



The Magical Garden at Biddulph Old Hall

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Future events (see pages 14/15/16)

CGT events

- Tuesday 15th July 2pm Queen's Park, Crewe
- Tuesday 12th August 2pm Clemley House,
- Monday 29th September: The Wonky Garden,
- Saturday 18th October: Norley Court,
- RHS Flower Show Wentworth Woodhouse 16-20 July

A Magical Garden at Biddulph Old Hall



Brian Vowles showing us round

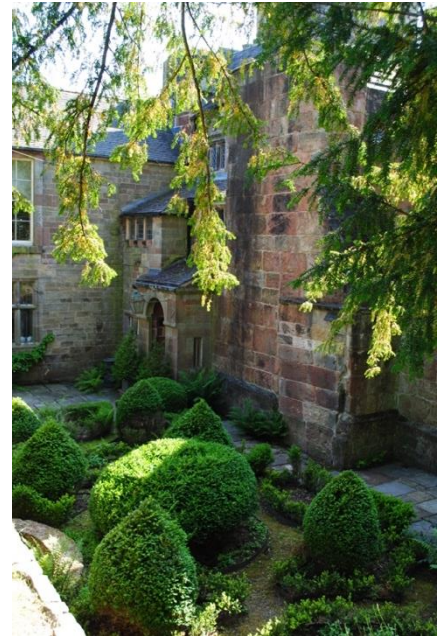
On a beautiful sunny day in June we had the privilege of spending the afternoon at Biddulph Old Hall in Staffordshire. Originally a Tudor Hunting Lodge and then a Medieval Hall, it has a fascinating history. But it fell into decline in the 20th century and was derelict until it was rescued by a couple who restored it and created a wonderful romantic garden.

We were shown round by Brian Vowles, the owner, who bought the property with his partner Nigel Daly and brother in law David Daly. They have done an enormous amount of research to uncover the secrets of the property. Sadly Nigel Daly died 3 and a half years ago, before some of the projects came to

fruition.

The Biddulph family who lived in the area, gained the property that became known as Biddulph Old Hall, through the marriage of their son to the oldest daughter of Ormus le Guidon. The original building, the hunting lodge, was built of large red stone blocks around 1425-1430. It had a feasting hall on the upper floor with a kitchen below. Originally the Biddulph family was based at Bailey's Wood, a post Norman conquest Motte & Bailey castle, but moved to Old Hall in 1530-1535, as it was a better site. They brought their timber framed building with them and gradually enhanced the original building. The rather spectacular octagonal tower was added so that the ladies could view the hunting and procession back to the Hall.

In around 1525-1530 Francis Biddulph began the construction of his "Fair New House of Stone". By 1580 it was a very large, very impressive Elizabethan mansion with stone encasing the timber built building. Sadly there are no images from that time, but Brian and Nigel were able to create a pen and ink drawing of what it might have looked like. A formal parterre was added, as



The original building



The octagonal tower

well as a pair of octagonal towers on the north side and eight smaller half octagonal towers one on each corner of the building.

After 1580 things became very difficult for staunch Catholic families like the Biddulphs as, after the defeat of the Spanish Armada, they were looked on as Spanish spies. They were also Royalists and garrisoned the house for the king. In February 1642 the Parliamentarians besieged Biddulph Old Hall. The impact of canon balls can still be seen. The house was ransacked, the family thrown out and locals set the building on fire. When the family was eventually able to return, only the smaller older red stone building survived; the rest was a ruin. The youngest of the family married an heiress and the whole family moved south, while the property was tenanted.

The house remained in the Biddulph family's ownership until 1835, when it passed to the Stoner family. They added a two storey Roman



Portrait of Caroline Bateman

Catholic Chapel in 1840. By 1862 the Storer family no longer had use for the building and it was sold for the first time in its history. It was bought by James Bateman who created the famous garden at Biddulph Grange. He made a woodland walk between Biddulph Grange and Biddulph Old Hall, which traversed the Elizabethan Yew Avenue before arriving at the front of the ruined mansion. James Bateman planted English lime trees all along the raised walkways of the Elizabethan parterre and sentinel limes at the head of the Yew Walk. James Bateman was the brother-in-law of Roland Egerton Warburton of Arley Hall and Nigel and Brian were given access to the archives at Arley which evidenced the garden at Biddulph Old Hall in both letters and photographs.

James Bateman sold the entire Biddulph Grange estate in 1871, but left a lifetime legacy to the Hall to his son Robert. Robert fell in love with Caroline Howard, daughter of the Dean of Lichfield Cathedral and granddaughter of the Earl of Carlisle. Caroline was not allowed to marry Robert because of social protocols. She was married to a bachelor vicar, 30 years older than her, to get her away from Robert. But he died within 3 years and the sweethearts were allowed to marry, living together for 40 years. Robert was known as The Lost Pre-Raphaelite, and his story was written about by Nigel Daly. She was painted by Robert and her portrait hangs in the hall of the restored house.

The Biddulph family actually bought back the Old Hall and lived there till the 1960s, when it was sold to a Buddhist Trust. It was sold again to the current owners' predecessor, but was slowly abandoned over the next 30 years and was in a parlous state when it was bought by the current owners. They have worked hard to recreate the garden established by the Batemans and to show the spirit of the place with its Tudor and Elizabethan history and Pre Raphaelite/ arts and crafts influence. A magical garden has been created in the ruins of the Elizabethan Hall, with mainly white plants, in particular with white rambling roses (Mme. Alfred Carrière and Mme. Legras de St. Germain). These are underplanted with white versions of lilies, foxgloves, agapanthus, valerian and monkshood. The original garden was created by Robert Bateman, based on the 'Legend of the Briar Rose' favourite of Edward Burne-Jones. In one of the small courtyards is a wooden sculpture created by Simon O'Rourke, based on the Burne-Jones painting 'Love leading the pilgrim' a fitting tribute to Nigel Daly.

At the back of the house are several beautiful garden features. There is a small pool, painted by Robert Bateman in 'The pool at Bethesda', now enhanced by another Simon O'Rourke sculpture.



Robert also painted 'Women plucking mandrakes'. This has been reflected in the garden created by Brian and Nigel, with deep red roses and purple foliage (left), representing the soporific nature of the potion 'mandragora', created from the mandrake plant, with stunning views over the countryside.

I think we were all totally overwhelmed by this house and garden and the creative energy that has gone into producing such a magical space and fascinating history. Thank you to Brian Vowles and David Daly for your hospitality.

You can find more information on this fascinating story on [The Biddulph Old Hall website](#) including links to Nigel Daly's book 'The Lost Pre-Raphaelite'.

Sue Eldridge (with help from Brian Vowles), photos Gordon Darlington and Sue Eldridge



The pool with Simon O'Rourke's sculpture

Stonyford Cottage Gardens



Andrew showing some of our members the shuttlecock ferns

Originally an actor, Andrew trained in horticulture at Pershore College and manages the business now with his brother and sister. Their parents, Tony and Janet Overland, still live on the site in a lovely cottage, but have now stepped back from the business, although Tony is still an active member of the Kew Guild having been a student at Kew Gardens.

The site was very marshy originally and this has been managed successfully by creating ponds. The largest pond has no liner, it just stays filled with water. The other ponds have been dug in the same way, keeping the paths dry, alleviating the need for Wellington boots. Although we had only just gone into our very dry spring the paths were all dry and made for a pleasant walk around the site. The paths are all well-maintained and there are wooden bridges that have been built on-site crossing the ponds.



The garden is a haven for wildlife, with kingfishers spotted darting about the ponds. A pair of swans (see left) return every year to nest and raise their brood. The sounds of birds filled the air which was very pleasant to hear.

Looking across the largest pond we could see a brick tunnel, which apparently led to another pond on the Wilbraham estate. A boat moored on the pond could be used to row through the tunnel and onto another lake.

Plants are chosen for their suitability for the conditions and therefore, they thrive well, such as the Indian bean tree,

Catalpa bignonioides. There is a champion tree, a lime and a fairly newly planted swamp cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) and dawn redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*); the latter is already very tall but still young. Alders and willows grow through the water and there are many shade and moisture loving plants. There are groups of primulas and astilbes growing on the margins of the ponds; one is *Astilbe* 'Kriemhilde', which is becoming very rare, and Stonyford Nursery is the only nursery that still sells it. The *Dactylorhiza* orchid, commonly known as the marsh orchid, spreads freely in

This was not our first visit to this garden. Previously, we had attended in the evening, and I remember it as quite a damp site. So, I put on my Wellington boots this time and went prepared.

We were greeted by Andrew, one of the sons of the owners who purchased the eight acre site as a field in the 1980s. In 1992 they started the nursery and planted fast-growing trees. Now, the site is populated with many rare trees, plants and shrubs and Andrew can tell you the Latin name of all of them.



Bridge over one of the lakes



The brick tunnel



Dawn redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*)

the moist conditions. The shuttlecock ferns (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*) are the plants that Charles Darwin discovered. A fragrant tree in autumn is the toffee apple tree, *Cercidiphyllum japonicum*.

Andrew gave us some useful tips, such as that slugs don't like yellow-edged leaves. To deter slugs, he spreads coffee grounds around the hostas when they first emerge. He also told us the origin of the phrase "grasp the nettle". If you hold a nettle firmly on the stem it won't sting, but you will be stung if you touch the leaf. If you get stung and you need a dock leaf, make sure you break the leaf before wiping the wet part on the sting.

We saw the garden in Spring, but it would be worthwhile repeating the

visit in Autumn, when the many trees are changing their leaf colour and it would again look spectacular. The garden is very tranquil and is used for mindfulness activities, by artists and photographers, and there is a hide for bird watchers. It changes all the time and this is reflected in the nursery, which grows many of its plants on site. The rest are grown by trusted suppliers. For more information on visiting and purchasing plants see the website; www.stonyfordcottagegarden.co.uk



Candelabra Primulas

Jackie Cawte

Photos Sue Eldridge and Andrew Overland

Reports from the AGM

Whitby Park, Ellesmere Port – 20th Cheshire Gardens Trust AGM, May 8th, 2025

Cheshire East	Cheshire West and Chester
Arley	Eaton Hall
Adlington	Ness Botanic Gardens
Cholmondeley	Burton Manor
Combermere Abbey	Grosvenor Park
Crewe Hall	Tirley Garth
Doddington Hall	Overleigh Road Cemetery
Dorfold Hall	Castle Park, Frodsham
Gawsworth Old Hall	
Lyme Park	Wirral
Mellor's Garden	Birkenhead Park
Peover Hall	Thornton Manor
Queen's Park, Crewe	Flaybrick Memorial Gardens
Rode Hall	Port Sunlight
Tabley House	
Tatton Park	Tameside
West Park	Stamford Park
Congleton Park	Stockport
	Vernon Park
	Cheadle Royal Hospital
	Trafford
	Dunham Massey
	Stamford Park
	Sale and Brooklands Cemetery

Barbara Moth opened the AGM by welcoming members to Whitby Park in Ellesmere Port, Wirral. This popular public park was one of the *unregistered* historic landscapes recorded this year by Cheshire Gardens Trust Research Group.

In England, designed landscapes 'of particular significance' are listed on the 'Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest', a searchable database. This list, administered by Historic England, holds over 1,700 designed

landscapes. Like listed buildings, parks and gardens are registered Grade I, II, II* and, by being on the Register, they are considered to be protected. The Gardens Trust is consulted during the listing process, and later, they have the Statutory Duty to comment on any planning application which will affect that historic landscape. CGT members will already be aware that the Gardens Trust is currently fighting a Government proposal to remove this Statutory Duty and so jeopardise the integrity of the historic landscape.

Cheshire's registered sites are listed above and include parks, large gardens, cemeteries and hospitals. Parks are shown in bold and landscapes where CGT has commented on planning

consultations are in red. One site, designed by Thomas Mawson (1861-1933) is on Historic England's 'At Risk' Register.

For many years, the Research Group has studied unregistered Cheshire sites referred to as non-designated historic assets. Each report documents the history of the ownership, the development of the designed landscape over the years, and is accompanied with appropriate maps and historical and modern images. Interesting sites, for example Halton Grange in Runcorn now the Town Hall and public park, was once a private house with grounds designed by Edward Kemp (1817-1891). He also designed the Grade II* Queen's Park in Crewe and Congleton Park.

Our reports are lodged with Cheshire Archive and Local Studies (CALS) and Cheshire Historic Environment Record (CHER) where planning officers, consultants and developers can refer to them.



Whitby Park was an interesting site to study. The hall and associated grounds were built in 1860 for John Grace and family and at that time it was surrounded by fields. The 1876 Ordnance Survey map shows the hall was reached by the drive from Stanney Lane, with a fish pond (left) to the north-east and stables and gardens to the south-west. Even some trees remaining from the old hedges around the fields still exist today.

In 1930 Whitby Fete and Flower Show was held in Whitby Park by permission of Jon Grace MP. The following year, the hall was acquired by Ellesmere Port Urban District Council and used as municipal offices. In 1932 the grounds were opened to the public and the services of a landscape gardener sought to prepare a scheme and costings for the laying out of Whitby Park. It was recommended that Thomas Mawson be engaged. Barbara's research has located Thomas Mawson's original plan in the Cumbria Archives. It is signed by him, dated October 1932 and titled 'Details of the Bowling Greens, Panel Garden and Herb Garden, Carriage Court and Car Park'. Mawson's 'Report on the Layout of Whitby Park for the Ellesmere Port and Whitby Urban District Council' of 1933 makes interesting reading as it lays out his philosophy for park design and was written shortly before his death.

Delays occurred until WWII stopped all further development in Whitby Park. However after the war Mawson's plan was revived and has, over time, been carried out. Today the Park is managed by Cheshire West and Chester Council.

The Research Group has focused on other designers too, for example, W. A. Nesfield (1793-1881) who worked at Dorford Hall in Nantwich, Crewe Hall in Crewe and Marbury Hall in Northwich. Shirley Rose Evans, latterly a CGT member, studied the Nesfields over many years and wrote the book *Masters of their Craft: The Art, Architecture and Garden Design of the Nesfields*. She was also instrumental in saving the Nesfield's papers and ensuring that the archive stayed in Britain at the Garden Museum.

The Research Group continues to produce reports of important designed landscapes which are not on the Register but challenges continue to occur. Members of the group are ageing and some have difficulty investigating sites on foot; CALS is currently closed to visitors while their new building is being built. However, the Group kept together throughout the Covid Pandemic by meeting on ZOOM and this can be done again.



We will continue to support these public parks and other historic landscapes. They are of enormous public benefit as was seen during Covid. But if the Government goes ahead with removing the Gardens Trust as the Statutory Consultee we would not be notified about planned changes nor would our comments be given the same weight. So it is important to support the Gardens Trust in their representations to Government and to raise awareness of the significance of our parks.

Barbara ended her report by expressing concern that not everyone appreciates the significance of registered historic landscapes. Recently she found that Grosvenor Park, the only reasonably sized green space in Chester city centre, designed by Edward Kemp in 1867, was currently hosting a “Big Wheel”. “Where is the space to picnic, play hide and seek, walk or sit and simply enjoy the park?” she asked.

Freyda Taylor

Images – Barbara Moth and Alison Moore

Report on AGM

Twenty five members and guests attended the 20th AGM held in the unusual venue of Theatre Porto within Whitby Park, Ellesmere Port, a well-loved community asset. There were fewer attendees than usual but we thank those twenty five members who took the trouble to tender their apologies. Immediate concerns discussed were the resignation of four Trustees/Members of Council of Management and the future of the Newsletter after the end of the year, when Sue Eldridge will resign. Fortunately Jackie Cawte and new member, Alison Moore offered to stand for CoM alongside Sue Bartlett and Martin Slack, which meant CGT is able to continue functioning and we hope for more volunteers to support us in the coming year, including members to join a group to produce the Newsletter.

The Research & Recording Group has the challenge of the temporary closure until 2026 of the Cheshire Archives & Local Studies centre and the Planning Group is adjusting to the county restructure which is affecting notifications of planning proposals. Even more serious is the possibility of the Gardens Trust being removed by the Government as a statutory planning consultee which would greatly reduce CGT’s influence.

Happily we were then able to celebrate the achievements of members of our various Groups, especially thanking retiring CoM members, Margaret Blowey, David Cash, Gordon Darlington & Peter Young, retired Membership Secretary Crispin Spencer and in particular, Barbara Moth, worthy winner of the Gardens Trust Volunteer of the Year Award.

Having reached our 21st year, we continue to face challenges but hold generous assets which the CoM will be looking to use in pursuance of our charitable aims. We again ask all members to consider how they may be able to contribute to the future running of the Trust by becoming actively involved in one of its groups.

The complete Minutes of the AGM will shortly be posted on the website here: <https://www.cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk/?About-Us> Follow the link within the paragraph headed Organisation to read them in full.

Sue Bartlett

Ladybrook Nursery



Blake Anderson in front of the cloud pruned *Taxus cuspidata*

Tucked away down the lanes of Bramhall, Stockport, with views of surrounding hills, one comes across a totally unexpected place, Ladybrook Nursery, producing wonderful trees and shrubs for architect designed developments. I drove along a very bumpy lane, past loads of polytunnels, to meet Blake Anderson, the third generation in the business. He described the development of the Nursery over the last 50 years. His grandfather, Robert Anderson, started the nursery in 1971. He had been made redundant from a landscape contractor and went into business for himself. He started growing plants in his garden shed, then managed to buy an acre of land, a greenfield site. Later this grew

to 7 acres, then 12/15 years ago increasing to 13 acres in all.

Originally the Ladybrook Nursery supplied shrubs for commercial and high-end projects. In 1991 they started supplying more specimen trees, shrubs and larger 5 litre perennials, grasses and herbaceous plants. Initially all the plants were grown on site from cuttings, but they then started buying in plants from elsewhere and now half is bought in and half they still grow themselves. Plants, particularly single and multi-stemmed trees, are bought in from growers in the UK. Other plants come from Belgium and Holland, which are very good for



Recent deliveries



Umbrella style pleached trees on a customer's site

topiary and generally very consistent. While I was there, I was lucky enough to see a recent delivery, including a stunning cloud pruned *Taxus cuspidatae*, 70 topiary balls (yew and *Osmanthus*), a conifer arch in two parts and much more. At one stage these would have been imported from Italy but because of delays at delivery and border controls and, at times, a lack of consistency, they no longer do. Paul Anderson, Robert's son, has spent years developing contacts with growers in the UK and Europe and knows them well, but they also work in a

consortium with other

nurseries in the UK to import from places like Italy.

The Nursery's market has shifted over the years. They used to work with landscape contractors and operated a cash and carry system, which was also open to the public, but this was very time consuming. They now do more contracted projects, sourcing plants to order, for big housing projects or for single large houses. On occasion, the Nursery is also able to specify the plants to be used. They work with several large developers



Plants on site



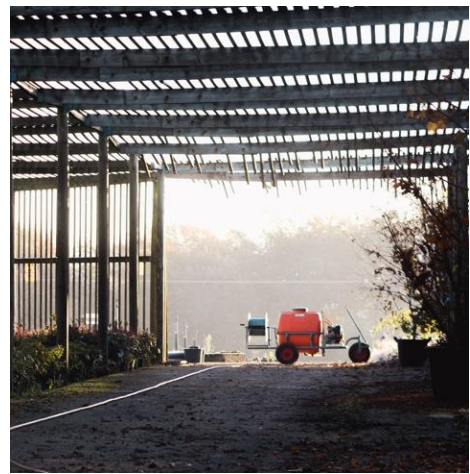
Cordyline in a polytunnel

across the North, having delivered planting for several schemes in central Manchester including the new Renaker Towers, and Kampus, a popular public realm scheme.

With this type of development stock control is important, growing exactly what is needed. Plants are grown outside and in polytunnels. There is a vast range of plants, specimen trees and shrubs, such as acers, magnolias, *Cornus controversa*, climbing hydrangeas, as well as the cloud pruned trees mentioned above; hedging plants and pleached trees, such as hornbeam, *Photinia* 'Red Robin', Portuguese laurel. Then there are

grasses, climbers, herbaceous plants and ferns e.g. *Choisya*, *Fatsia japonica*, *Sarcococca*, *Pieris*, *Anemone*, lavender, rosemary, *Euonymus*, *Echinacea*, *Rudbeckia*, *Euphorbia*, *Pulmonaria*, *Iris*, *Viburnum*, and foxgloves.

This is very much a family - run business, a hands-on team. Robert Anderson is still the expert on growing. Paul Anderson, as well as developing relationships with growers, has done a lot of the practical work around the nursery. The first time I visited, I spotted him moving trees around the site. Blake joined the nursery when he first left school, but then worked with a commercial company on interior design. He then worked with a lot of different companies and learnt a great deal about running a business. Four years ago he returned to the family firm and has brought in a lot of new business practices, with more attention to logistics and IT systems. Blake can now control a lot from his phone, such as delivery schedules, tracking sales and even irrigation systems. He has spent a lot of time developing relationships with their customers. For example he has recently been delivering training sessions for landscape architects, encouraging them to involve nurseries at an early design stage.



Irrigation system



Moving plants around the site

All this development means that he and the rest of his family have handed over more of the practical work to members of their staff. For example, control of irrigation has moved to one of the team and Blake is hoping to involve staff in pest and weed control. Training is therefore important, with one-off courses or learning on the job in areas like biological controls or the use of machinery. It is not a huge team, two full time members who have been with them for 12/15 years, one part-timer working three days a week, a driver and the office manager. In addition they have recruited two workers

from an agency for busy periods.

Blake knows that it is important to preserve what works and the Nursery's good reputation.

It is a fascinating place, very modern, yet steeped in quality, knowledge and tradition. They really know their stuff. I'm very grateful to Blake for spending time with me and explaining the Nursery's business to me.

For further information see the [Ladybrook Nursery](#) website

Sue Eldridge, Photos Sue Eldridge and Blake Alexander

Gold for Dave Green at Chelsea Flower Show



Dave Green in his show garden at Chelsea

Congratulations to Dave Green who achieved his first gold medal at Chelsea for his London Square Chelsea Pensioners Garden. A distinctive feature of the beautiful woodland garden was seating upholstered using the scarlet fabric recycled from the Chelsea Pensioners old uniform jackets.

In 2018 Dave was building his Oasis Garden at the Tatton Park Flower Show. Appallingly wet weather had seriously delayed the build schedule and Dave approached the Trust looking for assistance with planting to

enable the garden to be ready for judging. Some of us answered the call, the garden was completed on time and on that occasion Dave was awarded a Silver-Gilt Medal, Best in Category and People's Choice. When in the north-west Dave has drawn on help from local volunteers including from CGT and Arley Hall. He has reiterated his thanks for this ongoing support. One of those volunteers went on to work with Dave on his 2025 garden at Chelsea and has shared her experience with us.

Gwyneth Owen

Helene's story

I'm Helene, I left the corporate world in April 2024. I now run [The Heritage Organic Seed Company](#). We supply heritage and heirloom vegetable seeds to home growers. My horticultural journey has mostly been self-taught by experimenting in my own garden and on my allotment. Last May, I volunteered for Knutsford in Bloom. One morning I got chatting to a lovely gentleman who turned out to be Sam Youd, former head gardener at Tatton Park. Sam encouraged me to volunteer in the gardens at Arley Hall. I've now been volunteering there for over a year.

Not long after I started at Arley, a message came round from garden designer Dave Green, looking for volunteers to help with some RHS displays at the 2024 Tatton Flower Show. I'd always loved visiting the show and jumped at the chance to see behind the scenes. Then, earlier this year, Dave asked me to join his team for Chelsea. He liked how I'd worked at Tatton and thought I'd be a good fit— bringing some of my corporate skills to the world of horticulture. You can't really say no to an opportunity like that! I was nervous – the rest of the team were experienced horticulturalists and imposter syndrome crept in. I knew far more about edible plants than ornamentals! Dave organised a visit to the nursery in Taunton ahead of the show which was a great opportunity to meet the team and visualise the planting. Beyond the main structure, there was no rigid planting plan. The garden was divided into





The London Square Garden with the Chelsea Pensioners

areas – deep shade, light shade, marginal planting etc. Within those areas the planting was a creative process based on Dave's vision, rather like painting a picture with plants.

There were nine of us in the planting team working twelve hour days. Part of my role was to co-ordinate the amazing volunteers who supported us – giving them a site tour and health and safety briefing. Chelsea is a busy building site for the whole build with telehandlers and lorries constantly moving just metres from the garden. You have to stay alert!

We handled over 3000 plants made up of more than 100 different varieties. Each plant had to be 'cleaned' which meant snipping out dead or damaged leaves, checking for pests and just making sure they were at their Chelsea best. Everything in the garden had to be horticulturally correct. Moss had to be hand-picked to remove pine needles as there were no pine trees in the garden, and carefully placed where it would naturally occur. Fresh pruning cuts were 'aged', limescale stains removed from leaves caused by hard water, we even polished the hostas!

The best part of Chelsea was being part of a world class show and seeing the beautiful gardens come to life. The worst part was probably the infamous 'Chelsea cough' caused by the irritating fibres that fall from the plane trees lining the showground. What surprised me most was how inclusive the horticulture industry is vs the corporate world. Everyone was generous with knowledge and connections. I met so many others – many also career changers, a few had even published books about gardening!

I was thrilled when the garden won a Gold Medal. Dave had poured everything into the design and deserved every bit of it. I was proud to have been a small part of that win. I've now enrolled on a garden design course with The English Gardening School – inspired by the experience and the encouragement of the team. It all started from a conversation with a stranger – proof that sometimes the smallest moments can lead to the biggest opportunities. I threw myself into Chelsea and I'd do it again in a heartbeat!

The garden has since been relocated to the Royal Hospital for the Chelsea Pensioners to enjoy for years to come. For more information on Dave's gardens at Chelsea and elsewhere see [Dave Green Gardens](#)

Helene Martyn June 2025, Photos Dave Green and Helene Martyn

Arley Flower Show



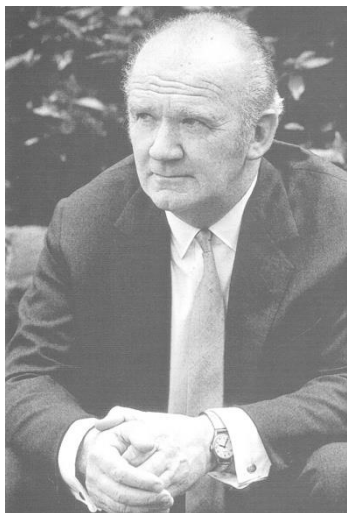
James Youd's garden

Following on from Chelsea Flower Show, Arley Hall and Gardens celebrated by holding their 30th Garden Festival. In addition to marquees, plant nurseries and garden tours, there were more schools taking part in the Gardening Challenge than ever before. The gardens were grown and planted by pupils with a little help from their teachers. Pearls for the 30th anniversary, the 81st anniversary of VE Day, pollination and bees were all much in evidence. The youngsters I talked to showed terrific confidence and engagement in the projects.

There was also a new addition to the show – the Creative Corner Garden Design, reminiscent of the Back to Back gardens at Tatton Flower Show. The standard was very high, entries included gardens designed by Arley Hall's James Youd, Arley Hall Nursery, Reaseheath College and Primrose Hill Nurseries. Helene Martyn had her own garden, comprising edible plants, for which she won a silver.

Text and photos Sue Eldridge

Sir Peter Shephard: Blue Plaque



Sir Peter Shephard

I recently attended the dedication of a Blue Plaque (14 June) at the childhood home of Sir Peter Shephard (1913-2002) at Oxtan on the Wirral. The event was hosted by The Oxtan Society. A monograph on Peter's life and work was published in 2004 and edited by Annabel Downs who had worked for Peter in his London office. There were several contributing authors to the monograph and I was fortunate to have written the chapter on his gardens. Although when I first interviewed Peter at his home in Hampstead, it was a rocky start when I told him I was writing about his gardens. His reply 'Oh, I never did many of those.' Then the question was raised about what is a garden? This resulted in two long interviews with him, and it was delightful to discuss all sorts of things with him including gardens.

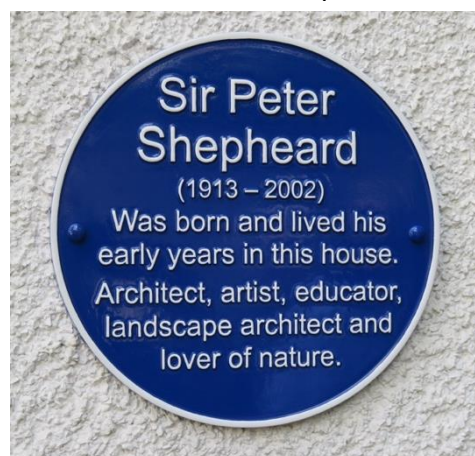
He attributes his love of plants to his childhood days on the Wirral with Birkenhead Park only a short cycle ride away. He had a great love of nature and he and his father, an architect as well, built a pond in their

garden which no longer exists. He was convinced that a lot of the non-native plants growing wild in the area were self-seeded from the ships that docked in Liverpool. Few architects have such passion for plants, however, he did not like variegated plants as they seemed too artificial. His own garden in Hampstead was very simple and naturally there was a pond and herbaceous planting.

Peter was an architect, landscape architect and town planner, however he did not like to separate these professions and felt they were meant to be together. He ran a successful practice in London, while becoming Dean of Faculty of Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania.

This entailed commuting between London and Philadelphia. He was very proud that he introduced life drawing to architecture students; until this time, only fine art students were allowed to draw nudes!

While he and his partner Gabby Epstein carried out work in various parts of the country, their most notable near us is Lancaster University. Peter was responsible for the structural layout and landscape details and much of this first phase still exists. It was innovative in many ways with a series of courtyards linked with a central spine, often a single tree or small grouping of trees. There was so much work it is impossible to describe: everything from the Festival of Britain, London parks, housing, Longwood Gardens (USA), and the Commonwealth War Graves memorials. It was a distinguished career and he was a very modest man. For me, it was a very special time in my career.



Text and images Ed Bennis,

Also see [CGT Newsletter July 2022](#) for article based on Ed Bennis's talk

Hochbunker St Pauli - Hamburg



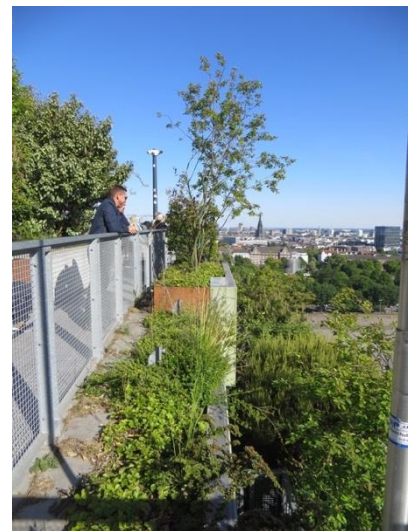
Hochbunker St Pauli

CGT members Christine and Rupert Wilcox-Baker recently visited the historic city of Hamburg and on their sightseeing list was this repurposed WW II relic. Their verdict – “Despite having read about this new garden, we were taken aback by the actual reality of a massive brutal building converted into a generous public space. The scale and ambition of the project is breathtaking - definitely a highlight of our trip.”

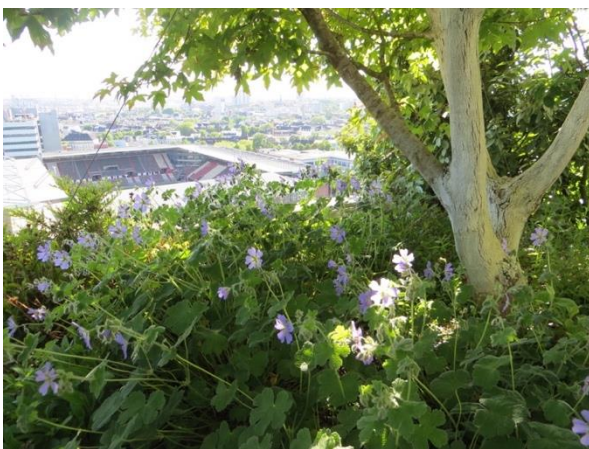
Since the end of the second world war the city of Hamburg has wrestled with the problem of what to do with the massive anti-aircraft (Flak) towers built across the city. The most

prominent, at some 50 metres high, is in the St Pauli district close to Hamburg’s infamous red-light area. Thanks to an ingenious intervention this once threatening sight is now a green oasis of hanging gardens and new public realm.

Built in 1942 in just 300 days using forced labour the tower was both air-raid shelter and emplacement for anti-aircraft guns mounted on the roof. Designed to protect up to 25,000 people from bombing raids in an above-ground structure required staggering amounts of concrete. After the German surrender, the Allies, as part of a wider denazification programme, intended to demolish symbols of that period including the St Pauli bunker. With walls and ceilings up to 3.8 metres thick demolition proved impractical and so the bunker remained. Initially it was used as much needed accommodation and then latterly as venues for live music and a night club, a climbing hall and studio spaces for artists and musicians.



Looking out over the city



The view from the roof garden

Now transformed, the bunker is Hamburg’s newest and fast-growing tourist attraction. With a newly built hotel adding several extra floors on top of the existing bunker it’s also becoming the city’s ‘in’ place to stay. Visitors emerging from the Feldstrasse U-bahn station are greeted by the awesome sight of the bunker, now embraced by a wide cantilevered walkway circling upwards with trees and gardens apparently spilling down from the roof.

Free to enter, the visitor climbs slowly upwards on a series of wide concrete steps and landings masterfully bolted to the outside of the bunker and suspended in free space. Some halfway up greenery begins to emerge in the form of Corten steel raised beds of perennials and hardy grasses.

Despite the height and exposure to extremes of weather many garden favourites such as geraniums, salvias and climbing varieties of hydrangeas, honeysuckle and roses appear to be thriving.

Further up, the lower floors of the newly built hotel on top of the bunker become visible and the greenery becomes denser with bold window boxes filled with evergreen shrubs and climbing ivy framing the view for guests. Finally, after an exciting vertiginous climb the roof garden is reached. A lawn surrounded by firs and pine trees is a deceptively calm sheltered oasis albeit one at well over 50 metres above street level. With grass, simple benches, stepping stones and gravel it could be any modest local park. Only the stainless steel cables holding the trees in place and the view across the entirety of the city and well beyond jolt the visitor back to the reality of the bravura engineering and plantsmanship that have converted an ugly eyesore into an enchanted castle.

Text and photos Rupert Wilcox-Baker

For further information and photos see the [Bunker St Pauli website](#)

Forthcoming Events

Cheshire Gardens Trust Events

Tuesday 15th July 2pm A visit to Queen's Park, Crewe. Please do book early to avoid disappointment as the numbers are limited to 25 places.



Tuesday 12th August 2pm Clemley House (left) Well Lane, Duddon Common, Tarporley, CW6 0HG.

Monday 29th September 1.30pm, The Wonky Garden, Ditton Community Centre, Dundalk Road, Widnes, WA8 8DF

Saturday 18th October: Norley Court, Marsh Lane, Norley, Frodsham, WA6 8NY, visit at 2 pm

You should have received information about the Queen's Park and Clemley House visits but further details and booking arrangements for the other forthcoming visits will be sent to you soon.

The Gardens Trust

How Can We Make Our Gardens Greener? -Three FREE Summer lunchtime sessions with the Gardens Trust

Week 1. 8 July: Cultivating Biodiversity - Grown in the Past, Sown for the Future.

Week 2. 15 July: Native Plants for Native Wildlife?

Week 3. 22 July: The Resilient Garden - When the Going gets Tough, the Tough get Growing.

Thursday 7th August 12-1pm How to Research Historic Parks and Gardens, free introductory session

Thursday, 21 August, 12-1pm, How to Record Historic Parks and Gardens, free introductory session

10th September, 6-8pm, The Gardens Trust AGM online

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

RHS Flower Shows

July 16-20th [Wentworth Woodhouse RHS Show](#), Yorkshire

National Garden Scheme



Norley Bank Farm, Sun 20th/Sun 27th July, Norley, Frodsham WA6 8PJ
2 Ashcroft Cottages (left), 26/27 July and other dates in August and September, Winsford CW7 4DQ, $\frac{3}{4}$ acre garden, large herbaceous borders, mature shrubs and a large wildlife pond

Chinook Cottage, Sun 10th August, Macclesfield SK10 3AJ, mature enclosed garden of flowers, edibles and fruit trees

Parvey Lodge, Sat 18th October, Sutton, Macclesfield SK11 0HX, 3 acre garden, spectacular autumn colour

For more information see [The National Garden Scheme website](#)

Planthunters Fairs

Cholmondeley Castle Gardens (see below, photo courtesy of Plant Hunters Fairs)

Weds 23 July Malpas SY14 8ET

Capesthorpe Hall, Macclesfield, SK11 9JY, Sun 10th August

Dorothy Clive Garden, Market Drayton, TF9 4EU, Sunday and Monday 24/25th August

Arley Hall and Gardens, CW9 6NA, Sunday 14th September

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



Other garden events

Arley Hall and Gardens, CW9 6NA

Autumnal Nature Walks, Saturday 27th September See [Arley September events](#)

Dorothy Clive Garden, Talk on Apples with Andrew Howard, and Tree Walk with Dr Peter Thomas, both on 10th August, [Dorothy Clive events](#)

Eaton Hall, Eccleston Chester CH4 9ET, open to the public on Aug 24th, pre-booking required [Eaton Hall open days](#)

Lyme Park Disley, Stockport, SK12 2NR, 3rd September free event [Walk the Walls at Lyme Park](#)

Ness Botanic Gardens Ness, Cheshire. CH64 4AY. Guided tours on 2nd and 3rd Saturdays of each month, 11am, booking essential

Norton Priory Tudor Road, WA7 1SX or WA7 1BD See [Norton Priory events](#)

Fruit tree pruning 20th July, Quince and Apple weekend 11th -12th October

Quarry Bank Mill, Styal, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 4HP 28th July and other dates in August, September, [Nature Walks](#) meet in Mill Yard at 11.30



And finally, Imogen Sawyer has decided to close her Lane End Cottage Gardens this autumn, after 31 years in business. She will not be open in July so her last openings will be

Saturday 9th and Sunday 10th August. 10-5pm. Gate money for N.G.S. Teas for RNLI

Saturday 13th and Sunday 14th September 10-4pm. Gate money for care and maintenance of the garden. Teas MSF

Lord Ashbrook MBE

We are so pleased to let you know that Lord Ashbrook, our Patron and owner of Arley Hall, has been awarded an MBE for services to charity and the community in Cheshire. He and his wife Zöe have been great friends to Cheshire Gardens Trust over the years, hosting events, supporting the initial development of the Trust, speaking at AGMs and other events. He was particularly responsible for developing the Grove at Arley with its wonderful collection of rhododendrons and in May 2016 he gave us a fascinating day course on Rhododendrons with Ruth Brown.



Lord Ashbrook showing us the rhododendrons in The Grove

His reaction upon being informed of his award:

I feel very delighted and honoured, and also somewhat humbled, to be receiving an MBE.

I am extremely grateful to those who have put me forward for an award and to the individuals and organisations who over the years have given me opportunities to carry out voluntary and community work in my much-loved home county of Cheshire.

Viscount Michael Ashbrook

Copy date for October Newsletter is 30th September 2025

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