



OXFORDSHIRE GARDENS TRUST

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Double wisteria in St Hilda's College Gardens © Vanessa Fell

From the Editors

Despite the unsettled weather, this spring was full of colour - bright daffodils, gorgeous tulips and amazing ropes of wisteria. However our visits so far have been to places where the gardeners are increasingly concerned over climate change and dwindling wildlife habitats. To maintain an attractive garden, with colour variation both in leaves and flowers, requires a re-look at planting for drought conditions, a different consideration of pest control and a more natural approach to feeding the soil. An awareness of the complex relationship between insects, plant health and food, opens doors to new planting and new eating! Gardeners are losing the pesticides and encouraging bugs, applying less nitrogen but using more natural herb-based feeds, less mowing and more lawn-meadows. The change is encouraging which I hope will reverse the continual downturn in bio-diversity loss. Here's hoping!

Felix & Vanessa



St Hilda's Roof Garden - pulsatilla seed heads

Julian Munby, 'From Cumbria to Oxford: Garden History in the Archives'

On 27th February members enjoyed an inspiring talk illustrating the value of archive material in the interpretation of garden history. Julian Munby is primarily known as an archaeologist and former head of Buildings Archaeology at Oxford Archaeology but his research into different sites worked on during his career unearthed rich records, feeding his interest in their historic gardens as well as their buildings.

He told us first about Levens Hall in Westmorland, where a campaign (successful) against a motorway planning proposal involved the gathering of evidence about the origins and historic value of the landscape and gardens. A rich archive, still held privately, supported the case that the late 17th century gardens were created by the French gardener M. Guillaume Beaumont for its owner, Colonel James Grahme. Levens is still known for Beaumont's magnificent topiary and beech circle. The ha ha, probably the earliest in England, prompts speculation that Beaumont may have been thinking in terms of the picturesque.

Letters, plans, vouchers and accounts are among the original records providing evidence for Levens, and similar sources illustrated Munby's descriptions of Thomas Wright's work at Horton, Northamptonshire, creatively restored by Gervase Jackson-Stops.

Oxfordshire examples of resources for garden history came from Blenheim, Rousham, Nuneham Park, Stowe, and Trinity College. These provided further evidence of the vagaries of archival survival, taking researchers from private deed rooms to the Bodleian or even the Huntington in California (Stowe). The talk ended with a reminder of how much is yet to be discovered and OGT members were encouraged to pursue such research themselves.

Dorothy Johnston



Bill for Gardeners at St John's College 1746. Reproduced by permission of the President and Fellows of St. John's College, Oxford.

Secret Gardens of East Anglia

Award-winning garden writer Barbara Segall provided us with an informative and lavishly illustrated talk based on her book "The Secret Gardens of East Anglia". This, her first contribution to the "Secret Gardens" series, introduced us to the delights of 22 lesser known gardens in the region. Here are just four I knew nothing of but would now like to visit.

In Norfolk, East Ruston Old Vicarage is a late 20th century garden of 32 acres divided into multiple garden rooms by high hedges. These not only provide shelter from the surrounding "agricultural prairie" but allow a wide variety of planting styles within it. By contrast Suffolk's Columbine Hall garden surrounded by a moat is literally a garden island. It is divided into four beds planted in horizontal blocks of colour and the colour theming continues beyond the moat in an extensive vegetable garden.

The 12th century Manor at Hemingford Grey in Cambridgeshire is one of the oldest houses in Britain but with a post-war garden inspired by the yew topiary of Levens Hall. But all is not topiary with most of its 3 acres having the appearance of a cottage garden with an emphasis on the use of old roses and irises. Finally at Essex's Wickham Place Farm the 4-acre garden is dominated by the longest wisteria in the country extending on both sides of a 10ft high wall to a total length of 250ft. Quite a spectacle in May.

Peter Edwards

St Hilda's College

On a surprisingly cold day on 15th May we were welcomed to St Hilda's College by Head Gardener Deborah Bowden who led our tour around the gardens, expertly informing us of the college's history and garden



St Hilda's College, Pavilion, shade-tolerant border and Deodar

development. Initially we visited the roof garden above the Anniversary Building, built 2020, now planted with several beds of prolific summer perennials. The beds are formed of a substrate that includes brick and shingle, and although the plantings are still experimental, they very seldom require any watering.

From our elevated position we were able to appreciate the layout of the gardens - the adjacent River Cherwell to the west, the riverside borders of colourful long-flowering perennials, the rockery, the two mature cedars and other trees, as well as the distant views. Close-by, we overlooked the riverside Pavilion, a social building built 2018, and the proximal tree fern dell with shade-loving and drought-tolerant underplanting beside the magnificent Deodar cedar.

To the south of the Pavilion is the waterside border, 73m long and variable in width, which together with its path, sometimes floods. On the other side of the path, the

rockery is currently being restored and extended using relaid stones set onto a base of sharp sand, shingle and soil, and selective planting. The college is keen to encourage wildlife habitats including food sources for insects, as well as providing a long season of interest and flower colour. Other areas we visited include the redeveloped Hall Garden borders, the historic rose garden, a commemoration area with wisterias in full bloom and a small bedding garden mimicking part of the college's coat of arms. Hot drinks and cakes on the south lawn completed the delightful visit.

Vanessa Fell

Can you identify these trees?

OGT Members learned about tree identification thanks to John Morris, a long-standing volunteer with [Cuttlebrook Nature Reserve](#) in Thame in April. John taught us how to identify trees and tell Bird Cherry from Wild Cherry. He also gave a guided tour showing the important ecological features being built there by volunteers to support wetland habitats.

Tree identification skills support important research and recording work that is useful when documenting historic landscapes. Stay in touch to learn about a new event in Banbury later this year to train OGT volunteers to do research and recording.



a



b



c



d



e

Clues:

A - Lovely, red-brown bark with fruits that feed birds

B - Very common tree in the UK with some species having showy white bark

C - People often carve initials into the smooth trunks of these trees

D - Typical tree coppiced for fencing hurdles

E - Often found on formal avenues of trees with suckers growing from the base

Marybeth Harasz

Asthall Manor

It was my first garden visit to an OGT event and how glad I was that I attended! The garden was originally created for the owner by Julian and Isobel Bannerman (best known for their work at Highgrove House) to provide traditional herbaceous borders, lawns and parterres. More recently the garden has taken on a more relaxed theme. As the head gardener led us along a gravelled path towards the rear lawn, I was amazed by the sight of prolific rose climbers cascading down the stone walls of the Manor and the scents of blossoms all around. A trial of vegetables growing amongst the herbaceous planting and peonies added interest to the borders and a beautiful philadelphus spilled over our pathway and scented the air. The lawn beyond has been transformed to a wonderful meadow of ox-eye daisies with a mown pathway meandering its way past fine views over the Windrush valley to other intriguing spaces. What made the visit even more enthralling was a tour of their walled kitchen garden. I could not believe how overgrown it appeared! However, nestled amongst all the wild plants and dare I say it weeds were numerous vegetables healthily growing amongst its carefree companions. It was a true revelation of how biodiversity can work in practice and made the visit even more worthwhile.

Anne-Marie Renny



View from the east side of the house, looking south

Postcard from Italy

For anyone contemplating a visit to Italy, I can highly recommend a visit to La Mortella (the place of the Myrtles) on the island of Ischia. This was created by Susana and William Walton, the former a talented gardener from Argentina, the latter one of the most eminent British composers of the last century. In 1956 Russell Page, the well-known landscape architect, designed the layout of the



garden including fountains, pools, water streams and terraces among the dramatic outcrops of volcanic rock. The garden continued to develop under the direction of Lady Walton into the first decade of the current century. Winding paths lead the visitor through a series of enchanting areas, all enhanced by luxuriant planting of tropical, exotic and water plants. The garden and museum are maintained by a charitable foundation and are open to the public from April through to October. Further details can be found here: <https://www.lamortella.org/en/>

Will Holborow

La Mortella, Ischia © Will Holborow

Member profile

Recently at a weekend Jubilee celebration I saw somebody whose face I recognised. Andrew Grout, a member of OGT, like me. He was sitting on a tractor seat in front of a selection of vintage lawn mowers. I had to ask "Why do you collect lawn mowers?"

Andrew was a great fiddler as a child and one day left to his own devices he managed to take apart an entire bucket of old bakelite switches and plugs in his grandfather's garage. Consequently he was given two old lawn mowers to tinker with instead. And that was it! His interest is partly about social history and partly about the history of the manufacturing companies. He appreciates the mechanism - says they cut better than modern machines and it is one of the few inventions that was designed correctly from the beginning, needing few further modifications. The mechanical lawn mower was the inspiration of Edwin Budding (1796 - 1846) an engineer born in Eastington, Stroud, Glos. Patented in 1830, his mower created a revolution in grass care as it replaced the scythe.

Andrew also finds the stories that people tell him fascinating and the thrill of the chase to track down a model exciting. The oldest machine in his collection dates back to 1860 and the most expensive cost £3K! At present he has about 40 models which he takes to shows. He is Chairman of the Old Lawn Mower Club, where both men and women enjoy the camaraderie of collectors (and much beer drinking is involved!). *Felix Lam*



Andrew sitting on his Atco Standard 24" mower c. 1924



Walter Hood Fitch - Curtis's Botanical Magazine v.108 [ser:3:v.38] (1882)

An extraordinary plant

Mouse Plant, Arisarum proboscideum

This extraordinary little plant is a welcome surprise in the spring - with shiny leaves and what could be taken for a clutch of tiny mice nestling in the foliage. It is a woodland perennial from central south-west Spain and central Italy and characteristically emerges in the spring, flowers, dies down and disappears.

A member of the Arum family (Araceae) it has flowers borne on an inflorescence known as a **spadix**, which is often partially enclosed in a leaf-like bract known as a **spathe**. In the Mouse Plant, the spadix is hidden away within the hooded dark purplish-brown spathe which grows up to five centimetres (two inches) long and tapers into a tail that can reach fifteen centimetres (six inches) long. Small flies are attracted to the flowers by a faint smell that is hardly noticeable to the human nose. Once inside, the insects transfer pollen from male to female flowers as they attempt to escape.

Felix Lam

Perennial, formerly known as the Gardeners' Benevolent Institution

This institution has provided over 185 years of service to the horticulture community and has a rich history deeply rooted in compassion and support for gardeners. George Glenny, a florist, garden journalist and agitator - a true maverick of his day, created the Institution in 1839. His motive and reasoning was little more than that other trades had a benevolent fund, and it was reported as: 'While the butchers, bakers, drapers and almost every other class of tradesmen had their benevolent associations, he expressed his surprise that none had hitherto been attempted for so scientific and useful a body as the gardeners, [and] he did not know of any class who had so great a claim.'

The key purpose was to dispense pensions to gardeners across the UK and it remained a pension-granting body until state pensions were introduced in the early 20th century.

Modern society may have evolved since Perennial's creation, but the struggles people faced back then were real and sadly too many similar challenges are faced by people today. Through various programmes and initiatives, the charity continues to provide essential assistance to those experiencing hardships, ensuring that they can live with dignity and security during their working lives and retirement years.



Gardeners, 1897, unknown location. © Perennial.

William Day, a nurseryman from Oxford and owner of Victoria Nursery, started to subscribe to the Institution in 1848, investing a small amount into his and his family's future. Subscriptions continued when his son David took over the nursery in 1866 following his father's death. Perennial's past is filled with stories of people who have been helped and those who have helped us, such as William and David. With one million people working in or retired from horticulture across the UK today, Perennial's services are in considerable demand. As a charity Perennial would not exist without the subscribers of the 1800s, or the generosity of the public and industry supporters by way of donations today. There are many ways to help make a difference, for further details visit perennial.org.uk/support-us
Abigail Silence, Perennial

More about the Days

William Day was born in 1796, probably in Surrey. At some point he moved to Oxford with his family and he purchased an 'allotment' of land which, after 1882, became the Victoria Nursery. The address in the following years is variously St Giles (Field), North Parade and Banbury Road, but also having premises in The Market (No 2). After his death in 1866 his son David continued trading and by 1872 is advertising as a nurseryman, florist and greengrocer at 1 North Parade and also at 50, 60 and 62 The Market. In the census of 1881 David now aged 59 is recorded as deaf. He is living with his third wife in St Giles with a nursery in the Banbury Road. However in July 1881 the St Giles premises were to be sold at auction. In 1884 John Gee took over the Banbury Road nursery. In the 1891 census David is described as a Gardeners' Benevolent Fund pensioner. David Day died in 1895. *Felix Lam*



OS, Oxfordshire Town Map, sur. 1873-6, pub. 1878.

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Where have all the flowers gone?

A hundred years ago, in 1925, Gertrude Jekyll wrote "Our roadsides, formerly beautiful with wild flowers and grasses, are now defiled with heaps of rank smelling tarred stones and collections of empty tar barrels . . . So much for modern improvements; everything for haste and hurry - nothing for peace and quiet enjoyment and use of life" (Jekyll 1925, p.166-7). She was lamenting the loss of vegetation alongside roads and paths, which, ignoring the reference to tar, is not too dissimilar from losses from our front gardens today.

A decade or two ago, our urban front gardens were ablaze with flowering beds alongside lawns and even crazy paving. Now we have a preponderance of concrete, tarmac and plastic grass - usually for easy parking of cars. A third of 21 million front gardens are now parking areas, equivalent to 42 Hyde Parks or 14,200 hectares of green permeable space. Detrimental effects of hard surfaces include loss of wildlife habitats and food supply, poorer health and wellbeing for humans, and an increase in local temperatures. After the 2007 floods, planning laws were altered to incorporate the use of permeable materials, or to direct run off to porous areas or soak-aways. For parking purposes, these permeable materials can include some gravels, block pavings, cellular pavings and grass reinforcements.

But where have all the flowers gone? Sometimes owners have managed to combine parking with vegetation to encourage wildlife, colour and charm. The parking area may be dedicated for regular cars, with permeable pathways and plantings occupying the rest of the ground. Pots and other containers, walls and fences, shrubs, hedges, trees and even planting pockets within gravels can all offer suitable spaces for plants. Beneath a parked car there could be low-growing tough plants such as creeping Jenny, *Lysimachia nummularia*; bugle, *Ajuga reptans*; and thymes such as *Thymus serpyllum*.



Pebbles, hard surface & plastic grass



Traditional 1920s/30s driveway with garden & gate onto road



2020s - plenty of parking and flowers

Jekyll, Gertrude (1925): *Old English Household Life: Some account of Cottage objects and Country Folk*. London, Batsford

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/communities/archive/pdf/greener-streets/greening-grey-britain-report.pdf>

What's in your salad?

The encouragement to eat wild leaves and more unusual salad additions from Ewan, the walled garden Head Gardener at Asthall Manor, reminded me that history tells us that 'salad' has been on the menu from the Greeks and beyond. Much has been documented in cookery books and gardening books. Thomas Tusser (1524?-1580) in *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry* lists 22 'herbes and rootes for sallets and sauce' to be planted in March alone. Thomas Hill (1528-1574) in *The Gardeners Labyrinth*, explains that lettuce had its origins in the Near East and suggests planting lettuce, 'Parcelly, Rocket, Sorrel, Endive and other divers Sallet herbs'. In John Evelyn's (1620-1706) *Acteria* he describes 73 herbs for use in salad, including bugloss, goats-beard and pimpernel.

Mrs Beeton, c 200 years later, has a modest 10 salads in her monumental *Book of Household Management*. The ingredients for her Summer Salad, includes 3 lettuces, a handful of mustard and cress, 10 radishes and a few slices of cucumber! *Felix Lam*

'A grand sallet'

"All sorts of good herbs, and little leaves of red sage, the smallest leaves of sorrel, and the leaves of parsley pick't very small, the youngest and smallest leaves of spinach, some leaves of salad burnet, the smallest leaves of lettuce, white endive and charvel, all finely pick't and washed and swung in a strainer of a clean napkin and well drained from water: then dish it in a clean scowered dish and about the centre capers, currants, olives, lemons carved and slic't, boiled beetroot carved and clic't and dished around also with good oyle and vinegar."

Robert May The Accomplisht Cook, 1660

Forthcoming events - Autumn 2025

Visit: 19th July, *Nuneham House*, Nuneham Courtenay

Talk: 16th October, *Cornard Wood to Fangorn Forest*, *British Trees in Art and Literature*

Talk: 13th November, '*One of the most beautiful landscapes in the world*' *Nuneham Courtenay Gardens, House and Village*

The AGM will take place on 19th September at 6pm at St Hugh's in Woodstock, followed by a talk by Anton Blackie on '*Horticulture in Hospitality*'. Further details in due course.

Bookings can be made via OGT website or directly to Eventcube at <https://ogtevents.eventcube.io>

Botley West Solar Farm update

There are six stages of an NSIP (Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project).

Botley West, which would be better named Blenheim West, (as it has nothing to do with Botley and everything to do with Blenheim!) is at Stage 3 Pre-examination. At this stage, interested parties, of which OGT are one, are invited to Register and make a relevant Representation. We have done this, stating our concerns about impacts on the setting of Blenheim World Heritage Site and landscapes of local interest and requesting further details to assess or mitigate impacts. Details can be seen on the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) website:

<https://national-infrastructure-consenting.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/projects/EN010147>

Sally Stradling

HELP



Like many organisations, OGT relies on just a few members to organise events and keep the administration flowing. Once upon a time (2018) we had a committee of ten or more and tasks were more evenly shared out. Now we only have a committee of five although many of the routine tasks are performed by volunteers who are not on the committee. We desperately seek more volunteers to bring in new blood and to share out the tasks. Currently we seek a Chairperson, Membership Secretary, webpage assistance, plus an occasional or more permanent newsletter editor. We always need help with on-going planning applications, events, research, and publicising our activities. Can you offer any assistance in some aspect of the running of the Trust without necessarily serving on the committee if you do not wish to? Please talk to anyone on the committee (see below) to discuss any particular role and commitments etc.

Useful committee contact details:

Secretary: Jane Carlton Smith email secretary@ogt.org.uk

Treasurer: Will Holborow email treasurer@ogt.org.uk

Membership secretary: Vanessa Fell email membership@ogt.org.uk

Events: events@ogt.org.uk

Website: <https://ogt.org.uk>

Many thanks to everyone who has contributed to this newsletter. If the photographs are not attributed, they will be either the authors own or were taken by one of the editorial team. Details correct at the time of printing, July 2025.

Answers to tree identification

A Cherry (*Prunus* spp.)

B Grey Birch (*Betulus* spp.)

C Beech (*Fagus* spp.)

D Hazel (*Corylus* spp.)

E Lime (*Tilia* spp.)