cheshire's designed landscapes.

After lunch in the Primrose Café, members enjoyed a tour of the walled garden led by Garden Manager and CGT member Oliver Groos. Barbara Moth then presented Barbara with a card and gift voucher on behalf of the group, together with everyone's thanks and best wishes for her exciting new adventure. We hope that she will stay in touch and know that her enthusiasm and commitment have left a lasting legacy within Cheshire Gardens Trust.

Words and Photo: Alison Moore

Norton Priory and Museums: Volunteers Sought for New Orchard Research Project

It is ten years since the lottery funded redevelopment of the museum at Norton Priory, and the staff are now looking to interpret the horticultural history of the site. The research will centre around the 18th-century walled garden, with part of the project focusing specifically on its orchards.

Evidence suggests that orchards were already established at Norton Priory by 1545, the year the Brooke family acquired the estate from Henry VIII. Archival records refer to the Infirmary Orchard and Smith's Orchard, indicating a long-standing tradition of fruit cultivation on the site. Recent work has been undertaken to create areas within the 42-acre site for new plantings of known Lancashire and Cheshire heritage varieties, with a further plantation devoted to new varieties.



In order to develop the interpretation of the orchards the museum is seeking volunteers to carry out research using archival material and the digital resources developed as part of the Cheshire Gardens Trust Caldwell Nursery Project. The aim is to establish the names of the original fruit varieties purchased by the Brooke Family for Norton Priory, as well as those acquired by other local families for estates in the area.

Norton Priory is already recognised as the home of the National Collection of quinces (*Cydonia*) and hopes to become known as a centre for North West heritage varieties of apples and pears.

Volunteers will work with Paul Quigley, the staff member responsible for the development of the orchard project.

Anyone interested in helping with the project should contact Paul Quigley:

Email: paulquigley@nortonpriory.org

Phone: 07950 381010

Words and photos: Moira Stevenson

Forthcoming Events

Cheshire Gardens Trust

Tuesday, 21st July: Visit to Higher Dam Head Farm, Mobberley, WA16 7HY



This two-acre country garden has plenty of interest for CGT members on a summer visit. The features include box-lined courtyards, large terracotta pots, deep herbaceous borders, a pergola, wildflower orchard, walled vegetable garden and a large glasshouse with succulents and cacti. An attractive natural pond has a waterside deck, and another area has silver birch trees and grasses.

The garden is mainly flat to walk around on paths and lawn with a few steps and a more difficult optional path around the pond.

Wednesday 5th August: Garden Party, 61 Hawthorn Lane, Wilmslow SK9 5DQ



A member's only event at the Wilmslow home of CGT Members David and Carys Cash. The event is free, but contributions to the Wilmslow Wells for Africa Charity, of which David is Chair, would be very welcome. Tea, coffee and homemade cakes are included. The garden has three levels, which are linked by a flowing lawn flanked by well-stocked herbaceous borders. A tulip tree, a fernery and a modern greenhouse with attached cold frame are also features. Following the removal of a large tree last autumn, one side has been replanted.

Monday 14th September: Heritage Open Day Walk, Verdin Park, Northwich, CW8 1BA



Verdin Park was formed from the pleasure grounds and parkland of the former Winnington Bank House. Set out in the early 19th century, the property was acquired by Robert Verdin in 1884 and given to the town to provide an infirmary and a public park with brine swimming baths. The park was laid out by James Holland, a ship's carpenter, and has grand gates acquired from the north lodge at Bostock Hall. Salt subsidence led to the loss of the brine baths and continues to affect the stability of the trees on the boundary banks.

See page 11 for more information about Heritage Open Days. The Verdin Park Walk will be led by Barbara Moth.

The Gardens Trust

8th September - AGM - GT members & County GT voting reps are invited to join online for the Annual General Meeting.

1st October - The Historic Role of American Plants in British and Irish Gardens.

9th and 10th October - Walled Kitchen Gardens Network - Forum 2026 at Holkham Hall, Norfolk.

The Gardens Trust Members' Visit to The Newt in Somerset is currently sold out.

