



## **A New Park for Manchester**

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- John Hitchens, Altrincham Gardener
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### **Future events (see page 8)**

- CGT Zoom talks - Sarah Murch, natural pool designer, 30th January
- Joe Wainwright, Garden Photographer, 27<sup>th</sup> February
- The Development of the Wildegoose Nursery 6<sup>th</sup> March 2023 at Worleston Village Hall



# Mayfield Park

Tucked away behind Piccadilly Station is Manchester's first new city centre public garden for 100 years – Mayfield Park, 6.5 acres in all. It is a public private partnership between LCR (London and Continental Railways who were involved in the redevelopment of St Pancras Station and the Stratford regeneration for the Olympic Games), Manchester City Council, Transport for Greater Manchester and the regeneration specialist company, U and I plc.



*A view across the park*

plan is visionary with the development of 1400 homes, as well as numerous retail and restaurant outlets built into the original station area and under the imposing brick built arches. But perhaps even more impressive is that the garden has been built first with all the rest to follow.

At first glance it seems very commercial and trendy and I suspect some of it may be but talking to the gardener on site when I visited I got a very different view. They've just planted thousands of bulbs and he is keen to



*The children's play area with helter skelters*

The area has quite a history. In 1782 Thomas Hoyle established Mayfield Print Works on the site of a former country house, producing calico prints for the middle classes. He made his name and a fortune. It was not until 1910 that the print works was demolished and Mayfield Railway Station built. It suffered from bombing during World War 2 and gradually gave way to Manchester Piccadilly Station. However, it was used for a variety of other purposes but gradually fell into decline.

In 2016 U and I plc was appointed as the major development partner for a £1 billion regeneration project. There were major hurdles to overcome, including financial ones. But the plan is visionary with the development of 1400 homes, as well as numerous retail and restaurant outlets built into the original station area and under the imposing brick built arches. But perhaps even more impressive is that the garden has been built first with all the rest to follow. At first glance it seems very commercial and trendy and I suspect some of it may be but talking to the gardener on site when I visited I got a very different view. They've just planted thousands of bulbs and he is keen to see it in spring. He was in charge of the landscaping of the site and has been kept on for two years for development and maintenance. He was hoping to stay longer and was very committed. The very generous planting is already looking good, with trees, herbaceous planting and riverside plants. Bridges and viewpoints overlook the River Medlock which weaves its way through the site. There is plenty of wildlife and there is a boggy/wetland area. There is a wonderful play area, with a helter skelter, and some spacious community areas. The Partnership is committed to keeping the area safe and open for all visitors and employs security guards on site, who are also very helpful in answering peoples' questions.

It will be good to go back in the spring and to see how it develops over the coming years. Apparently there is a 15 year development plan. Do visit if you can. From Piccadilly Station, go down to the taxi area, turn left along Fairfield Street, then right down Baring Street. You come across the entrance to the park unexpectedly at the bottom on the left.

For more information see [the Mayfield Park website](#)

**Sue Eldridge**

## John Hitchens, Altrincham Gardener

This time, instead of a Head Gardener, we tell the story of John Hitchens, a Cheshire gardener throughout his working life and winner of many trophies. He started gardening when he was nine years old, helping his mother on the family allotment and soon he took it over and started gardening for other people. He met a fellow gardener, Norman Jones, who took him to local horticultural shows where they showed sweet peas, and to the Sale Horticultural and Allotment Society.



