



Spring at Ness Botanic Gardens

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Welcome



It is hard to believe that it has been almost twelve months since I volunteered to join the Council of Management. Everyone has been so welcoming, and I have thoroughly enjoyed getting involved in all aspects of CGT. Of the many highlights over the course of the year, taking over as editor of this Newsletter has to be the main one, and it is surprising how quickly this second edition has come round. If you would like to find out more about the volunteering opportunities at CGT, why not join us at one of our upcoming sessions. Dates for the next meetings of the Council of Management, Research and Recording, and Events are on page 10.

I am pleased to say that spring is now in full swing, and after a winter of interesting talks and our AGM at Ness Gardens, it's time to look forward to the warmer months ahead. Our first event of the spring and summer season is at Rode Hall, and as our visit coincides with bluebell season, I thought I would explore the wonderful world of bluebells. English bluebells have a whole host of common names, but their scientific name is *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*. They can be identified by their narrow leaves, drooping stems, and deep violet-blue, tubular, bell-shaped flowers that grow only on one side of the stem.

They have long been at risk from their more vigorous European cousin, the Spanish bluebell *Hyacinthoides hispanica*, introduced by the Victorians as a garden plant. These 'interlopers' have broad leaves, straight stems, and paler blue, conical-bell flowers that appear all around the stem. Very easy to tell apart, you might think, but as the two species have hybridised over time, the majority of plants display characteristics of both.

English bluebells are mainly to be found in ancient woodland, where they can create a wonderful carpet of blue before the tree canopy casts its shadow. The image below was taken a couple of years ago in the woods near Bluebell Cottage Gardens, and you can clearly see the characteristic drooping stems. A walk in a bluebell wood always reminds me of the poem by Emily Brontë, the first verse of which is shown below.

'The blue bell is the sweetest flower
That waves in summer air;
Its blossoms have the mightiest power
To soothe my spirit's care.'

Let's hope we see many *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* on our visit to Rode Hall.

Best wishes

Alison



Winter Talks

At the beginning of the year, we had two excellent but very different talks. In January, Alexandra Fairclough spoke to us about the history of registered parks and gardens and the importance of protecting these special places. In February, it was the turn of Anne Beswick to present 'The History of Manchester in Ten Plants'. Many thanks to our Events Team for organising these, and to Sue Sherwood for her report on the first talk.

Understanding Registered Historic Parks & Gardens - Talk by Alexandra Fairclough



Alexandra Fairclough introduced herself as the daughter of an artist and historian and granddaughter of a nurseryman: the perfect background for a career in garden and historic landscape conservation. She has a very impressive list of graduate and postgraduate qualifications, including in law, but her overriding interest is the preservation of heritage assets. Having worked as a Building Conservation Officer for many local authorities, including Cheshire East, she is now based in Bolton, where she also works as a Blue Badge Tour Guide, lecturer, and Government adviser. Her talk focused on the protection of historically important landscapes, including parks

and gardens, their identification, the mechanisms of protection and the specialists required to protect them.

Historic England Registered Parks and Gardens

Today, historic parks and gardens are protected by virtue of being included on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England. Although ancient monuments have been protected since 1882 (Ancient Monuments Protection Act 1882) and listed buildings via the Town and Country Planning Acts since the 1940s, it wasn't until 1983 that historic parks and gardens were recognised for protection with the National Heritage Act 1983 (NHA1983).

The first historic parks to be recognised for their design, history and layout were those surrounding listed buildings such as Castle Howard, Yorkshire, in 1983, and Studley Royal, Yorkshire, in 1984. This protection was non-statutory and not equivalent to the protection given to listed buildings. For the next twenty years, historic parks and gardens, including public parks and cemeteries, were identified as being of special interest and added to a national list - the National Heritage List for England, NHLE - as a result of the NHA1983. Others were identified as non-designated heritage assets and entered on local lists held by the local planning authorities.

Registration proceeded apace, but, by 2010, it was noted in the Planning Practice Guide accompanying national planning policy for the historic environment that more work needed to be done: 'the Register of Parks and Gardens of Historic Interest in England is thought to represent around two-thirds of sites potentially deserving inclusion'. By 2026, there were 1713 registered parks and gardens on the list, across three grades: 146 Grade I, 461 Grade II*, and 1106 Grade II, with most gardens falling into the Grade II category.

The grading allocated depends on rarity, and most designated landscapes are over 30 years old. Designed landscapes which are less than 30 years old are unlikely to be considered unless they are of outstanding importance and under threat, although there are a few exceptions. For example, Peel Park, Salford, was designated Grade II in 2023.

More information can be found on the website:

[Historic England | What are Registered Parks and Gardens](#)

Statutory consultees play a crucial role in the planning system by providing expert advice on significant environmental, transport, safety and heritage issues. They must be consulted on relevant planning applications, and the responses can be given weight in the decision-making process. In 1995, the Garden History Society (which joined with the Association of Gardens Trusts in 2015 to become The Gardens Trust) was given the role of statutory consultee. This meant that when a planning application relating to Grade I or Grade II* registered parks and gardens was received by a local planning authority, Historic England should be consulted, and the Garden History Society, later the Gardens Trust, had to be consulted on all grades of registered parks and gardens. This ensured that planning applications affecting registered parks and gardens of all grades had the opportunity of specialist advice, which could then be taken into consideration in the decision-making process.

In summary, Alexandra stated that we have the tools to protect heritage assets through statutory consultees and national and local policies. However, the success of these mechanisms depends on the consultation process being applied correctly, and the consultees being properly resourced to provide adequate responses. Specialists are required within Historic England, The Gardens Trust, and local planning authorities to interpret the significance of parks and gardens.

At present, we are awaiting the results of the Government's consultation seeking to remove the Gardens Trust as a statutory consultee. Alexandra is concerned that without the role of the statutory consultee, these groups would have no formal power to respond, and their responses might not be considered in the decision-making process. In her own response to the consultation, she also raised concerns that the proposed new system would not work effectively. The knowledge, interest and passion of the Gardens Trust and county gardens trusts would be lost, and not all local authorities have specialists to provide this advice. This would result in the loss of protection for heritage parks and gardens.

Alexandra ended her presentation by mentioning several recent development schemes affecting heritage landscapes. These included Rousham, Grade 1, and more locally Adlington Hall, Grade II*, where the scheme has currently been withdrawn.

This was a very informative and timely presentation delivered by a passionate and knowledgeable speaker, encouraging us all to take a more active role in recognising, identifying, and protecting historic parks and gardens. Thank you very much, Alexandra, for your inspirational lecture and for providing detailed notes.

Words - Sue Sherwood

Photo supplied by Alexandra Fairclough

The History of Manchester in Ten Plants - Talk by Anne Beswick



Castlefield, Manchester

Over fifty members and guests were present at Marthall Hall in mid-February to listen to a talk by Anne Beswick. It was good to see so many new faces in the audience, and Anne did not disappoint. With a background in both science and garden design, and experience as a tour guide in Manchester, she presented a personal selection in her 'Ten Plants', each linked to the history of the city of Manchester. Most of us might have guessed at least one of them - the cotton plant - but there were also some real surprises, with fascinating connections to several of the city's famous

people. These were Anne's choices to illustrate the growth of the city through the Industrial Revolution and up to the present day. I won't pretend that reading about them here will be quite as engaging as hearing Anne's talk, but each example is fascinating.

1. Lycopsids - giant scale-bark trees such as *Lepidodendron*, an example of which can be seen in the Manchester Museum. These early vascular plants dominated Carboniferous coal-swamp forests (358–298 million years ago) and were the primary source of many major coal deposits, including those in the north of England. And of course, it was coal-powered steam engines that drove Manchester's cotton mills in the 19th century.

2. Teasel - the fuller's teasel, *Dipsacus fullonum*, was a key tool in the process of 'fulling' during the Industrial Revolution. After the impurities had been removed from woollen cloth, the spiny seedhead of the teasel was used to brush the surface to raise the nap and create a soft texture. Teasels are planted on the Castlefield Viaduct, where the aim was to showcase many of the plants used in the 18th and 19th centuries.



Teasels on the Castlefield Viaduct

3. Alder - *Alnus glutinosa* is a tree that was common in the area during the Industrial Revolution. It was an ideal wood for making clogs, and its charcoal could be used for gunpowder. As the north-west canal network grew, the construction of lock gates became essential, and although oak was the preferred timber, Anne also told us that alder may have been used for its water-resistant qualities.

4. Cotton plant - *Gossypium* is a genus of flowering plants from which cotton is harvested. Cotton was imported into the UK, arriving at the port of Liverpool and then being transported to Manchester. The Bridgewater Canal, and later the Manchester Ship Canal, became vital methods of transport. As Anne succinctly put it, cotton was the plant that changed Manchester, and the reason why the city became known as 'Cottonopolis'.

5. *Cattleya mendelii* - an orchid named after Samuel Mendel (1811–1884), a 19th-century English businessman, sometimes known as the ‘cotton king’ of Manchester, and a renowned orchid collector of his time.

6. Rhubarb - Timperley had been a major market-gardening centre since the late 19th century, supplying Manchester markets with fresh produce. ‘Timperley Early’ is a well-known variety of rhubarb and one of the region’s notable crops.

7. Manchester Poplar - also known as the black poplar, *Populus nigra* subsp. *betulifolia*. It became known as the Manchester poplar because so many were planted in the city in the 19th century to help combat the heavily polluted air from the mills. Sadly, this tree is now endangered.

8. Edible seaweed - *Porphyra umbilicalis*. This provided a particularly interesting link. Kathleen Mary Drew was born on 6 November 1901 in Leigh, Lancashire. She won a scholarship to study botany at the University of Manchester and graduated in 1922 with first-class honours - one of the first two women to achieve this there. She became known for her research on edible seaweed, which led to a breakthrough in the commercial cultivation of nori. Her legacy is revered in Japan, where her work is commemorated each year on 14 April. A monument to her was erected in 1963 at Sumiyoshi Shrine in Uto, Kumamoto, Japan.

9. Rosebay willowherb - *Chamaenerion angustifolium*. Once rare in Manchester, this plant spread rapidly during the railway boom. Anne explained that steam trains created draughts that carried the fluffy seeds along the tracks, while sparks from the engines could also ignite fires, which created the ideal conditions for the plant to thrive. Hence, its alternative name of fireweed.

10. Butterfly bush - *Buddleja davidii*, named after the Reverend Adam Buddle and Père Armand David, the clergymen associated with its introduction and discovery. It can now be seen growing in every nook and cranny along railway lines and throughout the city of Manchester.

They have been allowed to grow alongside other self-seeded plants at the entrance walkway to the Castlefield Viaduct.



Anne is clearly passionate about her subject and presented it in a very knowledgeable and entertaining way. It was a fascinating reminder that plants are woven into the history of Manchester just as surely as mills, canals and railways.

Words and photos - Alison Moore

Peak Cluster Pipeline

Peak Cluster is described as a project ‘to secure the future of Britain’s cement and lime production industry’, and is classed as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP). It involves three sites, Buxton and Hope in Derbyshire and Cauldon in Staffordshire, which together produce up to 40% of this country’s cement and lime. The proposal involves capturing carbon dioxide (CO₂) that is currently released into the atmosphere during the manufacturing process, and transporting it, via a new pipeline, across the country to the Irish Sea. There it will be stored in an empty gas reservoir.



Proposed route of the pipeline.

While several groups oppose the project on the grounds of environmental impact, questionable benefit, safety and cost, our remit as Cheshire Gardens Trust is to consider the impact of proposals on historic designed landscapes. For the initial consultation (through online and in-person events), the proposed route was shown as a broad swathe 300m wide, across the area under consideration. It is anticipated that the actual construction will be accommodated

within 50m. Nationally protected buildings and sites have been identified, and an Environmental Impact Assessment will consider the historic environment in more detail.

We looked carefully at the route using our research and mapping software. This enabled us to identify historic parks and gardens that are Non-Designated Heritage Assets (NDHAs) and would be impacted by the proposed route. Some sites have been researched, and others await investigation. We considered the impact on these and nationally designated sites, Lyme Park, Gawsworth Old Hall, and Thornton Manor, all of which are registered Grade II*, and on Hare Hill.



Deer Park Farm, Kermincham, where the proposed route would go through the deer park and wall.

More information on the project can be found here:

[Peak Cluster](#)

Our response to the consultation can be viewed on:

[Cheshire Gardens Trust - Planning Log](#)

Barbara Moth

Ness Gardens, AGM and Guest Speaker

Cheshire Gardens Trust last visited Ness Botanic Gardens in October 2023, and it was good to return on a perfect spring day to see what the garden had to offer in a different season. Overlooking the Dee Estuary and occupying 64 acres on the Wirral Peninsula, the gardens were founded in 1898 by Liverpool cotton merchant Arthur Kilpin Bulley, who had a passion for plant collecting and gardens. You can read about our last visit to Ness by clicking on the link:

[CGT Newsletter Jan 2024](#)

Of all the highlights in March, the most impressive is arguably *Magnolia sprengeri* var. *diva*. The seed for this variety was brought into the UK by plant hunter Ernest Wilson in 1900 on behalf of Veitch Nurseries. One of the plants grown was bought by J. C. Williams of Caerhays Castle in Cornwall, and all plants now grown in the UK descend from this tree. According to a recent social media post from the team at Ness, it is known as 'The Diva', and what a fitting name it is.



Magnolia sprengeri var. *diva*

Like many CGT members and their guests, I went on a little tour of the gardens to see what else was in bloom in mid-March. The path just outside the visitor centre is home to numerous varieties of narcissi, and you can just catch a glimpse of 'The Diva' in the distance. From here, I wandered down the slope, past the Mediterranean garden, which is currently undergoing some redevelopment, and took a left-hand turn to meander through the rock garden. There were little pops of colour everywhere, from spring bulbs to flowering shrubs and early perennials.



Ness has three National Plant Collections: *Betula*, *Sorbus* and *Alnus*, but in spring, it is the trees with blossom that are often the stars of the show. There are several different varieties of *Prunus*, including *Prunus incisa*, which is listed as a Champion tree, and *Prunus* 'Accolade', which almost forms a tunnel over one of the paths. This was at its best on the day of the AGM.



Prunus 'Accolade'

Camellias and rhododendrons can be found throughout the garden, but the majority are in the Pinewood and Rhododendron Border. This was well worth exploring, although it was a little early to enjoy the peak display of rhododendrons, which happens in late April and early May. You can read more about the history of Ness Gardens and Arthur Bulley's role in introducing rhododendrons to the UK by following the link:

[About Ness Gardens](#)

There is so much to see at Ness, and more photos will be on our website shortly, but the final image is the one that you see on leaving the visitor centre in winter and early spring.



Our day at Ness was thoroughly enjoyable, and a special thank you must go to Plant Record Officer Mike Roberts for giving our guest speaker, Advolly Richmond, a tour of the gardens.

Alison Moore

Report on Cheshire Gardens Trust Annual General Meeting held on Wednesday, 18th March 2026

After an opportunity to discover the charms of Ness Botanic Gardens on a gloriously sunny morning, we gathered in the Ness Lecture Theatre for our 21st AGM. It was heartening to welcome forty-six members and twenty-two guests, including seven friends from Lancashire Gardens Trust, two who ventured across the border from the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust, and special guest speaker, Advolly Richmond, from Shropshire.

Our Treasurer, Martin Slack, chaired the meeting, which accepted without comment the 2024/25 AGM Minutes and our Financial Report for 25/26. Martin pointed out CGT's substantial donation to the Gardens Trust to assist them in defending their important role during the Government's proposed reforms to the statutory planning consultee system. The outcome of this consultation, and its effect on the Gardens Trust and on historic designed landscapes, have yet to be announced. Martin also explained the impact of the upcoming removal of simplified reporting requirements for small charities, such as CGT, when submitting accounts to Companies House. He is investigating the option of CGT becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. This would not be a company and would be simpler to run, but a new name and bank account would be required - more information to follow on this.

Whilst no new volunteers offered to stand for the Council of Management, we are thankful that the existing members, Martin Slack, Jackie Cawte, Alison Moore and Sue Bartlett were prepared to continue. Thanks were offered to all volunteers who contribute to our various groups: Events, Research & Recording, Conservation & Planning, Newsletter, Website and Council of Management. Everyone is invited to attend their meetings to find out more about what they do. The next group meetings are on the following dates, and if you are interested, please email the appropriate address.

Research & Recording Group Meeting at Norton Priory on Friday 17th April – 10.30 am in the Café, then at 12 noon in the Walled Garden.

research@cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk

Council of Management Meeting on Monday, 20th April at the Newsletter Editor's home at 10.30 am info@cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk

Events Group Meeting on Monday, 18th May at the Edgerton Arms, Chelford at 12.15 pm

events@cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk

Fresh voices can make a big difference in helping us face the challenges ahead. Sue Eldridge is one such person who, nine years ago, volunteered to edit our Newsletter. She has made a considerable contribution to our Trust, always making that extra effort, including doubling the Newsletter issues during COVID. Sue has now stepped down as she will shortly be moving from Cheshire, and with our gratitude, she was presented with a book on the Gardens of Cumbria and a garden token. Saying it had been a satisfying and fun experience, Sue hoped to remain in touch with CGT members.

Finally, our thanks also go to Jackie Cawte of the Events Group for organising the AGM bookings, and to Gwyneth Owen and Freyda Taylor for circulating and printing the AGM papers. For those of you who were unable to attend, the complete Minutes of the AGM will shortly be posted on the website here:

<https://www.cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk>

Sue Bartlett

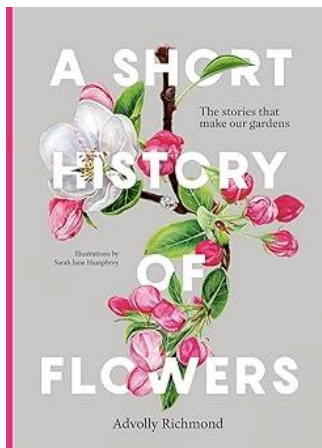
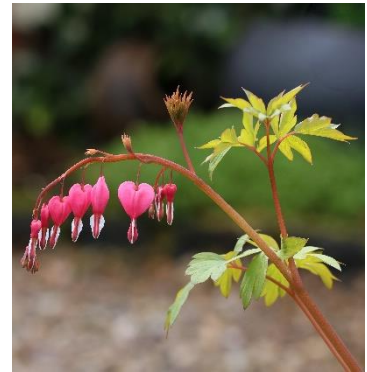
A Short History of Flowers: The Stories which make our Gardens - Talk by Advolly Richmond, OBE, FLS



We were delighted to welcome Advolly Richmond as our guest speaker to talk about her book, published in 2024, which was a Gardening Book of the Year finalist.

Advolly started by giving credit to Sarah Jane Humphrey for all the beautiful illustrations in her book. Sarah is an award-winning botanical illustrator who has won four RHS medals. Every flower and its story is accompanied by at least one of Sarah's drawings, and they are delightful. In the book, there are sixty plants ranging from *Alcea rosea* (hollyhock) to *Zinnia elegans*, and Advolly chose a few of these to share their origins with us.

One of my favourites was *Lamprocapnos spectabilis* syn. *Dicentra spectabilis*. Most of us also know this flower as bleeding heart, and it is one of the perennials that adds colour to our gardens as early as March. As befits a plant with heart-shaped flowers, its story is one of romance. A native plant of China, it is known there as Ho Pao mou dan or mountain purse. Mou dan is one of the names for a tree peony, whose leaves are very similar to those of a bleeding heart. Advolly told us the ancient story of a beautiful woman who embroidered little purses decorated with flowers for her missing lover, who was away in the army. She hung them on the branches of a tree peony, and as a reward for her devotion, the gods transformed her tree peony and all its decorations into a living plant.



Advolly shared a few more delightful stories from the book and also answered questions at the end of the talk. We learnt that her favourite flower is a rose and her least favourite is *Geranium nodosum*, because it is a vigorous plant that is almost impossible to get rid of once planted in the garden.

Many of us were keen to read all the other stories in the book, and happily, Advolly had copies available to buy once the talk was over. The book was a perfect memento of a highly enjoyable day, and our grateful thanks go to Advolly for such an entertaining conclusion to our 21st AGM.

Alison Moore

Gardens Trust News

At the beginning of February, we heard the news from Linden Groves that the Gardens Trust had been commissioned by Historic England to write an 'Introduction to Heritage Assets' (IHA) on walled kitchen gardens over the next few months. She asked for any contributions from County Garden Trusts, and we confirmed that we would be delighted to contribute.

Linden advised that the IHA series is designed to provide a briefing for listing advisers and others on the history and significance of buildings and structures and gardens. You can read more about IHAs at historicengland.org.uk

In this case, the IHA will provide a concise architectural history of walled kitchen gardens by explaining their historical purpose, context and development. It will refer to key features such as walls, glasshouses and frames, ancillary and specialised structures, and how these changed and developed over time, including in relation to wider technological developments. The IHA will also make reference to current use and how this can help with wider environmental challenges and potential health and well-being benefits, for instance, small-scale local growing, slow food, and community involvement.

Jenifer White, who is on the Gardens Trust Conservation Committee, is leading on the project, and Lucy Pitman of the Walled Kitchen Garden Network is also involved. They will be using Historic England's working definition of a productive walled garden, which is significant in historical, social and horticultural terms, and has the following characteristics:

- The site will be domestic in origin and in the past used for the production of vegetables, herbs, fruit and flowers primarily for the benefit of occupants of the house with which it is associated.
- The core walled enclosure will be more than 0.18 ha (half an acre).
- The core walled enclosure will be discrete, not containing the principal building (most often the house with which it is associated).
- There should be evidence of horticultural processes and production, for example, the presence of glasshouses.
- Sites will generally have a characteristic footprint, with a regular arrangement of paths and often tree planting following this pattern.
- The walled gardens are identifiable on the 1st edition 25-inch Ordnance Survey maps dating from 1843-1893.

Working to the strict timescales allowed for information submission, Barbara Moth put together images from some of the many walled gardens in Cheshire. These included Arley, Grade II* and a series of non-designated Heritage Assets, Marbury, Christleton, Savio, and Tilstone Lodge, researched by the CGT R&R volunteers in the past. Rode Hall would also have been an excellent example, but we had no available images, and other Cheshire sites, such as Tatton Park and Quarry Bank, would have required National Trust permission to use the photographs. We have yet to learn whether any of these sites will be included as examples, or whether further contributions are required.

Images of the Walled Gardens at Marbury and Arley Hall, submitted by Barbara Moth

Marbury



L. Eastern gateway to the walled garden at Marbury, originally used by the gardener to reach his cottage

R. North face of the walled garden with the remains of boiler flues.

Arley



L. Forcing House and Greenhouse at Arley, known as The Vinery, Grade II, in the Eastern Walled Garden.

R. 19th-century gate piers at the south entrance of the Western Walled Garden, taken from outside the walled garden.



Internal view of The Vinery



Historic opening mechanism



Eastern Entrance with pointed arch

Forthcoming Events

Cheshire Gardens Trust

Wednesday, 29th April - Visit to Rode Hall and Gardens.



10:45 arrival for 11:00 am guided tour of the house, followed by coffee or tea and homemade cake in the courtyard kitchen. There will then be the opportunity to explore the gardens at leisure. The Bluebell Walk is a highlight in April, and is a pleasant 40-minute stroll on good paths covered in bark chippings. The walled kitchen garden is another interesting area to investigate.

Thursday 21st May - Visit to Chester Zoo



The award-winning gardens at Chester Zoo are home to exotic plants from around the world, including 2000 carnivorous plants and over 1500 species of cacti. We meet outside the main entrance at 10.0am, and the guided tour of the gardens will start at 10.30 am at the entrance to Heart of Africa, just inside the zoo. The tour will last approximately 90 minutes, after which there will be free time to explore.

Monday 29th June - Visit to the private gardens at Crewe Hill



A unique opportunity to see this delightful 4-acre garden on the border of Cheshire and Wales. Highlights include a sub-tropical garden containing many exotic specimens, a large walled garden with a pergola, herbaceous borders, and a central water feature and rill. The Head Gardener is Tristan Salmon, whom we introduced in the January Newsletter.

Calendar for the remainder of the year

- Higher Dam Head Farm, Mobberley, Tuesday 21st July
- Heritage Open Day Walk, Verdin Park, Northwich, Monday 14th September
- Bucklow Farm, Plumley, Friday 9th October
- A Talk on 'Autumn Colours' by Barry Grain of Rosemeade Nurseries, Monday 16th Nov

Booking information will follow in due course.

The Gardens Trust

A programme of tours, study weekends, and online talks, including the Gardens Trust Volunteer Celebration 2026, which takes place in Norwich on the 12th June.

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

Plant Hunters Fairs

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

Sunday 26th April at Cholmondeley Castle, Malpas, SY14 8ET

Sunday 10th May at Capesthorne Hall, Macclesfield, SK11 9JY

Sunday 31st May at Norton Priory, Runcorn WA7 1SX

Sat - Sun 6th and 7th June at Hodnet Hall Gardens, Market Drayton, TF9 3NN

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

Other Events

[Arley Hall](#)

Arley Garden Festival takes place on Saturday, 27th and Sunday, 28th June. The popular Creative Corners return, and new for 2026 will be Show Gardens and also a Feature Garden. As RHS Tatton doesn't return until 2027, it promises to be a great day out.

[Lady Lever Art Gallery](#)

An exhibition celebrating the work of Arts and Crafts designer and maker, May Morris. It runs from 25 Apr to 1 Nov 2026, Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight Village, CH62 5EQ.

[RHS Bridgewater Events](#)

From Forest Bathing to Dazzling Dahlias, RHS Bridgewater has a full programme of events.

[Cholmondeley Castle](#)

From 3rd April, the gardens are open every Wednesday, Thursday, Sunday and Bank Holiday. RHS Members can enjoy free entry during May, and the 7 Million Bluebells Woodland Walk takes place on Sunday, 3rd and Monday, 4th May. Tickets available via the website.

[Wilmslow Wells for Africa](#)

A variety of gardens open on Saturday, 27th June, in aid of the Wells for Africa Charity.

[Tatton Garden Society](#)

Our friends at Tatton Garden Society have several events coming up in the next three months, including a visit to Combermere Abbey on 14th April and a practical propagation course with Margaret Holden on 23rd April.

[National Garden Scheme \(NGS\)](#)

Meet The Photographer



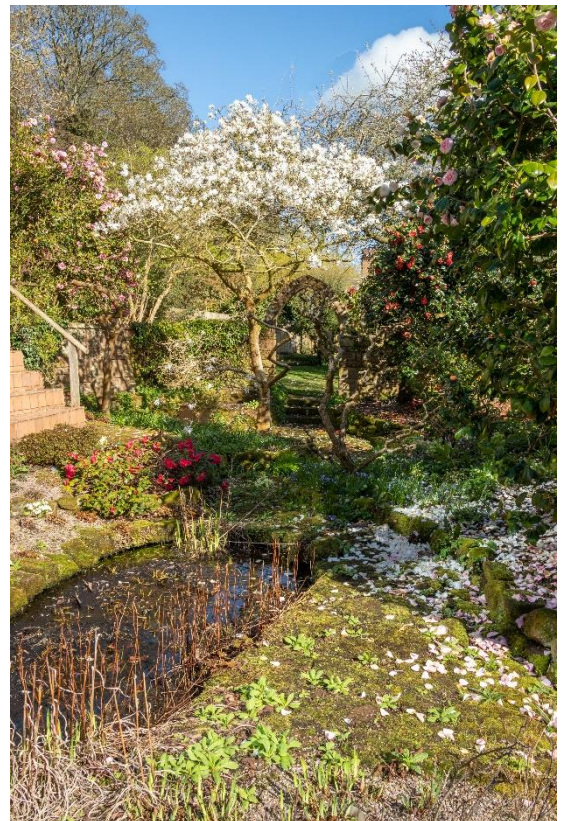
Liz Mitchell

Spring and summer are busy times of year for visiting NGS gardens, and many of us flick through the little yellow book, to be found in garden centres and libraries, to see what's open when. This invaluable guide gives us dates and descriptions of the gardens whose owners generously share their gardens with us for the day in aid of charity. But have you ever wondered who takes the stunning images that are used to illustrate the book? Volunteer Liz Mitchell takes all the photographs for Cheshire and Wirral, and I met up with her recently to talk about her career over the last few years.

Liz has been taking photographs since she was a child and has been selling a wide variety of images via Stock Agencies for the last 20 years. She has wide interests and enjoys everything from food photography to still life and landscapes, but it was only during COVID-19 that she began to focus on her garden. When she retired from her job as Product Manager for an IT company in 2022, she was inspired to start visiting more gardens, and on a trip to Dorothy Clive on the border of Cheshire and Shropshire, she picked up a copy of the aforementioned little yellow book.

With a little more time on her hands, volunteering for the NGS seemed like the perfect opportunity to put her newly acquired passion for garden photography to good use. The NGS were delighted to have her, and for the first year, Liz visited all the open gardens around her hometown of Congleton, including Rode Hall and the Lovell Quinta Arboretum. At the start of the following year, she started to venture further afield, and one of the first gardens she visited was Briarfield in Burton, Neston, CH64 5TL. Owner Liz Carter opens regularly for NGS, from February onwards, when her garden is filled with numerous varieties of snowdrops and other spring bulbs. The pair hit it off immediately, and Liz returned before the April opening to take shots of the spring garden.

Other favourite gardens of Liz include Abbeywood in Delamere, CW8 2HS, which opens on Sun 14th June, and Manley Knoll, Manley WA6 9DX, the home of Lord and Lady Timpson. This garden opens on Sunday, 17th May.



Spring at Briarfield



Erythronium at Briarfield. One of the images that Liz entered into the GMG awards

After a year of photographing as many gardens as possible, she had a full portfolio for illustrating the yellow book, and her images also came to the attention of Cheshire Life Magazine Editor Joanne Goodwin. It was agreed that there would be a new feature using photographs taken by Liz to highlight all the Cheshire gardens opening for NGS every month. It has since proved to be hugely popular with readers of the magazine, and an excellent way to bring garden openings to the attention of potential visitors over the spring and summer seasons.

In early 2025, Liz applied for membership of the Garden Media Guild. The guild is a professional association that brings together garden writers, authors, photographers, broadcasters, editors, and social media influencers.

Every year, they celebrate the best of talent in the industry across various categories, which culminates in an Award Ceremony in November. Liz entered the Portfolio Photographer of the Year, with a selection of images featuring pollinators in NGS gardens, and was thrilled to find herself on a shortlist of four, alongside some famous names in the industry. Whilst she didn't win, Liz says that it was a wonderful day out at The Savoy Hotel and a fantastic opportunity to meet up with fellow photographers.

As well as taking photographs for the NGS and Cheshire Life Magazine, Liz is also available for garden shoots in Cheshire, Staffordshire, Derbyshire and Shropshire. To book, you can visit her website or Instagram Account.



Liz at The Savoy Hotel

<https://lizmitchellphotography.com/>

https://www.instagram.com/lmp_gardens

The gardens opening in the next three months are too numerous to mention, but new for this year are the ones listed below.

- 7 Chesham Place, Bowden, WA14 2JL - Saturday 6th and Sunday 7th June
- Harewood, 20 Red Lane, Disley, SK12 2NP - Saturday 13th June (pre booking essential)
- Whitby Park, Stanney Lane, Ellesmere Port, CH65 9AQ - Saturday 13th and Sunday 14th June
- Normans Hall, Pott Shrigley, SK10 5GN - Sunday 14th June (pre booking essential)
- Marsh Farm, Northwich, CW8 2RL - Saturday 4th July. An artisan flower farm started in 2023.

Full details of all open gardens are in the yellow book, or follow the link.

<https://findagarden.ngs.org.uk/>

News in Brief

A New Curator for RHS Bridgewater



Tracy Snell has been appointed as the new Curator for RHS Bridgewater. Having been Garden Manager for over 7 years, responsible for Woodland and Estate, she takes over from Marcus Chilton-Jones. During her time at RHS Bridgewater, Tracy has played a pivotal role in developing the Chinese Streamside Garden, including the new Yangzhou Scholars' Garden, which is set to open later this year.

Gardens Trust Response to the Government's consultation on the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The consultation ran from 16th December 2025 to 10th March 2026, and sought views on proposed reforms and other changes to the planning system. The Gardens Trust said, "We welcome the aims to clarify the NPPF. The Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government's (MHCLG) 'seismic regearing' in this draft also opens up the opportunity to clarify how we protect our park and garden heritage through planning policy and statutory status".

You can read the full response here: [The Garden's Trust Response](#)

Overwhelming Support for the Garden's Trust statutory consultee role

The Gardens Trust says that it is cheered by the incredible support for its role in the English planning system during the Government's recent consultation on statutory consultee reforms. The consultation closed on 13th January 2026, and the Government's decision is awaited in due course. The CGT Newsletter editor met with Altrincham and Sale West MP Connor Rand recently, who has a young family and an appreciation of local parks and gardens. He has promised to keep in touch and provide updates when available.

You can read the Gardens Trust's News Item here: [Gardens Trust News Item 30.03.2026](#)

BGCI Accreditation for Ness Botanic Gardens and Chester Zoo

Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) is a charity dedicated to plant conservation and environmental education, and its work links over 800 botanic gardens across 118 countries. This year, Ness Botanic Gardens and Chester Zoo announced that they have joined twelve other institutions in the UK to be recognised in this way. Chester Zoo became the first zoo in the UK to be recognised, and only the second in Europe. The accreditation recognised the zoo's extensive work in plant conservation, research, and sustainability,

Copy date for July Newsletter is 15th June 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