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

National Garden Scheme (NGS)

July and August are particularly busy months for the NGS. As well as old favourites such as Laskey Farm and Norley Bank Farm, there are two new gardens. Marsh Farm is described as an artisan flower farm which was started by Holly Slimming in 2023. It specialises in seasonal cut flowers, which are grown without the use of pesticides. Situated on Marsh Lane in Crowton, Northwich, CW8 2RL, it opened for the first time on 4th July and will be open again on Sunday 23rd August.

Also opening for the first time is The Homestead in Macclesfield, not to be confused with The Homestead in High Legh, owned by NGS County Organiser and CGT member Janet Bashforth, which opened in June. The Homestead's three-quarter-acre garden lies within Macclesfield's South Park. This garden opens on Sat 25th and Sun 26th July.

Full details of all open gardens follow the link: <https://findagarden.ngs.org.uk/>

Laskey Farm and Norley Bank Farm



Laskey Farm in Lymm is owned by Howard and Wendy Platt and opens several times a year for NGS. You will find a network of pools, a maze with prairie-style planting, and well-stocked herbaceous borders. The roses are stunning!

Over the summer, the garden is open on the 11th and 12th of July and again on the 30th and 31st of August. They also accommodate groups by arrangement.

Norley Bank Farm is a 2-acre garden near Frodsham, with something different to see every year. As well as colourful borders, there is a recently planted orchard and a large pond that is teeming with wildlife, including damselflies and dragonflies. A second pond has also been dug to attract great crested newts.

You can read about CGT's visit to both these gardens in the: [October 2024 Newsletter](#)



Plant Hunters Fairs

A few of these events are coming up in Cheshire and Shropshire over the next three months.

Wednesday 22nd July at Cholmondeley Castle, Malpas, SY14 8ET

Sunday 9th August at Capesthorpe Hall, Macclesfield, SK11 9JY

Sunday 30th and Monday 31st August at Dorothy Clive Garden, Markey Drayton, TF9 4EU

Sunday 20th September at Arley Hall and Gardens, Northwich, CW9 6NA

For the full list of all events, visit [Plant Hunters' Fairs](#)

Other Events

[Ness Botanic Gardens](#)

Ness Botanic Gardens Annual Show takes place on Sunday 16th August. The categories being judged are fruit and vegetables, flowers, crafts, photography and baking. There is also a writing competition for both children and adults.

[RHS Bridgewater Events](#)

A whole summer of talks and activities, including:

Saturday 11th and Sunday 12th July - The National Sweet Pea Society Late Show.

Saturday 1st August - Right Plant, Right Place Course

[Heritage Open Days](#)

Heritage Open Days is England's largest community led festival of history and culture, involving thousands of local volunteers and organisations and takes place this year between 11th and 20th September. As part of this event, the National Trust properties at Hare Hill and Little Moreton Hall are free to visit on Saturday 12th September.

[Tatton Garden Society](#)

Tatton Garden Society have several events coming up in the next three months.

Wednesday 15th July - a visit to Normans Hall in Pott Shrigley, Macclesfield.

Tuesday 4th August - coach trip to Plas Cadnant and two private gardens on Anglesey.

Friday 11th September - guided Visit of the late Medieval Tatton Old Hall & its Tudor Garden.

Thursday 24th September – Tatton Park autumn guided walk with Simon Tetlow, Head Gardener.

[Mary Delany Exhibition at Dunham Massey](#)

A photographic exhibition of the work of Mary Delaney can be seen in the Orangery at Dunham Massey until the end of November. The fascination story of her work can be found on the following page.

The Botanical World of Mary Delany



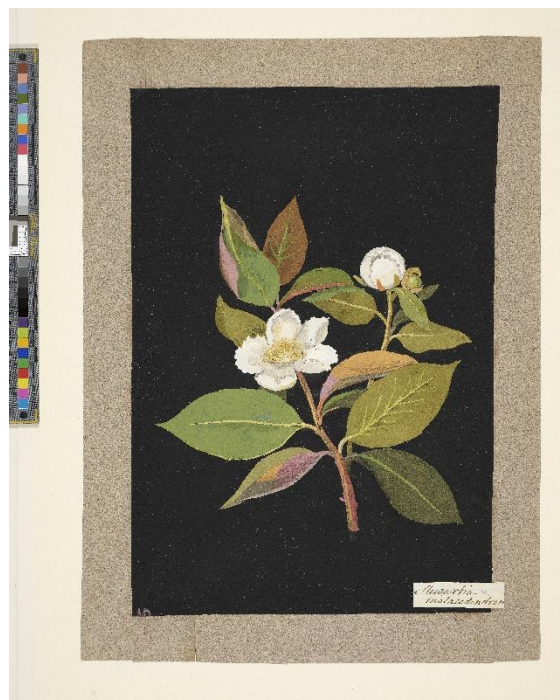
Rosa gallica

Mary Delany is best known for her beautiful collages, or 'paper mosaicks' as she described them, which depicted botanical subjects in incredible detail. This summer, a photographic display, part of the British Museum's touring exhibition series, can be seen in the Orangery at Dunham Massey, near Altrincham.

Mary was born Mary Granville on 14 May 1700 and, when she was only 17 entered into an unhappy marriage with Alexander Pendarves who was over 30 years her senior. She was widowed after seven years, and was fortunate that a friendship with Margaret Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, introduced her to Joseph Banks, the naturalist and botanist who sailed with James Cook on his first great voyage. Mary was able to see samples and drawings from his travels, and created her own artwork inspired by these new and exotic plants.

She married her second husband, Dr Patrick Delany in 1743, and they shared a mutual interest in gardening and botany. With his encouragement, she continued with her many artistic pursuits, including painting, shellwork and needlecraft. When Dr Delany died after 25 years of marriage, she found herself a widow again at the age of 68. From then on, Mrs Delany spent much of her time at Bulstrode, the home of her friend the Duchess of Portland, and in the company of Joseph Banks and also the Swedish naturalist Daniel Solander.

A few years later, Mrs Delany began producing a series of exquisitely detailed botanical collages. These were created by cutting tiny pieces of paper, that had been coloured with watercolour paint to match the flowers and foliage, and then sticking them to a black background, using a variety of different glues. Smaller pieces were laid over larger ones with painstaking precision to create a sense of depth and shade. It is incredible to think that some of the works had around 200 paper petals for a single flower. Every piece that Mrs Delany created included the botanical and common names of the plant, the date and place of its creation, and the name of the person who had provided the plant specimen. Inscribed on the reverse of *Stewartia malacodendron*, she wrote: 'Bulstrode July 1778, 'Kew' and 'Mr Solander and Mr Alstroemer'. Writing to her niece, she said 'Dr Solander etc. came, as expected and I am now going to get a botanical lecture and to copy a beautiful flower called Stuartia'.



Stewartia malacodendron



The Orangery at Dunham Massey

It is very fitting that this exhibition should be at Dunham Massey, because there were also family links between Mary Delany and Lady Mary Booth, the Countess of Stamford, 1704 – 1772.

Mary Booth was the only daughter and heiress of George Booth, 2nd Earl of Warrington (1675-1758) and Mary Oldbury. In 1736, she married her cousin, Harry Grey, Lord Grey of Groby, later 4th Earl of Stamford (1715-1768). As a result of this union, Dunham Massey passed to the Grey family.

In 1763, Lady Mary negotiated the marriage of her son George Harry Grey, 5th Earl of Stamford, to Henrietta Cavendish-Bentinck, the daughter of the Duke and Duchess of Portland. After Lady Mary died in 1772, George Harry Grey and his wife took over the management of the estate at Dunham and spent time residing there.

Experience Curator Emma Campagnaro says: “Through archive content, we know that Mary Delany and Henrietta Grey shared correspondence after Henrietta’s marriage when she lived at Dunham Massey, although copy letters indicate Henrietta’s correspondence focuses mainly on her children and family health.”

The original ‘Paper Mosaicks’ are kept at the British Museum, but a book in The Orangery allows visitors to see what is written on the reverse of some of the artworks. Perhaps one of the most exciting inscriptions is on *Cactus grandifloras*, where Mrs Delany wrote: ‘Bulstrode 12 August 1778’ and ‘the Day the King and Queen & the Royal Family were at Bulstrode’. This was described at great length in a letter written to her niece, where she refers to how the King requested to see her ‘book of flowers’.

King George III and Queen Charlotte became great supporters of Mrs Delany, and Queen Charlotte shared her love of art and botany. After the Dowager Duchess of Portland died in 1785, they gave her a small house at Windsor along with a pension of £300 a year. Mrs Delany continued to create her ‘Paper Mosaicks’ before failing eyesight forced her to stop at the age of 88. In total, there are an impressive 985 works of art.



Cactus grandifloras

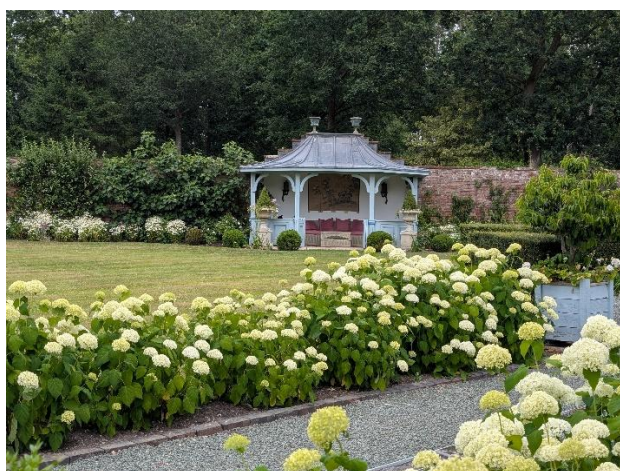
Further reading can be found on the [British Museum website](#) and the [British Museum Blog](#)

Words and photograph of the Orangery at Dunham Massey: Alison Moore.

Photographs of Mary Delany’s work © Trustees of the British Museum.

Tigers, Monkeys and Crocodiles at Crewe Hill

In the January 2026 Newsletter, the continuing series of Head Gardener interviews started by Sue Eldridge featured [Tristan Salmon](#) from Crewe Hill. It was therefore a great pleasure for members of Cheshire Gardens Trust to meet Tristan and the owners, Michael and Inger Trevor-Barnston, in person at the end of June. Thankfully, the heatwave from the previous week had passed, allowing us to explore the gardens in very pleasant conditions. As there were more than forty of us, half enjoyed a tour with Michael, while the rest were led by Tristan.



We began our tour in the walled garden, where we admired the new summerhouse and also the slate water feature built by Tristan. The line of *Hydrangea arborescens* 'Annabelle' on either side of the rill was planted in 2025 to replace a row of cypress trees and to complement the white theme in this part of the garden.

There is also a large pergola festooned with *Rosa* 'Claire Austin', which had finished flowering at the time of our visit.

Back in the main part of the garden, Tristan told us about the many sapling palm trees along the long border, all propagated from a single original tree. Wherever possible, plants at Crewe Hill are either grown from seed or propagated from cuttings.



Original palm tree in the background



The long border



Beautiful roses

Along the long border, you can see the young palm trees, roses, and a mix of colourful perennials.

The sub-tropical garden began with a single banana tree over thirty years ago. It is now home to numerous *Tetrapanax* (propagated from the original specimen), a magnificent *Paulownia tomentosa* with beautiful lilac-coloured flowers in spring, and a weeping *kōwhai* tree from New Zealand. These photos were taken on a previous visit later in the summer and show how Tristan uses bold coloured perennials that complement the lush foliage of the sub-tropical plants perfectly.



Outside the sub-tropical garden in September



Crocosmia provides a bright splash of red

In the main garden, the red oriental bridge is a key feature.



Not only is Tristan a talented gardener, but he is also a skilled craftsman. The water feature was built using upcycled materials, and the modern artwork was a bit of a talking point.



As we entered the woodland area, we encountered some of the Crewe Hill wildlife. Can you spot the little crocodile in the middle photo?



Tristan led his group past the new orchard and across the field to the rustic temple - pictured below - that he built last year. Here there are views down to the River Dee, and the top of the bank is currently planted with an annual wildflower mix.



Our last stop before refreshments was Kew Hill, which is a greenhouse like no other. It has a waterfall, seating areas, a variety of plants and mirrors the quirky nature of the garden itself.



Did I mention monkeys? We found this one inside Kew Hill, but there was also one on the monkey puzzle tree in the walled garden.

