



# CAMBRIDGESHIRE GARDENS TRUST

## NEWSLETTER No. 31 NOVEMBER 2011

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## CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

This last year has been a very busy time for members of the Cambridgeshire Gardens Trust. Following a very delicious lunch at our previous Annual General Meeting, in the Village Hall in Fen Drayton, which was attended by over 40 members, we were given an illustrated talk by Mrs Jenny Burt on the 'Parks and Gardens of Northamptonshire'. I am sure everyone who attended would like me to thank members of our committee who organised this event, which, because of easy parking, has become a regular event in our calendar.

Another New Year appeared and in March, as soon as the weather improved, over 70 members and their friends attended our First Study Day - '20th Century Gardens in East Anglia' held in the elegant Village Hall at Hemingford Abbots. Our thanks to our President for introducing the three speakers - Richard Ayres, Diana Boston and Alan Gray, all of whom spoke enthusiastically about what they had achieved with the gardens they were managing. Many thanks also to Christopher Vane Percy who conveyed to them the deep appreciation of the audience at the end of the afternoon. It was a great success and I hope we will be arranging further similar events. My thanks to all who helped with the arrangements and made sure the day went well without any hitches.

The weather warmed up very early this year and our visit to Ousden Hall, Suffolk, which was attended by over 40 members proved to be a further success. The owners, Mr & Mrs Alister Robinson, not only provided a delightful lunch for everyone but also showed us around their garden with its lake guarded by a mare and her foal. Since then we have ventured into Norfolk to see the Fairhaven Water Gardens filled with mouth-watering primroses and then to The Vicarage at East Ruston where, in the distance, Alan Gray was spotted busy arranging a massive delivery of exotic annuals and dahlias. Then members visited Beth Chatto's garden at Elmstead Market and later the same day were shown a private but superb garden planted by another highly capable plantswoman who managed the garden herself and had achieved impressive examples of planting in several areas. Richard Todd managed to show members only

half of the garden at Anglesey Abbey one warm afternoon: the 'wild garden', if I can call it so, was too far away in the north-west corner of the grounds. A group of twenty members were lucky to be shown round the very large garden at Hilborough House in Norfolk which had been laid out by Arne Maynard, eleven years ago and was now looking mature.

This year your committee has been funding various projects connected with gardens and a more detailed account of their achievements is to be found elsewhere in the newsletter. The committee has checked with the printer of 'Gardens of Cambridgeshire A Gazetteer' and have found that the original text has not been deleted. We are hoping to publish a 2nd edition with updates and revisions this coming year. The Committee would very much like to publish a book about the range of trees that grow in the county. If any member would like to help with this project please contact your nearest committee member. We will need every member to check with their own parish/ town /city council to find what are considered the best trees that grow locally.

Much has been achieved during the first 15 years of our existence; the Walled Garden at Ramsey is proving a great success and is the envy of other Garden Trusts. Recently a group from the Northamptonshire Gardens Trust and earlier visitors from the Suffolk Gardens Trust have been full of praise and encouragement. Over 1,000 people have visited the Walled Garden by the end of August this year. The effort that the volunteers and members of the Ramsey Abbey Walled Kitchen Garden have put into this project is astonishing, and they are to be congratulated on their success.

For my own part this has been an exciting time, and now I am going to take a sabbatical year to complete something for myself which I have been putting off for the last three years.

I conclude by thanking the members of your committee for all their work and support.

*John Drake, Chairman.*

# AN UPDATE ON THE CGT EDUCATION PROGRAMME

## September 2011

In September 2010 CGT started its five year education programme, so how have we been doing at the end of our first year? First of all, here is a summary of what the five programmes are about.

### 1. CGT Little Seedlings

Formed for Primary School children aged 4 – 12 years; this programme is a cash grant for **education**-related activities in **horticulture** or **arboriculture** and will be administered via Schools.

### 2. CGT Bright Futures

Formed for Middle School children aged 12 – 16 and in three parts.

- i. Sponsorship of an **agricultural** class at the County Show at Wimpole Hall run by Young Farmers.
- ii. Sponsorship of a **botanical** event at the Cambridge Science Week at Cambridge University run by the University.
- iii. A Scarecrow Competition held each year in open gardens.

### 3. CGT Research Grant

Formed for Further Education students over 18 studying **Garden History** related subjects in **Cambridgeshire**; it is a cash grant to support a research project on a subject of CGT's choosing.

### 4. CGT Garden Apprentice

This is open to any age group currently on a garden-related apprenticeship scheme in Cambridgeshire; free membership to Cambridgeshire Gardens Trust for five years providing access to a network of people and information to support them in their careers.

### 5. CGT Day Lectures

A series of one-day lectures designed for over 18's; these will aim to raise funds to pay for the other four education programmes.

Progress has been good in some areas, but in other areas we are still looking for volunteers to help. If you think you would like to help please contact Julia Weaver on 01223 842348. Events we have already held are briefly reported below.

**12th March.** Day Lecture: 20th Century Gardens in East Anglia held in Hemingford Abbots Hall. Many of the speakers' gardens were visited during the year. This event was sold out and got us off to a flying start, raising around £100.

**8th May.** Bright Futures: a scarecrow competition was held at Ramsey Walled Garden. There were three categories for the different year groups and the winners were Ramsey Spinning Infant School and Earith Primary School. Each category won a £100 prize.

**21st May.** We manned a stand at the Historic Water Garden conference run by Cambridge University to raise awareness of the Gardens Trust. We sold a number of books and signed up some new members.



*A scarecrow from the competition in Ramsey Walled Garden.*

**5th June.** Bright Futures: we sponsored an 'Identify the Vegetable' class at the Cambridge County Show. There were two joint winners: Adam Horsfield from Bottisham YFC and Chris Roberts from Ramsey YFC who shared the £50 prize between them.

**17th June.** Little Seedlings: we sponsored a school project at Fen Drayton Primary School. The children undertook a green project to increase awareness of the landscape and environment which included growing sunflowers. The school was awarded £50 and a more detailed report can be found elsewhere in this Newsletter.

We plan to award a research grant via Cambridge University that will commence this Michaelmas term and we have started discussions with Cambridge Botanical Gardens with regards to the apprentice scheme.

The education finances for year 1 look like the following:

Little Seedlings	- £50
Bright Futures	-£375
Research Grant	0
Garden Apprentice	0
Day Lectures	+£100
<b>Total</b>	<b>-£325</b>

We feel that we have made small but significant steps in each of the five categories, although I think we could class the Day Lecture category as a 'bounding leap'!

If you have students or apprentices that you think would be suitable for grants in the coming year, or if you have contacts with any of the areas like schools or gardens that would benefit from the education programme please contact Julia Weaver on 01223 842348.

We look forward to hearing from you!

*Julia Weaver*

# 'LITTLE SEEDINGS' AT FEN DRAYTON

## Summer 2011

This year saw the launch of our CGT education programme and by happy coincidence the year of the first ever Open Gardens Event for Fen Drayton. The 'Little Seedlings' category of our programme seemed the perfect opportunity to encourage the Fen Drayton primary school to visit and enjoy the Open Gardens Event by participating in a project which would both help to promote awareness of the garden environment and use the growing of plants as an aid to learning across the curriculum. The title of the activity was "Growing a Sunflower" and took place both within the school and at home. The headmaster at that time was Ian Connors and it was he who set the Homework Task. Each child was given:

- 3 sunflower seeds;
- a pot;
- compost;
- a bag to take everything home.



*Alex Surfleet sets the project homework in Fen Drayton school.*

How high could they make their sunflowers grow and could they sustain the care and interest even over the summer holidays? The children were encouraged to keep a diary of their efforts, to take photos of the important moments in the life of the sunflowers and to measure their heights at regular intervals. Small prizes were given to those who made a real effort.

For the youngest the planting of the seeds took place in school at the end of May. Diaries were begun followed swiftly

by art-work, data gathering and graphs. On Friday 3 June two leaves were noted and painted and as the days passed it was recorded that the seedlings liked soil, sun and water. Not all, however, was unmitigated success in the garden. Ants and slugs were spied, leaves turned yellow and spotty and some of the young plants died. Most, however, survived and some flourished to require transplanting into sturdier containers from which they literally reached for the sky.



*Scarecrow on guard.*

The enthusiasm spilled over into participation in the Open Gardens, with the children providing miniature gardens, using both natural materials, garden tableaux, paintings and scarecrows. The school's own gardens were open and many of the children brought their parents to admire both their own handiwork and to see for the first time some of the efforts of older Fen Drayton gardeners.

At the end of term, our Chairman, John Drake, visited Fen Drayton school and its garden, talked to the Head about the project and was impressed by the 'growing' enthusiasm of both staff and children.

Over the dry hot days of summer, children and parents tended the sunflowers, (not without skirmishes and sibling rivalry), made drawings and took photographs. Happily most sunflowers flourished.: "It is as tall as my neck. Myn is taller than my sisters", reported Alex (aged 6) on 25 July. Some grew over 2 metres. So when school re-opened in September there was plenty for the acting head, Aileen Murch, to review. The project continued in school for the older

children with the development of both group and individual projects such as research into Van Gough, creative writing and analytical graph work.



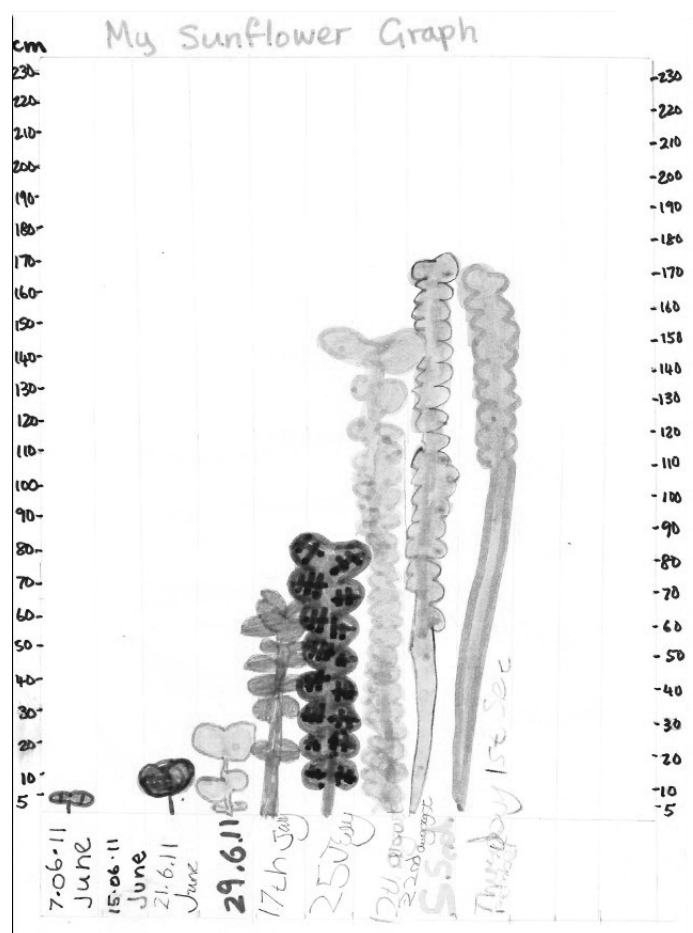
The slug rollers worked, but now we have black bugs. They are now 50 cm tall, roughly. I think we need to change the pot and put a stick in to hold it up.

*Dealing with slugs and black fly develops character in the young.*

They were fun to watch. The final measurement of the sunflowers is 2 meters. I really enjoyed growing my sunflowers.



*But it's all worth it in the end.*



*Data gathering and original visualisation.*

For many of the children this was their first experience of growing plants from seeds. Because pupil numbers are around 80 our funding of £50 went a long way towards the purchase of sunflower seeds, compost, pots and small prizes. It may also provided happy memories of a summer of growing achievements and, perhaps, who knows, even inspire a gardener of the future.

On behalf of the Cambridgeshire Gardens Trust, congratulations to Fen Drayton School for an outstanding project!

*Judith Christie*



*Fen Drayton School gardens after summer baking.*

# DOVECOTES IN HUNTINGDONSHIRE

The Garden Study Group of the Huntingdon branch of NDFAS is working on a new project. Because of its close links with the Cambridgeshire Gardens Trust, the Garden Study Group thought that CGT members would be interested to hear what was being done – and might also be able to offer advice and information.

In 'A Book of Dovecotes', 1920, Arthur Cooke noted that the county of Huntingdon must be passed over with the notice of a solitary, but very fine example, [of a dovecote]. The 1926 Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (RCHM) with its criteria for structures accredited to a date anterior to 1714, found 11 dovecotes in the county. In 1977 Peter Jeevar listed 13 in Huntingdonshire in his book, 'Dovecots of Cambridgeshire'. The current register of Grade II Listed dovecotes and pigeon houses in Huntingdonshire totals 12, however 9 of these were not on Jeevar's list.

Our interest in cataloguing the dovecotes began when we visited a dovecote in Hemingford Grey and, in trying to investigate its history, found that hitherto this dovecote seemed to have evaded all recognition. In our further research we were then disappointed by both the scarcity of information on Huntingdonshire dovecotes as well as its inadequacy as evidenced by the variations in numbers. We admired Beth Davis' comprehensive survey for South Cambridgeshire District Council in 1987 where she identified all dovecotes in that area as well as those demolished or converted. In Huntingdonshire we seem to have little idea of just how many dovecotes there actually are, and more importantly where they are. Whilst it would be fair to assume that there have been at least some, hopefully not too many, dovecotes demolished since Cooke's minimalist survey of Huntingdonshire in 1920, we might optimistically presume that all 13 noted in 1977 by Jeevar are extant. These 13, together with the other 9 that are Listed, plus the one at Hemingford Grey make a total of 23. We could be further encouraged in thinking that there are more waiting to be 'found'.

Our project in 2011–12 is primarily to locate, identify, record and photograph the existing dovecotes of the county and produce a gazetteer for historians and conservationists. There may then be individual examples that attract further research due to their architectural interest, history, owners or context etc. We are aware that we have set ourselves quite a task - Huntingdonshire covers a large geographical area and has 71 electoral parishes, over 15 of which are amalgamations of two or more villages.

A brief note should be made about the sources of information on the function and history of dovecotes. Arthur Cooke's book enjoyed wide readership and now that it is available in full on the internet it will no doubt continue to be quoted as an authoritative text. It should not. John McCann published 'The Dovecotes of Suffolk' in 1999 and in this fascinating book, (recommended reading for all garden historians) he overturns the old assumptions by virtue of thorough academic research, and he writes: *The study of historic dovecotes in Britain has been bedevilled by a few historical fallacies which appeared in the early literature, before they were fully understood. They were widely disseminated by Arthur O. Cooke in*

*1920, but they were originated by the earliest writers to take an interest in the subject: R. S. Ferguson in 1887 and Alfred Watkins (he of the 'ley' lines) in 1890. They have been copied over and over again by later writers who have not taken the trouble to study the historical evidence for themselves.* Peter Jeevar, in 1977, was unfortunately clearly influenced by Cooke; however the work of his survey is valuable and his many drawings of the dovecotes are charming.

## Dovecote at Somersham

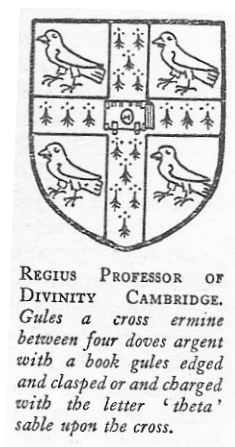
This dovecote is located in the northwest end of the churchyard of the Parish Church of St John the Baptist. It is a Grade II listed building, believed to be late 18th Century. The RCHM excluded it, presumably because of date. Peter Jeevar recorded it and noted that it was one of only three round dovecotes remaining in Cambridgeshire – the other two being in Haslingfield and Newton. So if Jeevar is correct in his survey, the Somersham dovecote is the only round dovecote in Huntingdonshire.



*Somersham dovecote, undergoing restoration in 2005.*

Today the dovecote looks quite incongruous, marooned by the tide of gravestones. The land on which it stands was previously within the curtilage of Somersham Rectory. In 1605 James I gave the benefice of Somersham, along with the chapelries of Pidley and Colne, to the University of Cambridge to be used as part of the endowment to the Regius Professor of Divinity. From then until the Somersham Rectory Act of 1881, the Regius Professors automatically became Rectors of Somersham; they employed vicars and curates to minister to the parish and, with few exceptions, were themselves largely remote from the parish. More research needs to be done in order to find out which of the Regius Professors was responsible for the Rectory dovecote – a building which would not only provide for good meals but also would be a handsome addition to the Rectory grounds.





However might we wonder if one of the Regius Professors looked at the coat of arms for the Chair and thought a dovecote was appropriate?

The parish church has sole responsibility for the dovecote and in 2002 the building was in a precarious state; timbers were rotten, many tiles were missing and the roof was being held together only by ivy. Major repairs were required if the building was to be saved. The PCC could not afford to restore the dovecote because, like

many a PCC, it was preoccupied with the church roof. However, working closely with the Huntingdonshire District Council conservation department, the PCC was fortunate to obtain a landfill tax credit grant from SITA Trust to cover all the costs, which eventually amounted to over £25,000. The repairs were carried out in 2005 by the building firm John Lucas of Peterborough, under the direction of the architect Julian Limentani of Marshall Sisson, Hemingford Grey. The building is now used as a store for the churchyard lawnmowers and other tools.

### Dovecote at Hilton Hall, Hilton

The dovecote, or pigeon house as it was called for many years, at Hilton Hall is well recorded; the RCHM, the Victoria County History for Huntingdonshire in 1932, Jeevar in 1974 and, most recently, English Heritage for its Grade II Listing. It is thought to be of a similar date to the Hall, early 17th century. It is two storeys high, built of red brick with a plat band and decorative cornice. The roof is of a saddle-back shape with pegtiles, and the overall condition of the building is described as good. Jeevar says that it is the only survivor of 4 dovecotes in Hilton village.



*Dovecote studio, Hilton Hall.*

In the mid 20th century the dovecote was given a new role – for which it may be more famously remembered than for its doves. David ‘Bunny’ Garnett, a novelist and critic, and a prominent member of the Bloomsbury Group, bought Hilton Hall in 1924. After the death of his first wife he shocked even his liberal-minded Bloomsbury friends by marrying, in 1942, Angelica Bell, the daughter of Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant. Angelica is an artist and writer and the dovecote became her studio.

David Garnett undertook some early repairs and alterations to the dovecote; a photograph taken in 1932 shows a weathercock being added to the roof and we can also see that, by then, a large, first-floor window had been inserted into the north elevation. Angelica had an outside wooden staircase built to access a new door to the first floor. Inside, the nesting boxes were removed and she decorated her studio by painting murals on the walls.

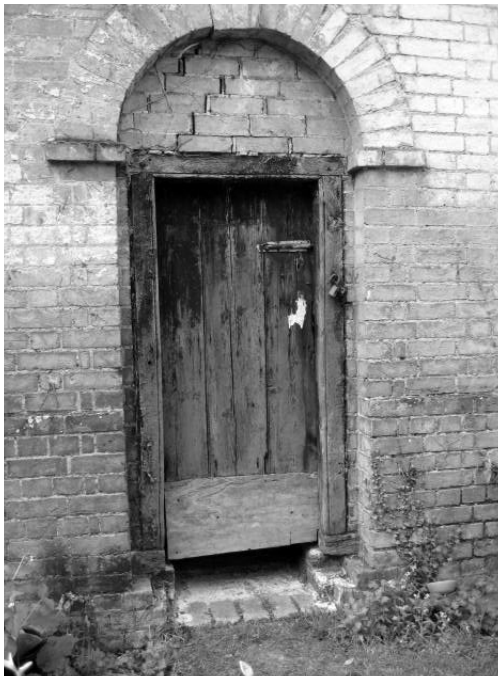
### Dovecote at Hemingford Grey

This little dovecote is remarkable in that it has survived demolition. It is tucked away in the back garden of a modern house (c1970) and is used as a garden store. The square building is outwardly indistinguishable as a dovecote now that the pitched tiled roof and its timbers have been replaced by a flat, corrugated iron roof. There is a confusing mixture of old curved pantiles and smaller peg tiles stacked against one of the walls. A description follows of the limited information we have uncovered from maps and local records (very few), deeds (lack of), architectural evidence (frustratingly insufficient) and reliable village memory (extremely patchy).



*Front view of Hemingford Grey dovecote.*

Next door to the modern house is ‘Dove Cottage’, a Grade II Listed building described as *C18 cottage with roof raised in C19*. An outline of Dove Cottage can be seen on the Enclosure map of 1801, but the dovecote is not there. So perhaps Dove Cottage only got its name after the dovecote was built? The 1801 map shows the land belonging to William Margetts; various members of the wealthy Margetts family lived in



*Door of Hemingford Grey dovecote.*

Hemingford Grey in the 18th and 19th centuries and their business and political tentacles extended across the county. The next map of Hemingford Grey is the OS map of 1887 and this shows the dove-cote – within the curtilage of the house now known as St Francis House which is thought to have been built about 1820–30 by one of the Margetts. The 1887 map shows another small building near the dove-cote, and we assume this to be the pigsties, the remains of which we saw in the garden. We might further assume that the pegtiles came from the dove-cote and the pantiles from the pigsties. We also note that the dove-cote looks to be built of the same pale gault bricks as those in the long stretch of perimeter



*Interior of Hemingford Grey dovecote with nesting boxes.*

garden walls of St Francis House. (Unfortunately for our investigations, the house is painted so we cannot compare those bricks.) However once we start looking at bricks we notice similar bricks in the tall walls around other Margetts' property in the village. One of the few things of which we can be certain, is that all these bricks would have come from the St Ives brickyards owned by the Margetts.

## Dovecote (now demolished) at Grove House, Fenstanton

Cooke's solitary Huntingdonshire dove-cote in 1920 was the beautiful dove-cote standing in a small paddock at The Grove, Fenstanton. But we cannot be sure that Cooke ever visited Fenstanton, because his survey often relied on responses to his newspaper advertisements for information on dove-cotes. His description of it reads: *It is believed to have been built about a century ago, its form and details being copied from one seen in Italy. It is remarkable for its height; the dome, supported on six slender pillars, being fifty-two feet from the ground; the weather-vane – a cock – adds four feet more. It is a brick building, circular, with a circumference of some sixty feet. There is a handsome string-course, with some ornamental work beneath the eaves. It has four storeys, and provides accommodation for about one thousand pairs of birds. The present occupants are chiefly owls and daws, who, under the genial sway of a bird-loving owner, hold their lofty fortress in unchallenged peace.* A photographic postcard of the dove-cote dated 1929 and signed by the then owner of Grove House – Joseph Hugh Leycester – has been found. It is probable that Leycester sent a copy of this photograph, along with the description, to Cooke for his dove-cote survey. The only other known photograph of the dove-cote was taken in 1968 by Jeffery W Whitelaw for an article in the magazine 'Cambridgeshire Life'. By then the building was a ruin: *it has had to be pulled down because it was dangerous – just one single circle of nest holes remains and the rest is open to the sky.* In 1977 Jeevar recorded: *now it has all gone.*



*Fenstanton dove-cote, The Grove.*

Grove House is an early 18th century house and one of its inhabitants was Admiral John Brown, a son of Capability Brown. Such a famous association can cause problems for historians because folklore is keen to capitalise on the name; some stories say that Capability Brown landscaped the gardens, and others that Admiral Brown built the dovecote to supply the Navy with pigeons during the Napoleonic wars. The garden design story must, for now, be left as conjecture; the story of the dovecote is wrong.

The builder of the dovecote was John Hammond, formerly a Fellow of Queens' College and curate of St Botolph's, Cambridge. In politics he was a staunch Whig and radical. The President of Queens' at that time, Isaac Milner, organised the trial of Hammond's close associate, William Frend of Jesus College, for sedition and blasphemous writings wherein he promoted Parliamentary reform and opposed war with France. The trial was something of a cause célèbre, with wide publicity, and resulted in Frend's 'banishment' from Cambridge. Hammond had left Cambridge some years earlier, resigning from the church to become an active Unitarian and, after travelling in Europe, he settled in Fenstanton at Grove House where he farmed an estate. A series of letters to William Frend from John Hammond and another like-minded thinker, Richard Reynolds, was found in 1960 and is now published. In these letters Hammond does not mention his spectacular dovecote but (as a small consolation for garden historians) on December 15th 1802 he writes: *Circumstanced as I found myself*

*buried in a country village, without society, without amusement and without employment, what could I do? Ruminating on my situation, the excellence of the advice occurred to me that "il faut cultiver son [sic] jardin" and that "le travail éloigne de nous trois grands maux, l'ennui, le vice et le besoin". ("we must cultivate our garden", "the work spares us from three great evils: idleness, vice and want". Voltaire, 1759, 'Candide').*

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Bridget Flanagan

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## A VISIT TO GREEN ISLAND GARDENS, ARDLEIGH, ESSEX

### 16 June 2011

On a blazing wet June afternoon our baker's dozen members/guests arrived at this fascinating and beautiful garden. Created and professionally designed by Fiona Edmond, the island, originally woodland but now featuring a series of terraces, borders and differently themed gardens, is a 20 acre 'land island'. The Edmonds moved to Ardleigh from London 15 years ago. Fiona, who was seriously ill with ME, used the garden design and development project as therapy to aid her recovery.

Timber from the many oaks and other trees felled by the great storm of 1987 have been used to construct decked areas, seats, border edging and several timber buildings. There is great emphasis on scent and the owners' enthusiasm for all varieties of acer is evident throughout the garden.

The main borders were created in 1997, mostly in the area of the old Ardleigh Park orchard. Planting aims to give all year round interest. Amongst others, magnolias, pittosporums, acers and phormiums define the structure. The range of plants in two newer borders benefit from the light native soil and includes watsonias and penstemons.

Our tour, guided by Fiona, included:

- the Japanese garden, enclosed with trellis screens and planted with acers, leptospermums and several unusual climbers.

- A Seaside garden, sheltered by willow panels, incorporating a small wildlife pond. The planting is silver and purple foliage plants; alliums and artemisias strongly feature.
- A superb Water garden, developed since 1998 around an original pond, drawing colour from a wide range of plants and flowers including bluebells, hostas, azaleas and primulas.

Much recent effort has concentrated on the development of the Woodland garden (an area of around 11 acres). Oaks, hornbeams and a variety of ornamental trees and shrubs have replaced fallen trees and the invasive sycamores and brambles. Snowdrops carpet the ground in winter and bluebells impress in Spring. Timber buildings have been constructed from on site materials.

Our visit concluded with refreshments and the opportunity to view a photographic record of the gardens' development and of other commissions undertaken by Fiona – a mother of six and a truly inspirational plantswoman!

NB: This article draws on information contained in Fiona Edmond's website: [www.greenislandgardens.co.uk](http://www.greenislandgardens.co.uk)

Alan Brown



# FOUR NORMANDY GARDENS

July 2011

For a thousand years we have shared a common culture with Normandy: in particular, our love of gardens. Yet appreciation of the subtle differences is an enduring source of stimulation which encourages us to invest the effort in a day of travel and selecting holiday accommodation in order to experience our mutual diversity at first hand. First encounters may be on the known territory of Jekyll at Varengeville or the acclaimed art historical experience of Monet's garden at Giverny. However, the less frequented ways of deepest Normandy, in the sparsely-inhabited bosky region to the south of Falaise, can reap equally rich rewards for garden enthusiasts with the flexibility of independent means of transport to probe the region.

We chose as our centre, the hamlet of La Pichardière, whose nearest centre of any size is Bauvain, a few kilometres from La Ferté Macé. There is a good variety of accommodation in the area, for example at the spa town of Bagnole de l'Orne, but we chose to stay in a restored farmhouse featuring the traditional massive granite fireplaces and exposed oak beams typical of the region, together with its own lovely orchard garden. (<http://www.ownersdirect.co.uk/france/fr4018.htm>).



*Restored monk's garden at Lassay-les-Châteaux.*

Close by to the west, the hill town of Domfront offers outstanding views, Romanesque churches, and a market square, with enticing sleepy cafés and hotels offering traditional fare, overlooked by a magnificent castle. This is feudal splendour matched only by that at nearby Lassay-les-Châteaux where today's residents stirred into action by mediaeval memories, have created a lovely monastic garden featuring contemporary medicinal, culinary and ornamental plants and herbs. Note the plural form of châteaux: not content with one castle, Lassay has three, which can be linked by a delightful walk taking in the pastoral landscape of the area.

Travelling along tiny, undulating, local roads through 18th century and earlier stone quarries, we stumbled upon the Château du Champ de la Pierre. In the time of the fall of the Bastille it had been at the centre of the resistance to the

new order. The chouans, or screech owls, as they were known from their haunting recognition call, wished to retain the beliefs and values of Roman Catholicism in the face of the new wave of state-sponsored secularism. In the last century, the same courageous spirit granted havens to the resistance fighters of the Free French and the château grounds were the scene of a two-day battle during the liberation of Normandy. Through all its tribulations the château retained its kitchen gardens, developed intimate rose and floral gardens and rediscovered the stately calm of its formal gardens with avenues of majestic beech trees leading down to lakes and wilder forest rides via summer houses, temples and an intricate maze.

Château du Champ de la Pierre represents a surprising coupling of interests of a foundry entrepreneur whose



*Rose garden entrance at Château du Champ de la Pierre.*

success allowed him to realise the philosophical and artistic trends of the wake of the Revolution in the creation of a garden. The garden has limited public viewing but may be visited by private appointment.

61320 Le-Champ-de-la-Pierre Tel/Fax +33 (0)233 27 21 70. Open from 14/7 to 30/9 from 10:00-12:00 and from 14:30-18:30, admission charge (2011) 3.50 Euro.

Great gardens have been described as masterpieces incapable of completion: perpetually changing, moving always towards perfection but constantly in a state of renewal. Near Carrouges, a new garden has recently been designed to capture the historical and philosophical associations of gardens. It is ambitiously titled Les Jardins du Conte de Carrouges. This new garden has massive energy and dynamism behind it. A huge investment of time, enthusiasm and resources has been made by talented gardeners who, as we visited, were combating one of the worst droughts on record. Their achievement is all the more commendable in establishing seven thematic gardens including a labyrinth, orchard and rose garden, a garden of the five senses, a poisons garden, gardens of gourds and of cereals, and a more than welcome water garden.



*Apples and roses in Les Jardins du Conte de Carrouges.*

61320 Carrouges Tel. +33 (0)963 45 99 79. Open daily 10:00-19:00 1/7 to 31/8. Open daily except Tuesdays 29/5 to 30/6 and 1/9 to 3/10. Admission ?6/?4. email [lesjardinsduconte@orange.fr](mailto:lesjardinsduconte@orange.fr)  
<http://www.carrouges.fr/jardins-du-conte.html>

While many outstanding gardens vied for attention in our area, including the Parc du Château de Sassy, Clos du Coudray, Parc et Jardins du Château de Vendevre, our personal favourite was the Château du Canon. The garden offers wonderful vistas of varied woodland with softly reflecting canals and lakes, slowing the pace of rivulets, fountains and waterfall. There are follies for every taste, including a Chinese pavilion, a neo-classical temple and an extraordinary dovecote in the style of a temple of love. Amour de quoi? Love personified in the form of Cupid, love of gardens or love of Nature? But the highlight is the area called La Chartreuse. Here a succession of walled gardens,



*The splendid dovecote at Château de Canon, Mézidon-Canon.*

evoking the cloisters and closes of a Carthusian monastery, create in a series of rooms a perfect backdrop for all manner of plants against the honey coloured stone and unify harmoniously the tiers and contrasting sculpting of the widely differing multi-coloured herbaceous borders.

14270 Mézidon-Canon. Tel. +33 (0)250 93 65 17. Open Friday-Monday, 14:00-18:00, 1/4 - 25/4. Open Saturday, Sunday and holidays 14:00-18:00, 30/4 - 31/5. Open daily except Tuesdays, 14:00-18:00, 1/6 - 30/9. Open weekends and All Saints holidays in October 14:00 - 18:00. Admission ?6.

<http://www.chateaudecanon.com/> Canon.visites@gmail.com

Our stay in Normandy was but a week and there is a huge number of gardens still to enjoy. We are already making our plans for further visits.

*Judith Christie*

## A VISIT TO THE FAIRHAVEN WATER GARDEN May 2011

Members visited the Fairhaven Woodland and Water Garden, hidden in the edge of the Norfolk Broads, on a beautiful early morning in mid-May. The garden is a mix of ancient woodland of native trees, a network of dykes and cultivated plantings bordered by the South Walsham Inner Broad.

The garden has a close connection with the Gardens Trust being created by Lord Fairhaven's father. Major Henry Broughton (2nd Lord Fairhaven) purchased the South Walsham Estate in 1946. During World War II, the house was used as a convalescent home and the water gardens as a training ground for the Home Guard. After the war, the first priority was to restore the house and formal garden (now in private ownership). A year later work began on restoring the garden which had become a jungle. Lord Fairhaven was an enthusiastic gardener and designed the garden himself, influenced by his friend Sir Eric Saville. He had a team of seven gardeners and two woodsmen to help clear what is now the main garden. The garden we see today took fifteen

years to create. Many of the trees were grown in a dedicated tree nursery and large greenhouses, which meant that more than 90% of the plants were grown from seed.

The 2nd Lord Fairhaven died in 1963 and he requested that the garden be left in Trust for the public to enjoy. His son Ailwyn, 3rd Lord Fairhaven is Chairman of the Fairhaven Garden Trust. The garden opened to the public in 1975 and is now open every day except Christmas Day.

The garden has a long history, with ancient fishponds (King Stephen's Pond) being mentioned in the Domesday Book and the King Oak is thought to be about 900 years old. This tree was pollarded in the middle ages for house and boat building.

The heart of the garden is the network of dykes which in May are edged with colourful bands of Candelabra Primula. These were introduced by Lord Fairhaven and now amount to some 50,000 plants, the largest naturalised collection in England. There are three types of primula: *Primula pulverulenta*, *Primula japonica* (of which there are many

different varieties) and the orange *Primula bulleyana*.

The banks are lined with gunnera, the white candles of skunk cabbage (*Lysichiton americanus*), royal ferns (*Osmunda regalis*) and many other water loving plants. As well as the native trees there are clumps of *Philadelphus*, rhododendrons, the white flowers of the layered *Viburnum plicatum* 'mariesii', as well as many other shrubs.

The garden is managed organically and is a haven for

birds and other wildlife. One major task is clearing the dykes which is done manually every winter.

The primulas were spectacular for our visit and the whole garden was lovely with the sun shining through the new leaves of the trees (oak, beech, alder, ash, hazel and hornbeam). The atmosphere was very peaceful as we walked through the gardens to the Broad.

Jane Sills

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## A VISIT TO BETH CHATTO'S GARDEN NEAR COLCHESTER

### June 2011

The weather forecast was rain; however, undaunted, we headed off with rainwear and wellies in the boot. The sky became blacker as we travelled. Starting to rain hard, we arrived in rain and, since it showed no signs of stopping, fortified with coffee, we began our tour of the garden.

It all began in 1960 on land belonging to Beth's husband, Andrew Chatto, a fruit farmer. Their house was built first. A single storey, split-level building in a sheltered position, the open plan living area looks out onto the gardens beyond. The beauty of the seasonal changes became an integral part of life.

Most of the land had been considered unfit for farming and was virtually a wasteland. A few fine trees, oaks and hollies, rose above a tangle of willows and blackthorn, but there was a spring-fed ditch. They established a garden. Andrew, the researcher, fulfilled a life's ambition and Beth benefited from this as the designer and planter. The garden was shaped from this partnership.

**The Gravel Garden**, started in 1991, covers three quarters of an acre. It had been a car park of sand, gravel and impacted soil. Rotavation and hard digging was needed; it was ploughed and then left until the following January. The area was partly sheltered by a framework of trees, protecting it from the icy, cold east winds. The garden was laid out with plenty of homemade compost and imported mushroom compost. Planting began in March with plants and shrubs chosen for their ability to withstand drought, some already tested in a Mediterranean garden. The plants flourished and, during the second summer, gravel was spread to conserve moisture and to suppress weeds. This garden provides round the year colour, season to season, and is one of the Garden's best features.

**The Water Garden** is a cool oasis. Over the years, four large ponds have been created, each slightly lower than the other and separated by mown grass. There is lush green growth and colour from early to late summer with the huge, upturned parasols of gunnera, tall grasses and clumps of *Phormium tenax*, both plain and variegated. In spring the marsh marigold, candelabra primulas, marsh ferns, white-haired cotton grass and, later, the strikingly bright red stems of *Cornus alba sibirica* provide further colour.

**The Reservoir Garden** is named after the farm reservoir alongside. During 1976, the year of the great drought, this ground was a wasteland, with gravel to the depth of 15 feet

overlaying clay. The reservoir was excavated by their neighbour, who wished to extend and enlarge it. The clay removed was spread on this wasteland to make it more water retentive; a difficult texture to deal with, holes were prepared and filled with gritty compost to give the trees and shrubs a start. This garden has flourished, with plants which do not like to dry out: hostas, ferns, verbascum, *Baptisia australis* (false indigo) and *Phlomis russeliana* do well here.

**The Shade and Woodland Garden** has a long shady walk, sheltered on one side by ancient oaks. It is home to shade-loving plants: helebore, hostas in their many varieties of leaf and colour, dicentras, spotted pulmonarias, foxgloves, solomon seals, cyclamens, autumn crocuses, snowdrops and the lovely *Erythronium revolutum*, which seeds itself if left undisturbed.

**The Scree Garden** is the latest addition. Planted in 1999 and situated on the south side of the house, it is part of the old Mediterranean garden and provides a setting for many small plants, which were out of scale in the Gravel Garden. This garden has five irregular island beds, tilted westward and supported by broken paving looking like a dry stone wall, it has gravel paths. A Judas tree, planted in 1996, is a fine sight; it is home to easy alpine, thrift, the silver-eared stachys lanata and the lavender pasque flower, wrapped in soft silken hairs, offering protection from excessive evaporation.

There is an extensive nursery and I challenge anyone to come away without buying a plant!

Beth Chatto is a remarkable lady in her achievements and richly deserves the acclaim and honours, which she has received: 10 gold medals from Chelsea, an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Essex, an OBE in 2002 and, in 2009, an Honorary Doctorate in Science from Anglia Ruskin University in recognition of outstanding achievement in her field.

Essex has a very low rainfall. In May 2011, it had 2.02mm, the lowest of all counties, but I think on the day of our visit, the reading would have been somewhat higher! On the return journey it continued to rain but as we crossed into Cambridgeshire it stopped and the sun came out. Cambs had received very little rain that day, although we needed it just as badly as Essex.

Jean Kearney

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