*John Hitchens on his mower in front of Dunham Knoll*

While at school, Mr Winfield, the gardening teacher, encouraged John's interest and helped him find his first job at Dunham Massey at age 14. He worked as apprentice gardener under Mr Gilbert Gillies, Head Gardener to the Earl of Stamford from 1932 to 1972. John worked in the walled kitchen garden (across the road from the Hall and gardens), from 8am to 5pm, 44 hours a week for £2-10 shillings a week. They grew vegetables of all descriptions, especially asparagus, and flowers for the Hall. Mr Gillies lived in the Head Gardener's house within the walled garden. There were 12 greenhouses growing peaches, nectarines, tomatoes, cucumbers and chrysanthemums, as well as arum lilies which were grown for local churches. The garden walls were heated and all manner of apple and pear varieties were grown. It was hard work, digging in all weathers, whitewashing greenhouse walls, shovelling coke and lagging boilers. Mr Gillies was very strict. John feels it was the end of the Victorian era, but he learnt a lot, not just about gardening itself but making bouquets, wreaths, flower arranging and plant displays, which came in very useful later on.

At the end of his apprenticeship, John had the opportunity to work as a private gardener at a beautiful house in Hale (right) owned by Mr Platt of Platt Clothiers; there he had the much higher salary of £10 a week, which he couldn't afford to turn down. There was an acre of land, with herbaceous borders, rose beds, traditional summer bedding, lawns, a tennis court and a greenhouse with a Black Hamburg grape vine (see page 4). He used to plant 2000 wallflowers and 2000 tulips each year. It was here that he started showing at the flower shows and winning cups. It was also where he got married. He worked here for nine years.

He then moved on to Dunham Knoll (above) a guest house for the company GEC. After a year the Head Gardener retired and John took his place. He was there for 25 years. Here there was a tremendous opportunity for growing





things which there hadn't been at the previous garden. There was a 100ft long greenhouse, all heated, as well as fruit trees and bushes. In addition they were able to grow a lot of the bedding from seed and cuttings. John now had an under gardener working for him, George Dean who had originally been at Clibrans Nurseries.

Alongside this, John was getting more and more involved in the Altrincham and District Mutual Improvement Society, which operated from 1894 to 1994. It was a highly successful society for working gardeners, with shows and many other events. John started as a very young member, was very soon on the committee and ended as its Chair. By 1994, there were fewer full time gardeners in the area and they were losing members, so the decision was made to close. With help from Hazel Prior, a local historian, John produced a very comprehensive history of the 100 years of the organisation.

When Dunham Knoll closed, John started working for himself, gardening in nine properties in the last 10 years of his working life. The most spectacular was at High Lawn in Bowdon, a Grade II listed building from around 1865 which was converted into a three storey house and seven individual apartments. The view from the Belvedere (penthouse apartment) is, apparently, stunning.



*John with the Black Homberg grapes*



*John Hitchens at his garden in Lymm*

Since retiring John still keeps busy with an allotment and a large family that includes 15 grandchildren. Currently he's working with one of his granddaughters to break the record for the biggest pumpkin.

I am very grateful to John for sharing his memories, his photos and scrapbooks, as well as his book, *'Memories of a Life Well Spent'*; sadly this is a portrait of a career that no longer exists.

**Sue Eldridge**

**Photos by John Hitchens and Sue Eldridge**

## Hidden History Tour at RHS Bridgewater

I stood on the foundations of Worsley New Hall looking out over the terraces below and the view beyond. It was a spine-tingling moment. I was lucky enough to be on one of the last 'Hidden History' tours at RHS Bridgewater, at the end of October. With two very knowledgeable volunteers we walked up past open ground at the top of the site into the formal part of the estate, and then through woodland. I had imagined that it would all be scrub but much had been cleared and, though hard going at times, we were often on good paths. We were near the very top of the site, close to the edge of the property and the road. Along the way we had passed the walls of the original garden, the driveway to the servants' part of the estate, a fire house, an



*Our guide showing us the steps up to the road*





*Walking down through the woodland*

ice-house, gates and steps up (page 4) to what was originally a bridge over the adjacent road. Nearby there was an imposing concrete building on the foundations of the servants' quarters. This has had a variety of uses, including military; it had even been used as the venue for raves until it was closed down completely.

The house designed by the architect Edward Blore, was built for Francis Egerton, the 1st Earl of Ellesmere from 1840 to 1845. Just as grand as the house, the magnificent gardens were landscaped over a 50-year period. William Andrews Nesfield was involved in the project, particularly the imposing terraces, from 1846.

Beyond the terraces, landscaped parkland extended to a lake and by 1875 the lake had been enlarged and a grotto built on its island, which was reached by a footbridge. Later we walked down along driveways and paths on the other side of the house (see left). Here you could still see lime avenues and old specimen trees, part of the original estate. This led down to a path round the lake. While one part of the lake has been drained and restored, it has been decided to leave the remaining part as it is to encourage biodiversity of wildlife.

Worsley New Hall became a British Red Cross hospital during the First World War and afterwards, with the departure of the Egerton family from the Worsley Estate, the hall and the gardens fell into decline. In the Second World War parts of the hall were requisitioned by the War Office, its gardens used as training grounds by the Lancashire Fusiliers.

During the early 20th century the hall fell into disrepair. Weakened by dry rot and following a fire in 1943, this once-grand building was finally demolished by a scrap merchant, who had bought it for just £2,500. By 1949, after a century of heritage, the hall became part of Salford's historic past. In subsequent years parts of the grounds were used as a garden centre, a Scout camp and a rifle range.

Now of course it is part of the RHS Bridgewater site. It has not yet been decided what to do with the area around the house foundations and terrace. More immediate developments will be completion of the Victoria wildflower meadow, and the Chinese pavilions along the streamside. A new development is starting. There will be an arboretum on the site of the open land to the left of the entrance. The famous pigs are already at work in there, clearing the ground. Coming soon is an exhibition 'What Next for Bridgewater': keep your eye on the [RHS Bridgewater website](#). It will be very interesting to see what happens next.

**Sue Eldridge**



*Concrete building built on foundation of servants' quarters*

## Concrete greenhouses

Annabel Downs, garden designer and speaker for Gardens Trust zoom talks, has contacted us about concrete greenhouses. She has been asked to research this topic in connection with a greenhouse in Wales, which they are hoping to restore. It was built by a quarry called Hendy Quarry 1947-1960. Annabel only knows about three others - Tapeley Park (Devon), Garsington Manor (Oxford), and at Llanerchaeron (Cardigan). For more information see [Concrete greenhouses](#)

So if you come across any concrete greenhouses in Cheshire or elsewhere let me know and I will pass it on. [sue\\_eldridge@hotmail.com](mailto:sue_eldridge@hotmail.com). Thank you and thanks to Ed Bennis for passing this on.

## Walton Hall and Gardens



Julia Whitfield (CGT events and research and recording groups) volunteers at Walton Hall and Gardens on the south-west outskirts of Warrington and wrote about the gardens and their history in the April 2022 edition of this Newsletter. In October she led a group of CGT members on a tour to discover the hall, gardens and parkland, once the estate of Lord Daresbury and his family.

The weather was kind to us and the autumn colours beautiful. We entered the grounds by the double bridge over the Bridgewater Canal and admired the Sensory Garden developed by prisoners (see left). We walked past the children's play area and Children's Zoo, which even includes

three alpacas, then crossed beautiful parkland with many specimen trees, some very old, some planted more recently. We were lucky to be invited into the Hall, now a venue for weddings and other events, to admire the magnificent staircase and spectacular fireplace and grand mirror in the room overlooking the park.

In front of the hall are the terraces with the original stone balustrade beyond; here outdoor events are held. This area would originally have had borders with seasonal bedding. We then moved into the more formal area of the garden with shrubs, herbaceous borders and some very special trees and shrubs, such as unusual *Magnolia* and *Camellia*, as well as *Azalea* and *Rhododendron*. We noted that it would be good to visit in spring. Originally there was a rose garden in this area but now this is lawn with borders and bedding plants. Part of the parkland was used to expand the formal garden and is now an orchard.



*The parkland in autumn*

Again, there were more interesting trees and shrubs as we moved towards the recently renovated conservatory and greenhouse (see below) Originally this was where exotic plants and flowers were grown, while another greenhouse provided the more regular fruit and vegetables for the Hall. It now houses Don Billington's award winning collection of bromeliads and is a resource for visiting students. Walton Hall and Gardens is a tremendous resource for educational and community groups; this includes a partnership with Myerscough College. It is obviously very well used. While we were there we met Head Gardener Steve with his regular gardeners, volunteers, community groups involved in horticulture and students as well as interested visitors.



Finally, what was once the stables is now a very nice heritage café, which is where we finished our morning tour. The gardens are open daily, from 8am to 5 pm in the winter and 8am to 8pm in the summer. Do visit if you can.

For further information see the April edition of the newsletter and the events gallery on the website

[CGT Website Events Gallery](#)

**Sue Eldridge**



# Collections and Conservation at Chester Zoo



*A Pleurothallidinae orchid*

Phil Esseen, Curator of Botany and Horticulture at Chester Zoo, gave the first “in person” talk for Cheshire Gardens Trust in almost 3 years.

He spoke about the history of the gardens at the Zoo, from the days of bedding plants, the floral clock and the elephant enclosure surrounded by roses. The current approach is to provide appropriate and enriching environments for the animals. There are future plans for a new arboretum in the wider estate, as well as a new Africa zone.

The Zoo houses five National Collections of plants, which comprises three genera of cacti, an orchid collection with 100 different species, and 130 species of *Nepenthes*, the carnivorous pitcher plant. Conservation of both flora and fauna are central to the work

of the Zoo. As well as maintaining gardens and enclosures for the animals, the Zoo grows food for them too. Phil said that when they had giant tortoises it cost £6,000 a year to feed them dandelions!

This was an informative and entertaining talk in the excellent venue of the Hall at Marthall. For more photos see [CGT Website Events gallery](#)

**Isabel Wright, Newsletter support group**

**Photo Phil Esseen**

## Why is this here?



If you ever travel along the A49 towards Warrington, you will pass through Appleton and, about half-a-mile from Stockton Heath, you may notice this blocked-up entrance. The fence forms a boundary for the house on the other side, so why are these old gate posts/piers here?

In 1820 the Lyon family started building Appleton Hall and the wider of the entrances was the main entrance to the estate. The smaller entrance was to the lodge which once stood just to the right of this gateway.

In 1944 the estate was broken up and sold, and the hall itself was demolished in the 1950s. It is now the site of the lower school of Bridgewater High School. The original parkland and gardens have been used for the upper school and housing.

The original entrance and the boundary sandstone walls remain. The number on the gate post was presumably allocated to the lodge when housing development took place along the A49.



*View of Appleton Hall taken from the Internet*

**Julia Whitfield**

## Forthcoming Events

**The Gardens Trust** Spring programme of online lectures has now started, with the ongoing garden history series now reaching C20<sup>th</sup>. Talks started on 12<sup>th</sup> January, and will cover the interwar years, including Sissinghurst and designers Geoffrey Jellicoe and Norah Lindsay.

Other series cover C17<sup>th</sup> & C18<sup>th</sup> Books & early illustrators of Natural History (4 talks from 6<sup>th</sup> Feb); Garden Archaeology, looking specifically at the use of water in gardens from fish ponds and moats to formal canals (6 talks from 10<sup>th</sup> Jan); and 5 talks in the Unforgettable Gardens series, in conjunction with Yorkshire Gardens Trust, ranging from an C18<sup>th</sup> Tour of Yorkshire to Historic Parks for the Future (from 1<sup>st</sup> March).

Following a 2022 survey undertaken with the help of audience development and market survey companies, The Gardens Trust has found that there is wide interest in and use of our designed landscapes, with the conservation of historic green spaces, and protection from development or neglect a main concern. Talks such as these now offered online, and social media generally, prove to be the best way to engage this potential audience and, hopefully, supporters of Garden Trusts.

Details all available on [The Gardens Trust events page](#)

**Cheshire Gardens Trust** will be hosting 3 talks over the next three months. The next two talks over the winter months of January and February will return to the format of zoom, with the third talk in March



meeting face to face. Sarah Murch will be talking about natural pool design (left) on 30<sup>th</sup> January and Joe Wainwright, Garden Photographer, will be taking us on a tour of the region's gardens on 27<sup>th</sup> February. Jack and Laura Wildgoss will be talking about the Development of the Wildegoose Nursery at Worleston Village Hall on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2023. See [CGT Events page](#)

The Events Team is also planning a series of visits to be held over spring and summer of 2023 and we will start to provide details of these early in the New Year.

The **National Garden Scheme** has also seen the benefit of online talks, and has 4 lined up for February/March, looking at Denmans Garden, Sussex; Gardening in the Dolfor Hills, Monmouthshire; Broughton Grange, Oxfordshire; and Rewilding at Knepp Gastle, Sussex.

And for seeing real life gardens, pre-Easter NGS garden openings are Briarfield, Neston (3<sup>rd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Feb) [Briarfield](#); Bucklow Farm, Knutsford (26<sup>th</sup> Feb) [Bucklow Farm](#) and Oulton Park House, Tarporley (5<sup>th</sup> Mar) [Oulton Park House](#)

For further openings and information on online talks see [The National Garden Scheme](#)

**Rode Hall** Snowdrop Walks - 4<sup>th</sup> Feb-4<sup>th</sup> March. [Rode Hall](#)

The first of this year's **Planthunters Fairs** will be held at Arley Hall on 26<sup>th</sup> March, followed by Ness Botanic gardens on 2<sup>nd</sup> April, Dorothy Clive garden on 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> April and Cholmondeley Castle Gardens on 23<sup>rd</sup> April. See [Planthunters Fairs](#)

The Garden Museum has announced that Sarah Price is to design a Chelsea Garden for them, based on Benton End and the plants of Cedric Morris. Should be lovely. [Sarah Price's Chelsea Garden](#)

The Landscape Institute has publicised a travelling exhibition **Women of the Welfare Landscape**. It runs from 24<sup>th</sup> January to 7<sup>th</sup> February at the Department of Landscape Architecture in Sheffield in late January 2023, before going on to the Garden Museum, Birmingham University, and the Museum of English Rural Life in Reading. For further information see [Landscape Institute](#).

**Liz Roberts**

**Newsletter/Research and Recording groups**



# Research and Recording Group



Well here we are (or most of us), well fed after our Christmas lunch.

*From left to right – Liz Roberts, Barbara Wright, Jacquie Williams, Mary Jeeves, Monica Walker, Jackie Cawte, Freyda Taylor, Julia Whitfield and Moira Stevenson. (Jo Bishop had departed to catch a train)*

The group has gone through various iterations since initial establishment in 2004 but the aim has always been to fulfil Cheshire Gardens Trust's aim – to undertake research and recording in collaboration with others - while having fun researching, exploring and eating together. Members come from a wide range of backgrounds bringing complimentary skills and knowledge to our activities.

Barbara Wright, one of the founders of Cheshire Gardens Trust, started the research and recording group. She had taken Alan Ruff's course in 'Garden and Landscape History' at Manchester University (1995-98) and joined the research team of the Yorkshire Gardens Trust. Barbara provided a sound foundation for subsequent action by developing lists of possible research sites from a study undertaken for English Heritage in 1995. Her enthusiasm for unravelling a landscape's history remains undiminished, and she has completed research reports on almost all sites in the Congleton area.



*Barbara Wright recording Ravenscroft near Middlewich*



Barbara Moth (left) (a landscape architect specialising in the conservation of historic landscapes in a former life), took over as Coordinator in 2010. She worked with members to develop a research and recording handbook, provide introductory sessions, training and support, and to begin issuing completed research and recording reports to owners, custodians, Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, Cheshire Historic Environment Record and local authorities.

For Freyda Taylor interest in designed landscapes began with her first job at the Veterinary Hospital on Garscube Park, a listed estate bequeathed to Glasgow University and still with the remnants of the designed landscape. In retirement, courses at Reaseheath and joining the research and recording group allowed that early interest to flourish.

In 2012 Barbara Moth gave a talk to Cheshire Archaeology Day called 'Maps, Mounds and Memories', encapsulating what we do to research historic designed landscapes. A colleague said that you could hear the penny drop, and it certainly did with some of the audience who immediately signed up and became stalwart members of the group, notably Jacquie Williams and Jackie Cawte. Both are actively involved in their local history groups. For Jacquie, retired from teaching IT at Stockport College, the activity follows a lifelong interest in gardens and landscapes and how man has changed his surroundings in order to have a successful and happier life; and of course Jacquie is able to provide valuable assistance and short cut tips for IT.



*Jacquie Williams checking that she is appropriately spaced in an empty Verdin Park during lockdown*



*Jackie Cawte investigating Kemp's design*

Jackie Cawte has now recently taken on the organisation of Research and Recording meetings as well as taking the meeting notes – thank you Jackie.

A few years after Julia Whitfield retired she was looking for something new and spotted an advert for a course in garden history led by Jane Roberts at Arley Hall. Course members included people from the Cheshire Gardens Trust who encouraged her to join. Ten years later she is on her fourteenth site, mostly in the south Warrington area, and the research has led to Julia becoming a leading member of the Friends of Walton Estate.

Mary Jeeves joined Cheshire Gardens Trust in 2015. An AGM presentation by the Research & Recording Group reawakened her fascination with maps and inspired her to join. Mary, and husband Jim, are active members of the Friends of Anderton and Marbury (FOAM) where Mary has undertaken research on the salt landscape and led many walks on history and flora.

Liz Roberts was a garden designer for nearly 30 years before joining Cheshire Gardens Trust R&R group in 2017. As you would expect she has a keen interest in garden design and its history. She has recently finished a full report on Capesthorpe Hall and is also a member of the Newsletter group.

Other members are:

Moir Stevenson, who has a particular interest in Norton Priory

Peter Young, whose recent article *Balloons Over Cheshire: the Genesis of Manned Flight* in the latest edition of Cheshire Local History (no.62), was written following interest and discussion of early balloon flights over the county in the research and recording group.

Judith Allman and Amelia McCourty, lock down joiners with lots of local knowledge

Monica Walker joined following research into public parks for the newsletter

Jo Bishop, a recent member and new to Cheshire, former volunteer and researcher at Wreath Park

With some great training sessions at Cheshire Record Office, the Cheshire Historic Environment Record and on site, we have to date issued 103 full reports and have several more close to completion. We are frequently amazed at what we discover. The information is shared; it enables us to have a greater understanding of our historic landscapes and their significance and helps inform Cheshire Gardens Trust responses to planning consultations.

If you would like to know more, join in or simply come along and see if we are as friendly as we look, you are welcome to come to our next meeting at Whitley Village Hall on 25th January, 10.00 to 12.00, or contact Barbara Moth [barbara.moth@btinternet.com](mailto:barbara.moth@btinternet.com). Also see [the research pages on the CGT website](#)

**Barbara Moth**

## RHS Snippets

Thanks to funding from the National Heritage Fund, RHS Libraries has begun a project to digitise the collection of 28,000 plant nursery catalogues and make them available online for the first time. The catalogues from 2,000 nurseries date back to 1612. See [RHS Libraries](#).

After its debut at RHS Chelsea Flower Show, 'The Blue Peter Garden' is moving to RHS Bridgewater shortly. The design by Juliet Sargeant, called Discover Soil, which is aimed particularly at children and young people, includes the same ingredients but covers a lot more space.

Copy date for April newsletter is 31<sup>st</sup> March

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](mailto:newsletter@cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk)