CHESHIRE GARDENS TRUST

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# Newsletter

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**Inside:**



**Some future events:**

- Tirley Garth – Thursday 14 May
- Cholmondeley Castle Gardens – Wednesday 17 June
- Thornbridge Hall Derbyshire – Wednesday 15 July
- Historic Trees Workshop (see back page)


Rode Hall at Scholar Green is a fine early 18th century country house set in a Repton designed landscape. Home to the Wilbraham family since 1669, the extensive grounds have a woodland garden, a formal garden, a beautiful, two acre walled kitchen garden which provides produce for the farmers' market and tearooms, and a new Italian garden.

In recent years, whilst the garden is beautiful in itself and worth a visit anytime during the year, it is the spring snowdrop walk that attracts so many visitors. The popularity of the common snowdrop, a hardy plant, easy to grow, has increased in recent years and lies in the lovely white flowers blooming at a time when little else is in flower, heralding that spring is on its way at last after the cold dark winter weeks.

On a still cold overcast day a group of CGT members arrived at 12 noon at Rode Hall for this very popular snowdrop walk. We gathered in the warm tea room for an excellent light lunch of hot soup and bacon butties. Then, following lunch, we had the pleasure of meeting Lady Anne Baker-Wilbraham, who took delight in an introductory talk and a tour of her private snowdrop collection in the Colonel's walk.

*Lady Anne Baker Wilbraham*

The snowdrop walk, one of the North's finest snowdrop walks with over 50 varieties, has taken place annually in February and early March since 1999. Much of the development work has been undertaken by Lady Anne, who has taken so much care of the varieties in the garden, many of which are descended from the original snowdrops planted in the 19th century.

Real interest in snowdrops started at this time when easier travel resulted in Victorian plant-hunters introducing new species of snowdrops, with varieties such as *Galanthus plicatus,* originating in Turkey. There is the possibility of snowdrops journeying across Europe with the soldiers returning from the Crimea.

The Latin name for snowdrop, *Galanthus,* means 'milk flower', and there are about 20 species with 100s of hybrids in existence today!

At Rode Hall the interest in snowdrops was started by Sibella Egerton (a relative of the Tatton Egertons) who married Randle Wilbraham.

Sibella introduced the snowdrops to Rode Hall, planting them in the Old Wood around the 1800s. And, more than 150 years ago, one of the family, General Sir Richard Wilbraham, sent his young daughter a pressed bunch of snowdrops during his military service in the Crimea. These pressed snowdrops still exist at Rode Hall!

Lady Anne's own interest began when she arrived at Rode Hall from her home in Scandinavia. She describes the snowdrop as: *'….the first indestructible flower to appear in the spring which reminded me that summer was on the way'*.

By the time Lady Anne arrived at Rode Hall, many of the snowdrop varieties planted in the nineteenth century had been neglected over time or had been dug up. Lady Anne started the task of searching the estate *'for pockets of the original snowdrops'* carefully lifting, dividing and replanting them. Her idea of opening her garden for snowdrop walks came to fruition and since 1999 the number of visitors has steadily increased year on year.

Lady Anne outlined the meticulous work required in snowdrop cultivation and replanting, including the precise location of particular varieties, such as at the fourth pole along a specific fence!

Lady Anne has an encyclopaedic knowledge of snowdrops which she was very pleased to share, in particular those in her private collection in the Colonel's walk. The varieties include the distinctive 'Colossus' with its large classic flowers (see next page), the popular 'Arnott' with its yellow centre and beautiful scent, and 'Merlin' with an entirely green inside to the flower.

An extract from the sap of snowdrops, Galantamine, is being used today as a treatment

for Alzheimer's. And Odysseus is reputed to have taken snowdrop bulbs on his travels to enable him to remember to counteract the enchantment of Circe.
We were also shown another favourite, a much sought, double snowdrop with yellow markings and Cheshire connections. The 'Lady Elphinstone' was named after the wife of the finder Sir Graeme Elphinstone of Heawood Hall, Nether Alderley, in 1890. Then there was also the 'Mrs Macnamara', named after the mother-in-law of Dylan Thomas, with its synonym 'Milkwood'.

And other varieties included 'Magnet', 'White Swan', 'Jacquenetta' and 'Straffan'.

Following the conclusion of Lady Anne's talk and walk through the Colonel's walk, we were able to complete our visit to Rode Hall by wandering through the impressive walled kitchen garden, where well-established fruit trees caught my eye, and then taking the snowdrop walk through the main garden itself.

Lady Anne's passion and love of snowdrops had impressed us all so much that our appreciation of the beauty of snowdrops has increased as well as our extended knowledge of so many different varieties. Lady Anne was quoted a few years ago as saying: *'They are something to be enjoyed after all the dark days and no matter what the weather does once above the ground, the snowdrops never fail to perform their magic.'*

Many thanks, Jacquetta, for organising such an enjoyable afternoon's visit.

*Snowdrop 'Colossus'*

*Post script*

Henry and I recently visited the very interesting exhibition at the Manchester Art Gallery, *The Sensory War*, with some very moving exhibits of the brutality of World War I and subsequent wars. The day we visited, the day after the Manchester snow (!) was the first day when sand bags planted with snowdrops by local children were exhibited in the foyer and outside the main entrance. Explanatory information indicated that snowdrops, symbols of hope and peace, had been planted on war graves as a reminder of home.

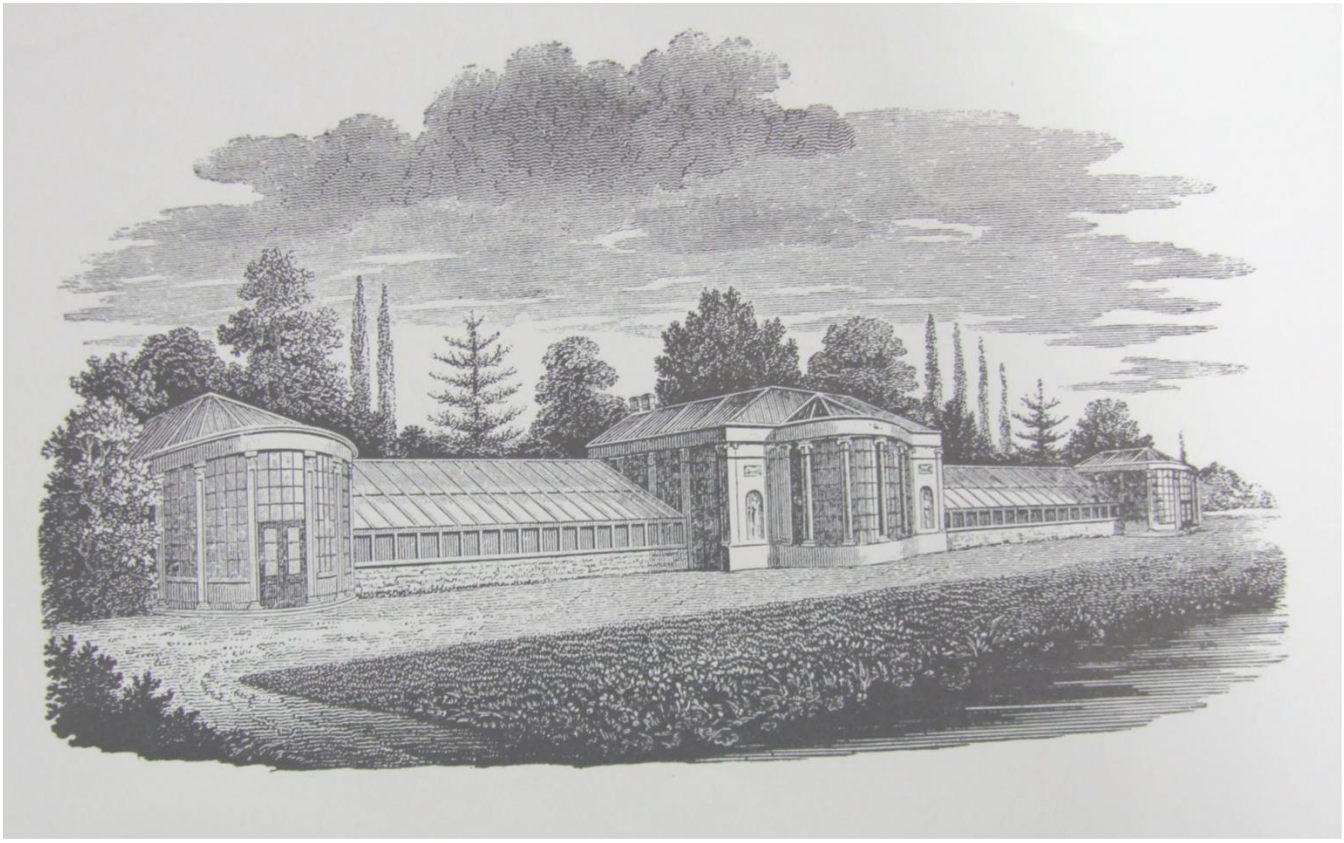
***Margaret Blowey***

# Bluebell Walks

There is something magical about a sea of just one type of flower and now that snowdrops are over, it is time for the bluebells and a return visit to Rode around the end of April/early May would take in the bluebells in the Old Wood.
Or you could visit Combermere on 26 April for their annual two-mile Bluebell walk. Then there are the bluebell woods at Capesthorne where children aged up to 11, wearing a fairy costume, can explore them for free.
Tushingham Hall's Bluebell Walk is on 26 April and, in addition to the flowers, there is tea and cake on offer and a brick-and-brac stall to raise funds for Tushingham Church and the Hospice of the Good Shepherd.
Cheshire East Rangers has organised a 3.5 mile circular walk from Rode Heath Rise at 10 a.m. on 10 May, but you must book in advance. Google "Bluebells and Boaters" for more information.
Personally I prefer primroses. As a child in Kent the spring visit to the primrose woods was an annual treat.

# William Roscoe and the First Liverpool Botanic Garden

Lecture by John Edmondson, CGT Member, 17 January 2015 at Burton Manor, Wirral.



On a bitterly cold day we received a warm welcome to our first event held at Burton Manor. The 30+ members who attended were also privileged to have a close look at the glasshouse where coffee was served and several hardy well wrapped up members were able to explore the wider area of the gardens which are home to one of the largest Auricula Theatres in the country.

However - to the main event: John Edmondson informed and entertained us with his presentation of the part played by William Roscoe (1753 – 1831) in the development of Liverpool's first Botanic Garden, a forerunner to botanic gardens at Kew and Edinburgh.

We were given a glimpse into William Roscoe's early life as the son of a market gardener and publican. On leaving school at the age of twelve, he spent his time helping his father in the garden and in reading and study. He was, on the whole, a self-educated man who became a successful Liverpool lawyer and radical politician whose interests included history, poetry, botany, languages and art. He became an influential figure in the development of culture in Liverpool where he founded the Athenaeum Library and the Liverpool Royal Institution.

John's description of the founding of the Botanic Gardens in the early 1800s and their subsequent development and demise formed the main part of the talk. They were beautifully illustrated with original plans, maps, catalogues, drawings (*see above*) and illustrations of some of the prominent species.

Roscoe was keen to establish a local facility which would enable the sharing of plants and seeds collected from around the world. For example, links were forged with similar gardens in India and Russia as well as Edinburgh and Kew.

We saw how the gardens were innovatively funded by public subscription including women as shareholders.

The original gardens were built in Mount Pleasant, rapidly growing to be a collection of over 4,000 plants. They moved to Wavertree in the 1830s prompted by the rapidly growing size of the City of Liverpool and the increase in air pollution which was harmful to the plants.

Then, most devastatingly, in 1941 bomb damage shattered the glasshouses. This necessitated "evacuation" to all available temporary accommodation around the City and beyond. Research into the nature and history of the

gardens has been obstructed by the fact that many of the records which would have been held in the Curator's Lodge are said to have been burned as fuel by soldiers billeted there during the second Great War.

*William Roscoe*

Post-war, a new home was found for the Botanic Garden on the Harthill Estate in Calderstones where it remained until it was disestablished in 1984. There was an interesting discussion about political influences in Liverpool in the mid-1980s and their impact on the Botanic Garden which was brought into the civic estate.

This was the point where the specialist skills and knowledge were lost as was the vision and drive needed to re-establish the Botanic Garden. The plants were divided into "collections" and re-housed around the City where suitable conditions could be found. Derivations can still be seen at Croxteth Hall where only one plant of each species was conserved and in Sefton Park where the Palm House received palms and orchids. Hearsay points to many plants having been "liberated" from skips by gardeners and the possibility that some may still be in existence under the guardianship of private individuals!

Work is ongoing towards the continuation of the collections and further developments can be followed on Twitter @LivTropicals. [*Ed: Do look at this, there are some great photos, plus illustrations like the one below provided by John.*]

Roscoe was particularly interested in studying "economic" plants i.e. cotton, rubber, sugar etc. and also medicinal plants. As the hub of the shipping trade at the beginning of the 19th century, Liverpool provided a natural route into Britain for the importation of such plants.

The wealth of shareholders in the Botanic Garden was largely based on the proceeds of slave trading. They would therefore have been well placed to be able to ensure that their sea Captains collaborated in creating conditions which would keep the plants in cultivation during the long voyages back to Britain.

There is irony in the fact that Roscoe was elected as an independent Member of Parliament for Liverpool in 1806 following a vociferous campaign as an abolitionist. He stood down after one year, during which time he had been able to cast his vote in favour of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act (1807).

John's talk was packed with fascinating detail, facts and figures and was wonderfully illustrated. He acknowledged the contribution of slides by Stephen Lyus. This was another event that featured a fascinating subject but which also raised questions for further exploration and we thank John for that.

I would urge members to take advantage of the opportunity to attend the broad range of talks presented by members and/or guest speakers. They are so interesting and entertaining and can lead to some fascinating discoveries – in my case, a casual comment led me to discover that the road where I have lived for the past 32 years is actually named in honour of William Roscoe in recognition of his work on reclaiming Chat Moss!!

Thank you CGT for that.

***Gwyneth Owen***

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# John Shepherd, first Curator of the Liverpool Botanic Gardens

Roscoe needed a Curator for the Liverpool Botanic Gardens and John Leigh Philips of Manchester recommended a man ten years Roscoe's junior.

John Shepherd, born in 1763 in Gosford in Cumberland, was described by Philips as '*eminently gifted by nature*' for such a position. Roscoe appointed him and he was still in post when he died, aged 73, on 27 September 1836. A few weeks earlier he had set out for London but, falling ill, had returned home and never recovered.

Although in charge of the Botanic Gardens, he found time to superintend the planting of shrubs at the Low Hill Cemetery (1825), landscape the Liverpool Zoological Gardens (1833) and undertake private commissions. In his obituary, John Loudon wrote that many gentlemen were '*… anxious to avail themselves of his correct taste in the disposition of their grounds and gardens…'*

One such commission was for gardens in Sale described as '*… extensive PLEASURE GROUNDS and FLOWER GARDEN, belted with a thriving plantation of ornamental trees, including an infinite variety of rare and costly American and other evergreen and deciduous shrubs, disposed on the most scientific principles of Landscape Gardening with the greatest taste and effect, by Mr. Shepherd, Curator of the Botanic Gardens, Liverpool*.' (*Manchester Times,* 30 May 1829.)

Shepherd's obituary appeared in Loudon's *The Gardener's Magazine* (December 1836, p. 724). He was described as having a '*native love of gardening*' and having been '*indefatigable*' in his efforts to make the Liverpool Botanic Gardens into one of the best in Europe. Indeed, for many years the Garden's hardy herbaceous collection was unrivalled. It was the scitamineous (banana family) plants – also very successfully cultivated which gave rise to a rather special publication.

Roscoe took the opportunity to have these plants illustrated – that on page 5 is from Roscoe's book *Monandrian Plants of the order Scitamineae, chiefly drawn from living specimens in the botanic garden at Liverpool*. The drawings were made by George Smith between 1824 and the date of publication, 1828. [This was a limited edition of 150: one sold at Christie's in 2002 for £23,900, well above the estimated price of £12k-£18k.]

Shepherd was a cheerful man, an enthusiastic gardener, with immense energy and very sociable. He could tell a good story as my own favourite anecdote shows.

He told the tale of how James Lee of Hammersmith had introduced the '*first fuchsia in England*'. Whether or not this is an apocryphal tale I leave to you to decide. According to *The Garden Flowers of the Year* published by the Religious Tract Society the earliest introduction was *Fuchsia coccinea* which arrived in 1788 when it was presented to the Royal garden at Kew, no other species being introduced until 1823. Of course, it may have been James Lee who donated it to Kew.

But the reason I am so fascinated by the story is the way it kept re-appearing throughout a period of at least sixty years.

James Lee was born in 1715 and established his Vineyard nursery around 1760. So when Shepherd first told his tale and spoke about Lee being well known "*fifty or sixty years ago"* he must have been talking in the 1820s.

When the tale (*see next page*) first appeared in a newspaper, this made sense. The earliest record of it that I have found was in the Hull Packet on 16 August 1831. In October that year the story could be found in the Morning Post. At that time, newspapers tended to copy their stories from one another without credit so there is no knowing when and where it first appeared.

The story re-appeared in 1837 and in December 1845 it was repeated in *Sharpe's London Magazine* from where it was picked up by the provincial newspapers, appearing in swift succession in *The Manchester Times, The Lancaster Gazette, The Glasgow Herald, The Blackburn Standard, The Dumfries and Galloway Standard, The Kentish Gazette, The Taunton Courier, The Chester Chronicle, The Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, The Reading Mercury and the Kendal Mercury.* It continued doing the rounds in early 1846 – including in the Hull Packet again – and it can be found in 1847, 1850, 1855, 1872, 1878, 1879 and 1890!

The wording hardly varied through all these reproductions, so that Mr. Lee of Hammersmith was still famous "*fifty or sixty years ago*" in 1890 as he had been sixty years previously!

## The Fuchsia Tree

Mr. Shepherd, the respectable and well-informed conservator of the Botanical Gardens at Liverpool, gives the following curious account of the introduction of that elegant little flowering shrub, the Fuchsia, into our English green-houses and parlour windows. Old Mr. Lee, a nurseryman and gardener, near London, well known fifty or sixty years ago, was one day showing his variegated treasures to a friend, who suddenly turned to him and declared, "Well, you have not in your collection a prettier flower than I saw this morning at Wapping." "No! and pray what was this phoenix like?" "Why, the plant was elegant, and the flowers hung in rows like tassels from the pendant branches; their colour the richest crimson; in the centre a fold of deep purple", and so forth. Particular directions being demanded and given, Mr. Lee posted off to Wapping, where he at once perceived that the plant was new in this part of the world. He saw and admired. Entering the house, he said "My good woman, this is a nice plant, I should like to buy it". "I could not sell it for no money, for it was brought me from the West Indies by my husband, who has now left again, and I must keep it for his sake". "But I must have it". "No, sir!" "Here", emptying his pocket, "here are gold, silver, copper" (his stock was something more than eight guineas). "Well-a-day! But this is a power of money, sure and sure". "Tis yours, and the plant is mine; and my good dame, you shall have one of the first young ones I rear, to keep for your husband's sake". "Alack, alack!" "You shall, I say, by Jove!" A coach was called, in which was safely deposited our florist and his seemingly dear purchase. His first work was to pull off and utterly destroy every vestige of blossom and blossom-bud: it was divided into cuttings, which were forced in bark-beds and hot-beds; were re-divided and subdivided. Every effort was used to multiply the plant. By the commencement of the next flowering season, Mr. Lee was the delighted possessor of 300 Fuchsia plants, all giving promise of blossom. The two which opened first were removed into his show-house. A lady came; "Why, Mr. Lee, my dear Mr. Lee, where did you get this charming flower?" "Hem! 'tis a new thing, my lady – pretty, is it not?" "Pretty! 'tis lovely. Its price?" "A guinea – thank your ladyship"; and one of the two plants stood proudly in her ladyship's boudoir. "My dear Charlotte, where did you get?" &c. &c. "Oh! 'tis a new thing; I saw it at old Lee's; pretty, is it not?" "Pretty! 'tis beautiful! Its price?" "A guinea; there was another left". The visitor's horses smoked off to the suburb; a third flowering-plant stood on the spot whence the first had been taken. The second guinea was paid, and the second chosen Fuchsia adorned the drawing room of her second ladyship. The scene was repeated as new comers saw, and were attracted by the beauty of the plant. New chariots flew to the gates of old Lee's nursery-ground. Two Fuchsias young, graceful, and bursting into healthy flower, were constantly seen on the same spot in his repository. He neglected not to gladden the faithful sailor's wife by the promised gift; but ere the flower-season closed, three hundred golden guineas chinked in his purse, the produce of the single shrub of the widow of Wapping; the reward of the taste, decision, skill and perseverance of old Mr. Lee.

*Sharpe's London Magazine.*

# O is for Orchard

As fruit trees begin to blossom, it feels an appropriate time to consider that O is for Orchard.

It has been said that the terms 'garden' and 'orchard' were used interchangeably for many centuries.[1] A review of 18th and 19th century Latin dictionaries shows that *Hortus* could be translated as '*a garden or orchard*', but could also mean a village.

To confuse things, there were other Latin words the meaning of which could also include 'orchard', such as *Arbor*, *Arbustum, Silva* and *Pomarium*. A 1589 book [2] provides us with three different words: *Pomarium* meant 'a young orchard, or grove'; *Frutectum* was 'an orchard for pleasure' and *Hortus* was 'an orchard for damscens and plums'.

Whatever our distant ancestors meant by the word, by the end of the 18th century it had acquired its modern connotation.

In 1735 Philip Miller, in his *Gardeners Dictionary*, felt no need to explain what the word meant, but went straight into a warning about choosing the right ground for one and planting trees well apart. What does seem surprising is his recommendation that people should adopt a new approach – planting the fruit trees as much as 100 feet apart and using the space between to raise crops of wheat.

Abercrombie was more helpful. In his 1778 book *The Universal Gardener and Botanist*, we learn that an orchard is 'a garden-department, consigned entirely to the growth of standard fruit-trees, for furnishing a large supply of the most useful kinds of fruit'.

Apples headed his list, followed by pears, plums and cherries and he seems to have expected that a private orchard would contain at least all four of these, although to be *really* useful there should also be 'quinces, medlars, mulberries, service-trees, filberts, Spanish nuts, berberries, walnuts and chesnuts', the last two being particularly useful for planting around the border of the orchard to screen the other trees from wind.

Abercrombie's detailed exposition, including how to choose the right soil and aspect, how to prepare the ground and so on, was lifted almost in its entirety (and without credit) by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* for its 1781 edition – eight years previously the entry had read simply 'ORCHARD, a plantation of fruit trees, See GARDENING'.

There were single-fruit orchards – particularly in Kent, which was renowned for its cherry orchards serving the London market – and there was this clear distinction between the private orchard and one where fruit was grown for sale.

It was this latter type which was referred to in the 1808 *Agricultural Survey of Cheshire*. Apparently there weren't many orchards in the county, which was surprising, given that Manchester was so close.

The writer was hard put to find the reason, because fifty years earlier there had been a lot more apple and pear trees. He suggested two reasons – one was that new trees were grafted from diseased stock (taking the disease with them). The second possibility was that farmers planted fruit trees and before they were safely established allowed cattle to graze among them, so damaging them.

Private orchards probably fared better – as the report from Maria (below) suggests.

If you have – or are thinking of having – your own orchard and you would like to add interest, you could consider Batty Langley's suggestion of the 'correct' statues to include in one:

*'Pomona* Goddess of Fruit, and the three *Hesperides, Eagle, Aretusa,* and *Hisperetusa*, who were the three Sisters that had an Orchard of golden Apples kept by a Dragon, which *Hercules* slew when he took them away.'[3]

***Joy Uings***

[1] Eburne, Andrew and Taylor, Richard, *How to Read an English Garden* (Ebury Press, 2006, p.159)

[2] Rider, John, *Bibliotheca Scholastica*.

[3] Langley, Batty, *New Principles of Gardening*, 1728

# Cheshire orchards; *old*…

Our parish, Huxley in West Cheshire, is working towards a Neighbourhood Development Plan.

As part of this, a team of volunteers has surveyed the landscape of the village and found old orchards with many of the houses. By now there may be only one or two trees, but they are easy to spot because the old varieties were so tall (*see image below*).

It appears that most houses would have had an orchard, because homes were essentially self-sufficient, and this entailed planting a variety of fruit trees.

They more often contain large, old Apple and Damson trees, but there are some Plum and Pear, including the small Hazel Pear.

At the landscape survey group most people did not know what varieties they had. They may be common, or rarer ones specific to the North West, adapted to crop well in our less favourable climate.

They could have them identified, for example by the Brogdale Trust. This could be an area for further study, recording and perhaps even community apple-pressing!

Orchards were a feature of most agricultural counties before modern fruit production and imports. Cheshire's orchards have been studied (Orchards of Cheshire, Women's Institute, 1995). Common Ground was at the forefront of helping people to appreciate and conserve old orchards, and they continue with this work, see http://commonground.org.uk/projects/orchards/.

Traditional orchards are recognised as 'biodiversity hotspots' but also a declining habitat (see http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-57060). Hence they have been designated as a UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Priority Habitat. Other than this they usually have no statutory protection.

These orchards are not part of a 'designed landscape' of a large house and park, but they are a 'planned landscape' in many of our rural communities. They are part of our cultural history and still make a significant contribution to the local character. Do you have some in your area?'

***Maria Bull***

# … *and new*

## Willaston Meadow Community Orchard

As part of a larger development of a local field as a wildflower meadow and woodland, the Friends of Willaston Meadow joined in with the Cheshire Orchard Project, which aims to establish a network of community orchards throughout the county to keep the tradition of planting alive; to help carry it forward; and to promote the importance of orchards and fruit growing.

In 2004, as our part of the project, we planted the first twelve apple trees in the WI Orchard in Big Meadow. The Cheshire Landscape Trust provided our apple trees, and our three village WIs provided funding for the stakes and ties.

Helen Carey, the president of the CLT, was present at the spring planting ceremony. Subsequently, a total of 21 apple trees have been planted, along with three pears and three damsons. Where possible, we have tried to obtain a few of the 32 known Cheshire varieties of apple. The complete planting list is on next page.

Apples from the orchard have been used as demonstrations at several "Apple Days" locally, and are available for local people to collect.

The nearby primary school uses the whole Meadow for their Forest School and each year press some of the apple crop into juice.

We have also been able to establish mistletoe on several trees, and this is cut annually for sale in the village.

***Hilary Morris***

| Name | Date | County/Country | Type |
|---|---|---|---|
| Arthur W Barnes | 1902 | Cheshire | cooking/dessert apple |
| Blenheim Orange | c.1740 | Oxfordshire | cooking/dessert apple |
| Calville Blanc d' Hiver | 1598 | France | cooking apple |
| Costard | c.1300 | Oxfordshire | cooking apple |
| Duchess's Favourite | c.1800 | Surrey | dessert apple |
| Eccleston Pippin | 1883 | Cheshire | cooking/dessert apple |
| Egremont Russet | 1872 | Sussex | dessert apple |
| Hawkridge | 1875 | Sussex | dessert apple |
| Laxton's Superb | 1897 | Bedfordshire | dessert apple |
| Lord Clyde | 1866 | Cheshire | cooking apple |
| Lord Combermere | 19th cent | East Anglia | cooking apple |
| Lord Derby | 1862 | Cheshire | cooking apple |
| Lord Lambourne | 1907 | Bedfordshire | dessert apple |
| Mannington's Pearmain | c.1770 | Sussex | dessert apple |
| Millicent Barnes | 1903 | Cheshire | dessert apple |
| Monarch | 1888 | Essex | cooking apple |
| Moss's Seedling | c.1955 | Shropshire | dessert apple |
| Newton Wonder | c.1870 | Derbyshire | cooking/dessert apple |
| Sussex Mother | 1884 | Sussex | dessert apple |
| Ten Commandments | 1883 | Herefordshire | dessert apple |
| Winter Queening | very old | Norfolk | cooking/dessert apple |
| Conference | 1885 | Hertfordshire | cooking/dessert pear |
| Doyenne du Comice | 1849 | France | dessert pear |
| Williams' Bon Chretien | c.1770 | Berkshire | cooking/dessert pear |
| Cheshire Damson (2) | very old (seedling) | Cheshire | cooking damson |
| Merryweather | 1907 | Nottinghamshire | cooking damson |
| Kingston Black | 19th cent | Somerset | cider apple |

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## Special offer to CGT members!

This year Combermere Abbey will be having 5 garden open days (see dates below) and head gardener Phil Tatler is offering CGT members a reduced entry fee of £4 (Normal price is £5).

Take this newsletter with you as proof of membership.

The walled garden, pleasure garden and pleasure garden wood (with access down to the Mere) will all be open. There will also be refreshments (in the Glasshouse) and a plant stall.

Dates are: 20 May; 17 June; 22 July; 26 August; 23 September.

Opening times are 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. with last entry at 4 p.m.

# Cheshire's first gardening guru?

Maria E. Jacson of Bebington and Tarporley

Cheshire has been the birthplace of several distinguished authors on gardening. Possibly the earliest was John Gerard of *Herball* fame, author of the first garden catalogue *Catalogus Arborum Fruticum ac Plantarum* (1596), who was born in Nantwich in 1545.

But an author in the Georgian period, relatively unknown – possibly because her books were mostly published anonymously – was Maria Elizabetha Jacson (1755-1829) who aimed her work at youngsters and amateurs.

That she deserved an entry in Blanche Henrey's *Dictionary*, and an article by Joan Percy in the journal *Garden History*, suggests that she was important in pioneering what we might now call accessible garden writing.

Maria Jacson was a daughter of the Rector of Bebington, Simon Jacson and his wife Anne Fitzherbert, who came originally from Somersal in Derbyshire. The younger of two sisters (Frances Jacson became a novelist) and with a brother Roger, she grew up in a rectory with 'two gardens and two orchards'.

St. Andrew's parish church in Bebington is one of Wirral's most historic buildings, a Saxon church mentioned in the Domesday Book whose present buildings can be dated to Norman times.

Maria lived in Bebington until the age of 22, then, in 1777, she moved with her father and sister to Stockport and later, around 1796, following the death of her mother, to Tarporley.

Her first book, published in London by Joseph Johnson: *Botanical dialogues for the use of schools* (1797) was intended for educational use. The book includes a preface by Sir Brooke Boothby and Dr Erasmus Darwin (dated 1795).

It was perhaps unfortunate that Priscilla Wakefield also published *An introduction to botany in a series of familiar letters* in 1797, a book that went through several editions and was a best-seller, as it outshone Miss Jacson's book which had been written in dialogue format.

Undeterred, she issued another book titled *Botanic lectures* in 1804, containing similar material but not in dialogue form and aimed at a broader readership. She was an early proponent of the Linnaean system of plant classification, and as her father's blindness made him dependent on his unmarried daughters she probably felt the need to supplement the family's income by authorship.

While living in Tarporley, she wrote *Sketches of the physiology of vegetable life,* published in 1811 a few years after her father's death. It describes experiments she carried out some twenty years earlier, i.e. when she lived in Bebington, including an attempt to germinate a coconut.

Her best-known book, however, was her *Florist's manual: or, hints for the construction of a gay flower garden.* This first appeared in 1816 and was still semi-anonymous, albeit with the author's initials 'M.E.J.'. Unlike her earlier works this ran to three editions, the last two under her full name.

By this time she was living in her maternal ancestral home, Somersal Hall at Somersal Herbert near Uttoxeter, the seat of the Fitzherbert family. Blanche Henrey wrongly identifies her as the wife of Roger Jackman (*sic*), whereas in fact she was his sister. Roger inherited the hall on the death of Richard Fitzherbert, and it survives to this day, along with flower-beds little changed since Maria's time.

Maria Jacson's *Florist's manual* shows her to have been an early incarnation of Gertrude Jekyll, as she places great emphasis on colour combinations in floral planting.

My use of the term 'guru' in the title of this piece also alludes to the fact that she carried on an extensive correspondence with people (especially ladies) who shared her interests. One of these, Lady Broughton of Hoole, who created a famous rock-garden, was acknowledged in a dedication to the 1816 edition of *Florist's manual*.

The book contains a list of all the plants that were in flower in her garden in March 1812, many of which were spring-flowering bulbs such as *Narcissus*, *Hyacinthus* and *Fritillaria*.

Maria Jacson died 'of a fever' on 10 October 1829 while visiting the Parker family at Astle Hall

near Chelford; she is buried in the churchyard of St. John's.

Her grave can still be seen there, according to Joan Percy's article in *Garden History* vol. 20 part 1 (1992), from which much of the information in this article was obtained. I can recommend it for further reading, as there is much to be learned about this modest lady and her lifelong devotion to flower gardening.

***John Edmondson***

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At the time that Maria Jacson was writing, the word *Florist* generally referred to someone who raised Florists' flowers – tulip, auricula, pink, polyanthus, hyacinth and ranunculus were the main ones. Florists were mainly men and Jacson was writing for women and she called them 'general florists' –

'*…for I speak not of those Florists who confine their admiration of flowers to the greater or lesser number of stripes in the petals of a tulip or of a carnation…'*

Enjoy your flowers, was her message, not 'win prizes'.

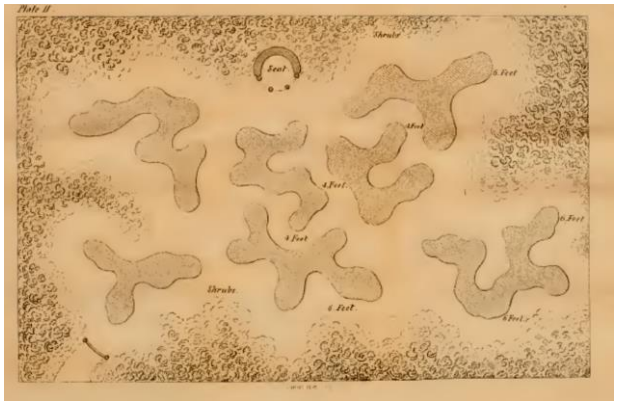
Her book starts with a couple of plans showing how to lay out island beds for viewing flowers from all directions.

The first one *(below)* is for a flower garden, surrounded by shrubs, in the middle of a pleasure ground:

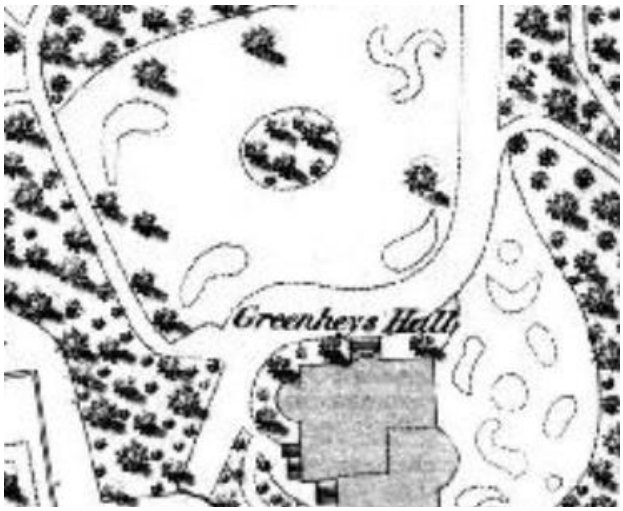

These beds should be twenty-three to twenty-five feet in length and no more than four feet wide, and raised above the level of the grass.

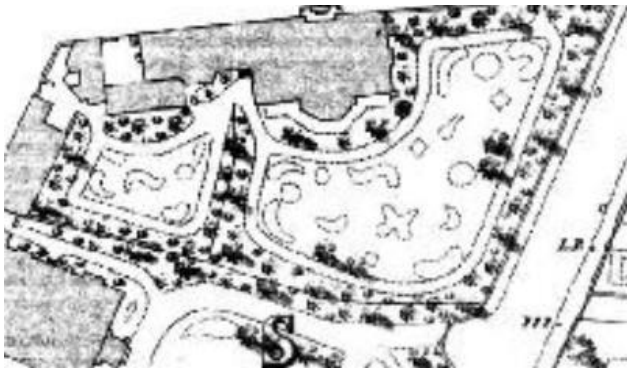
The tree at the entrance should be very light and, for preference, pendulous, but with the crown lifted to give a good view as one entered via the pathway.

The second plan was supposed to be '*on a large scale',* although the measurements given are not much different:



There were some gardens in Greenheys in Manchester in the 1840s which lead one to think they may have followed Jacson's advice:



A reprint containing both Maria Jacson's Botanical Lectures and Florist's Manual can be purchased from around £22 from Amazon.

***Joy Uings***

# William Andrews Nesfield and William Eden Nesfield

Below are two different takes on the following book:

**Masters of their craft, The Art, Architecture and Garden Design of the Nesfields**, *Shirley Rose Evans, Lutterworth Press 2014, 228pp, 55 B&W and 51 Colour ills, ISBN 978 0 7188 9323 1, £30.00*

Think of a Victorian garden and the image that comes to mind is probably a scheme by William Andrews Nesfield. The work of Nesfield and his son William Eden Nesfield was so prolific that their contribution to architectural and garden design in many ways exemplifies the age. Inspired by the beauty and romance of history they played an important role in the nineteenth-century revival of the Jacobean, Renaissance and Gothic styles.

They were commissioned by wealthy patrons across the country and received prestigious public commissions in London; both were also highly accomplished watercolourists and draftsmen. William Andrews Nesfield *parterre-de-broderie,* an intricate pattern of highly artificial bedding on a flat plane, became his signature design and the centrepiece of many commissions, but it was the very complexity, level of control and materials used in these designs that eventually led to the style falling from favour.

Shirley Evans, who has spent years researching and publishing articles about the Nesfields, is well placed to produce a study focusing on their lives and work. Privileged access to the family archives, beautiful photographs from Country Life, contemporary publications and original sources have yielded a wealth of information about their lives, interests and designs, so much in fact there seems to be material for a volume dedicated to each man.

The flow of the narrative is interrupted by short biographies and context concerning other artists and designers with whom the Nesfields associated, suggesting that the book is aimed at a wide audience, not just architectural and garden historians.

This study provides a wonderful portrait of these Victorian gentlemen, products of their age, and includes many fascinating details including informative captions from a shrubbery plan, extracts from letters to clients providing insights into design intentions, and quotations from contemporary descriptions of parterre planting.

However this level of detail simply invites more questions and analysis: what exactly made William Andrews resign his military commission to become a painter? Which commissions most clearly demonstrate the influence of their painting on landscape design, and how did one commission lead to another?

A fuller assessment of the Nesfield's legacy and influence would have made a useful contribution to the conclusion.

The book includes valuable lists of commissions and of the exhibited watercolours of William Andrews Nesfield. It is referenced and generously illustrated throughout, with the drawings and watercolours by the Nesfields demonstrating their considerable skill.

It would have been useful to have dates and sources of all photographs to aid understanding and clarity about what remains or has been restored.

This book is a welcome addition to studies of prominent landscape designers. It will inform greater understanding of the Nesfields' work and contribution to architectural and garden design, and encourage readers to search out their surviving creations.

***Barbara Moth***

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William Andrews Nesfield (1793-1881) was one of the most prolific garden designers of the nineteenth century. He often gained his commissions working with friends and relatives who were architects, including his son William Eden Nesfield. His father was a clergyman from Co. Durham, and after leaving school he joined the army, where being able to draw and paint the countryside, and create aerial perspectives was an essential requirement for an officer. Nevertheless, he was as much a practical engineer as an artist.

After serving abroad in Spain and Canada, he decided to leave the army and become a professional artist, and his skill as a painter attracted the admiration of one of his first clients, Lord Crewe of Crewe Hall.

His brother-in-law, the architect Anthony Salvin, encouraged him to try garden design and he created a formal pleasure ground to the north of the house overlooking the lake. He also created a new access road and enlarged the western end of the park.

William became the supreme exponent of the elaborate Victorian parterre, with formal flower beds placed on terraces between the house and the parkland. He worked at Broadlands, Castle Howard, Holkham Hall, Mentmore and Witley Court, as well as Kew Gardens and Regents Park.

The return to formality was part of the renewed interest in 17th century France and Italy. William considered he was a gentleman first, and a professional second, and he used his social connections to obtain commissions.

In Cheshire he worked with Salvin on the gardens at Arley, Capesthorne, Carlett, Hooton, Peckforton, Marbury and Tabley. At Eaton Hall, Chester, he laid out two large *parterres-de-broderie* to the east of the hall incorporating large monogrammed 'Ws' for the Marquess of Westminster, while at Rode Hall he provided a plan for the formal treatment of the grounds surrounding the house, including a rose garden.

At Dorfold Hall he worked for Wilbraham Tollemache, and straightened the avenue up to the front of the hall, with an entrance court, and built a new lodge and coach-house, and a parterre at the back of the house. When the owner`s wife returned from holiday, she was horrified, and a codicil in her will stated that at her funeral she was to be carried to the church over the open fields, and not down the hated new drive! Like many designers, William must have submitted designs which were rejected, and the family archives note plans for Combermere Abbey, Eaton Hall, Congleton, High Legh, Toft and Wythenshawe, and further research is needed to see if they were carried out. William was later joined in his business by his second son, Markham Nesfield, who became a noted designer in his own right.

William Eden was a leader in the Arts and Craft movement, known as the Old English Style, in partnership with Norman Shaw. He worked with his father at several houses in Cheshire, and designed cottages at Weston and Crewe Green and at Gt. Budworth on the Arley estate. Later he developed the red-brick Queen Anne style.

Just over the border in North Wales is Kinmel Park near Abergele where in 1871 Eden rebuilt the house in the Queen Anne manner and William laid out a now vanished formal parterre on the terrace.

In 1872 father and son submitted plans for additions to nearby Bodrhyddan Hall with an intricate parterre. Fortunately, the house and garden remain here, the only complete collaboration between the two men.

This pioneer book is welcome and the illustrations are excellent, but, there are a number of concerns.

Apart from constantly referring to WA`s father as the Rev. Nesfield, the lists of commissions are confused and often give the wrong county, while the index is woefully inadequate.

***John Davies***

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Little Sparta Trust in partnership with the Garden History Society & AGT are hosting a special fund raising gala opening of Ian Hamilton Finlay's garden in North Lanarkshire, Scotland on Saturday 8th August 2015 from 11-3pm.

There will be a visual history of the making of the garden, a film extract with Ian, poetry readings and music as well as tours with the head gardener George Gilliland.

Refreshments will also be available alongside art and plant souvenirs to buy. A bus will be available to take visitors from Central Edinburgh to the venue. Tickets can be booked directly at: https://littlespartagardenparty2013.eventbrite.co.uk or through the website http://www.littlesparta.org.uk Entrance £25. With return bus £35.

# Events

Our Events Group has provided us with a fascinating array of talks and visits this year – so much so that we are receiving more applications than we have spaces available.

It can be a difficult juggling act – trying to work out how many places should be arranged for each visit. The numbers for talks depends upon the venue and how many chairs can be comfortably arranged and still leave room for the speaker/laptop/projector.

Visits to gardens are more difficult to work out. How many people can fit into the tea-room? If we are being shown around a garden by an owner or head gardener, what limits should be placed on numbers to ensure everyone can hear? Is it possible to have two groups with different leaders going in opposite directions?

These are the sorts of logistical problems that the Events Group has to tackle for each talk and visit and without knowing in advance how popular a particular event will be. We are enormously grateful to them all for the work they have put in over the years, but as the numbers of members increases the demand for places rises too and that has led to some disappointment.

Not everyone can be sure of the demands on their time, particularly those who are working and have to meet the requirements of employers and customers. You may have delayed booking for just such a reason only to find that there are no spaces available when your diary becomes fixed. What to do?

We talked around this problem at the Council of Management meeting on 8 April without finding a solution. If you have any ideas, please let us know – email tina@tinatheis.com.

Meanwhile, for an event you would really like to attend, why not make sure that whoever is taking bookings knows that you are interested. You can explain that you will not know whether you can attend until nearer the date, but they can reserve a space for you pro tem. Or send in your booking, keeping your fingers crossed. Cheques are not banked until after the event. If you let us know three days in advance that you won't be able to come your name can be taken off the list and your cheque returned to you (or destroyed by us). The three days gives us time to offer the place to anyone who may be on a waiting list.

***Events Group***

# Arley Sculpture Trail

Following the success of their 'sculpture trail' in 2014 Arley Hall and Gardens are this year again having a trail.

The work, in a number of different materials, is mainly by local artists and is situated in The Grove woodland area.

Look out for the large silver sculptural 'Rhododendron' bench by artist and CGT member Christine Wilcox-Baker.

Inspired by Lord Ashbrook's collection of rhododendron's Christine created the design and worked closely with blacksmith Dave Broadbent and team who forged it in their Mobberley workshop.

# Out and about with the researchers and recorders

The Research group meets regularly to catch up with news, give each other support and plan which histories should next be tackled. Sometimes these meetings are indoors – at other times we venture out as a group to prepare a report on a particular property.

This month we went to Poulton Hall in the Wirral. On the outskirts of Bromborough, the Hall lost a large amount of its park to the M53 though their loss at least meant that it was quick and easy to get there even for those of us on the edge of Manchester.

The Lancelyn Greens can trace their family back some 900 years and there are supposed to be the remains of a castle (though now invisible!). The current hall dates from 1653, but has been added to by different generations.

We were made very welcome by CGT member June Lancelyn Green who has been the guiding hand behind the recent development of the gardens. These are a tribute to her husband, Roger, and her son, Richard, both of whom were scholars with particular interests – Roger in Lewis Carroll, Peter Pan and C.S. Lewis (author of the Narnia stories); Richard in Sherlock Holmes. Throughout the gardens are sculptures and art works which reflect these interests.

Before recording the gardens, we were shown around the hall including the library, its contents reflecting the interests of Lancelyn Greens through the centuries. On the shelves are 18th century notebooks where household expenditure has been recorded: in one the handwriting and layout is beautiful, in another quite the opposite.

We were also shown the brewhouse – the photo above right shows us climbing the rather steep outside stairs to the upper floor which is used by the local Scout group. It also houses 32 bells. These don't simply record the passing of time – being computer controlled they do so by playing a variety of tunes.

We then got down to the serious business of recording the gardens. If you are interested in joining the Research group, why not contact Barbara Moth on barbara.moth@btinternet.com.

## Date for your Diary

## Trees in Historic Landscapes

### Cholmondeley Castle 26 September 9.30 – 4.30

This will be the first of what we hope will be many Workshops. Look out for full details in the next Events mailing. Cost will be £48 – or £44 for CGT members – and the day will include the history of the gardens and the ancient tree-planting on the site. A walk around the site will allow participants to see how the trees relate to their surroundings. After lunch there will be hands-on tree planting, looking at both traditional and up to date practices. Consideration will be given to species, historical context, cultural requirements, siting, and how the tree will interact within the landscape in future years.

**Copy date for July newsletter is 30 June**

Contributions to the Newsletter are very welcome. If you want to comment on articles in this edition or would like to contribute one for the next, please contact the
Newsletter Editor, 26 Sandford Road, Sale, M33 2PS, tel: 07900 968 178 or e-mail joy.uings@btconnect.com.