



# Island Gardens

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# Island Gardens: Journeys around the British Isles

## Talk by Jackie Bennett May 2021

In this inspiring talk based on her book *Island Gardens: Journeys around the British Isles* (2018, White Lion Publishing), the author took us to islands from the far north to the west and the south. There are more than 6,000 islands off the coast of the British Isles; over 100 of them are inhabited and where there are people there are gardens.



The journey started on Orkney where there is only a small window of growing opportunity from May to August. The first garden, called the Quoy of Houton (above) is located very close to the shore overlooking Scapa Flow. It is a fairly new garden enclosed by stone walls and a gate to keep the otters out of the pond! The photographs taken from a drone showed the formal structure of the garden, and that plants were fairly low growing.



*Orkney Candelabra primulas*

The salty winds can do a lot of damage, which is why the second garden, Kierfield House, has very little lawn. Keeping a lawn green is a particular challenge because the salt and rain leach nutrients out of the soil. There is also a double row of hedging to protect from the wind. Despite the challenging growing conditions there is an Orkney Garden Festival with some twenty-eight gardens opening biannually. It was amazing to see such lovely gardens in a wild setting.

Hardy geraniums are an Orkney specialty (see below); Alan Bremner is an Orkney geranium breeder; he will probably have bred any geranium with Orkney in the name.



We then moved on to Achamore House on Gigha, a tiny island only 1.5 miles long off the western coast of Kintyre. This *Rhododendron*, *Camellia* and shrub garden was established by Colonel Sir James Horlick (do we remember Horlicks the malted milk bedtime drink?). The island was purchased after the Second World War by Colonel Horlick to house his collection of rhododendrons and where he continued to breed these and camellias. The mild climate of the South Western Scottish Islands allows for many interesting plants and trees to flourish. The Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust now maintains the garden, quite a task with far fewer gardeners than in Horlick's day.

After these Scottish gardens there was an "interlude" while Jackie talked about researching the book and some of the challenges. Jackie and Richard Hanson, the photographer, made thirty-eight ferry crossings, two flights, and several thousand miles of car journeys. They encountered Lindisfarne Castle covered in scaffolding and the photographer had the task of photographing the Gertrude Jekyll Garden without including the scaffolding! (Now gone happily!).

The next location was the Isles of Scilly where Jackie described gardening as "being in the islands' DNA", with narrow strip fields for growing daffodils. Tresco Abbey Garden (see front page) is the jewel in the crown of island gardens and will be well known to many. The



*Puya chilensis on Tresco*

garden was started in 1834, when the island was barren. The 17-acre site was built around the remains of a Benedictine priory. It is sometimes referred to as a subtropical garden, but should be thought of as a Mediterranean garden. On the whole, the climate is mild, with only 9°C difference between summer and winter temperatures. Even on New Years Day there are about 300 plants in flower. However, in 1986 they experienced a long period with temperatures as low as minus 8°C, followed by snow and hurricane winds, so the garden had to be completely re-stocked. Huge echiums are a feature of the gardens, and on the Scilly Isles they are almost like weeds because they are so common. There are also towering palms, many succulents, King Proteas, *Furcraea*, and *Strelitzia*. The gardeners raise very few plants in greenhouses and they do no watering. The garden is privately owned, with long serving head gardeners over the years, and a loyal and committed team. The present head gardener came as a student in the 1970s and has remained ever since.

The final island was Sark, which is about an hour by ferry from Guernsey. Sark is a fiercely independent island of



*Island view Guernsey*

about 500 inhabitants. It has no cars and has Dark Sky status. La Seigneurie Gardens (below) are the home of the Seigneur, who historically governed the island. A romantic nineteenth century walled garden with many roses and clematis, it is considered to be one of the finest gardens in the Channel Islands. It opened to the public in the 1950s; it is now run by an independent trust and is an RHS member garden.



I particularly enjoyed discovering the gardens that Jackie selected for us because unfortunately I am a very poor sailor, so I am unlikely to visit any of these myself.

**Isabel Wright**

**Photos Richard Hanson, Island Gardens, White Lion Publishing**

## Sheer Folly - weird and wonderful garden buildings

### Talk by Caroline Holmes April 2021



*Orcus, the Ogre at Bomarzo*

Caroline took us on a whistle stop tour of garden buildings from the opulent to the homespun; from the Renaissance to the present day. She suggested that a folly defies definition. It can be cryptic, fantastical, allegorical, innovative, romantic, modern. The name may be derived from the French 'feuillé' meaning leafy or shady. It often takes us on an intellectual journey with a number of buildings perhaps set in woodland.

At Bomarzo we were lead on an exploration of life, based on the writing of Ariosto. An Etruscan bench, a 'Sacro Bosco', a sea god with a gaping mouth from which the landscape can be viewed without being seen. Created in

the Mannerist style by Pier Francesco Orsini in the sixteenth century, it inspired Salvador Dalí in the twentieth.

In the eighteenth century we saw a landscape of follies at Painshill, where Charles Hamilton built a Hermitage (and advertised for a hermit to inhabit it), a Gothic Temple and a Grotto with waterworks.

In Yorkshire John Aislabe created a vast landscape with a series of buildings, including a Temple of Fame, and his son William bought the ruined Fountains Abbey. He created Queen Anne's seat (named for Anne Boleyn) where she could have looked out at the ruined abbey - destroyed as a result of Henry VIII's love for her.

At Downhill House the Bishop of Derry built the Corinthian Mussenden Temple in 1785 as a memorial to a young friend. Inspired by the Temple of Vesta at Tivoli, it perches precariously on a cliff top and houses a library.

At Rousham one of the many buildings in the 18th century Kent landscape - Venus' Vale carries an inscription with a poem in memory of Ringwood, an otterhound.

In the nineteenth century James Bateman created a world of gardens at Biddulph Grange.

We witnessed displays of wealth in Lea Park Estate (Witley Park) where J Whittaker-Wright spent a fortune made in dubious financial dealings, creating lakes and an underwater tunnel leading to a submerged 'fairy room' for entertaining and dancing.

In France the hotelier Jacques Garcia created a garden on an enormous scale representing the journey of mankind from the mineral, via the vegetal, the animal, the conscience and the light to the intangible spirit. The Temple Grotto here is lined with mineral fragments.



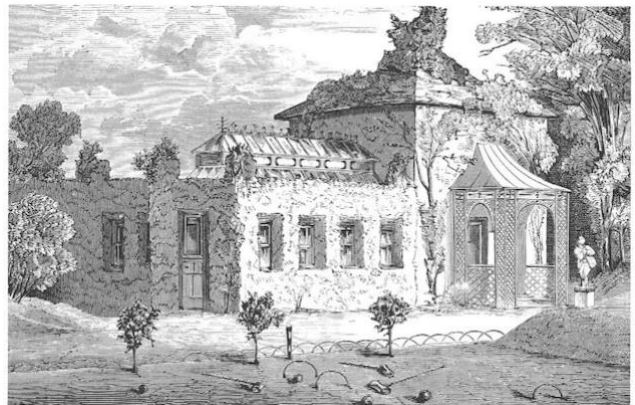
Some buildings were used to display found or collected objects such as shells as at the Ballymaloe Cookery School in SE Ireland (see above). A building with a gothic window was lined with shells to celebrate a Silver Wedding Anniversary.

At Tresco a simple wooden structure forms a gazebo with an interior covered with shells and pieces of tile (trencadís). Shells also cover the Valhalla museum which displays a collection of figureheads made by Augustus Smith. An elephant referencing a family member who was a plant collector in India decorates the gazebo. Tiles were also used by Blasco Ibanez at Fontana Rosa in Menton. His Garden of the Novelists celebrates Balzac, Flaubert, Dickens and especially Cervantes all of whom he approved for having a social conscience.



*Cervantes and Don Quixote steps and columns, Fontana Rosa, Menton*

We saw buildings made from saved wooden furniture and pieces of buildings in twentieth century postcards (Garden Museum). J C Loudon's ideas for garden buildings included a replica Stonehenge and an elaborate allotment garden shed. In 'Rustic Adornments for Homes of Taste' Mr. Shirley Hibberd suggested a rustic greenhouse and smoking room with rough plasterwork outside and a porch.



*Shirley Hibberd's rustic greenhouse in Stoke Newington*

Caroline finished her entertaining talk with a dome-shaped fernery built by Richard Pim at Westonbury Mill Water Gardens in Herefordshire using wine bottles; a 'Blotto Grotto'. She encouraged us to be inspired by what we had seen and to create some garden buildings of our own.

"They have exploded the strictures of taste - you can take it where you will"

**Monica Walker**  
**Photos Caroline Homes**

# Jake Croft, Adlington Hall

## Fourteenth in our Head Gardener Series



*Jake Croft under the Laburnum Arch in May*

Jake Croft is the new Head Gardener at Adlington Hall, a worthy successor to Anthony O'Grady, who many members will remember. Jake grew up in Oadby, Leicestershire where he spent a lot of time with his nan, helping with her garden, which was part cottage garden, part woodland. They both liked watching garden programmes on TV and Jake wanted to be like Geoff Hamilton. When he finished school, he went to Brooksby College in Melton Mowbray where he was awarded a National Diploma in Horticulture. Since then, Jake has gained his RHS Masters qualification, mostly working at home but latterly at Wisley, taking 3½ years in all. His specialist subject was irises which he now grows in his own garden. He's hoping to be at Chelsea 2022 with the British Iris Society helping with their centenary display.



*Irises (Jake's passion) in front of the Georgian front of Adlington Hall*

After college Jake was offered a job at Leicester Racecourse, starting on track maintenance, but eventually moving to the paddock, gaining experience of

Intermediate and advanced groundsman training with the Institute of Groundsmanship. Eventually he got tired of just bedding out and moved to a private estate, Slawston Grange in Market Harborough, where he was the sole gardener. The garden was 2-3 acres but the estate was 1000 acres. Jake had help from designer Adam Frost from whom he learnt a great deal, and a landscape team. They dug up and rebuilt the whole garden. Jake even helped with Adam's Chelsea Show Garden.

The garden was designed to link two buildings, the house and the estate office next door. There was beech hedging and perennial planting. Jake stayed for 3½ years; by then the garden was well established and the work was mainly maintenance. Jake needed a new challenge.



*Jake in the Lime Avenue leading to The Wilderness at Adlington Hall*

Jake moved to Barkby Hall, a Grade 2 listed building in Barkby, Leicestershire and the seat and property of the Pochin family since 1604. It is a private estate, only open for one day every two years to raise money for charity. There are 10 acres of formal gardens with herbaceous borders and woodland walks. There is a *Camellia* collection under glass. Jake started here as an experienced gardener but was soon promoted to head gardener with five staff. His main project was the walled garden, where he researched the old apple trees and brought glasshouses back into production. Many of the apple trees dated from 1806, often with the original lead labels. They had trouble with camellias and brought in Geraldine King from Chiswick House in London to advise on how to restore them. They also developed a new scented garden.

After 3½ years Jake moved on to something very different. This was a new private garden in Henley on Thames, only five years old. He had regretted leaving Slawston so early before seeing the garden through to

maturity. The new garden had been designed by Pip Morrison, who had worked with Fergus Garratt, Head Gardener at Great Dixter. Jake liked the design, but thought it needed tweaking.

It was Jake's girlfriend who urged him to come north; she really didn't like the south. The job at Adlington Hall (below) was ideal.



*The new parterres in front of the Tudor side of the house*

The historic element drew him but there is also plenty of challenge. The garden had been neglected between Anthony O'Grady leaving in 2019 and Jake arriving in December 2020. There had only been one gardener during the intervening period, impossible to manage the 30 acres of wilderness and 7 acres of formal garden. There is plenty to do to restore the garden to its full glory and plenty of mysteries to solve. But Jake has a three-year plan, starting with the formal areas around the hall in the first year. In the second year he will be replanting, dealing with overgrown parts of the garden and the big rockery. Then in the third year he will be getting to grips with the Wilderness. To help him he has two full time staff, Andrew and Joe; Sue, a WRAGS apprentice who



*Left to right, Alison Hamill, Andy Tabron, Sue Hallam*

works two days a week; and two volunteers, Andy and Alison. All have been recruited in the last few months. Jake has found the working environment excellent, with good team work, including the people who work in the house. The owner, Mrs Legh has been very supportive. She doesn't live in the house but in the walled garden, which is not open to visitors. Two caretakers Sarah and Vik live in the Hall and often help out.

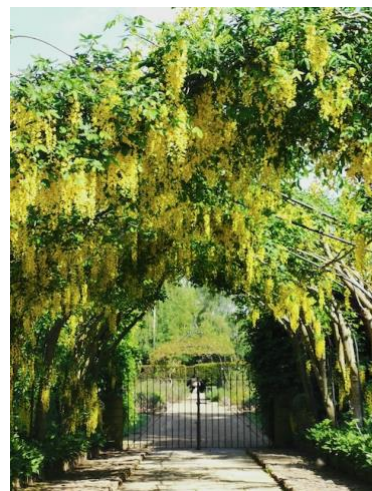
The Hall has been in the Legh family for seven centuries, but its history dates from Saxon times, when it was a hunting lodge. Like the house, the garden has many layers of alterations. Overall there is a 2,000 acre estate.

From the 17<sup>th</sup> Century there were extensive waterworks, a moat, a channel from the River Dean, a millpond and a network of canals linking to a fishpond and powering a corn mill and timber mill. The gates and the walkway of limes leading to the Wilderness were introduced by Thomas Legh as a welcome to William of Orange who invaded England in 1688. The Wilderness, a serious project for Charles Legh from around 1747, was developed over a number of years. The result was rococo style with many follies and garden buildings throughout the grounds. Although the Wilderness has become overgrown with *Rhododendron ponticum*, over more recent years it has begun to be cleared, displaying many exotic trees and architectural features.



*The Temple of Diana in the Wilderness*

We walked round the garden and Wilderness to look at ongoing work. The rose garden and paths have needed a lot of renovation being seriously overgrown. The maze beyond hadn't been cut and will take some time to restore. The laburnum arch is being restored and is well on its way. Although there is a polytunnel in the walled garden, there had been little propagation so new plants have had to be bought in. The family is very pro wildlife so the cows are allowed to stray on to the front lawn



*The laburnum arch in June*

and there is no shooting of rabbits. Alongside the house the formal parterres have been completely changed using *Ilex crenata* instead of box hedging and filled with herbaceous plants.



*Nepeta surrounding Napoleon at the side of the house*

Jake has plans for the beds next to the shell house (at the end of the lime avenue) with tulips and dahlias replicating the original yew circles. So, not all the work in the first year will be close to the hall. In the Wilderness grass paths have been mown throughout to help access, a mammoth job. Apparently the bluebells have been beautiful this year. While all the work is going on Adlington Hall is thankfully open to the public on Sunday afternoons during Spring and Summer. Jake is also hoping to run talks in the Great Hall during the autumn and winter months, using some of the contacts he has

made during his career. It is unlikely that Adlington Hall will be standing still during his time here. There is plenty to do. Jake is keen to develop links with other gardens and gardeners in Cheshire and explore more of the history of Adlington Hall. As he says there are still things to discover in the grounds. We can but wish him well.



*Entrance to the maze from the rose garden*

**Sue Eldridge**

**Photos Jake Croft and Sue Eldridge**

*For members interested in learning more about the history of Adlington Hall and the garden buildings in the landscape, see Historic England at [The List Search Results for adlington hall | Historic England](#)*

*You may also like to look at reports of previous visits to Adlington Hall, featured in Issue no. 20 October 2008 and Issue no. 47 July 2015. You can find back copies if you haven't already got them, on the CGT website <http://www.cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk/?newsletters>*

## The Arno, Oxton, Wirral

*I was delighted to receive this report on a park in the Wirral from Peter de Figueiredo, Secretary of the Friends of The Arno and Oxton Fields.*

The Wirral peninsula is famous for its attractive parks, coastal landscape and countryside sites. Most celebrated is Birkenhead Park, the world's first publicly-funded park, but there are many others, less well known and often hidden away, providing benefits for local people and visitors. One such is the Arno, its name deriving from the



*The Arno in the 1920s*

Norse *Arni Haugr*, literally Arni's Hill. The site is indeed a hill top, the southern end of the sandstone ridge that separates Birkenhead from the villages of Upton and Woodchurch. As part of the township of Oxton, the land came into the ownership of the Talbot family, Earls of Shrewsbury, in 1521.

Until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the sandstone of Arno Hill was extensively quarried for local houses and wall construction, but in 1900 two wealthy Oxton residents applied to the Earl of Shrewsbury for a 15-year lease in order that, at their own expense, they might convert the disused quarry into a recreation ground for use by local people. The Earl agreed, and the site, now barren, was landscaped as a place of recreation. Ten years later the Earl decided to donate the site, along with additional land to Birkenhead Corporation in perpetuity, on condition that the beauties of the area were preserved in their natural state. Thus with appropriate ceremony on 30 March, 1912 the Arno became a public park.

The park covers 3 hectares and consists of several

sections. There is a formal rose garden and two wild areas, a quarry garden and the woodland, all interconnected. Then there is the Little Arno, a separate walled enclosure a short distance away, and the Oxton Fields, an extensive area of open space with woodland copses and allotments bisected by the charmingly-named Duck Pond Lane.

The Friends of The Arno and Oxton Fields, formed in 2007, have played a significant role in enhancing and promoting the park for the enjoyment and wellbeing of the local community. The Green Flag was first awarded in 2010, and in 2019 the Arno Rose Garden achieved the highest level in the RHS/Britain in Bloom Community Awards.



*The Rose Garden*

The Rose Garden (above) was created for the grand opening of the Arno in 1912. Its circular layout with a radiating pattern suggests a rose in bloom as seen from above. There are 42 beds containing over 3,000 roses. It is a rare (some would say anachronistic) survival of an Edwardian municipal rose garden and in 2014 was threatened by cuts in Council expenditure. Had the Friends not offered to take over its maintenance, it would have been lost and grassed over. Recognising its importance and how much it meant to the locals, the Friends launched a public appeal which raised over £5,000 to replace many of the roses and erect a rose arch as the focal point.

Another outstanding feature is the Long Border, 100m in length, which had been abandoned to nettles and brambles before the Friends were established and which has now been replanted by volunteers with sweeping drifts of perennials, from *Macleaya cordata* and *Thalictrum delavayi* at the back to *Geranium*, *Phlox*, *Hemerocallis* and *Pulmonaria* at the front. Two other borders on the edge of the rose garden are being restored by the Friends with a mix of shrubs and perennials, focussed on Mediterranean, South African and Australasian species that prosper in the mild Wirral climate. These include *Cistus ladanifer*, varieties of *Salvia*, *Agapanthus*, *Grevillea victoriae*, *Hoheria sexstylosa*, *Baptisia australis* and a cluster of the sky rocket *Echium pininana*, the latter a source of astonishment for many visitors.



*Echiums in The Arno*

At the entrance to the Quarry garden (below) is a rock garden but it too had been lost beneath brambles and ivy. During the recent pandemic, it was cleared and planted with spring bulbs – *Chionodoxa*, *Narcissus* and *Camassia* – funded by a generous donor. A local farmer kindly provided us with a large heap of well-rotted manure, which is now nourishing the rose beds. Meanwhile composting of prunings and clippings, production of leaf mould and propagation of cuttings has been underway in the well-organised working area. We are planning regular plant sales to raise income.



The Friends volunteer group is small but multi-talented. This means that each member can perform a role that interests and challenges them. Thus fairies have left their traces in a mini-grove of trees and shrubs for the delight of children; bees have taken up residence in our two bee hotels fixed to trees in sunny spots, while a high-class bug hotel can be found in a shady dell. Bird, bat and owl boxes are hidden in the woodland. Our biggest project to date has been the restoration of the shed, formerly used by the Council's gardeners as their mess room. Abandoned long ago, its roof had collapsed, the shell consumed by ivy. Now leased from the Council on a peppercorn rent and fully restored, it serves as a place to store gardening equipment and to brew up. Its rather mundane exterior has been transformed into a work of art with mural paintings of a rural idyll by our artist members.



Inspired by the success of these projects we are now embarking on something much more ambitious. This is the transformation of the Little Arno, the pocket park on a steeply sloping site contained within a stone wall. This, like several little-used Wirral parks, is no longer receiving any maintenance from the Council, in part a budget-saving measure, but also a potential means of increasing biodiversity. However, the Friends feel that this park is too valuable to be lost. It has an interesting history as the site of a windmill; it is on a fine sunny spot with a stunning view of Moel Famau and has potential for use

by the primary school that adjoins it. We are now working with the support of the Council and the expertise of volunteer landscape professionals to come up with a scheme that will not only benefit biodiversity, but also create a beautiful and peaceful place to visit. This, we believe, is in the spirit of our founders who gave us the Arno.

**Text and photos Peter de Figueiredo**

For further information look at the Friends blog and facebook pages

<http://friendsofthearno.blogspot.com/p/about.html>

<https://www.facebook.com/friendsofthearno/>



*Friends of The Arno and Oxtun Fields, with Peter de Figueiro on the far right*

## Recognition for Caldwell's Nursery Research Project

Many of you will have been pleased to take advantage of the Gardens Trust zoom lectures over the last year, enabling us to listen to fascinating talks from the comfort of our own home. Many Gardens Trusts have contributed and it is now Cheshire Garden's Trust's turn, recognizing the unique contribution that the Caldwell's Nursery project has made to garden history.

Starting in the autumn, the Gardens Trust is offering a series of talks on the theme of plant nurseries, plant hunters and pioneers. These are to be held weekly on Monday evenings over the period from September 2021, starting at 6.00 pm, and will continue in 2022. In September, they are planning to start with four talks on the general history of plant nurseries. Sally Jeffery who is coordinating the project suggests that this is a neglected area of garden history that is now attracting much interest. This will be followed in October by a four-week series on the Veitch Nurseries of Exeter and Chelsea. In the six weeks of November and early December, there will be six talks mainly on family nurseries of the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in different parts of England, including the Greenings of Brentford

the Norwich Nursery, Hampshire nurseries, the Grimwoods of Kensington, the Backhouse nursery of York and Caldwell's of Knutsford.

Because of the research that Cheshire Gardens Trust had done and the information on the Caldwell's website, Cheshire Gardens Trust was invited to talk on Caldwell's of Knutsford as part of the series. Barbara Moth agreed to talk on our behalf and on 13 December 2021 @ 6pm will be giving her presentation via zoom. So keep the date free. For further information see The Gardens Trust website later in the year, probably from August <https://thegardenstrust.org/events-archive/?events=gardenstrust> especially if you want to sign up for the complete set of talks. I'm sure we will also be circulating information nearer the time.

It will be good to have the research into Caldwell's Nursery shared with a wider audience

For further information on the Caldwell's project see the website <https://www.caldwellarchives.org.uk>

**Barbara Moth and Sue Eldridge**

# The Mystery of the Missing Maple, found in Swettenham

*Those of you who were involved in the Caldwell's Nursery project, which involved oral history (family, staff, customers) and wading through masses of archives, may remember that Don Leaman (now using his full name Donovan Caldwell Leaman) was co-director of Caldwell's Nursery until it closed. We recorded his finding of a fastigate form of Acer campestre, eventually named Acer campestre 'William Caldwell' in 1976 and featured an article from the Tree Register in the April 2020 edition of the CGT Newsletter. Don has now written to Barbara Moth with further information about the tree.*

**Acer campestre 'William Caldwell'. The Caldwell Maple. "BILL", in the U.S. National Arboretum, Washington, D.C. The Exclamation Mark Maple. The World's Finest English Field Maple. "My Maple".**

As I write this, I realize suddenly that it is 44 years and 7 months since I spotted "MY MAPLE", a single fiery autumnal scarlet sapling amidst 4999 typically yellow seedlings of our native Field Maple. That's more than half my lifetime ago! Then in Summer 2019, the Tree Register of Britain and Ireland (TROBI) decided to investigate the largest specimen trees they could find to anoint with the title, Champion Tree. My personal records and memories of many of the early progeny became the basis of the report in the TROBI Newsletter of Spring 2020 under the headline, 'Search for Bill's Maple' by John Weightman. One particular tree eluded my search. I have in my possession still, a single order form dated 27th August, 1986 in my Cousin Bill's hand for 1 *Acer campestre* 'Wm. Caldwell'. £15.00 + VAT. Total £17.25. Collecting 2nd week Sept. The customer's name, address and 'phone number were appended, but no mention of road or lane. I personally handed over the Tree on the day appointed.

Now, thirty-five years on, none of my scouts in the Knutsford/Goostrey area could locate the cottage. Local pubs and even the district postmen were unable to help. I gave up! Then, inspired, I thought there's no chance, surely, of the 'phone number being the same as that of August 1986, but I'll try it with the area code amended." EUREKA! " or even "BULLSEYE"! I left an appropriate message of enquiry on the ansaphone and not much later, I had my answer. The property had a new owner of longstanding who had chosen to revert to the original title of the dwelling. From my description, he quickly found the tree to which he could now put a name.

As expected, the Autumn colour is spectacular. I shall not know if the Tree qualifies for Champion status until I can arrange for the TROBI Official Tree Measurer to visit.



*The missing Acer campestre 'William Caldwell', found in Swettenham*

The current National Champion "BILL" MAPLE for height is atop Alderley Edge. BUT the Champion Tree for girth is in the garden of my last home in Knutsford.

The superb specimen that I planted on Caldwell's famous Shrub Border in 1980 to commemorate our Bicentenary was bought by Civic Trees of Tring when we closed 31st January 1992. I am still looking for that tree of historical significance which may well be the Champion of Champions by now and be over 60 feet in height.

**Donovan Caldwell Leaman. 17th April. 2021.  
Wensleydale.**

*For further information on Caldwell's Nursery and recordings of family, staff and customers visit The Caldwell's Nursery website*

<https://www.caldwellarchives.org.uk>

# Why is this here? Beaconsfield House, Wirral



I have lived in Runcorn all my life and this wall, with its change of materials for no discernible reason, has always intrigued me. Walking along the road with my mother and seeing the gateposts leading into a small copse, I was told that there used to be a grand house here called Beaconsfield House. Looking at the OS maps I could see that there was indeed a Beacon site here, further up the hill, and perusal of the maps showed the house marked. This map (below) was published by Ordnance Survey in 1899. To the West, is the River Mersey which could be viewed from the house. To the north, the Pennines could be seen. Behind the house is a steep hill, used for quarrying sandstone and the home of a reservoir.



I discovered that the house had been owned by a chemist at ICI called Harry Baker during the early twentieth century. In Cheshire Local Archives Studies (CALS) archive in Chester, I found many photographs taken by the Baker family at the start of the twentieth century. Subsequently, the house became a school.

The map in the next column, published in 1912, shows the steepness of the site, including directly in front of the house. There are photographs in the archive that show gardeners moving earth up the site, using a wooden platform, being hauled uphill by the men using ropes. No place for a wheelbarrow here.



I found that the house had been built by a local soap manufacturer and he was the first occupant. One of his brothers also had a house built in Runcorn, close to the River Mersey and he had his garden designed by Edward Kemp. Kemp designed three gardens in total in Runcorn, after he became superintendent of Birkenhead Park. There is no evidence that Kemp ever worked on Beaconsfield House, but the gardens show signs that a garden designer had in fact been involved. There were glasshouses attached to the house, used for pleasure as well as growing plants, but these were in decay by the turn of the nineteenth century.

The house was built very close to the road leading to Weston Village, and according to a local resident who passed the house every day in the 1930s, the road was widened to accommodate heavier traffic and as the hill itself was to the east of the site, there must have been some impact upon the house, leading to its eventual demolition. By 1954, two sets of semi-detached houses had been built within the site of the house, but quite a long way from the adjacent road. Nothing remains now, except for the strange wall and two gateposts, one missing its capital. The lake was filled in at the request of local residents in the new houses who were fearful of their children drowning. Now it is part of Beaconsfield Wood.



This photograph shows these gateposts and in the far distance, the view of the River Mersey. This was taken from Weston Road, Runcorn.

**Text and photos Jackie Cawte**

## Arley Commemorative Tree Planting



From l to r Gordon Baillie, Zoe Ashbrook, Ed Bennis, Ruth Brown, Michael Ashbrook, Beric and Sue Bartlett, Joy Uings, Martin and Kate Slack

It is interesting what research can turn up. By chance, Dr Joy Uings discovered that 8 May would be Lord and Lady Ashbrook's 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. This seemed an ideal opportunity to extend the Arley plant collection, as well as thank Lord Ashbrook for his support of the Trust from the very beginning when we launched the Trust at Arley Hall 16 years ago. The Ashbrooks

requested a *Nyssa sylvatica*, a North American native particularly planted for autumn colour. It goes by several common names: Black Gum, Sour Gum and the Black Tupelo tree. Arley has a *Nyssa sinensis* in its collections; you will find our contribution in the grass area between the garden centre and the pleached lime entrance.

Michael and Zoe are passionate about their gardens; with their hands-on approach Arley's gardens are far more personal than many others. Some members of the Council of Management were able to attend an informal dedication, complimented by suitable liquid refreshments. This also gave us the opportunity to welcome Martin and Kate Slack; Martin is the new treasurer for the Trust.

After a few words of thanks from both sides, Michael and Zoe led us around the garden challenging our plant knowledge. Personally, I didn't do very well; but, being led around the gardens, discussing plants and numerous issues is always a treat when the owners guide you. Our best wishes to Michael and Zoe from Cheshire Gardens Trust.

Ed Bennis, Acting Chairman

## Cheshire Sandstone Ridge considered for Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

On Thursday 24 June Natural England announced proposals for new protected areas across England, alongside an ambitious, landmark programme to examine how more areas could benefit from landscape improvements, and deliver more for people and nature.

We are excited to confirm that this includes the Cheshire Sandstone Ridge, described as a diverse, distinctive, and celebrated landscape located in the heart of Cheshire, in close proximity to the large populations of NW England, rich in heritage, archaeology, wildlife and culture



View from Bolesworth castle on the Sandstone Ridge

Chair of Natural England Tony Juniper said:

*The benefits of our stunning, protected landscapes go far beyond their visual appeal, from enhancing our wellbeing, providing places for living and working communities, to making an important contribution to nature recovery and combating the climate emergency*



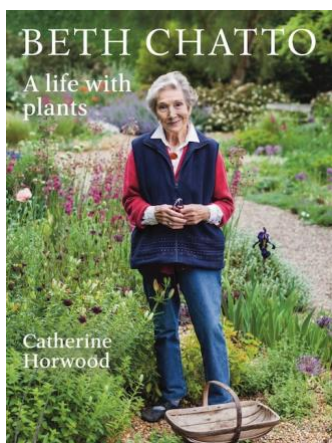
View from Beeston castle on the Sandstone Ridge

For more information see Natural England's full announcement here:-

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/natural-england-announces-landmark-new-programme-for-protected-landscapes>

# Beth Chatto - A life with plants

## Talk by Dr Catherine Horwood, June 2021



In June Dr. Catherine Horwood gave us a lively talk based on her book on the life of Beth Chatto. Catherine's enthusiasm for her hero was based on personal knowledge and research, having been asked by Beth to write her biography. She was given access to notebooks and private diaries and even given a list of people to interview.



*Beth Chatto with her gold medal at Chelsea Flower Show*

Beth became a public figure and influential plantswoman through her books, garden and nursery. She wrote many books including Catherine's favourite 'Garden Notebook' or 'The Dry Garden' but she is most well known across the world for her gravel garden. The nursery, which Beth established, grows 90% of its own stock by propagation or from seed and has received a top vote for its online service. Beth was keen to educate people and asked those buying plants to write their own labels. Her catalogues are collectable as they contain so much information. She is well known for her displays at Chelsea during the 1970s and her achievement of winning ten gold medals (above). She also appeared on television.

Cedric Morris, artist and plantsman, who was famous for



*Beth and her team at Chelsea*

his iris and the pastel shades he used, was a friend and influential on Beth. He also bought plants from Beth, as did Piet Oudolf, who took them back to Holland. Beth shared a language of gardening with Ernst Pagels in Germany, who named one of his grasses after her.

Catherine had featured Beth in her book 'Gardening Women', published in 2010, and they spent time together working on Beth's archives which would be transferred to the Garden Museum in London. The biography describes the private side of Beth's life.

Betty Little and her twin brother, Seley, were born in 1923 in a village a few miles east of Chelmsford in Essex. Their father, William, was a policeman and the family moved to Great Chesterford near Saffron Waldon in 1926, to a basic house with no electricity and a well in the garden. They were a close-knit, happy family with life revolving around the church, their home, the garden and their puppies. There was some sadness after the birth of twins and the survival of only one, followed by the death of the family dog, Gypsy.



*Beth (then Betty) aged 10 at Great Chesterford*

Beth's parents were keen gardeners and she became infatuated with it, growing her first snowdrops. Beth was bright at school and wanted to be a teacher. Following another family move to Elmstead Market near Colchester, Beth went to Colchester High School and

then to teacher training college at Bishop's Stortford. At the age of 17, Beth was studying the salt marshes on the Essex coast.

Beth met Andrew Chatto, a fruit farmer who had spent some years in California. He was a water colour artist and had a keen interest in botany. He was in his thirties when they married in 1943, whilst Beth was only twenty; they lived at his family home 'Weston'. They travelled on botanising holidays, sometimes accompanied by Cedric Morris, and they had two daughters. Following advice from Cedric as to the unsuitability of the soil at Weston, Beth and Andrew built a new house at the fruit farm at Elmstead Market. The site was chosen for the creation of Beth's new garden and nursery and this became their life.

Flower clubs started in the 1950s and Beth was a keen flower arranger, continuing her flower demonstrations for many years. She was ambitious and had her own way of doing things! She wrote books, gave talks and enjoyed teaching.

Beth and Andrew were together until his death in 1999. Christopher Lloyd became Beth's closest friend and she loved Great Dixter. They shared many interests, including travelling and food, but they especially shared laughter.

Beth died in 2018 leaving a tremendous gardening

legacy into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, through her writing and her garden in Essex. She encouraged young gardeners, promoted the plants that we grow and her garden shows the importance of foliage and year round interest. The future of the business (the garden, nursery and an educational trust), is secure through her granddaughter, Julia. For further information on this see the website <https://www.bethchatto.co.uk>.

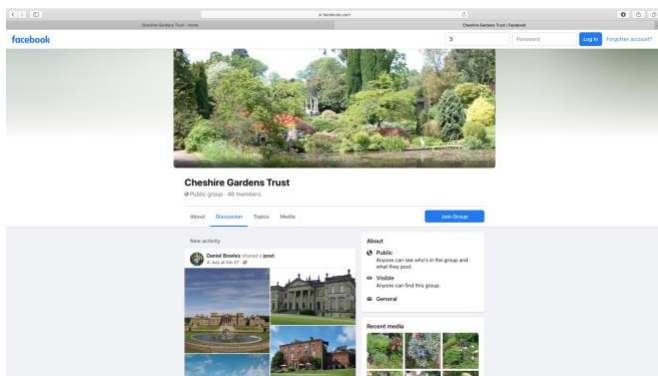


*Beth Chatto with her granddaughter Julia*

Further details of Beth Chatto's life can be enjoyed in Catherine's book but it can be summed up in Beth's own words 'For me it's not a fashion, it's a passion'.

**Janet Horne**

## Did you know that Cheshire Gardens Trust has a Facebook page? Yes, we have!



In recent months Cheshire Gardens Trust has revitalised its web site. The results of the considerable hard work can be seen at <http://www.cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk>. Details of all our activities, past newsletters, as well as a great deal of background information can be found there. And you will notice that there is the Facebook logo peeping through! Yes, we also have a Facebook page!

The main purpose of the Facebook page is to create a dialogue between members and their invited friends on the gardens they have visited, as well as useful information on future events. For example, I recently posted information about the then forthcoming

Wilmslow Wells for Africa Open Gardens on 26<sup>th</sup> June. 18 beautiful gardens. What a feast!

Many of you might be saying Facebook is not for me. I acknowledge that many of you are concerned that if you join Facebook, you can be subject to all sorts of problems. But I can assure that if you do join, just for Cheshire Gardens Trust, you are joining a closed group and the only Facebook mail you will receive will be limited to the messages and photos from fellow CGT members and invited friends.

So, what about it? Please do join and hopefully see the wonderful gardens that members and friends are visiting this summer. The more people who join, the more photographs can be seen. So do give it some thought. And if you decide in the end not to join, please do send me some photographs or information on events by e-mail ([rhmeh@aol.com](mailto:rhmeh@aol.com)) to add to the enjoyment of this beautiful summer. See page 16 for suggestions of visits. NGS Gardens, Planthunters Fairs, RHS Bridgewater and all our wonderful Cheshire gardens are open. Let's share our wonderful experiences!

**Margaret Blowey, CGT Events Group**

## A Passion for Hostas



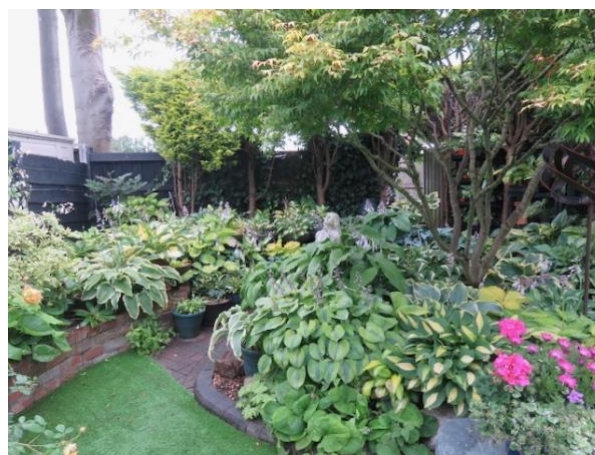
If you are looking for specialist growers or collectors, start with <https://www.plantheritage.org.uk> where you will find nearly 700 specialist collections in the UK, Ireland and the Channel Islands. Many of our local collections are held by organisations such as Ness Botanic Gardens, Chester Zoo or the Tatton Garden Society. Nationally, it seems that most are held by private individuals who have a real passion for their plants. Cheshire has 17 collections and you will find *Geranium*, *Heuchera*, *Tiarella*, *Hosta* and *Mentha* (mint being the newest) held by individuals. However, if you look beyond the nationally recognised collections, there are other gardens that hold good collections as well.

I was fortunate to spend some time with Tim Saville who holds one of 13 national *Hosta* collections. He was awarded the National Collection of Tetraploid Hostas in 2006, and he gave me a crash course in the fundamentals of hostas. It seems that America leads the way in hybridising hostas, although the same plant performs differently here than in the USA. Tim believes that it is the amount/level of sunshine which produces a stronger contrast in colour in the USA. The first stage of my education is that there are three main categories of the genus based on chromosome count: Diploid 2, Triploid 3, Tetraploid 4. The visible difference between Diploids and Tetraploids is that the latter have thicker leaves (more slug resistant), a more rigid shape larger flowers and wider variegated margins than the parent (Diploid) plant. After that came information on sports versus hybrids, newer varieties with ripple edges and streaky hostas.

This collection has 'legs' as it was started in Middlesbrough, moved to north Wales, then it has had two homes in Cheadle Hulme, the current one is about 100m from my home! He and his wife moved here in 1979 bringing a collection of *Hosta* and *Astilbe* which suited the damp, heavy clay soil. But nothing is permanent, they moved near Wrexham in 2008 and

needed an additional removal van just for the hostas; then back to Cheadle Hulme in 2016 with his well-travelled plants. Some of Tim's plants have travelled in his suitcase from the USA, with the proper paperwork. His garden was open under the NGS banner but he also started selling at plant fairs, and exhibiting at RHS Tatton including a Silver-Gilt Award. His last move to Cheadle Hulme reduced his collection to 300, although it appears to have grown again.

Tim said that he was never a hybridiser, but has an eye for spotting 'sports'. He refers to himself as a 'sport fisherman' and has clearly been successful. *Hosta* 'Beckoning' is his only worldwide plant introduction - a yellow centred sport of 'Blue Angel'. 'Beckoning' was presented to Prince Charles for his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday and Tim helped to identify some hostas at Highgrove. In addition to the national collection, he has over 50 favourites and over 50 'specials' which are mostly his own seedlings and sports.



The garden (above) is absolutely delightful: small, linear and two halves where Tim's hostas are counter balanced by his wife's love of roses and clematis. A garden of two halves, but Tim seems to have the bigger half. All of his plants are in tubs with a gravel mulch. Asked about copper tape around the pots to discourage slugs, he said he never tried it, but he does resort to slug pellets. There is an interesting detail to the plastic pots where there is a drainage hole around 50mm above the base of the pot. This allows water to stand in the bottom, essential creating a bog garden. He picked up this hint from his American contacts as he is a member of the American Hosta Society as well as the British Hosta and Hemerocallis Society. Tim has attended several national conventions in the USA, and had his *Hosta* photographs on the cover of their journal. His collection of Tetraploids is around 200, and oddly these are mostly cultivars and sports that have been chemically induced since the 1990s. Only one Tetraploid species exists, *H. ventricosa*.

What drives someone to develop such a passion, I do not know but thank goodness for people like Tim. I will always remember him saying 'I had to buy it!'. On a final note, if you happen to be in Cheadle Hulme, look at the small planting of hostas on the corner of Turves Road and Cheadle Road - Tim's guerilla garden! **Ed Bennis**



## Forthcoming Events July/August/September

### NGS Gardens Open

For more information <https://ngs.org.uk/find-a-garden/?clear=true>

**Southlands**, 12 Sandy Lane, Stretford, M32 9DA,  
Sun 18<sup>th</sup> July 12 -5.30

**Norley Bank Farm**, Norley, Frodsham, WA6 8PJ  
Sun 18<sup>th</sup> July 11-5, Sun 1 August 11-5

**Milford House Farm**, Wettenhall, Winsford, CW7 4DN  
Sat 24<sup>th</sup> July 12-5

**Field House**, Lymm, WA13 0TQ  
Sat 24<sup>th</sup> July 12.30-5

**Rose Brae (new garden)**, Parkgate, Neston, CH64 6RY,  
Sun 25<sup>th</sup> July 1-4.30

**The Firs**, Barbridge, Nantwich, CW5 6AY  
Sun 25<sup>th</sup> July 1.30-5.30  
Sat 8<sup>th</sup> August 1.30-5.30

**Laskey Farm**, Thelwall, Warrington, WA4 2TF  
Sat 31<sup>st</sup> July/Sun 1<sup>st</sup> August 11.0-4.00  
Sun 29<sup>th</sup>/Monday 30<sup>th</sup> August 11.00-4.00

**10 Statham Avenue**, Lymm, WA13 9NH  
Sat 31<sup>st</sup> July/Sun 1<sup>st</sup> August 12 – 5

**15 Park Crescent**. Warrington WA4 5JJ,  
Sun 8<sup>th</sup> August 11.30-5

**Briarfield**, Burton, Neston, CH64 5TL  
Sun 12<sup>th</sup> September 11-5

### Planthunters Fairs

**Cholmondeley Castle**  
Sun 18<sup>th</sup> July 10-5

**Capesthorne Hall**  
Sun 15<sup>th</sup> August 10-4

**Dorothy Clive Garden**  
Sun 29<sup>th</sup> – Mon 30<sup>th</sup> August

**Ness Botanic Gardens**  
Sun 5<sup>th</sup> September 10-4  
<https://www.planthuntersfairs.co.uk>

### Exhibitions further field

**Garden Museum**, Lambeth Palace Road, London SE1 7LB, Constance Spry and the Fashion for Flowers  
Until 26<sup>th</sup> Sept.

**Compton Verney**, Warwickshire, CV35 9HZ  
Rebecca Louise Law 'Seasons: A Journey through Nature', Until 30<sup>th</sup> August

**Isabel Wright**

## The Gardens Trust News

The Gardens Trust's successful run of on-line lectures will pause for the summer, after the last two Unforgettable Gardens talks with Cragside and Alnwick on 14<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> July respectively. Tickets can be bought individually.

From 2020 to 2023 The Gardens Trust has been celebrating Unforgettable Gardens – what they mean to us, the threats they face, and how we can all help save them for future generations. The on-line talks, in conjunction with County Gardens Trusts, have been running from January, and you can read about some of the gardens in the Campaign section of the website.

Details of future lecture series will be posted on the

Gardens Trust website through the summer.

Two events already for later in the year are an international conference to be hosted in conjunction with Kingston University by Hestercombe Gardens: Artists and the Garden, New Perspectives (27<sup>th</sup> September 2021); and a talk by Berkshire Gardens Trust: Public Parks, The Paradise of Victorian Innovation (19<sup>th</sup> November 2021).

Also see the Caldwell's Nursery Research article, page 9.

Full details and links are available at <https://thegardenstrust.org>

**Elizabeth Roberts**

Copy date for October newsletter is 30<sup>th</sup> September

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)