Our thanks go to Michael, Inger and Tristan for a wonderful afternoon at Crewe Hill. The garden tour was both informative and highly entertaining, and the afternoon refreshments under the gazebo were excellent.

More photos will be added to the website gallery in due course, and if you are interested in learning a little more about the development of the garden, you can read the article published in [Cheshire Life Magazine](#) in January 2023.

Arley Garden Festival

Following on from the success of the 30th anniversary Garden Festival last year with the introduction of 'Creative Corners', the show was expanded further for 2026 to include larger 'Show Gardens' and 'Feature Gardens'. Amongst the designers displaying their skills were James Youd of Arley Hall, Pip Probert, and the team at Arley Hall Nursery.

During the week leading up to the show, the temperatures soared, creating challenges for all the designers, but the standard was excellent. There were nine 'Creative Corners' in total, and the judges Sue Beesley and Callum Corrie handed out four gold medals, three silver-gilt and two silver medals.

Best in Show went to Pip Probert, and the garden designed by James Youd for Arley Hall won gold for the second year in a row. The public vote went to 'Harriet's Garden' designed by Amie Walker-Shelton at Alder Garden Services in memory of their friend Harriet Lewthwaite.



Pip Probert and James Youd with the judges

In the Show Garden category, 'Wild at Heart, Modern in Mind' was designed by Danielle Harrington of Canalside Garden Centre and won a Gold Medal, Best in Show and the also the public vote.



A total of sixteen schools took part in the school's gardening challenge this year. The children, with a little help from their teachers, were tasked with planting a 2.45m x 1.25m raised flowerbed, provided by Arley.

1st place went to Winnington Park Community Primary School from Northwich.

2nd place to The Russett School, also from Northwich.

3rd place to Barnton Community Nursery and Primary School.

The public vote went to Alderman Bolton Community Primary School.

Congratulations to all the budding gardeners who took part.

News in Brief

Birkenhead Park



Grade I listed Birkenhead Park, which opened in 1847, was the first public park to be established at public expense in the United Kingdom. It was designed by Joseph Paxton and is considered an outstanding example of his work and a landmark in the history of public parks. At the end of June, it was announced that a £2 million investment for the park had been approved by Wirral Council's Economy, Regeneration and Housing (ERH) Committee. This will fund a major programme of improvements, marking a significant step forward in the borough's ambition to secure UNESCO World Heritage Site status. [Newsletter Report 2019](#)

The Gardens Trust volunteer of the year

In mid-June, the Gardens Trust announced its annual Volunteer Awards. Sally Ingram from Sussex Gardens Trust and Gwen Miles from Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust were joint winners.

You can read about all the winners and nominees here: [The Gardens Trust Volunteer Awards 2026](#)

John Ravenscroft

John Ravenscroft VMH, founder of Bridgemere Garden Centre and Show Gardens, passed away peacefully at home on 26th May. After selling the business in 2006, he went on to create Cherry Tree Arboretum with his wife Liz at their home in north Shropshire. Here they established a fifty-acre arboretum and a remarkable collection of trees and shrubs, including magnolias, American oaks, and liquidambars. An RHS Vice President, John was awarded the RHS Veitch Memorial Medal for his outstanding contribution to the advancement and improvement of horticulture, and in 2008 received the RHS Victoria Medal of Honour.

A Five-Year Milestone for RHS Bridgewater

Since it opened in May 2021, a year later than planned due to the COVID-19 pandemic, RHS Bridgewater has welcomed more than 2.49 million visitors. One of the North West's most visited attractions, it has become a thriving asset to the area with a series of community programmes.

Marcus Chilton-Jones, Head of Site, said: "Bridgewater was always intended to be more than a garden it's a place to grow skills, wellbeing and connection. Five years on, it's inspiring to see how deeply people feel part of this landscape. Our volunteers, community partners and supporters have made it thrive in ways we couldn't have imagined. With major developments on the horizon, including the Yangzhou Scholars' Garden, we're entering an exciting new phase of Bridgewater's story." Read more here: [RHS Bridgewater Fifth Birthday](#)

Copy date for October Newsletter is 15th September 2026

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, don't hesitate to get in touch with Alison Moore, the Newsletter Editor, on 07412 288929 or email newsletter@cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk