CAMBRIDGESHIRE GARDENS TRUST

NEWSLETTER No. 60 May 2026

LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN

WELCOME TO THE May 2026 Newsletter. We have been enjoying a wonderful succession of blossom, both wild and in gardens, this year. It seems that we can now routinely expect this spring spectacle about two weeks earlier than previously. Mercifully there were no late frosts to accompany it and spoil the show, at least not in our area. The one thing we are lacking is rain; here in Wilburton we haven't had any since mid-February. Are spring droughts to be the pattern from now on?

I would like to focus on the Newsletter in this letter. There are two things to think about: its editorship and its content. First, Phil Christie, as you probably know, has been doing a wonderful job editing the Newsletter for fifteen years now. He has tirelessly produced a very high quality publication (the envy of many gardens trusts!). Now he is ready to scale down, and eventually relinquish, this role. So we will be looking for a new editor in a year or so's time, with a gradual handover of the role before that. If there is anyone out there who would like to volunteer to succeed Phil please would you get in touch. We would be hugely grateful.

Volunteering is fun! Judith Christie (right) helping Frankie Taylor staff a Gardens Trust - CGT gazebo at a Gardeners' World event at Audley End.

Secondly, the Newsletter does not fill itself! It needs contributors. Whether it is a short article on a piece of research that you have undertaken, or a write-up of a visit, a book review, or a summary of a workshop or talk, Phil and/or his successor would be delighted to receive it.

I would also like to draw your attention to a pleasant situation the Trust finds itself in: we have an excess of funds! As you are probably aware the Charity Commission frowns on the hoarding of funds by charities and asks them to spend any excess on projects that fit with their charitable purposes. Over many years we have amassed a surplus to our requirements of about £14,000. We are therefore setting up a sub-group of trustees and CGT members, led by Judith Christe, to look into this 'problem' and come up with suggestions on how we might spend the money. We will keep you informed but, if anyone has ideas or views on this subject, please do feel free to get in touch with Judith via the admin email. We very much look forward to hearing your thoughts.

Over the past five months we have had a succession of excellent and well-attended talks. At the November AGM in Hilton village hall, Liz Lake explored the links between the characteristics and features of modern garden designs and their historical predecessors. The Margaret Helme Christmas Lecture was given by Gillian Hovell, who delved into the world of Roman gardens at Pompeii. In January, we were rivetted by Joe Sharman's revelations about the snowdrop, its structure, growing conditions and varieties, of which there must be hundreds. Most of us came away with some of them, for our own gardens, that Joe had brought along from his famed Monksilver Nursery near Cottenham, and some can be seen on a new CGT webpage.

In March we had a very successful Study Day, back in our customary venue of Hemingford Abbots village hall, focussed on the theme of *Water in the Landscape*. Water in many forms was explored: water management in the pre-drainage Fens, (Professor Sue Oosthuizen), overlooking river traffic from gazebos (Bridget Flanagan), the historic layout of water gardens at Boughton (Lance Goffort), the Fens Reservoir (Stuart Holmes) and 17C hydraulics in the landscape of Euston Hall (an edited version of a Zoom talk by Steve and Pippa Temple). It was an enjoyable, informative and stimulating day.

The programme of events for the summer, to be found in this Newsletter, looks excellent, and many thanks to the events team for putting it together. I would like to draw your attention to one of the visits, to St Peter's Church, Offord d'Arcy, St Neots, on 24th June, as the work here on improving biodiversity and planting wildflowers was not only grant-aided by the Trust but has also won a Wildlife Trust Award. We can bask in a certain amount of reflected glory!

Elisabeth Whittle
Chairman, Cambridgeshire Gardens Trust

THE CGT STUDY DAY 14 MARCH 2026

AFTER A GAP OF TWO YEARS the 2026 Study Day returned to the familiar surroundings of Hemingford Abbots village hall. Unrelated to the soggy spring, our theme for the day sought to discover what water has offered in the past by way of economic development, landscape enhancement and recreational opportunities, together with what we have to look forward to. Of the five talks that were set to examine multiple facets of water in the landscape, three of them were delivered by CGT members, amply displaying the curiosity and research drive of the membership, and the relevance of the Trust to the current environment.

A strong turnout of members and guests gathered to hear our speakers give their thoughts on the theme. After refreshments served during registration, Liz Whittle, CGT Chairman, welcomed everyone to the event and introduced Professor Susan Oosthuizen who was to be the anchor person for the morning, as well as the first speaker. Sue is Emeritus Professor of Medieval Archaeology in the University of Cambridge, an Emeritus Fellow of Wolfson College, Cambridge, and a Fellow of both the Society of Antiquaries and the Royal Historical Society. She is also a CGT Patron.

PRE-DRAINAGE WATER MANAGEMENT IN THE CAMBRIDGESHIRE PEAT FENS.

Prof. Oosthuizen's talk on water management in the Cambridgeshire peat fens before drainage was the perfect start to our day, giving a historical perspective of the landscape, how water was managed and how it supported communities over a significant period of time. In addition, we heard fascinating detail about the day-to-day management and engineering carried out to ensure the maintenance of a functioning system which played a crucial part in creating the topography in the fens and informing the social structures.

The Cambridgeshire fens (Fig. 1) are divided into the silt fens in the north and the peat fens in the central and southern part of fenland. The fen basin, lying on or just above sea level, has a very gradual slope towards the sea and is subject to considerable flooding from the rivers which bring large quantities of water to the area at certain times of year. The highest level of those floods - the floodline - lies at around 3.6 m above sea level.

The uneven floor of the peat fen results in three types of environment. The lowest area, at or below sea level, holds

Figure 1. The Fenland basin, geography. Figure © Susan Oosthuizen, reproduced with permission.

lakes, meres and ponds. The highest areas, rising above the floodline, are islands including Ely, Chatteris, March and Whittlesea. Varying degrees of dampness in the intermediate level, flooded in winter and dry in summer, meant that the sequence from aquatic to grassland plants could occur in changes of height above sea level of less than 0.5 m. The absence of the natural succession from around 4000 BCE until drainage in the 17C - a characteristic of unmanaged landscapes in which reeds, sedge and grasses gradually give way to scrub and trees - is one of the signs that the peat fens had been managed across those centuries for grassland and other natural resources like peat, thatch, fish and waterfowl. Access to these

resources was restricted to those with rights of common who worked together to manage them.

Figure 2. Wetland meadows at Wicken Fen, Cambs. Figure © Susan Oosthuizen, reproduced with permission.

The predominant source of livelihood over these centuries was livestock farming on the grassland (Fig. 2), mainly cattle and dairying Almost all commoners had cows but only 50% also had sheep. The herds were small, five to eight cows for peasants and larger numbers for the manors. The cheese they made produced a stilton style of cheese in spring and summer, and a cheese similar to camembert in autumn, Large amounts of cheese were made and sold across the region in markets such as those in King's Lynn and Peterborough. Peasants were often paid in cheese for their work for the manor and there are even records of cheese being left in wills.

The management of this central fen level focussed on the crucial provision of suitable and adequate grazing for the stock. This entailed ensuring the correct wet or dry conditions for the rich variety of flora which naturally grew in the fen with a density of up to fifty species per square metre. Strategic management of appropriate water levels ensured the growth of the right species so that herds could be moved around, probably on a six-week rotation, to access sufficient and appropriate nutrition. Many places still bear the names of the types of grasses which grew there.

While some flooding was welcome to ensure growth and protect and fertilise the land, there was risk if water stayed too long. It had to be removed once the grass was showing above the water and there was a three-week window of opportunity to do this before damage was caused.

The requirement to manage water led to the development of three interconnected types of water course. Catchwaters were built along the floodline to capture the water draining from higher ground. Lodes (canals) with embankments, carried the water from the catchwaters to the rivers; most were navigable. However, lodes tended to cut across the natural drainage lines, so ditches in between the lodes needed to be opened or closed as required, using sluices, probably worked by hand.

Channels or culverts with sluices were known as gotes and some sluices were made of hollowed-out tree trunks, set into an embankment or dyke. They had a clapper board at one end that was pressed closed by water coming into the fen and opened to let water out when outside water levels were low. A 16C copy of a late mediaeval map (Fig. 3), held in Wisbech and Fenland

Figure 3. Four Gotes, Cambs. Detail from a late 16C copy of a mediaeval map. Map courtesy of the Wisbech and Fenland Museum, reproduced with permission.

Museum, shows the area around Tydd St Giles with Four Gotes and the clapperboards at the ends are clearly indicated.

These names remain in use today, as in these examples: Bottisham Lode and Reach Lode, Tydd Gote and Four Gotes. Clows seem to have been larger channels with large sluices or floodgates set into an embankment or dyke. It is not clear exactly how these worked but they were large enough to allow boats to pass through and included doors which could be opened and closed to control water flow in either direction. Archaeological excavation in Rotterdam has revealed navigable clows with a roofed oak box frame that allowed dry passage along the top of the dyke into which the clow was inserted.

Local communities of commoners engineered their own earthworks and the features they required. Some needed quite large-scale engineering and it was all done by hand with shovels and wheelbarrows. The earthworks could be enormous, requiring huge amounts of manpower to create. In the 10C, for example, an eleven-kilometre canal across March was dug to create a new course for the River Nene after its existing course had become blocked. Because the natural resources of the peat fenland belonged to local communities of commoners, systems for managing both grass and water could be sustained over long periods of time.

The talk gave a fascinating and enlightening insight into the ingenuity, resourcefulness and profound knowledge which enabled this productive environment to be maintained over thousands of years, achieving a balance between a level of production which supported communities, while also respecting and sustaining the natural rich resources of the fens.

Carol Meads, March 2026

WATCHING THE WORLD GO BY: 18C GAZEBOS OVERLOOKING THE WEALTH OF RIVER-BORNE TRADE

The second talk was given by Bridget Flanagan, CGT member and an energetic researcher with a focus on the social history of Huntingdonshire and the influence of the Great Ouse Valley landscape. Bridget is a trustee of the Great Ouse Valley Trust which seeks National Landscape designation for the area. Her books include *Artists along the Ouse 1880-1930* and *A*

Commanding View – The Houses and Gardens of Houghton Hill. Her recent project, with co-author Keith Grimwade, was the publication in June 2025 by Windgather Press of *The Watermills and Landscape of the River Great Ouse in Cambridgeshire*.

Bridget's talk explored and developed the theme of her initial research into the 'gazebo or summerhouse' of Barnes House St Ives which had been the subject of an article in the CGT newsletter 59, October 2015. The gazebo of Barnes House can be seen along the riverside path, known as Barnes Walk, which runs from St Ives Parish Church to the beginning of The Thicket Path to Houghton. Until 1998 the gazebo belonged to Barnes House but is now no longer part of the curtilage of that property. In 1979 Historic England assigned the structure as Grade II and described it as a 'gazebo' although, as Bridget noted, all earlier references to it in deeds and sale documents are as a 'summerhouse'. The first use of the term 'gazebo' is dated by the Oxford English Dictionary to 1752, and the OED suggests this term was possibly a pun, manufactured by linking the Latin second conjugation future tense ending, *-ebo* (I shall), with the English word *gaze*. Today the term gazebo is most often applied to a small, often temporary, garden shelter or tent, or a summerhouse sited to avail of a view of either a garden or a park. However, the Barnes House gazebo certainly predates the OED date of the first use of the word – Bridget showed an engraved view looking west to St Ives church in which both the church steeple and gazebo are plainly seen. This dates the gazebo to before 1741, the year in which the church tower lost its pinnacles and much of its spire in a great tornado and was subsequently rebuilt in a different style. Bridget placed the date

Figure 4. Barnes House gazebo. North elevation has stairs to first floor room while east elevation has door to ground-floor room and first-floor window facing downstream.

of the gazebo's construction as around 1725, which may be several decades earlier than the building today known as Barnes House. So how did the gazebo come to be built, and what was its purpose?

The two-storey building is 12' 6" (3.81 m) square and built of pale, gault-clay bricks (Fig. 4), very probably sourced from the nearby How brickyards. It is part of the southern boundary wall of the garden of Barnes House. An outside staircase leads to a door to the first-floor room, where there are three segmental-arched windows - to the east, south and west elevations (but none to the north and the garden). The pyramidal roof has a decorated lead ridge and a central chimney. Inside on the first floor there is a corner cupboard, a fireplace (without its 'Dutch' tiles, last recorded in 1920) and a wooden window seat. It is a comfortable room to accommodate a party of perhaps six or eight people.

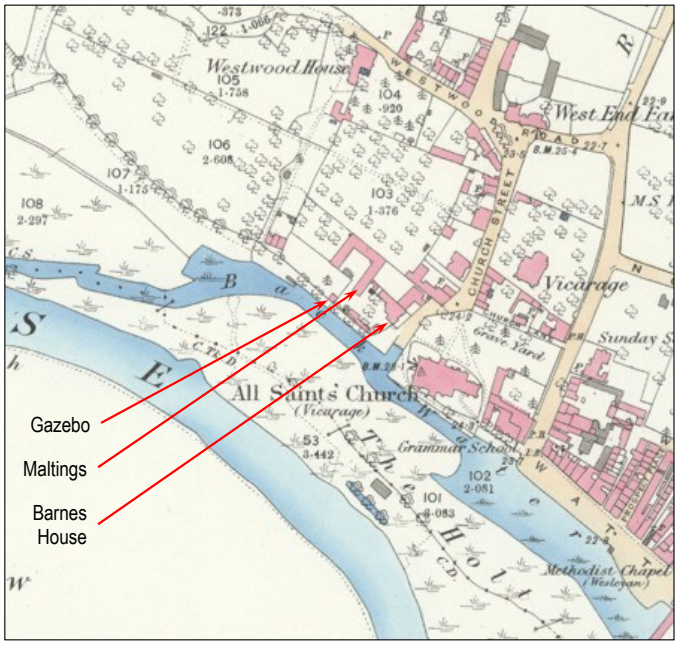

Figure 5. Detail from 1888 25" OS map, showing locations of gazebo, maltings yard and Barnes House. Reproduced with permission from the National Library of Scotland.

Bridget's research linked the curtilage and early buildings of what were to become Barnes House with an up-and-coming gentleman, Samuel White (1672-1736), who had married an heiress, Anne Williamson, and thereby acquired land, property and a brewery business in King's Lynn. In 1716 Samuel bought the property which would become Barnes House and updated it for his family's needs. To serve his business, he built to the west of the house a yard with a large maltings, kiln, granary, wine store and stables (Fig. 5), and enclosed it within a wall from the riverside path. The river frontage on the short backwater off the main channel enabled him to site a wharf just yards from the gate to his property. From here he could unload coal for his kilns, brought up-river by barge, and send malt by return, down-stream to his brewery at King's Lynn. The first-floor windows of the gazebo afforded very good views of all this business activity, both of the wharf on the backwater and also the main channel of the river, because neither the lime trees of Barnes Walk, nor the willows of Holt Island had yet been planted. In the late 17C the navigation on the Great Ouse had been restored by the construction of locks to by-pass the numerous watermills that had blocked the river; consequently there was then a boom

in commercial river traffic. Samuel White was a merchant who availed himself of the transport improvements and grew rich as a result – as would the Barnes family who bought the house and maltings in 1737, after Samuel's death, and prospered there for 120 years.

Having established that the Barnes House gazebo was not a viewpoint for the garden, but rather something akin to a watch-tower or look-out for the owner's business interests, and maybe to keep an eye on those of his fellow merchants, Bridget wondered if there were other examples of this genre. Starting in East Anglia, and by combing the Historic England register of Listed Buildings titled as 'gazebo', more and more buildings emerged with very similar characteristics; generally 18C (but sometimes late 17C), small, square, with pyramidal roof, with a first-floor room having three windows looking across, up-stream and down-stream along a waterway. At Wiggenhall St Germans, on the east bank of the River Great Ouse there is a late-17C, little brick building about 20 m from the 17C Grade II*-listed St Germans Hall. It has a pyramidal roof, with a door to the north and windows on the south and west sides, the southern window now blocked up (Fig 6). The windows look out to the river, but here they also have a close view of the nearby bridge. Until 1821 this was the lowest bridging point on the Great Ouse and served the important commercial port of Kings Lynn. Bridget proposed that this gazebo may have been a place to watch, not only the goings-on of commercial river trade, but also trade carried by road as it was distributed to and from the water transport.

Figure 6. The gazebo at St Germans Hall at Wiggenhall St Germans. Photo by Bridget Flanagan.

In the centre of Oundle, the Grade I-listed house Berrystead, a very splendid merchant house, has a c.1700 two-storey gazebo built into the wall of its long back garden. The gazebo is similar in size and structure to the Barnes House gazebo with an external staircase and windows which look out on three sides, though somewhat removed from the present course of the River Nene. The Limes at Tinwell has a two-storey gazebo looking down to the River Welland, and a gazebo complete with camera obscura can be seen at Thorpe Lodge, sited on Yarmouth Road at Thorpe St Andrew. The latter was built c.1790 for John Harvey (1755-1842), textile merchant, banker and Mayor of Norwich, and was one of several gazebos in the waterfront gardens of merchant houses along the River Yare.

Figure 7. A cluster of 18C gazebos, restored in the 1980s, at Ware on the River Lea.

There is a well-known group of 18C gazebos at Ware (Fig. 7) on waterfronts of properties on the High Street backing on to the River Lea. In the 18C Ware's fortunes were based on malting; it was the biggest producer of brown malt for the breweries of London, and the River Lea was a very busy commercial highway. A visitor to the town in c.1830, John Smith, recorded 25 river-side gazebos, calling them 'Dutch Summer Houses'. In 1980 The Ware Society organised the restoration of the buildings, but by then there were only ten survivors. The earliest building is dated 1697 and has the initials of MD, believed to refer to Mary Docwra, wife of John Docwra, maltster of 65 High Street.

Further afield on The Thames there is another town with a proud heritage of gazebos. This is Lechlade in Gloucestershire (Fig. 8). By the early 18C, improvements on the Thames, similar to those on the Great Ouse, saw the town become the highest navigable point on that river. Bridget noted that this pre-dated the main era of the 'Canal Age' by about 50 years – but was at a similar time to the expansion of the Turnpike Trusts (Fig. 9) which enabled significant road improvements.

Figure 8. Church House and its gazebo at Lechlade.

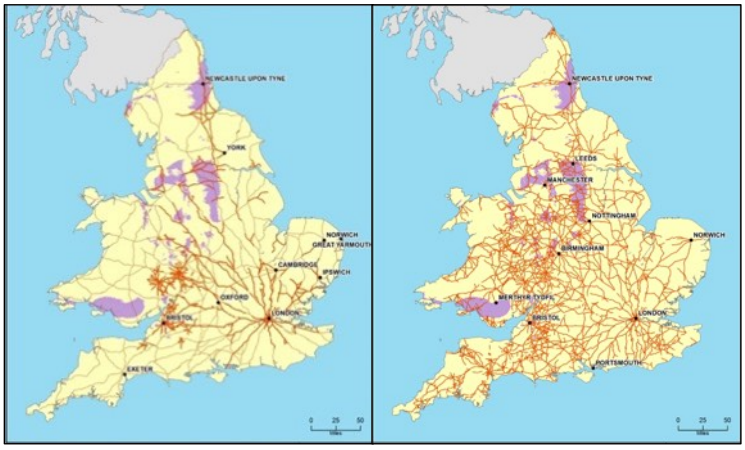

Figure 9. Turnpike road development in 1750 (left) and 1770 (right). Purple areas are exposed coalfields. After Bogart (2017).

Lechlade boasts a town map showing nine 18C gazebos belonging to merchant houses along its roads and river. Lechlade is about 30 miles from Gloucester, where goods were transferred up-river from the port of Bristol, carried by road to Lechlade, and then moved by river to London. It was a hub on a combined cross-country/ river trade route that also had many arterial off-shoots. And whereas the trade along the Rivers Great Ouse and Lea was dominated by corn and coal, trade along the Thames was much more diverse. It carried the raw ingredients and the products of the growing Industrial Revolution, and the imports from the East India Company and the New World.

At the other end of the Thames, in London, there are very few surviving 18C gazebos – compared to the numbers that can be identified on contemporary paintings and engravings.

Figure 10. Greenwich Crooms Hill gazebo, 1672. Probably designed by Robert Hooke (1635-1703) for Sir William Hooker (1612-1697), Alderman and later Mayor of London. The Gazebo overlooks the wall of Greenwich Park directly across the road: is it high enough to view the river?

Bridget showed examples of riverside views at Richmond, Twickenham and Chelsea each with several gazebos.

Figure 11. Gazebo at Old Cromwell House, Mortlake. Thomas Cromwell was given the Manor by Henry VIII in 1536. Edward Colston, merchant and slave trader, lived here 1695-1721. He made a fine garden and built the gazebo from where he reputedly spent many hours watching the river. After Hall & Hall (1859).

The gazebo at Mortlake (Fig.11) has a domed roof, rather than the pyramidal roof shape of the majority of the gazebos seen. This roof shape is the same as the very well-known 'Theekoepels' of Holland (Fig. 12). They originate from the 17C, and their name describes their roof shape – a cupola, or dome. The buildings are sited on the garden waterfronts of merchants' houses, known as Buitenplaatsen, along the rivers Spaarne and Vecht (Fig. 13). These houses were magnificent summer residences to which the families would repair to escape the smells of the city canals in the summer. Attached to the houses were equally magnificent gardens, of which it seems the riverside Theekoepel was an essential component. They were not large but had opulent interiors and fittings; they were a display of wealth and were a place both to see what was going on along the river and, importantly, to be seen to be doing so. Bridget was sceptical as to whether the Theekoepels were originally built solely for the drinking of tea, or whether this name was a later description. However, she proposed that the 18C English gazebos had very probably developed from the earlier Dutch model. They were simpler and built in a more classical style as of early Georgian architecture. But their

Figure 12. Photo showing Dutch Theekoepels tea dome.

Figure 13. Engraving, 1719, showing Buitenplaatsen (summer houses) and Theekoepels) tea domes along the River Vecht.

primary function was the same, where business and leisure were as one. Although the gazebos were sited within a garden, they did not relate to the garden. For their merchant owners they were a place to sit and enjoy watching the world (as well as their own goods) go by.

Bridget Flanagan, April 2026

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BOUGHTON WATERSCAPE AND BEYOND

The final talk of the morning session was given by Lance Goffort. Lance is a Heritage Landscape Advisor, a Project Director, and a specialist in the restoration of historic parks gardens and waterscapes. He currently works in Scotland, Wales and overseas on major projects as well as Birmingham Botanical Gardens glasshouses and gardens. This year he celebrates 40 years working in the industry on amazing projects with great teams and experts, one such project being the restoration of the waterscapes at Boughton House.

This article is also a heads-up for a trip to Boughton in October to see the results of the restoration work that Lance came to talk to us about. He refers to the work as a reconstruction and has overseen this project for ten years from 2005 to 2015, and no one knows better than he the difficulties that had to be overcome. Boughton House and Estate in Northamptonshire is home to the Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry and has been the ancestral family home since 1528. Today, the estate comprises 11,000 acres (4,452 ha), a 500-acre (202-ha) Deer Park and 110 acres (44 ha) of gardens and waterscape. It is not the only Buccleuch landscape to receive attention, as Lance has also been busy at Bowhill in the Scottish Borders.

Many of us will have been to Boughton and perhaps seen the transformation it has undergone over the years. All will be familiar with its title of 'The English Versailles'. Ralph, the first Duke of Montagu (1638-1709), was an ambassador to France and chose this style for the house he had built in the 17C with extensive and formal parterres that were the fashion at the time. In 1685, Ralph appointed the Dutch gardener Leonard van der Meulen as head gardener. Van der Meulen was a land surveyor and water engineer and he oversaw the construction of the large formal gardens, including lakes, canals and fountains. The water gardens necessitated diverting the River Ise to feed the canals and lakes. The archive material is limited but there are enough plans to show that the LIDAR (light detection and ranging) image (Fig. 15) is a close match to a 1714 plan by Nunns and Booth, showing the late-17C design (Fig. 14). The LIDAR image also shows the positions of the Star Pond and the Mount, illustrated in the plan of 1746 (Fig. 16).

Figure 14. Detail of the 1714 garden plan by Nunns and Booth, showing the parterres and, in blue, the canals formed by diverting the River Ise. Note the ornamental water garden (top, centre) edged by canals on the site of the 1729 Broadwater Lake. North lies 18° clockwise.

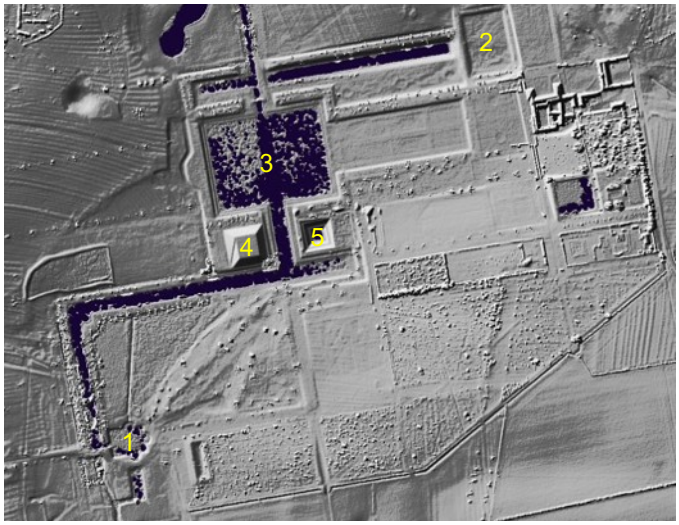


Figure 15. LIDAR image approximately referenced to Fig. 14. Relics of several parterres can be seen, as well as the canals and the Star Pond (1). Clearly visible are the Grand Etang (2), the Broadwater Lake (3), the re-created Mount (4) and the new Orpheus landform (5) by Kim Wilkie.

The water feature known as the Grand Etang is now reinstated and looks exactly as it must have done some 300 years ago when it was illustrated in a c.1730 view, perhaps by Bridgeman, and mapped in 1746 by Delahaye (Fig. 16). I first saw it as a sunken grass square but now its surface reflects a mirror image of the magnificent house (Fig. 17), quite a transformation. When the sunshine sparkles on the water the effect is sensational. Originally it was used as a reservoir for the fountains and was surrounded by a deer park with both red and

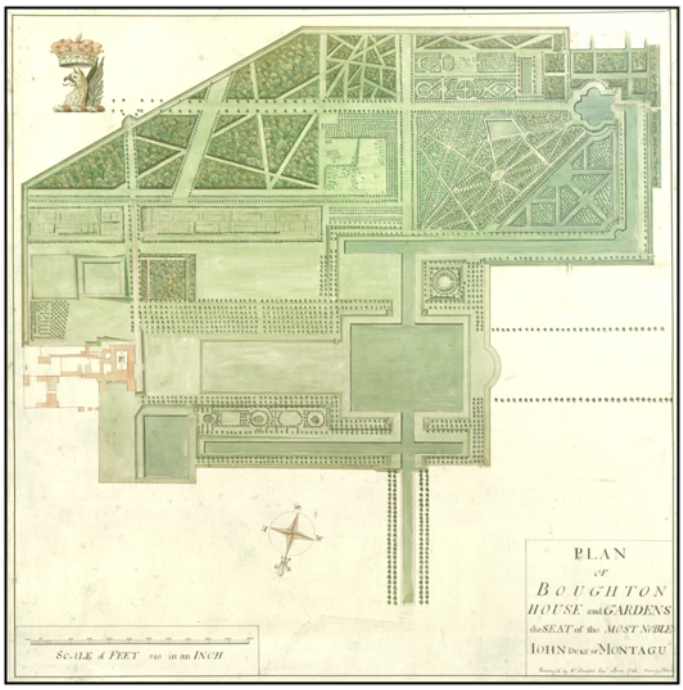


Figure 16. Plan of the garden at the Delahaye survey in 1746. The Broadwater Lake lies on the house axis, and the Mount has been created from the dug-out spoil. The Star Pond is seen top-right. North lies 198° clockwise towards the bottom-left.

Figure 17. View of Boughton House, reflected in the Grand Etang, restored in 2014.

white deer, which enhanced the sweeping vistas of the park that were separated by the bodies of water.

The second Duke was known as John the Planter (1690-1749) and inherited the estate on the first Duke's death in 1709. As well as being a notorious hoaxer, he was responsible for the planting of 70 miles of avenues in the French tradition, although it is said that he really wanted to plant an avenue all the way to London. While the first two owners devoted themselves to creating a fashionable landscape, all was to change after the 2nd Duke died and the title passed to owners who had other estates that they preferred so, from 1749 'Boughton fell asleep for two hundred years', to quote Lance. During this time all the shallow water features became completely silted up and only the outlines were visible as depressions in the land.

In 1975, the 9th Duke, John Montagu, reawakened the landscape by restoring the lake and installing a new sluice gate to the River Ise. In 2003 Richard, who was to become 10th Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry, commissioned a landscape master plan from the Landscape Agency and, in 2006, Lance was appointed Landscape Manager to oversee a 5-year project to 'restore/reconstruct' the landscape to its historical appearance by restoring the canals and clearing the Mount of trees. This restoration was guided by archaeological research, LIDAR surveys and plans and maps in the archive, such as those by Nunns and Booth (Fig. 14) and by Delahaye (Fig. 16), showing wetland water gardens with large water features. Within the archive is Thomas Badeslade's plan for Vitruvius Britannicus dated c.1722, which shows half the Broadwater Lake, while a bird's eye view of c.1729, possibly by Bridgeman, shows the full-size Lake and encompasses some three miles of ha-ha, including his trademark bastions and together these provided the basis for the restoration of 120 acres (49 ha) of the formal gardens.

Visitors today will see a pristine 18C garden, so how was it done? Lance's pictures showed how challenging it was to work on the water features during the wet winter months. They needed to have the heavy equipment within the water features to avoid damaging the banks and had to cope with the ensuing mud and floods. The Mount had become overgrown with sycamores but there were also a few cedar trees which were retained, while the sycamores were felled and the timber used for furniture.

Figure 18. Oak boarding used to revet the canal banks.

Two and a half miles of 6-ft (1.8-m) oak boarding was needed for the canal edges, which makes for a sharp, geometric line (Fig. 18). One section of canal was always known as Dead Reach and it is not known if this is because the original boards had all been taken from coffins or because the canals do not lead anywhere. Certainly, the original pipework had used drilled-out elm trunks, so elmwood from coffins is not entirely fanciful. Looking at the beautiful images Lance showed us of the finished work, it was hard to believe all this could have arisen from the work-in-progress pictures. As he said, the project was a reconstruction not a restoration.

Lance admitted that had the project been planned at the present time there might have been more emphasis on the ecological aspects of the work, but as Landscape Historians we can but be captivated by the accuracy and detail of this extraordinary project, and grateful to all those who worked so hard to bring the old landscape back to life.

For those who are interested in the details, 10,000 m^3 of silt was removed from the canals. The Grand Etang is spring-fed; it took three months to fill with two million litres of water and can now power fountains 30 m in height. Bridgeman's drawing

showed thirteen jets and numerous statues. The water level in the canals is now controlled by an automatic double Penstock weir, installed in 2010, but the automation mechanism failed after two years and so they are operated manually. Hundreds of trees were removed from the raised banks of the canals in order to clear the view to the water.

The removed silt was analysed for pollen to establish the original species and identical lime trees from Holland were used to restore the avenues. Every modern technique - apart from using laser levels which didn't work over the distances involved - was employed to recreate what was originally constructed by men with spades!

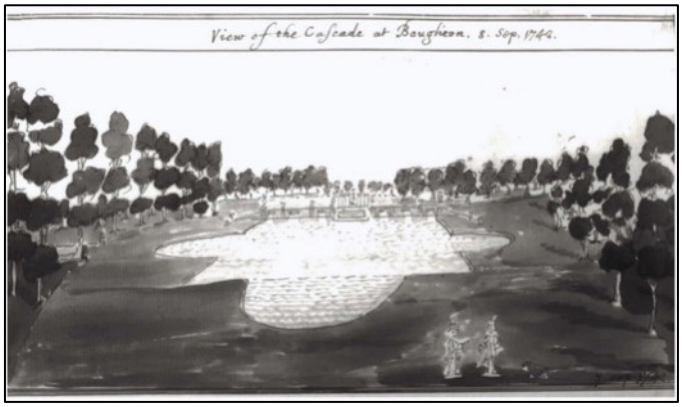


Figure 19. A sketch of the Star Pond made by William Stukeley on a visit to Boughton in 1742. Stukeley and the Duke are in the foreground.

The Star Pond was the last feature to be reinstated and there was a useful reference in an illustration by Stukeley (Fig. 19) on one of his visits in 1742 in which he includes a picture of himself with the Duke, but no sign of his trademark dog. William Stukeley is considered to be the 'Father of British field archaeology' so who better to provide a reference. This was the final feature to be reconstructed and was completed ahead of schedule; there are no plans to reveal the intricate parterres that originally surrounded it (Figs 14 & 16).

Amid all this amazing historic restoration is a 21C addition. In 2009, Kim Wilkie was asked to design a feature which would complement the geometric nature of the newly reinstated landscape and his design will be familiar to all. It is sited between the house and the Mount which was originally created from material excavated from the canals and Kim's design, titled 'Orpheus', echoes this by forming an inverted pyramid extending 9 m below the river level (Fig. 20). A gently sloping grass path winds its way down to a reflecting pool at the bottom. It is complemented at ground level by a stone rill that traces Fibonacci's Golden Ratio, beloved in baroque architecture and reflected in the earliest designs for the garden. The scale is dramatic, as is its impact on the landscape. We are delighted that we have managed to arrange a tour of this wonderful site in October, when we hope to appreciate the full glory of all the work.

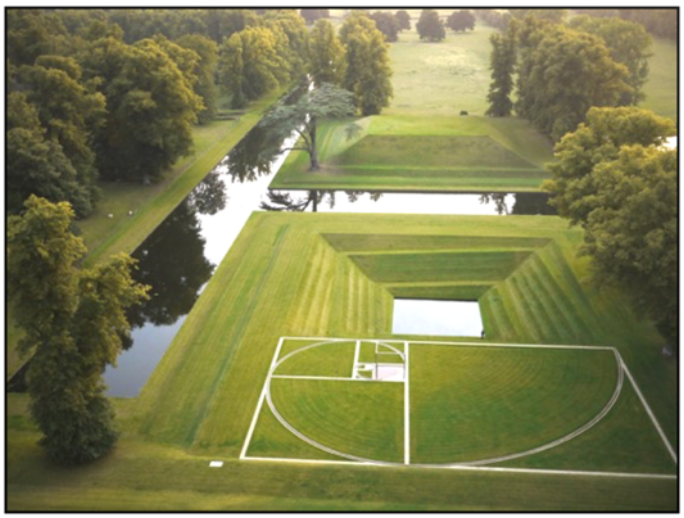


Figure 20. The trapezoidal Mount, Wilkie's Orpheus and the Fibonacci artform.

Judy Rossiter, March 2026

THE VISION FOR THE FENS RESERVOIR – DESIGNED TO BRING PEOPLE, NATURE AND WATER TOGETHER

After an excellent buffet lunch and a chance to discuss the morning's talks with each other, the Study Day audience settled down to hear Stuart Holmes and the futuristic Fens Reservoir. Stuart is the landscape lead within the LDA Design & Fereday Pollard Fens Reservoir Masterplanning team, working on behalf of Anglian Water and Cambridge Water. As a Landscape Architect working in major infrastructure, Stuart has been involved in the development of the Fens Reservoir masterplan for the last three years. Before specialising in major infrastructure, Stuart was involved in several Cambridgeshire projects including the development of a masterplan for Peterborough Station Quarter, the Peterborough City Centre public realm strategy and the landscape design for the King's College Cranmer Road residential campus in Cambridge.

The proposed new Fens Reservoir, a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project, will bring the largest and most dramatic change to the fenland landscape since the fens were drained from the 17C onwards. Stuart gave us an introduction to the complex design process that aims to ensure that the reservoir becomes integrated into the landscape as well as providing a valued public space. The major aim of the project is, of course, improving the region's resilience in the capture, storage and supply of water but other important objectives ensure that the design offers more than an isolated engineering structure. Key aspects of the project are to create an accessible landscape with recreational and cultural opportunities, that will lead to improvements in the health and wellbeing of the local population and have a positive impact on local economic prospects. A target is to attract 400,000 visitors a year. Creating more diverse environmental habitats with a biodiversity gain is also important.

Stuart outlined the UK's water problems: there is too much of it at the wrong time and too little when needed, with significant impact on agriculture and maintaining supply to the population. No new reservoirs have been built in the last 30 years and during that time the UK's population has increased by 10 million, with Cambridge and East Anglia seeing a lot of population growth. A new reservoir, which would be one of nine being planned by 2050, would capture and store water locally to help manage water in the face of longer, drier summers and less frequent and heavier rainfall whilst easing pressure on aquifers (helping to protect vulnerable chalk stream habitats) and support new development.

Most reservoirs in the UK are formed from flooded river valleys, such as the local Rutland and Grafham Waters, but this is not possible in the flat fenland landscape. To create the

capacity required for the Fens reservoir, embankments need to be built and water pumped into the enclosed area. Water will be abstracted from rivers when available, mainly when there is high flow and winter rainfall. This type of reservoir is called non-impounding, i.e. one that does not dam a natural watercourse. The new reservoir (Fig. 21), to be located between Chatteris and March, near to Doddington, Wimblington and Manea, will have a surface area of some 500 ha – not as large a footprint as Grafham Water (806 ha) but still a very significant area, holding some 55 billion litres (55,000,000 m^3) of water.

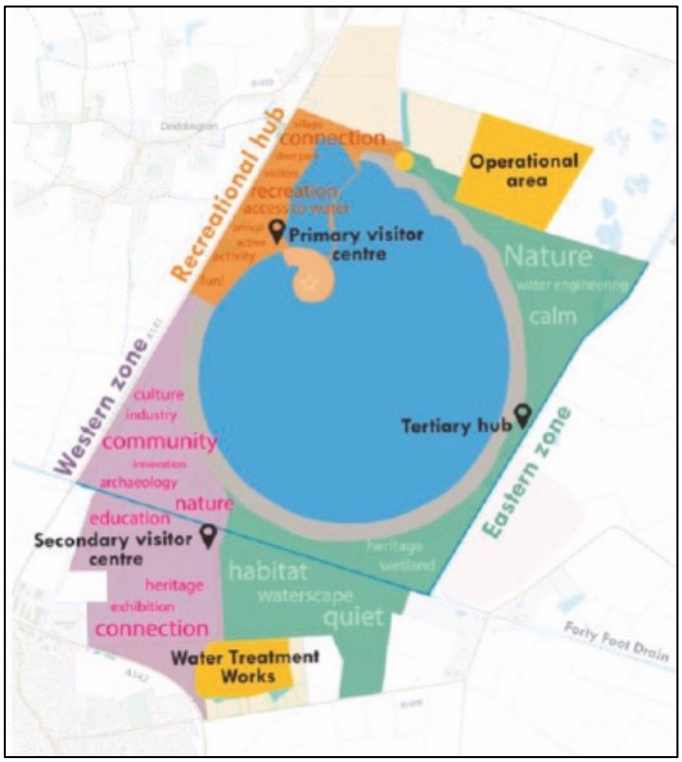


Figure 21. The consultation three-character area plan shows proposals for a recreational focus in the NW, with the western zone creating a multi-functional space providing habitat value, recreational function and active travel opportunities. To the east, habitat creation takes priority with passive recreation access limited to embankment slopes.

Stuart pointed out that while non-impounded reservoirs do exist, they are usually isolated from their surroundings by steep banks; this will be the first such reservoir to have high-quality land and water-based recreational and ecological enhancements as central objectives in the design phase.

The design process

In the flat fenland landscape, a structure with embankments of between c.6 m and c.15 m high cannot be hidden, but there is the opportunity to create a number of different shapes that could link with past activities in, and uses of, the area. To develop design proposals required a deep understanding of the area both historically and topographically. Research and surveys gave an understanding of the landscape character and ecology of the site and its setting, both in the past and the present.

The site sits across two distinct landscape character types: the Fen Isles that stand up to 10 m above the surrounding countryside, with more tree cover, and smaller, more organic field patterns often bounded by hedgerows, and the drained fen, a vast open landscape formed by man-made linear features. The design team considered many shape proposals, some of which closely referenced the two distinct landscape characters. Another approach was to create a distinct landmark that related to the history of the site as well as the clearly man-made, highly engineered landscape that it will sit within.

The design solution

Ground investigation boreholes have found many ammonite fossils in the bedrock clay – reflecting a geological time when this area lay under warm, shallow seas. Inspiration for the shape has been drawn from these ammonite fossils, creating a connection with the site's marine history. The circular geometry is also highly efficient for water storage and has a synergy with the linear drained fenland landscape, which is underpinned by engineering principles. In the north-west, where the ground is higher and less embankment material is required, the ammonite form maximises the extent of shoreline where it is most accessible. It is here, nearest to Doddington and Wimblington, where the main area for recreational activities will be developed, which includes a visitor centre, parking, play areas, paths and open grassland (Fig. 22). The eastern side of the site will be where habitat creation takes priority, aiming to form an important stepping stone habitat alongside the Middle Level drains which form a key habitat corridor between nationally and internationally important sites across the Fens.

The main recreational hub (Figs 21 & 22) will be adjacent to an enclosed lagoon within the reservoir – at 28 ha it will be slightly bigger than the watersports lake at Ferry Meadows. This will have access for boating, with beaches on the water side.

Figure 22. The proposals for the western recreational area include a separate, more-consistent water-level lagoon with a beach and elevated recreational spaces providing views over the water and inclusive access to the embankment from surrounding access points.

The embankment crest height is critical to the function and surveillance of the reservoir. The crest will therefore be a consistent height; however, the ammonite shell has inspired a sculptural approach to landform on the downstream face. This will reuse excavated site materials to create a rich and immersive visitor experience with paths that meander through diverse habitats, offering a varying relationship with the water's edge and framing wide views across the fenland landscape and toward Ely Cathedral.

Because of the characteristics of a non-impounding reservoir, there are limited opportunities for the creation of wetlands within the reservoir. However, beyond the toe of the embankment, much of the land sits below the water level

maintained in the adjacent existing perched watercourses, potentially providing an opportunity for large scale wetland creation (Fig. 23). The wetlands would provide net biodiversity gain and protected species mitigation and although public access will be limited in places, elsewhere they will be designed to be multi-functional, providing recreational spaces near Chatteris and active travel connections to the reservoir and between nearby settlements.

Figure 23. Artist's impression of how the proposed wetlands in the NE area may look.

The timeline

Such a massive project will take many years before it is completed, so no visits by Cambridgeshire Gardens Trust will be possible for a very long time. The earliest that the developers, Anglian Water and Cambridge Water, will be able to submit planning applications is 2027. Construction will take five to six years, and it will take an extended period of time for the reservoir to fill and much longer for the planting to mature and soften the landscape. The current schedule date for supply of water to our homes is 2036 –pop it into the calendar now!

Carol Meads, March 2026

FROM ONE GREAT PLAGUE TO ANOTHER – THE HISTORY OF THE SUPERB EUSTON HALL GARDEN

We closed our Study Day with a reprise of a fascinating Zoom talk that was given to members during the covid lockdown by Pippa and Steve Temple, who related their 2021 visit and joint research at Euston Hall. Sadly, Steve was diagnosed with terminal cancer last year and died in January, so replaying the talk was a wonderful opportunity to honour his memory. Steve was an extraordinarily gifted inventor with a passion for finding out how things worked, and had amassed an armful of patents dealing with the hydraulics of inkjets. Over many years, Pippa re-designed their garden at Impington Mill while Steve restored the mill to full working order and headed the Mill Section for the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. In the course of researching Euston Hall, Steve uncovered some historical mysteries regarding the Hall's water tower and hydraulic pumping system. We are grateful to Pippa for kindly giving us permission to use the edited recording.

Euston Hall was built for Lord Arlington (Fig. 24) in 1666, the second year of the Great Plague following the restoration of Charles II, and so Steve and Pippa noted similarities and differences in the epidemiology of the Great Plague from that of covid-19. In the talk, Pippa led by dealing with the land-scaping history by such minor players as John Evelyn, William Kent and Lancelot Brown, while Steve dealt with the really

Figure 24. Lord Arlington (1618-1685) who caused Euston Hall and the water mill to be constructed.

important issues of the hydrology of the lake and, in particular, the hydraulics of the enigmatic Euston Hall Water Mill.

The mill, as seen today, was built by William Kent in 1731 and resembles a tall, square church tower (Fig. 25) with battlements and Gothic windows, but it houses a 4-m undershoot water wheel. It replaced an earlier mill, supplied by water from a lake in John Evelyn's Pleasure Grounds. What grabbed Steve's attention was a quotation from John Evelyn in an old visitor leaflet that Pippa had retained. Evelyn's 1671 diary entry stated that the mill was used not just to grind corn but also to supply water to the Hall and the estate fountains. This was achieved by what Evelyn called 'a pretty engine', built by Sir Samuel Morland, to pump water some 15 m up to a header tank in the top of the mill's church tower.

Figure 25. Euston water mill built 1731 by Kent; the tower houses a large water tank supplying the Hall.

As a technology historian, Steve knew that the standard village lift pump of the time (Fig. 26) could not lift water up 15 m. However, Steve remembered that Samuel Morland had recently invented a new type of force pump (Fig. 27) capable of withstanding the high pressures involved in raising water to a significant height. The theory of the force pump (Fig. 27 left) had been known for centuries but nobody had succeeded in building one because of the difficulty in engineering a tight-fitting seal between piston and cylinder over the length of the cylinder; the metal-working lathe had not been invented. Morland's plunger force pump (Fig. 27 right) confined the sealing problem to only the entry point of the plunger into the

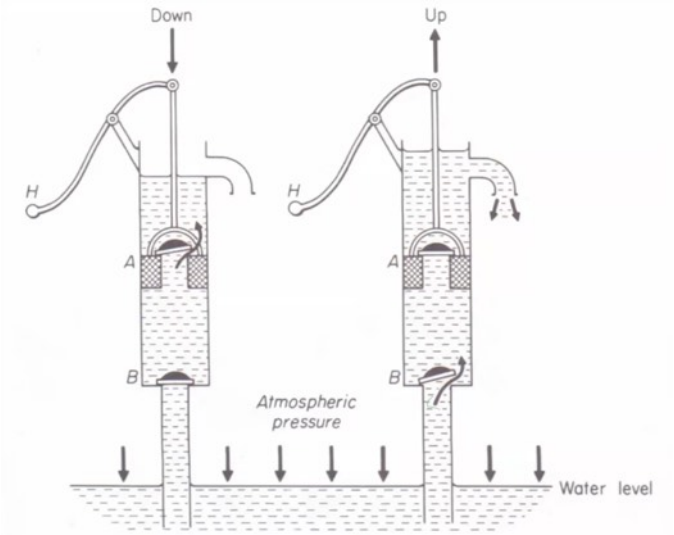


Figure 26. Village pump. On the upstroke (right) valve A closes and the upward movement of the piston lowers the pressure at B and in the pipe below, opening the valve and drawing water into the cylinder. However, the maximum possible height between B and the water level is 10 m because a 10-m water column balances atmospheric pressure.

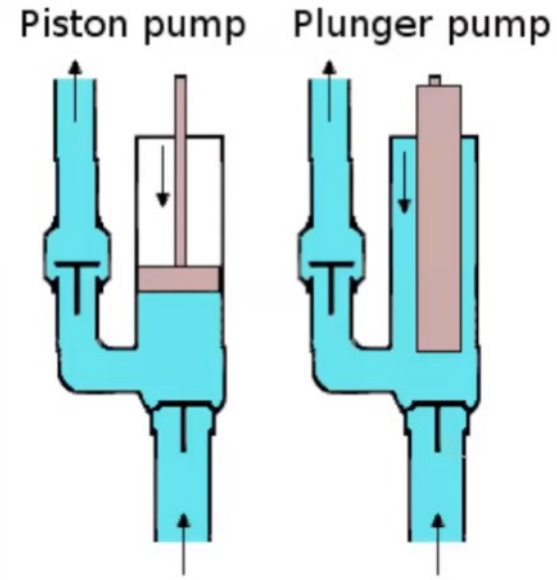


Figure 27. Two force pumps. Left: The piston downstroke can force water up to any height, in theory, but the technology to create a high-pressure seal between a piston and the full length of the cylinder did not exist until 19C. Right: Morland's plunger pump limited the required seal to the entry point of the plunger into the cylinder, achievable in the 17C.

cylinder, which could be addressed with greased string or leather. It turns out that Evelyn's 1671 diary entry was the earliest reference to Morland's pump, which Morland patented 4 years later in 1675. Steve's photo (Fig. 28) shows Morland's pump in operation.

But more was to come: according to the Easton Hall archives, Evelyn and Morland were assisted by an unnamed Flemish water engineer, later associated with creating a water supply for Versailles. In 1679, three Liègeois engineers, Arnold de Ville and brothers Paulus and Rennequin Sualem, won a competition to design a pumping system (Fig. 29) to take water from the river Seine at Marly, raise it 100 m and discharge it into a 6-km aqueduct to supply Louis XIV's fountains and water features at Versailles. The Marly Machine, as it was called, was probably a scaled-up version of the pumping system at Euston Hall, using 14 waterwheels, each 10 m in diameter,

Figure 28. Morland's 'pretty engine' in Euston Mill. The rotating horizontal shaft drives an eccentric wheel causing the vertical rod to rise and fall. The rocker bar transmits the motion to the pump rod. Photo by Steve Temple.

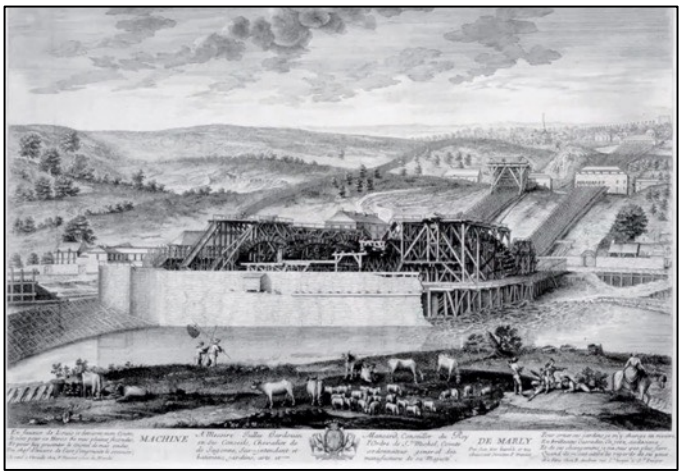


Figure 29. Engraving of Machine de Marly. Fourteen water wheels drive batteries of Morland pumps to raise water some 100 m to feed the aqueduct that takes the water to Versailles.

to drive batteries of Morland pumps. Steve believes that the mill at Euston Hall was the inspiration for the Marly Machine, and that Morland's invention was 'borrowed' by one of the Sualem brothers to do the job. Steve estimated that the whole system probably generated about 2MW of mechanical power which is pretty impressive for the time. Although Morland had patented his pump in 1675, history does not relate whether he received any royalties from the use of his technology at Marly. The Marly pumps operated for some 130 years and their modern replacements occupy the same place on the Seine bank.

The partnership between Steve's hydraulic technology research and Pippa's garden history not only provided a highly entertaining talk during the dark days of covid but it also pinned down the earliest mention of Morland's breakthrough pump and the likely connection between the Euston Hall water mill and the fountains at Versailles.

Phil Christie, April 2026

AGM LECTURE: IS THERE NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN?

THE 2025 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING was held on 15 November 2025 in the village hall at Hilton and, following the business of the day, members were treated to a comprehensive talk by CGT member, Liz Lake, who discussed how key characteristics of historic landscapes are reinterpreted in contemporary landscape design. Our roving reporter, Gin Warren, picks up the story.

A very perceptive question at the end of the session crystallised this event for me: it wasn't a lecture, it was a 'walk' round an exhibition, guided by an expert. I apologise I did not record who it was who asked whether there was a book version because it would be brilliant to give as a Christmas present. Yes! Filled with magnificent colour illustrations accompanied by the essential text, it would grace your coffee table well. You could dip into it while you waited for your drink to cool.

Liz used a structured approach to her subject matter, arranging the landscape features into nine major headings, such as First Impressions, Circulation and Typologies. Beneath each major heading were sub-groups such as Entrance Drive (under First Impressions), Raised Walk (under Circulation) and Courtyard (under Typologies). Depending on how you count them there were about thirty-five before-and-after pairs, triplets and quadruplets of images of landscape features. So we were invited to compare the visual effect of the ha-ha at Burghley House (Fig. 1) with an infinity pool on the roof of a hotel in Singapore (Fig. 2); a courtyard in Palma, Mallorca (Fig. 3) with another reclaimed from a polluted industrial site in Duisburg-Nord in the Ruhr (Fig. 4); Arundel Castle kitchen garden with its echo in the toxic soil at Duisburg-Nord; the mound at Kościuszko at Kraków with the now-dismantled Marble Arch Mound, and so on. This last-mentioned pair benefitted from Liz' pausing to spell out why, apart from a huge budget overrun, this last eyecatcher failed: ill-conceived design concept and lack of public engagement.

Figure 1. Brown's ha-ha at Burghley House. Photo Liz Lake.

Figure 2. The infinity pool at Marina Bay Sands, Singapore.

Photo Silas Khua. Licence CC BY-SA 2.0

Figure 3. A Palma courtyard. Photo Liz Lake.

Figure 4. A courtyard in Duisburg-Nord. Photo Liz Lake.

Otherwise, it was a hugely stimulating whirl of interesting images, which left the impression that if there is one place on Continental Europe that you didn't know you needed to visit for your landscape education it's the 'urban oasis' of the Landschaftspark[1] at Duisburg-Nord, which featured in several 'after' images. The rewilding of a large, polluted, redundant industrial site is impressive both visually and ecologically.

Liz concluded that many features of historic landscapes are being re-interpreted in contemporary design with flair and imagination and in a more egalitarian way to benefit the public. She felt that richness comes when features are used in combination and that new parks give opportunity to exploit historic concepts but there are not enough new parks being created. So, thank you, Liz, for having compiled such an extensive collection of images of all sorts of landscapes and their features. And thank you for sharing them with us, antiphonally. A veritable visual psalm!

Gin Warren, November 2025

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Landschaftspark_Duisburg-Nord

THE GARDENS OF POMPEII UNEARTHED – AND BROUGHT TO LIFE: CGT MARGARET HELME CHRISTMAS LECTURE 2025

WE WERE DELIGHTED that Gillian Hovell, 'The Muddy Archaeologist', could give our Margaret Helme[1] Christmas lecture in person, following on from an entertaining Zoom talk in 2020. Gillian wanted to add to the long list of 'what the Romans did for us', by demonstrating that the private gardens of Roman householders provided a stylistic model that Renaissance and later gardens adopted and adapted to shape the gardens that we recognise today. These Roman gardens were designed to be an essential part of social, commercial, private and public life of the householder and his or her family. Gillian revealed that other gardens of the ancient world were developed for many different reasons – the various needs of temples, places where funerary rites were held, and to demonstrate the power of ruling houses – and have had more nuanced influence on the design of modern gardens. In the 2,000-year-old gardens of Pompeii can be found familiar elements such as enclosed courtyards, topiary, flowers, water features, pathways as well as vistas and kitchen gardens.

The affluent town of Pompeii, obliterated by the volcanic eruption of Vesuvius in AD79, was first excavated in the 18C and the remains of buildings and frescoes discovered indicated that gardens were an important part of life in the town. The Romans' love of gardens had been known previously through the writings of Pliny the Elder (AD 23/24-79) on natural history, including the design and uses of gardens as well as the plants grown. Pliny wrote, perhaps with nostalgia, that *at Rome the garden itself was the poor man's farm; the common folk provisioned themselves from a garden; how much more harmless their way of life was then!* But life as a farmer was tough and tough farmers made tough soldiers. Pliny's manuscripts, first printed in 1469, became widely known and influenced Renaissance ideas of garden design and, in turn, these ideas were adopted by owners of stately homes in the UK. Recent archaeological excavations and studies have revealed many features that flesh out the knowledge of what these gardens looked like and how they were used.

Gillian took us on a tour of some of the gardens (Fig. 1) and their striking features. It was not difficult to imagine that you were walking through the atrium of the House of Pansa (Fig. 2), by a shallow pool once painted with fish, into a shady, colonnaded courtyard. The enclosed space had no windows onto the street and gave the impression of a private peaceful area for relaxation and, to the invited guests, it would be apparent that this was an affluent household with good taste.

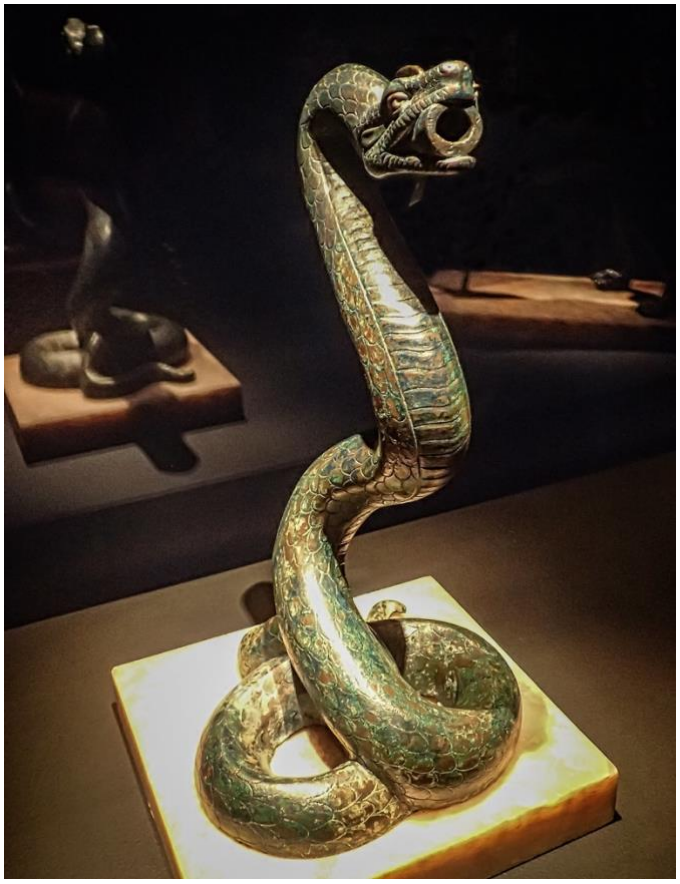
Figure 1. Map of Pompeii, green rectangles indicate known gardens within the walls of the town. Figure © Gillian Hovell, The Muddy Archaeologist.

Figure 2. The peristyle House of Pansa, which had a shallow fish pool. Photo by Wildmountainscene.

Figure 3. The House of the Vettii, with its central garden, included complex plumbing. Photo by Argo Navis.

The opulent House of the Vettii (Fig. 3) illustrates the wealth of Pompeii. Two grand colonnaded gardens had a complex system of water channels and 12 fountains that required sophisticated plumbing and would have demonstrated the high status of the owners, brothers who had become rich through trade. Statues and wonderful frescoes depicted a mythical world where gods were revered, and erotic fertility symbols abounded. The snake was thought of as a guardian spirit of the household and, because of its ability to appear from the ground, it was associated with fertility, rebirth and connections with ancestors. In the House of the Citharist there is a giant bronze snake (Fig. 4) with a fountain jet coming out of its mouth – part of an assemblage of bronze sculptures shown attacking a wild boar. Ivy was associated with Bacchus, the god

[1]*Margaret Helme, who passed away in June 2018, very generously left a legacy to CGT and this funds an annual memorial lecture in her name.*



Licence CC BY 2.0

Figure 4. Bronze snake with water-jet from the House of the Citharist. Photo by Mary Harrsch.

of wine, fertility and festivities and in the House of Octavius Quartio there were ivy-covered trellises (Fig. 5) alongside the dining area, encouraging people to feast.

Licence CC BY 3.0

Figure 5. Euripi (channels), vistas, trellises, and clipped ivy at the House of Octavius Quartio. Photo Magistermercator.

Pompeiian gardens reflected the Romans' love of order and control – symbolising their dominion over the wild world. The poet Statius praised a garden, writing c.90 CE: *Here nature has favoured a place, here she has been excelled and, having been conquered by cultivation, she has yielded and been tamed to gentle ways not known before.* The power of the Roman empire also ensured that a ready supply of trees, plants and crops was brought in from far-away places. In the rich soil of Pompeii plants grew well and the *topiarii* – who designed and maintained gardens and shaped the hedges and trees – gave their name to the art of topiary.

Modern methods of research have provided fascinating details about the ancient species of plants cultivated in the

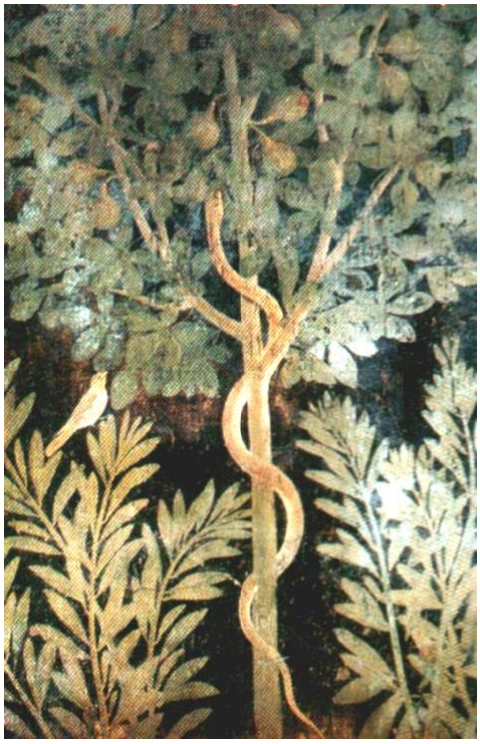


Figure 6. Snake in a fruit tree at the House of the Orchard.

Pompeiian gardens. Plaster casts of decayed root forms, like lost-wax moulds in the volcanic ash, pollen and carbonised seeds have now been identified, corroborating the visual images that appear in frescoes including olives, vines, daphnes, box, laurels, ivy and fruit trees. Frescoes in the House of the Orchard (Fig. 6) depict lush gardens with palms, shrubs and fruit trees, such as lemon, fig cherry, pear, plum and pomegranate. To get a real-life view of what Roman gardens may have looked like Gillian recommends the frescoes in the House of Livia in Rome: flowers and trees are depicted in accurate detail with 30 different species of birds flying through the tree canopy. In the House of Dioscuri in Pompeii, brackets to hold netting have been discovered around a courtyard that could have formed an aviary. Commercial gardens – *hortuli* – were also in existence and these were known to have supplied roses and violets, plants prized for their beauty, but these also had practical uses. Roses were used in making scent, and violas were thought to prevent hangovers. Inhabitants of Pompeii also needed plants for food and medicine, and many had kitchen gardens and orchards as well as vineyards.

For those who would like to see a 'living' version of a Roman garden, you would have to travel to The Getty Villa in California, where four Roman-inspired gardens have been created, or visit Fishbourne Roman Palace in Sussex where the gardens have been recreated.

I think that we would agree that Cicero put it well, writing that if you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need. Gillian clarified that a more accurate translation of the famous quote is 'if you have a garden in your library, nothing is lacking' – as the Roman garden was designed for thinking, philosophising and serious discussion.

Roman gardens have been important sources of style ideas that have echoed down to our own times, and prompts the question, briefly touched in Gillian's introduction and worth a whole new talk, what influences did the Romans draw on?

Carol Meads, December 2025

THE CGT SMALL GRANTS SCHEME

MEMBERS WILL BE AWARE of the Small Grants Scheme, whereby the Trust seeks to further its charitable objects by making financial grants to fund projects which are consistent with our goals. The Scheme has two rounds of funding every year and we will soon be evaluating applications received in Round 10, which closes on 30 June (full details may be found on the Outreach page of the website). Initially launched for a period of 5 years, the Scheme has disbursed over £3,000 and, from time to time, we like to feature projects that have been funded through the Scheme so that members can see where surpluses raised from events and visits actually go. This time we feature a Round 9 award of £500 made to Ashbeach Primary Forest School.

ASHBEACH PRIMARY FOREST SCHOOL – GROWING OUTDOOR LEARNING.

Thanks to the support of the Cambridgeshire Gardens Trust Small Grants Scheme, Ashbeach Primary School has been able to further develop its Forest School provision in the School Common – a natural green space within the school grounds used for outdoor learning and exploration.

The grant has helped us purchase a range of hands-on resources to enrich our Forest School sessions, including wildlife habitats and bird feeding stations, small-world play resources, and equipment to safely introduce children to fire lighting and outdoor cooking. These activities help pupils connect with nature while developing confidence, curiosity, and practical skills.

Thanks to resources funded through grants such as this, more and more of our 138 pupils are now able to access and benefit from Forest School sessions. The new resources have been particularly valuable during our weekly Forest School sessions for children with special educational needs. Outdoor learning offers a calming environment that supports sensory exploration, emotional regulation and teamwork.

The School Common is maintained with the help of parents, staff and community volunteers, who regularly give their time to care for the space so that it remains safe, welcoming, and rich in wildlife. The grant has helped us enhance this environment and expand opportunities for children to learn about nature, conservation, and the outdoors. We are very grateful to CGT for supporting this project and helping us create a richer outdoor learning experience for our school community.

Figure 1. Ashbeach children acclimatising to the woodland environment.

Figure 2. Fire lighting requires the use of safety gloves.

Figure 3. Hand augers create holes in slices of branch...

Figure 4. ...to make into a bug hotel.

Louise Fröhlich, Ashbeach Virtual Assistant, March 2026

A MASTERCLASS ON SNOWDROPS – 21 JANUARY 2026

WHAT A WONDERFUL WAY to start our new year with the CGT, having a January lecture in Coton Village Hall on snowdrops, the plant of the month. And what treasures they were too. Lady Lavinia Nourse, one of our Patrons, arranged the lecture with Joe Sharman (Fig. 1) who runs his own famous nursery, Monksilver, specialising in snowdrops. The Monksilver website[1] says that the nursery offers a collection of new varieties and old resurrected varieties that are rarely found in catalogues. Interesting varieties do not come cheap, and Joe announced that in 2022 one bulb of *Galanthus plicatus* 'Golden Tears' sold for £1,850. This was a living plant and not an ornament fashioned in gold. Luckily, he had many more varieties much more reasonably priced, and sales were rapid at the end of the lecture.

Figure 1. Joe Sharman, galanthophile and founder of Monksilver nursery. Photo © Monksilver Nursery.

It was an absolute delight to sit back and listen to an expert so obviously enthralled by his subject, so well versed in every aspect of their origins, breeding and development and able to convey it all with great charm and fluency, without the aid of the ubiquitous PowerPoint. Joe, a proud snowdrop obsessive, is self-taught, gaining his immense knowledge of all aspects of the *Galanthus* genus, through years of collecting and breeding fascinating variants but also through getting together with other collectors to share information and swap plants. Primrose Warburg (1920-1996), a famous and generous galanthophile, used to hold snowdrop parties, and invitations were much prized. Joe has written, lectured and broadcast extensively on horticulture, plant collecting and, especially, on snowdrops.

The lecture started at nursery school level with the botanical basics, and it was not long before we were all grateful for these details as they proved to be essential for identifying the huge variation that has arisen from years of hybridisation. Snowdrops belong to the genus *Galanthus* (derived from the Greek for milk flower) and there are over 2,500 different cultivars, all originating from *G. nivalis* with narrow leaves (Fig. 2), *G. plicatus* with broader folded or pleated leaves (Fig. 4), *G. elwesii* with broad leaves wrapping round each other at the base (Fig. 7), and *G. gracilis* with twisted leaves.

Figure 2. Galanthus nivalis. Photo Janet Probyn.

None of these is native to Britain and it is possible they came to our shores with the Romans or monks but they have certainly been here for a very long time. *G. plicatus* snowdrops, native to the Crimea, were recognised as a separate species in 1583 by the herbalist Carolus Clusius (1526–1609). It is thought that soldiers returning from the Crimean War in the mid-19C brought home a lot of *G. plicatus* bulbs. The botanist John Gerard (1545-1612) wrote about snowdrops in his 1597 book, *The Herball, or, Generall Historie of Plantes*.

In the wild, snowdrops are always found within an ecological community of other species that thrive in the same conditions. Despite not producing much pollen, they hybridise naturally and many varieties arose in the wild. Snowdrops are now widely naturalised in Britain, but they grow in a manner different from those in their native habitats of Europe and the eastern Mediterranean: there they flower freely in evenly spread carpets, rather than in clumps that we are familiar with in this country. Birds scratching around the roots of snowdrop clumps spread the bulbs widely, hence the glorious sites we associate with drifts of them across a forest floor or country churchyard, where they are undisturbed (Fig. 3).

However, the subjects of our lecture, the rare and exotic, will never be found in such numbers. Evidently, some are tricky to grow, even for the experts, and very choice varieties demand to be displayed where their unique characteristics can be

[1] https://www.monksilvernursery.co.uk/

Figure 3. Snowdrop bank at Easton Walled Garden. Photo Jane Sills.

appreciated. We are familiar with Auricula Theatres but don't often see snowdrops displayed this way; however, close inspection is the only way to appreciate the subtleties of all the minute variations.

Joe's photographs of a selection of rare cultivars demonstrated the wide variety of form and one could see how tempting it would be to collect as many variants as possible, or money would allow. The prices of some highly desirable cultivars reflect how prized they are, and these prices reflect the many years it takes to develop a desirable plant from a chance mutation or selective breeding.

Gardening has always been an important part of Joe's life but his exalted snowdrop career started with a chance to obtain a bulb of a rare yellow snowdrop, spotted by his mother in 1985 at the site of the Iron Age hill fort of Wandlebury Ring in Cambridgeshire. This proved to be a strongly growing variant of *G. plicatus*, unlike other yellow snowdrops which were often very weak. Joe asked Bill Clark, the site's warden, for a bulb, Bill kept one himself, another was given to the Cambridge Botanic Garden (the CBG's Snowdrop Trail still lists it as growing there) and the rest were sold to a Dutch nursery for £1,000. The snowdrop was given the name of *G. plicatus* 'Wendy's Gold' (Fig. 4) after the warden's wife.

Unfortunately for the Dutch a disaster struck, and all the bulbs were lost, so Joe had the opportunity to breed from his one bulb to create a marketable stock – and this caused a frenzy of demand. Galanthophiles are nothing if not determined to get their hands on new varieties. The interest in 'Wendy's Gold' led to Joe being invited to join a snowdrop swapping club and his career as 'Mr Snowdrop' took off. His keen eye for interesting and rare characteristics has enabled him to spot offspring from promiscuous crossings that offer the opportunity to breed a wider variety of colours and forms. It took Joe ten years to breed another very desirable yellow form which he

Figure 4. Galanthus plicatus 'Wendy's Gold'. *Photo Penny Price.*

named *G. plicatus* 'Golden Fleece', with its wonderfully flared flower form.

Joe pointed out that many impressive snowdrop varieties and collections have a connection with Cambridgeshire. Anglesey Abbey is renowned for having in its winter garden one of the finest collections in the country, with over 500 varieties. The variety *G. nivalis* 'Anglesey Abbey' originated in the Fairhaven garden at the Abbey; indeed, it is one of several snowdrops associated with the estate including the cultivars 'Richard Ayres' (Fig. 5), 'Lady Fairhaven' and 'Ailwyn' (the latter two are considered synonymous: Fig. 6).

Figure 5. Galanthus 'Richard Ayres'. *Photo Penny Price.*

James Sanders, who ran a nursery, flower and seed shop in Cambridge (at 22 Trumpington Street) in the mid-19C spotted

Figure 6. Galanthus 'Ailwyn', named after CGT President Lord Fairhaven and considered by the RHS to be synonymous with 'Lady Fairhaven'. *Photo Mary James.*

a yellow form of snowdrop on a visit to Northumberland. He took bulbs home to propagate and sent samples to Reverend Henry Harpur-Crewe, a famous 19C galanthophile, who named them *G. nivalis* 'Sandersii Group.

Many snowdrops – such as the species *G. gracilis* - come from mountainous areas of Turkey and this means that they prefer a wet Spring (mimicking snow melt) and hot, dry summers. This makes snowdrops perfect for the increasingly hot summers that we are facing.

Some particular favourites that Joe covered include: *G.* 'John Gray', a hybrid for sunny winter spots; *G. elwesii* 'John Tomlinson', with enormous flowers and late season flowering; *G. nivalis* 'Scharlockii', with green tipped flowers; *G. nivalis* 'Quad', with inner and outer whorls of four floral parts, rather than three, appearing as a double; *G. nivalis* 'Angelique', distinct and elegant with all flowers parts nearly uniform in length, was discovered in an old garden in Normandy and named for the late daughter of Madame le Bellegard; Autumn-flowering *G. reginae-olgae*, with leaves developing after the flowers – a good adaptation to cope with climate change. A favourite of the audience was *G.* 'Grumpy' – an *elwesii* variety that has an unmistakable cross expression with two green eyes and a downturned mouth on its inner segments (Fig. 7).

Figure 7. Galanthus elwesii 'Grumpy'. *Photo Mark Wilkinson.*

Although snowdrops can be easy to grow and increase in numbers, they do have some threats which, besides climate change, include the narcissus bulb fly (*Merodon equestris*) and swift moth (*Korscheltellus lupulina*) that will lay their eggs on snowdrops and their larvae will completely eat the bulbs. Grey mould, botrytis, and many viruses can also cause serious problems.

As if we had not been convinced already about his obsessive interest in all things *Galanthus*, to end his lecture Joe gave us a taste of his collection of snowdrop artefacts and ephemera. Who knew that you could get kitchen towels and toilet paper imprinted with snowdrop designs?

Judy Rossiter & Carol Meads, January 2026

References

Joe recommended this most comprehensive book on snowdrops:

Bishop, M., Davis, A. & Grimshaw, J. 2006. *Snowdrops: a monograph of cultivated Galanthus*. Maidenhead, Griffin Press, 364pp, ISBN: 978-0954191603.

Figure 7. Galanthus 'inherited with the garden'. Photo Rosemary Way.

PROGRAMME OF VISITS AND EVENTS 2026

We invite members to evaluate prevailing covid advice and to consider whether participation in an event is appropriate for them. If members would like to suggest visit locations, please do contact via the admin email below.

MAY	26 Tues	2:00pm for 2:15pm	**Visit**: to the wonderful waterfront gardens of Fullers Mill, West Stow, Bury St Edmunds IP28 6HD. Seven-acre garden created by Bernard Tickner (1924 – 2017) who, from 1958, spent 50 years transforming scrub and woodland into a delightful landscape of shrubs, perennials, lilies and marginal plants along the River Lark. Meet at 2:00pm for 2:15pm introduction by Head Gardener Annie Delbridge, followed by a tour. Refreshments are available but not included in the entry, which is £13 for members/£15 for guests.
JUNE	11 Thurs	10:30am-1:00pm (approx.)	**Tour:** of the gardens of CGT members Catherine and Darby Dennis at Walcot Hall, Barnack PE9 3EU, with an introduction by Catherine. The historic gardens surrounding the Carolean Grade-I house have been developed over the years and feature different levels looking over the lawns, garden buildings such as temples and a rotunda, formal canal and water features and a fine double avenue of limes. Members £18/guests £20 to include refreshments on arrival. Please see website for further details.
JUNE	24 Weds	2:00pm-4:30pm	**Visit** to the churchyard at St Peter's, Offord D'Arcy, to see the environmental improvements supporting biodiversity and wildflower planting. This work, partly funded by CGT, has won a Wildlife Trust award. The meadow will be enriched in 2026 with seed from King's College. The Friends of St Peter's will open the lovely church, and CGT members Janet Bedingfield and Julie Angell will be on hand to talk about what has been achieved. There will also be an opportunity to visit Janet's own garden where there will be refreshments. Entry £14 for members/£16 for guests; bookings by 17 June please.
JULY	16 Thurs	1:00pm-3:00pm	**Visit** to Benton End, Hadleigh, Suffolk IP7 5JR. Benton End, now operated by the Garden Museum, is a Grade II* listed 16C half-timbered house, home of artists Cedric Morris and his partner Arthur Lett-Haines for four decades from 1940, where they set up an arts school and created a famous garden; one of the first modern gardens of naturalistic design. Entry £18 for members/£20 for guests. Further details will be on the website.
AUGUST	18 Tues	10:30am-4:30pm	**Summer Social double visit**: Crow's Hall, Debenham, IP14 6NG. Island gardens with borders of summer colour, heritage roses, smooth lawns and neat box hedging. Planting by Xa Tollemache set within a 16C moat, gracing three sides of the manor house. Coffee on arrival, tours of house and grounds, and buffet lunch. In the afternoon we move to Columbine Hall, Stowupland IP14 4AT. A moated mediaeval manor house with a 1993 redesign by George Carter. Garden visit with tea and cakes. Package for both visits: £60 members/£65 guests including coffee, lunch and tea.
SEPTEMBER	15 Tues	TBC	**Visit** to Pampisford Hall arboretum CB22 3EZ. Formal gardens, pleasure grounds and parkland covering about 60 ha. Planted between 1820-1870 the gardens, noted for their collection of conifers, have been enthusiastically restored. Full details to follow.
OCTOBER	7 Weds	10:30am-12:30am	**Visit** to Boughton House, Kettering NN14 1BJ. A follow-on from the Study Day, to see the 21C water landscaping of Kim Wilkie and Lance Goffort. Members £17/ Guests £19 to include coffee/tea and biscuits.
NOVEMBER	7 Sat	11:00am for 11:30am	**AGM & lecture**: at Hilton Village Hall, Grove End, Hilton PE28 9PF. The AGM starts at 11:30am, followed by a talk and then a light lunch. Full details to follow.

(For up-to-date details please go to https://cambridgeshiregardenstrust.org.uk)

Our preferred method of booking is by BACS transfer to **our new account** Cambridgeshire Gardens Trust (sort code 30-99-50, account number 80635768) using your name as reference; please confirm payment by email to admin@cambridgeshiregardenstrust.org.uk. Cheques, **payable to Cambridgeshire Gardens Trust,** to Judith Christie, Teal Cottage, Fen Drayton CB24 4SH.
To avoid disappointment (some venues limit numbers), please book at least 2 weeks before the visit, where possible.
Should you need to cancel a booking, please advise admin@cambridgeshiregardenstrust.org.uk as early as possible.