



Ness Botanic Gardens

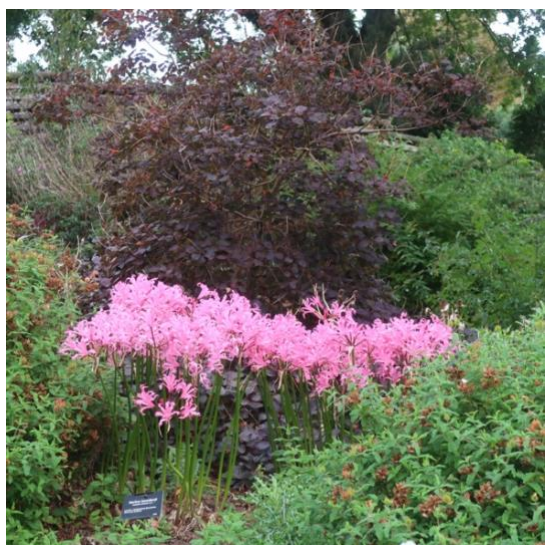
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- The Streamside Garden, RHS Bridgewater
- Stefan Roberts, Head Gardener, Lyme Park
- History of Herbaceous Borders
- Quinta Arboretum
- Dunham Massey Orangery

Future events (see pages 11/12)

- CGT Events: Marcus Chilton Jones, Curator RHS Bridgewater, 11th March 2pm, Marthall Hall
- 22nd May CGT 20th Anniversary Garden Visit and AGM at Arley Hall
- 28th May Visit to Bankhead
- RHS Urban Show, Manchester 18th – 24th April 2024

CGT visit to Ness Botanic Gardens



Nerines

were founded by Arthur Bulley in 1898, and 75 years since 'Bulley's Garden' became the University of Liverpool's Botanic Gardens in 1948.

Our tour began by passing a bed of plants linked to Ness, featuring an aster 'Small Ness' and a cranesbill 'White Ness'. Other beds had Ranunculaceae and grasses. The sheltered Mediterranean garden was built on free draining sandstone with borderline hardy perennials such as salvias, cistus, santolinas and lavenders. The pink nerines (above) were in flower.

We walked past lawns to look across to *Sorbus* with its autumn colour and down to the herbaceous beds where the gardeners had been dealing with bindweed. In Bulley's day there had been 48 gardeners but today there are 7 ½ and some volunteers. We saw an American prairie bed while the European bed was in the process of being redesigned (also see page 8). The story of Ness was represented by a circular garden originally designed by Chris Beardshaw 15 years ago with a sculpture of a grain of pollen in the centre. The walk took us through the potager with its ornamental kitchen garden and small glasshouse looked after by the Alpine Garden Society.



Looking across to Chris Beardshaw's garden



Red colour at Ness

Cheshire Gardens Trust members and friends met at Ness Botanic Gardens on an especially pleasant October day for a guided tour.

It is 125 years since Arthur Kilpin Bulley, a cotton merchant from Liverpool, founded the sixty acre garden overlooking the estuary of the River Dee. Bulley sponsored plant collectors which enabled him to introduce many rare plants from all over the world. Several years after his death in 1932, Bulley's daughter Lois Agnes bequeathed the gardens to Liverpool University plus an endowment of £75,000. Since 1948 the gardens have been owned and managed by the university, maintaining and developing their beauty. There is an emphasis on research, conservation and education reflecting Bulley's original interests. The garden holds the National Collections of *Sorbus* and birch. 2023 was a double anniversary for Ness, as it marked 125 years since the gardens

The path wound round through a variety of interesting trees and shrubs, past the large original *Pieris forestii*, which would be best seen in spring with its red foliage, and the very rare Chinese spice bush *Lindera praetermissa*. The path took us past the monkey puzzle tree and azalea beds and by the red oak trees which were just beginning to change colour. Looking across to the Wilderness we were told of the emphasis on managing the area for wildlife, including dormice and insects.

Research is being carried out for global warming and experiments are taking place. We passed the *Ginkgo biloba* and then a grove of

Australian Wollemi pines. The water gardens had ponds originally formed from marl pits and the rock garden was built on clay making it rather wet, suiting plants such as the candelabra *Primula*. Part of the 'wedding area' had been replanted. The final area to visit was the upper terrace sheltered by a sandstone wall making it a good spot for semi hardy Mexican plants. The Californian poppy was in flower.

Janet Horne

Photos Gordon Darlington and Margaret Blowey

For further photos see the [CGT Website gallery](#)

Also see article on page 8



Wollemi pines

The Chinese Streamside Garden at RHS Bridgewater



On the day ex-hurricane Lee made its way across the UK, a few determined CGT members made their way to Salford, to the newest RHS garden on the Duke of Bridgewater's former estate. We were met by Steve and Janet, two RHS volunteer guides who divided us into two groups. Once the rain had subsided we set off along the main path up to the woodland area.

I was in the group led by Steve and this report is based on what he told us as we walked around the garden. Also included are facts taken from the RHS website. The particular area we were exploring was the Chinese Garden. One of the first trees Steve drew our attention to was an oak which had been planted to commemorate our late queen, Queen Elizabeth II (left).

The woodland area has undergone clearance work which has seen an improvement in the number of insect and bird species etc. The area was prone to flooding in the past and the Victorians built 'swales' to slow down the flow of water from higher up. These may still be seen today and control water in times of heavy rain. According to Steve, the water now flows through the Chinese Garden. The path we were walking along was a historic one which led from the former hall to the kitchen garden area.

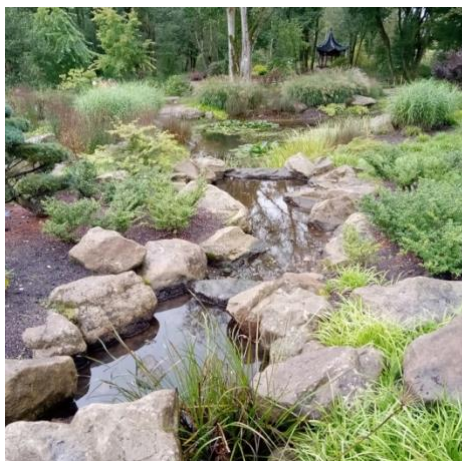
We reached Ellesmere Lake which was made by the Victorians but today it is only half its original size as it has silted up. There was a fountain in the lake, powered by water collected in reservoirs up on the local moss. However,

this apparently did not really work. The Nesfield terraces above the lake were also pointed out but it will possibly be 4-5 years before they are restored, depending on finance.

We were now at the top of the Chinese Garden where the design and planting represented the top of a Chinese mountain with a stream running down the hillside (left). The imported rocks are Derbyshire gritstone. The garden was designed by a Chinese Company, Yangzhou Classical Garden Construction Company and the local Chinese



Plaque thanking Chinese community



community has been heavily involved, especially with funding of the scheme. Unfortunately during lockdown the Chinese could not actually be at Bridgewater so the RHS staff had to take instruction via Zoom as they started to construct the garden. Planting is familiar to us as so many of the plants in our own gardens originated in China. The RHS lists the following on its website: snakebark maples, magnolias,



CGT Members on one of the bridges

rhododendrons, primulas, hydrangeas, *Cornus kousa* (Chinese dogwood), *Betula albosinensis* (Chinese red birch), *Ginkgo biloba* (maidenhair tree) and *Davidia involucreata* (handkerchief tree).

We followed the stream down the “mountain” crossing the first of 5 bridges over it. Each bridge is a different design. Here was the music pavilion which had recently been completed but, at the request of the RHS, the colours were muted. “It is a remarkable structure featuring classical Chinese architectural design and authentic construction, serving as a breathtaking centrepiece. It is the first of 4 interlinked pavilions that will make up The Scholar's Garden, a project that draws inspiration from classical Chinese

garden design and is due for completion in 2026”. ([RHS website link below](#)). The four pavilions will represent traditional arts that were historically viewed as essential for self-cultivation: music, chess, calligraphy, and painting.

The lowest section is yet to be planted up with 5,000 Chinese meadow plants and it is planned to do this by the end of the year.



The Music Pavilion



The Music Pavilion set in the Middle Section of the Streamside garden

It will contain a Chinese meadow and a bamboo garden, known as a bambusarium. The meadow will blend into the English meadow called the Victoria meadow, named after Queen Victoria who twice visited Bridgewater.

Our walk ended at the Moon Bridge Water,

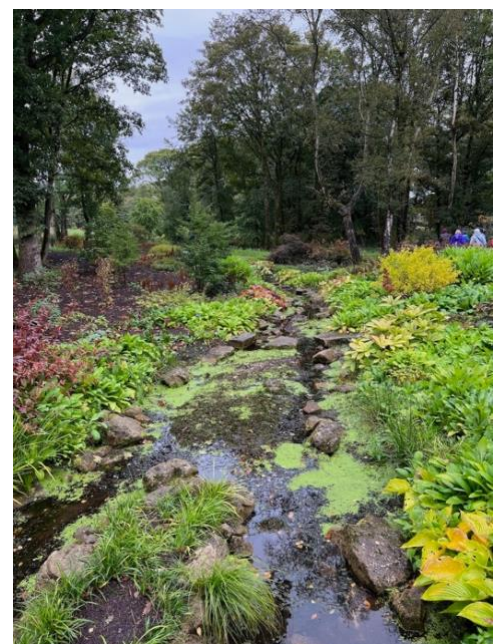
the lake created in front of the visitor centre. Steve explained that the name is a combination of Moon City and Bridgewater.

Although I had walked through the Chinese Water Garden on past visits, having a guide made such a difference to understanding what is behind the design.

For more details, see [RHS Bridgewater Chinese Streamside Garden page](#)

Julia Whitfield

Photos Julia Whitfield and Ken Moth



The Middle Section of the Streamside Garden

Stefan Roberts, Head Gardener, Lyme Park

Eighteenth in our series of Head Gardeners



Stefan Roberts, photo courtesy of Nation Trust

Stefan Roberts did not take a conventional route into gardening. He was born in 1988 and grew up in Macclesfield with his parents and three brothers. The family had holidays in the UK and often visited National Trust properties. He has always loved the outdoors, particularly woodland.

After school Stefan went to Leeds University to study English, his first love, but he realised very quickly that it wasn't for him. He was able to find a course at Leeds Metropolitan University that suited him much better – Garden Design and Landscape Architecture. After graduation, he realised that he needed to increase his plant knowledge and attended Reaseheath College to study for the RHS Level 3 theory course, followed by volunteering at Macclesfield Community Garden Centre at West Park. He was then lucky enough to get an RHS Apprenticeship at Harlow Carr where he

rotated round different areas of the gardens.

Stefan now had a very wide background in horticulture and he started in the garden at Quarry Bank Mill. The post was sponsored by a private benefactor and he spent two days a week in the private garden and three days in the gardens at Styal, mostly working in the lower garden, where he managed the tennis lawn and borders. He was also involved in the renovation of the top garden, which included learning how to establish and prune wall fruit trees. He found he was involved in everything; he enjoys being a jack of all trades.

After 5 years at Styal, Stefan set up on his own doing garden design and maintenance in private gardens where he was able to use his design skills. He was still doing 2 days a week with the original private benefactor.



Cascade taking water away from the Lake 1



Looking down over the Italian Garden and the potential new entrance to the garden

He then applied successfully for the Head Gardener post at Lyme Park. In addition to Stefan, there are three full time gardeners and one part timer. There are also around 80 volunteers, up to 8 a day in the garden, as well as garden engagement volunteers who greet people and run tours and are vital in helping visitors with mobility issues have access to the garden.

Stefan started as Head Gardener at Lyme in October 2022, following his predecessor Sarah Witts (see [CGT Newsletter January 2021](#)). We walked round the garden together on a cool November day. He took me past the cascade and round the bottom of the Italian garden where the new planned entrance to the garden will be.



Much of this area will have to be remodelled and planted, but he needs to wait until the plans are approved by the National Park Authority.

As we continued our tour, Stefan updated me on current developments. Adjacent to the rose garden is a double border. Sarah had planned a white border, but Stefan decided a bit more colour was needed and is echoing stormy skies with blue/white/silver/grey/purple low growing plants like *Geranium*, *Sedum*, *Stachys*, *Polemonium* (jacobs ladder), *Anaphalis* and grasses. Beyond are two rockeries (see left) which Stefan has

updated by planting perennials, and the rose garden where the pond is being repaired. Below this are two long borders adjacent to the house. These have been reduced in width and they are waiting for special winter heathers, which will come from the specialist National Trust propagation centre in Devon/Cornwall. There will be Japanese Quince and *Pyracantha* on the walls. Stefan would like to introduce more seasonal interest, especially using spring flowering trees.

The formal bedding alongside the house will remain, being key features of the historic garden, but they are not easy to manage in the cooler, wetter climate at Lyme. The clock borders will stay the same with winter and summer bedding, but the sunken border (see below) will be replaced with perennials, changed every 2/3 years. The orangery is being renovated with a new door and windows being made at the in-house craft centre at Dunham Massey, and there will be a new roof soon. It will be fascinating to see the new planting next year.



New border awaiting planting



Stefan is keen to make the garden more accessible. Some ideas are very simple like hand rails on flights of steps, and a more ambitious route round the garden to avoid the steps. He also has ideas about linking the garden with the surrounding estate. The Killtime ravine was badly affected by the floods, but it is a beautiful area. He is hoping to do some more planting here, and also, if at all possible, link a gate from the outside to the existing bridge over the Killtime and into the garden.

It will be fascinating to see the changes to the garden at Lyme, especially once some of the structural changes are in place. My thanks to Stefan for his time and enthusiasm.

Text and photos Sue Eldridge

For more information see [Lyme Park website](#)

For more photos see [CGT Website Gallery](#)

The Development of the Herbaceous Border at Ness Botanic Gardens



The double August border, being enjoyed by the family, courtesy of The University of Liverpool Botanic Gardens and the Department of Special Collections and Archives

The classic herbaceous border had its heyday in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Gertrude Jekyll (1843-1932) was particularly influential in developing some of the key concepts, including the use of complimentary colours and planting in 'drifts'. Her book *Colour Schemes for the Flower Garden* (1908) describes the effects she sought to achieve and influenced famous herbaceous schemes at other gardens including Hidcote Manor in Gloucestershire and Sissinghurst in Kent. Jekyll's own garden, Munstead Wood in Surrey, included borders designed to look at their best in certain months. A June border was planted with lupins, delphiniums and other early summer-flowering perennials and a September

border was loaded with Michaelmas daisies.

The herbaceous border in the true sense is labour intensive – requiring staking, division and cutting back – and fell out of fashion during the course of the twentieth century. Herbaceous borders were superseded by easier-to-maintain mixed borders that included woody plants – for example, Christopher Lloyd's (1921-2006) long border at Great Dixter in East Sussex – although some practitioners of classic herbaceous borders remained, including Graham Stuart Thomas (1909-2003) who worked as Gardens Advisor for the National Trust.

Arthur Bulley (1861-1942) began to develop his gardens at Ness in 1898. When local people talked about 'Bulley's Gardens' they were referring to three separately enclosed spaces, each about an acre in size and linked by a public path. One of these was the herbaceous garden, located in the area of the current herbaceous border and adjacent lawn.

Brenda McLean in her book *A Pioneering Plantsman: A. K. Bulley and the Great Plant Hunters* (1997) wrote:

'As an Edwardian flower garden, Bulley's herbaceous garden must have been hard to beat. Located on the most suitable, deep-silt soil... an acre of a field was transformed... along one side of the garden was an azalea border, backed by a hornbeam hedge... at one end of the garden was a bright display of dahlias, and an area of rose beds of gentler hues. At the opposite end an iron trellis was covered in *Clematis montana*. Otherwise four monthly flower borders were Bulley's pride and joy. The May border was over 60m long, on one side of the garden, while the June, July and August borders were across the garden with cinder paths and backed by tamarisk hedges.'

In 1958 Ken Hulme removed Bulley's seasonal beds and replaced them with the one long herbaceous border that we still have today. The guidebooks from the 1970s and 1980s describe planting which included



The herbaceous border in 1974

'Phlox, *Rudbeckia* and sweet peas trained on posts', followed by *Agapanthus* and *Galtonia candicans*. In his newsletter dated June 1978 Hulme wrote:



Echinacea pallida (Wikimedia Commons)

'*Delphiniums* and *Dictamnus* are drawing visitors to the herbaceous border and there are also *Paeonia* and *Rodgersia* in flower in this section. This style of gardening has been judged an expensive luxury and has been replaced in some gardens by features more economically maintained. There may be differing viewpoints on the desirability or otherwise of maintaining herbaceous borders; we could not possibly manage however without so many of the constituent plants.'

More recently, following eradication of bindweed, there was an opportunity to redesign the herbaceous border. Summer 2022 saw the first section replanted with herbaceous perennials from North America including such familiar plants as *Rudbeckia* and *Echinacea*, but also the choice of plants reflected the role of the botanical garden to preserve endangered wild species.

A group of the Ness team worked on the new planting plan. Andy Lambie wrote:

'The design for the North American section of the herbaceous border is to represent plants from the three zones of the surviving areas of the north American plains (western Canada through to northern Mexico).

The border itself will be split into three areas, short grass with plants such as *Bouteloua gracilis* and *Zinnia grandiflora*. The middle section will be mixed grass prairie – *Schizachyrium scoparium*, *Echinacea pallida* and *Dalea candida* and then long grass with such plants as *Panicum virgatum*, *Veronicastrum virginicum* and *Silphium laciniatum*. In addition, we are going to plant the border in two distinct planting styles – drift for the short/long grass and matrix for the mixed grass.'



Dalea candida (Wikimedia Commons)



Veronicastrum virginicum (Wikimedia Commons)

In more recent editions of The Gentian, Phil Kay, reported that the North American section of the border, planted out in Spring 2022, gave a wonderful display over Summer 2023, which continued into Autumn. The second section of the border will be planted with European native plants and the final section will be planted at the end of 2024 with Asian-origin plants.

Nick Lightfoot, Gardens and Collections Manager, Ness Botanic Gardens

Photos courtesy of The Gentian, the Newsletter for Members of Ness Botanic Gardens

Editor: We are grateful to Ness Botanic Gardens for allowing us to use the original article by Nick Lightfoot, which first appeared in Summer 2022 in issue no. 229 of the Gentian. This is an abridged version.

Quinta Arboretum Revisited



The restored lake with reflections of the avenue of limes

CGT members last visited Quinta Arboretum in Swettenham in October 2018. I was delighted to be able to go again when the restored lake was reopened, this time courtesy of Tatton Garden Society.

The Arboretum was created in the mid 1950s by Sir Bernard Lovell, best known for his telescope at Jodrell Bank and his work with radar. Development took place over a number of years with land being acquired to extend the site. Sir Bernard's aim was to collect one example of every tree and shrub that would grow and flourish in Cheshire and was listed in the then five volumes of W. J. Bean's seminal reference work *Trees and Shrubs Hardy in the British Isles*.

During the development, a lake was excavated and lined with puddled clay to form a significant landscape feature. Part of the design included avenues and groves to enhance the layout. As the Arboretum was established plants were presented, donated and sourced from a wide range of places, a number being used as features to mark major events in Sir Bernard's life. He was also meticulous in keeping records including hand-drawn plans and a card index for each plant. Some 15 years ago all the records were digitised and entered onto the Arboretum Database (Arboretum DB).



Martin Brown, Veolia planting shrubs around the lake

The lake is bordered on the south side by an avenue of red-twigged limes planted by Sir Bernard Lovell, in recognition of his Reith lectures in 1958. The veteran oaks at the end of the lake are over 300 years old.



Acer rubrum 'Red King'

Over several decades the clay lining of the lake cracked and water levels dropped. In 2015 the Arboretum's parent charity, Tatton Garden Society, had the lake drained and relined with blue clay. Unfortunately this didn't work and a more permanent solution was needed. In 2023, thanks to a grant from Veolia Environmental Trust, the lake was dug out and relined with a flexible impermeable liner for longevity.

The lake was officially reopened on 24th October by David Skidmore, Chair of Tatton Garden Society. He thanked the many members of the Society for their hard work in developing and supporting the successful bid to Veolia for funding. Martin Brown from Veolia was present and

explained the important role of the Society and the local community in the success of the bid, and he emphasised the importance of the project in environmental terms.

We were very lucky that the sun came out and we were able to appreciate the beauty of the lake and the reflections of the surrounding trees in its clear water. The rest of the Arboretum was looking beautiful, with autumn colour in the acers, ornamental oaks and other shrubs and trees. It is well worth another visit.

Sue Eldridge, with grateful thanks to Tatton Garden Society and Veolia

Dunham Massey Orangery Before and After



The Orangery before planting

out. Other plants in pots were taken to the Glasshouses in the Walled Garden for storage.

In 2023 new planting started to be introduced, retaining the very popular book corner. New metal plant stands were made, following the design of wooden stands, which were known to have been in the Orangery but were too



The Orangery after planting

Sempervivum, *Echeveria*, *Cuphea ignea*, *Aspidistra*, *Begonia* and *Pelargonium*. In flower this month is a *Fuchsia arborescens*, which has clusters of pink flowers and, as the weather warms up, plants which were removed to the glasshouses for winter, will be reintroduced. These include banana, lime and kumquat. Additional pots of spring bulbs will also be added. The climbing roses which grow on the south facing front wall include Rosa 'Desprez à Fleur Jaune', R. 'Aimee Vibert', Rosa 'Fellenberg' and R. 'Céline Forestier'. Unfortunately, the name of the fragrant rose on the left side of the entrance door is unknown. The borders in front of the Orangery are planted with pink Nerines which flower in the autumn. The planting will continue to develop and change with the seasons.

Patricia Hazlehurst

In recent years the 18th Century Orangery at Dunham Massey has had major repairs and restoration carried out, including a new roof, repairs to the ceiling, pointing of exterior brickwork and repairs to the windows. In preparation for this work all plants in the Orangery were removed. The passionflower which covered the interior walls, but only produced a few flowers, was taken



The Orangery before planting

fragile to be used. Some of the plants which had been stored were brought back including the *Olea europaea*, *Fatsia polycarpa* and *Dicksonia antarctica*. A new climber, *Holboellia brachyandra*, was planted on the rear wall. This vigorous evergreen climber from Yunnan, China is named after Frederik Ludvig Holbøll (1765-1829) of Copenhagen Botanic Gardens. It has male and female scented flowers in the late spring and, hopefully, will produce edible sausage shaped fruits from which it gets its common name, the short-antlered sausage vine. The plant stands are covered in pots with a variety of ferns,



The Conservatory after planting

Forthcoming Events

Cheshire Gardens Trust events



Monday 12th February 2pm (via zoom), **Market Gardens and Small Holding through the ages**, Liz Wright. Email Margaret Blowey (rhbmeh@aol.com), if you are interested.

Monday 11th March 2pm, Marthall Hall, **Marcus Chilton-Jones, Curator RHS Bridgewater**, developments since the garden opened and plans for the future.

Wednesday 22nd May, **Cheshire Gardens Trust 20th Anniversary Garden Visit and AGM at Arley Hall**

28th May, **Visit to Bankhead** (left). Two acres of terraced gardens developed from Victorian times with

spectacular views south and west over the Dee valley towards the Welsh hills. Splendid borders with azaleas and rhododendrons.

For further information see [the CGT Events page](#) on the website

RHS Urban Show, Manchester, Thursday 18th April to Sunday 21st April. See [RHS Urban Show](#)

[RHS Houseplant Weekend, RHS Bridgewater](#) 27th -28th January 10am – 3pm

[Language of Gardening: A Beginners Guide](#) RHS Bridgewater 17th February, morning or afternoon

The Gardens Trust

Community Landscapes A series of online talks with FOLAR, Weds @ 6pm from 10 Jan, £8 each or all 5 for £35 (GT and FOLAR members £6 each or all for £26.25)

John Singer Sargent and Gardens A 2-part online series with Elaine Kilmurray, Tues@10 starting 30 Jan. £14 for both or £8 each

Ancient Roots A 6-part online lecture series exploring Ancient Roman Roots with Gillian Hovell on Tues@10, from 13th February £42 or £8 each (GT members discount applies)

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

National Garden Scheme [NGS website](#)

A sample of snowdrop and spring gardens

[Rode Hall](#) open for snowdrops 4th Feb – 4th March

Also see information on NGS Zoom talk – In Celebration of Snowdrops, 30th January 7pm - [National Garden Scheme](#)

[Briarfield](#) The Rake, Burton Neston, open 9th and 16th February for snowdrops and in March and April for spring flowers.

[Parvey Lodge](#), Parvey Lane, Sutton, Macclesfield, Cheshire, SK11 0HX



[Norley Court](#), Marsh Lane, Norley, Frodsham, Cheshire WA6 8NY, open 12th and 26th May, a large spring garden with rhododendrons, azaleas, pieris, a bluebell wood and erythroniums

[Parm Place](#) 10 High St, Great Budworth, Northwich CW9 6HF, open 7th April, large collection of bulbs and flowers, camellias, hellebores and blossom.

Planthunters Fairs

The first of the Planthunters fairs are at: Arley Hall and Gardens 24th March, Cholmondeley, 28th April, Capesthorpe Hall 12th May and Norton Priory 19th May,

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

Lane End Cottage Gardens reopen on 13th and 14th April



21 March 2024 6.30 pm Developing the Meadow as an Urban Cultural form

Talk by James Hitchmough, Cross Street Chapel Cross Street, Manchester M2 1NL

James Hitchmough will talk about his research and practice into how to make meadows and meadow-like vegetation in urban (and sometimes rural) landscapes – in the UK and around the world – and how people view and experience them. Cost £15. For further information see the [Manchester Lit and Phil website](#)

And finally, in CGT's 20th Anniversary Year...

At the request of the Council of Management, Christine Wilcox Baker, CGT member and designer, has designed an advert to attract new members, to appear in the NGS Cheshire and Wirral Yellow Book. There will also be large, illuminated advertisements in three shopping areas in Warrington, courtesy of Signing Solutions, a charity for the deaf.





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Copy date for April Newsletter is 30th March 2024

Contributions to the Newsletter are very welcome. If you want to comment on articles in this edition or would like to contribute one for the next, please contact the Newsletter Editor, 148 Chester Road, Hazel Grove, Stockport SK7 6HE or email newsletter@cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk