

The University of Oxford

109

# Botanic Garden & Arboretum

Friends'  
newsletter

*Celebrating  
400 years*

Autumn/Winter 2021/22





# From the Editor

By Chris Thorogood

On 25th July we celebrated the 400th anniversary of the Botanic Garden, launching a year-long programme of celebratory events encompassing history, horticulture, botanical science, and the health and wellbeing benefits associated with plants and gardens. These themes feature prominently in this special edition of the Friends' Newsletter. As does the Oxford Physic Rose, a beautiful new rose announced on the celebratory day by Professor Simon Hiscock alongside rose breeder Ian Limmer of Peter Beales Roses Ltd. This is a germane legacy for a garden established as a Physic Garden on Rose Lane, Oxford! In late July, the rose featured in a beautiful head dress designed by milliner Lyn Oswin of Enchanted Floristry, as you can see on p.10. The rose will be launched officially at the Chelsea Flower Show in 2022.

A key celebratory activity this year is an inaugural online symposium called 'Celebrating Botanic Gardens: Past, Present and Future' on 21st-22nd October. During this public symposium, we will share our successes - such as those that feature in this newsletter - with our partner gardens around the globe; in turn we will learn about the work they do, and how we can work together on botanical research, education, conservation and horticulture. This symposium replaces the annual 'Autumn Science Lectures'. Meanwhile we plan to hold our annual 'Winter Lectures' in person

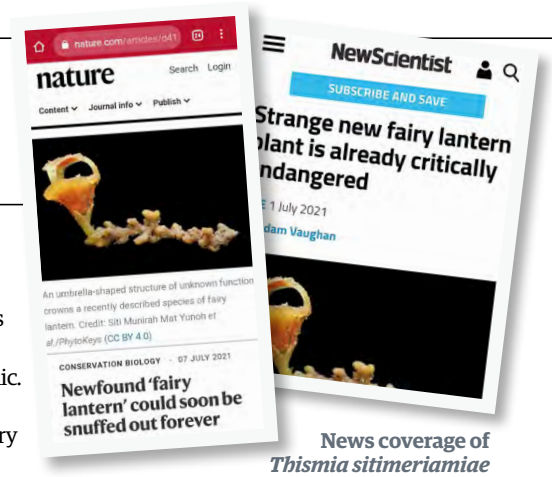
*Michauxia campanuloides*



in Oxford once again, from January 2022. Do check the website and e-bulletins for updates on the lectures and other courses which are steadily returning in the wake of the pandemic.

Each year, the University of Oxford's Gardens, Libraries and Museums (GLAM) carry out 'Audience Finder surveys'. These help us to understand our visitors' motivations for visiting, their demographic profile, and their experiences during their visits. During the pandemic, these surveys (like so many things) were undertaken online, via our ticketing system. We received 1280 responses. The data from the Garden indicate a higher number of visitors with children, fewer international tourists (unsurprisingly), and shorter visits (under one and a half hours) than before the pandemic. Meanwhile the data from the Arboretum indicate a local demographic who visit because of word of mouth. These data confirm that we have more to do to increase awareness of and access to the Arboretum - which is exactly what we plan to do.

Whether they travelled from near or far, our visitors this summer enjoyed a taste of the Mediterranean in the newly planted Rock Garden. In May and June, rocky crevices gleamed with jewel-like alpines, and by midsummer, *Michauxia campanuloides* sent out hundreds of its peculiar flowers, like white lanterns strung up over the rocks. Many of the plants in the Rock Garden are new to the Botanic Garden's collection, and represent a 'living legacy' of the Flora Graeca, as explained in the previous issue of the Newsletter. Horticultural breakthroughs didn't end there: parasitic plants from Japan and rare Middle Eastern and Canary Island endemics all prospered behind the scenes; do read about all that our talented propagator Russell Beeton has been achieving on p. 7.



Under glass, our expanding collections of carnivorous pitcher plants and giant Amazonian water lilies have supported research carried out with other scientists in Oxford, linked to identifying technological applications. And further afield, we worked with scientists from the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia to describe a new species of 'fairy lantern' (p.15). The conservation status of the plant is Critically Endangered, indeed it may already be extinct. Such discoveries convey important messages about the urgent need to understand the diversity of plants that exists so that we may conserve it. The fairy lantern, unknown to science before this year, featured in Nature and New Scientist and was seen by millions around the world.

We look forward to the annual blaze of autumn colour at the Arboretum. Do check our 'What's on' <https://www.obga.ox.ac.uk/whats-on/#/> page for the assorted courses taking place here; they will include tree identification, hedge-laying and coppicing. Next year we will resume our wellbeing-related courses including yoga and forest-bathing which we plan to develop a hub for in future years.

This is an exciting year for the Botanic Garden and Arboretum. And during the celebrations, and our reflections upon four centuries of history, we continue to look to the future: explaining the importance of plants to people in the face of global challenges. At 400 years old, the Botanic Garden has never been more important than it is today.

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Ian Limmer (Left) with Prof Simon Hiscock (Right) and the Oxford Physic Rose



# From the Director

By Simon Hiscock

Celebrating the Botanic Garden's 400th anniversary during a pandemic has been challenging. Nevertheless, despite all the restrictions, the summer 2021 was certainly one to remember, most notably for the visit on June 8th of HRH Prince Charles, Prince of Wales. Arriving through the Danby Gate on a glorious sunny day, our royal Patron was greeted by the Vice Chancellor, me and the Chairman of the Friends before being taken on a tour of the Garden. Brief stops were made at the whitty pear, Bobart's yew and the Rock Garden before arriving at the eastern end of the Literary Garden where the Prince planted a black pine grown from seed collected from the original 'Tolkien Pine' that grew in the same spot from the 1830s until 2014. He then met with staff and learned about some of the botanical treasures of the glasshouses from the Deputy Director. Everyone who spoke to the Prince was impressed by his knowledge of plants and horticulture and by his genuine interest in the Garden (and Arboretum, which he expressed an interest in visiting in the future). Before departing, gifts - an Oxford Physic Rose and a bottle of Physic Gin - were

presented to the Prince by two of our apprentices. On receiving the Physic Gin, the Prince beckoned to one of his aides who passed him a bag from which he produced a bottle of Highgrove Gin, presenting it to me to much amusement.

Just ahead of the Royal visit, on June 4th the Garden received a visit from G7 Health Ministers attending a medical conference in Oxford. The Ministers and representatives of the NHS, WHO and EU each planted a Japanese cherry (Sakura) tree in remembrance of those who had died of Covid-19. This historic visit acknowledged the founding of the Botanic Garden as a Physic Garden for teaching medical students about plants used in herbal medicine and recognised the importance of the Garden and Arboretum as spaces for people's mental health and wellbeing.

On July 25th, the anniversary of the day the Garden was founded in 1621, a group of -50 staff, patrons, Friends and donors gathered to



**G7 Health Ministers planting Japanese cherry (Sakura) trees in the Botanic Garden to remember lives lost to Covid-19 around the world**

celebrate in the company of the Chancellor, Lord Patten of Barnes (President of the Friends), who later planted a handkerchief tree (*Davidia involucrata*) at the eastern edge of the



**HRH Prince Charles, Prince of Wales visiting Oxford Botanic Garden in June**





From L to R: Director, Professor Simon Hiscock, Curator Mark Brent, Chancellor Chris Patten planting a handkerchief tree (*Davidia involucrata*)

Events Lawn to mark the occasion. The Oxford Physic Rose was then launched (softly) by the Director and Ian Limmer, Head Rose Breeder at Peter Beales Roses Ltd. At 1.30pm the public were admitted to the Garden and, following speeches from the Chancellor and me, at 2pm the bells of Magdalen College rang out to mark the exact time the founding stone was laid in 1621, and to launch of a year of celebrations for the 400th anniversary. This began

immediately with the release, online, of a special 400th celebration song-poem, 'The Same Blackbird' by Alice Oswald and Stevie Wishart (see: <https://obga.web.ox.ac.uk/alice-oswald-same-blackbird>).

And on July 30th, to round off our celebrations, there was a special celebratory concert by the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment (OAE) at the Museum of Natural History, performed to an audience of 50, and recorded for later release. The



Oxford Physic Rose

concert by eight violins focused on music from the 17th century and included new arrangements created especially for the occasion to launch OBGAs Season Partnership with the OAE.

These new musical arrangements and the Oxford Physic Rose are lasting legacies of the 400th, and others will follow, including: a new song cycle by Cheryl Frances-Hoad and Kate Wakeling inspired by the Botanic Garden and commissioned by the Oxford Lieder Festival and OBGAs, a 400th anniversary 'Black Pine Whisky' created with the Oxford Artisan Distillery - 400 bottles each accompanied by either a coaster tray or presentation box made with wood from the original black pine, and a further poem by Alice Oswald - the Garden's response to the Blackbird, to end our year of celebration in July 2022. These legacies will endure far longer than our memories of the celebrations and I hope some may even feature when the Garden celebrates its 500th anniversary.



Emma-Jane Lewis

The Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment (OAE)



© Sarah Gillespie/blackbird

'The Same Blackbird', a celebratory poem by Alice Oswald and Stevie Wishart



# News from the Garden

By Mark Brent

The rather lacklustre spring and abbreviated summer brings to mind a musing on the seasons by A.A. Milne 'The Year is arranged badly. Why should the days begin to get shorter at the moment when summer is fully arrived? Why should the evenings be drawing in when we are still having strawberries for tea? Already the oak trees have taken on an autumn look...' No sooner had summer started in the Botanic Garden, than autumn began to arrive in the trees. As I write this in September, the Katsura tree (*Cercidiphyllum japonica*) is beginning to emit its familiar caramel scent.

Fortunately the weather has been kind to us at the right moments during our 400th anniversary year, for example when HRH Prince of Wales visited the Botanic Garden in June. It was an honour and a privilege to be able to give a tour of the Garden to our patron. We take pride in the standard of the Garden, and on the day it was immaculate; I was immensely proud of the whole horticultural team. It was also pristine when we hosted the G7 Health Ministers for a tree planting to commemorate Oxford University's role during the pandemic later in June.

I would like to extend my thanks to our Friends, and all those who have given us support and encouragement throughout



*Dracunculus vulgaris* in flower in the Rock Garden

a particularly challenging time. I hope you have been able to enjoy the Garden as much as our celebrated guests. I don't doubt that there will be challenges ahead but for now, the Garden has recovered its pre-pandemic vitality and there is a feeling of optimism throughout the collections.

The Rock Garden in particular is flourishing under the care of Russell Beeton. Russell joined Chris Thorogood and

me in delivering a tour for the Mediterranean Plants and Gardens group. In the last few weeks Russell has added a further 100 species to the Rock Garden collection, extending its coverage from eastern to western Mediterranean.



*Michauxia campanuloides* in flower in the Rock Garden



The Walled Garden on July 25th, the anniversary of the day the Botanic Garden



Returning to A.A. Milne, another apposite quote comes to mind 'Weeds are flowers too, once you get to know them.' The pandemic has given many a chance to reconsider our immediate environment, and the importance of the wildlife on our doorstep. Our Botanic Garden's conservation programme supports the recovery of rare native species. Jim Penney has been working with local stakeholders to re-establish vulnerable plants in appropriate locations around Oxfordshire.

At the end of September, our apprentice Laura Quinlan will complete her apprenticeship and will be taking the next steps in her career. Laura has been exceptional and we all wish her well. Joining us are two new apprentices, Jack Willerton and Lucy Hoggett who will undertake the 'Ann Sowerby Horticultural apprenticeship' and the '1621 Horticultural apprenticeship' respectively over the next two years. We also look forward to Toby Warren joining us at the beginning of October as the new Botanical Horticulturalist. Toby is a very experienced horticulturalist who has trained at Cambridge Botanic Garden and RHS Wisley. Toby will be working on the medicinal plant collection and the geographic collections around the perimeter of the Walled Garden.



© Dana Naumann

Henry Danvers commemoration

The support from our volunteers is crucial in caring for the collections. It has been a pleasure to welcome back volunteers to the Garden, now that the guidelines have permitted this. I would like to thank Peter Girling and his wonderful team of garden guides for giving free tours to visitors to the Garden, for which we receive glowing feedback on a regular basis.

Our relationship with Bonn University Botanic Gardens has grown this year. I was able to visit Germany in August. Next year will see the 75th anniversary of the twinning of Oxford and Bonn, and the Friends of Bonn Botanic Gardens are planning a visit to Oxford next summer; they would very much like to reciprocate our hospitality by hosting a visit from the Friends of Oxford Botanic Garden in 2022. Our Apprentices would also benefit from an exchange programme. Food for thought.

Finally it was with great pleasure that I was able to represent the Botanic Garden at a commemoration of Sir Henry Danvers, 1st Earl of Danby, at the Church of Saint James The Great at Dauntsey Park House. Henry Danvers was a remarkable man as those of us who attended discovered. The occasion was a reminder of what a privilege it is to be a custodian of this historic Garden, and to play a part of its incredible story.



Mark Brent, Chris Tolley and the specimen of *Acer ribesifolium*

## A tree from a Friend of Oxford Botanic Garden

By Mark Brent

A donation of a 40 year old specimen of *Acer ribesifolium* 'Shishigashira' (lion's head maple) was recently made to the Arboretum by a long-standing Friend of the Botanic Garden, Chris Tolley. For many years Chris was the Head Gardener of Waddesdon Manor in Buckinghamshire and played a significant role in the restoration of the gardens there. Chris was also my mentor when I began my career as a trainee at Waddesdon in the 1980s! The tree will be a welcome addition to our acer collection at the Arboretum.



The specimen of *Acer ribesifolium*



# Propagation in the Garden

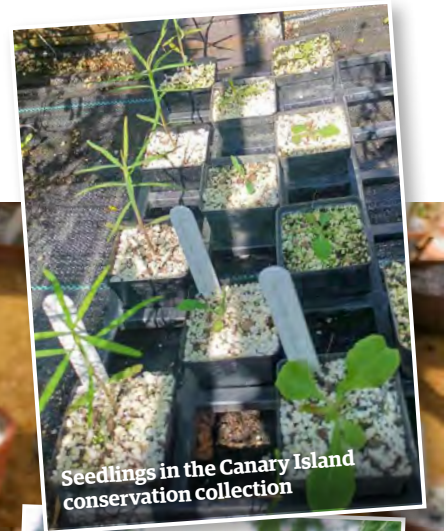
By Russell Beeton

I have been working at the Garden for two years now, and in that time I feel we have accomplished a lot. The Rock Garden, for example, has increased by leaps and bounds and now has an extensive planting of eastern Mediterranean species. I am currently developing a western Mediterranean planting scheme that focuses on the flora of Italy, (especially Sicily) and the Pyrenees. This year we also succeeded in growing parasitic plants such as *Orobanche coerulescens*, sourced from Japan, for the first time in the UK, as well as the rare native *O. picridis*, and *O. minor* var. *pseudoamethystea*. We hope to build on these successes next year in the newly established parasitic plant conservation bed.

Other exciting new plants we have propagated under glass this year include *Amborella trichopoda* and *Iris haynei*. At the time of writing, 60 new species have just been planted into the eastern Mediterranean section of the Rock Garden with another 40 to go. By spring next year the Rock Garden will have 1400 plants, representing 200 species, the majority of which have been grown from seed that was sent to us from botanic gardens all over Europe and as far afield as Israel.

Since October 2019, a lot has changed, both in the Garden and in our everyday lives. Working at Oxford Botanic Garden has, at times, been an oasis for me when

the pandemic took hold. Being able to bring my skills and experience from my previous training at RHS Garden Wisley, Cambridge University Botanic Garden, and Tresco Abbey Gardens, has allowed me to weather the stormy waters while also giving me the ability to help develop the Garden's plant collections and show them at their best.



Seedlings in the Canary Island conservation collection



*Orobanche picridis* in cultivation for the first time at OBG



*Orobanche coerulescens* in the parasitic plant bed



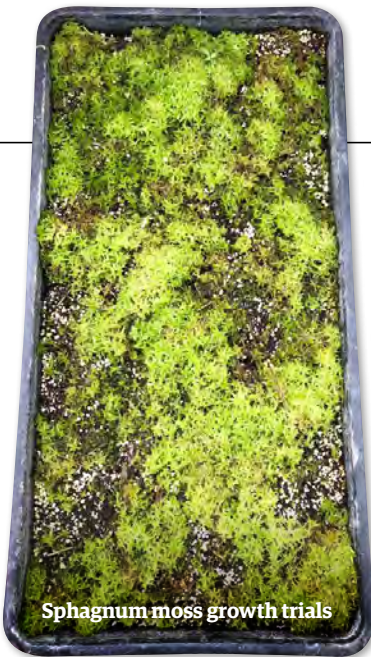
*Iris haynei* propagated from seed collected in Israel

*Launaea nudicaulis* in cultivation, propagated from seed collected in the Canary Islands



# News from the Glasshouses

By Kate Pritchard



Sphagnum moss growth trials

Staff from the glasshouse team celebrated the Botanic Garden's 400th anniversary delivering a series of public horticultural workshops. With the focus on the glasshouse collections, we provided secrets of growing success with cultivation tips on orchids, succulents and plants that can be grown indoors at home.

We've been able to squeeze two giant waterlilies into the tropical pond this year! *Victoria* 'Longwood hybrid' has dominated the centre of the display, out-competing *Victoria cruziana*. Although night-flowering, a benefit to these dull days is that the blooms are opening from mid-afternoon. *Aristolochia arborea* is starting to flower in the Rainforest



*Aristolochia arborea*

House. Unusually for a birthwort, this species which from tropical rainforests of Central America, is small tree. The flowers are produced in clusters, directly from the trunk, a characteristic termed cauliflory.

As part of our contribution to a programme to manage an invasive non-native carnivorous plant, Glasshouse Curator Kate Pritchard recently made a visit to the peat bog where it has established, to monitor this year's flowering. Since the 1980s *Sarracenia purpurea* has proliferated and has the potential to displace less competitive native plant species. Native species growing within this plant community include the sundew, *Drosera rotundifolia*, and the marsh gentian *Gentiana pneumonanthe*. Work in other sites in the UK has shown that 25% cover by *Sarracenia purpurea* has the potential to reduce sphagnum moss abundance, and 50% cover can cause a marked decrease in species diversity.

The horticultural industry has a long history of the unsustainable use of sphagnum moss and peat. The UK Government's action plan is committed to ending the sale of peat products to gardeners by 2024. We use peat-free composts at the Botanic Garden but we do add sphagnum moss to some of the composts we use for difficult orchids, carnivorous plants and epiphytes. We keep use to a minimum and as part of our commitment to sustainability in horticulture, we have started to cultivate our own sphagnum moss. In the photograph you can see growth after six weeks. We predict we will be able to start harvesting next spring and are working hard towards being sphagnum self-sufficient!



Night-flowering cacti (the following morning!) growing in the propagation houses



The 'Survive and Thrive' course on orchid care at the Botanic Garden, led by Lucinda Lachelin



Louisa Hall carrying out maintenance in the Water Lily House



# News from the Arboretum

By Ben Jones



*Clethra barbinervis*



*Fistulina hepatica*



*Clerodendrum trichotomum*



*Cryptomeria japonica*

As I'm sure many of you will have observed, earlier in the year we enjoyed a wet growing season, one of the first in almost ten years. Whilst prolonged periods of heavy rain through the end of April and into May dampened spirits and early summer barbecues, our newly planted trees and shrubs have flourished. A short walk around the Arboretum will reveal rhododendrons with healthy extension growth, which is a promising sign for the future, and other plantings establishing, such as *Cryptomeria japonica* (Cupressaceae) known as the Japanese cedar, which was grown from seed collected in Toyama prefecture, Japan. It is always rewarding to see new plantings, even more so when they start to produce flowers or fruit for the first time.

In each planting season since the autumn of 2015, we have been raising trees and shrubs from seed collected during our fieldwork work carried out with colleagues in Japan. Throughout the Arboretum, there are accessions which have been

incorporated into the landscape, which have begun to either flower or fruit for the first time. In the autumn of 2014, we collected *Clerodendrum trichotomum* (Lamiaceae), known as the Harlequin gloryblossom. A multi-stemmed deciduous large shrub, it is notable for its fragrant flowers which are produced from mid-summer to autumn, and fruits that ripen in the autumn. The berries are at first bright blue, then turn black, contrasting with the red calyxes strikingly. *Clethra barbinervis* (Clethraceae), the Japanese clethra, is another example of a plant raised from seed we collected in central Honshu. A large deciduous shrub, it has attractive bark, forms fragrant white flowers in late summer and early autumn, and has foliage that turns orange to red through the autumn. Along with many others, these accessions have established well and are taking pride of place along the Serpentine Ride, and across several glades.

The meadows were cut in late August, a sign of the end of summer at the

Arboretum. Every two years in three, the meadows are cut and baled, and on the third year the meadows are left uncut and grazed. Castlemilk Moorit, a rare breed of domestic sheep, graze the sward, and their cloven hooves push down seeds from species such as yellow rattle, helping them to establish.

This winter we have a range of courses taking place at the Arboretum, as part of our Public Education Programme. Courses range from winter tree identification and coppicing, to hedge-laying, and are led by Arboretum staff. For more information, visit our 'What's On' section of the website at: [www.obga.ox.ac.uk](http://www.obga.ox.ac.uk)

If you would like to hear more about the exciting work going on at the Arboretum, you'd be very welcome to join our monthly insight tours which take place on the first Wednesday of every month at 1:30pm. These tours are being reinstated from Wednesday 6th October 2021.



The meadows of the Arboretum after cutting in late August











# Education at OBGGA

By Tegan Bennett, Catherine Vivian and Lauren Baker



A Level students examining the biodiversity of the Arboretum's meadows

## Celebrating Botanic Gardens: Past, Present and Future

As part of our 400th anniversary celebrations, Oxford Botanic Garden is hosting our inaugural online symposium celebrating the vital work botanic gardens around the world do in research, education, conservation and horticulture. The symposium, to be held on 2pm-8pm on the 21st and 22nd October 2021, includes speakers from our partner institutions and from botanic gardens in Oxford's twinned cities. Keynote speakers include Professor Beverley Glover, Professor Ned Friedman, Professor Susanne Renner and Professor Sir Peter Crane. A report on this symposium (which will run at the time of printing the current issue) will be given in the next issue. For those who missed the live event, recordings will be available to watch on our YouTube channel.

## Meadow sessions at the Arboretum

Six hundred children explored the Arboretum's beautiful wildflower meadow during our school sessions this summer. They learnt about the importance of the meadow habitat and the plants and animals found there, including discussions on biodiversity and food chains. The children enjoyed minibeast hunts, pollination, and

looking for animal signs. We also thought about the threats to wildflower meadows and how to protect them. These 21 school visits were funded by Natural England.

## Marvellous Meadow day

We celebrated summer with a Marvellous Meadow day at the Arboretum in June. Visitors were able to enjoy the meadow and spot spikes of pyramidal orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) and swathes of the distinctive pink-flowered ragged robin (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*). Children created beautiful craft butterflies and flowers, and went on scavenger hunts around the Arboretum. We had lots of tasty food and drink to enjoy as well as music and souvenir stalls. Days such as these are an ideal opportunity to engage a wide audience with the importance of the different habitats, and the biodiversity they contain, across the site.

## Alice's Day in Oxford Botanic Garden

Alice's adventures were brought to life this July by WhatNot theatre, who performed a quirky tea party for visitors to the Garden. The day also featured family-friendly crafts where children had the opportunity to decorate their own drink-me bottles. This special event formed part of an Oxford-wide celebration of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.

## New faces

The Education team is delighted to welcome two placement students: **Lucy Robinson** and **Lottie Apsey**. Lucy Robinson is studying for her doctorate in the Department of Education at Oxford University. She will be working with us from August to November, carrying out research to engage local secondary schools and explore why early stage secondary school children lose interest in plant sciences as a career option. A report will be produced as part of her project and we look forward to sharing the results in due course.

**Lottie Apsey** is a second year Biology student from the University of Durham who is joining us for a nine-month placement from early September. Lottie's role will be based in the Education and Engagement team and she will support various scientific communication and education programmes, including a new Oxford Botanic Garden Youth Forum.

We're also delighted to welcome back **Catherine Vivian** to her role as Primary Education Officer and say a fond farewell to **Nienke Abbing**, who was Catherine's maternity cover.



# Bulb planting with Iffley Academy

A guest feature by **Miranda Millward**

Since 2018 I have been working on a partnership between Oxford University's Gardens, Libraries and Museums (GLAM), and the Iffley Academy School in East Oxford. Iffley Academy is a 'community special academy' for children and young people up to the age of 18 who have complex special educational needs and disabilities.

OBGA were delighted to be able to support the a new landscaping project at Iffley by securing a donation of 5000 bulbs from Lubbe & Sons (Netherlands) to plant in the school's grounds. Mark Brent kindly made bulb planting guides for students to look at, and delivered tools to the school. The majority of the bulbs were planted in a single day. The remaining bulbs were then planted by a team of student volunteers working towards completing their Duke of Edinburgh's Awards. Teaching Assistant John Cornley kindly devoted time to supervising these volunteers and accrediting their time. Michelle Whitehead who is the Lead teacher for Sixth Form and Learning Manager for Preparation for Adulthood at Iffley Academy said:

*"The highlight of the process was seeing one student who struggles to engage with*

*group work or be part of social activities, enjoy and take pride in bulb planting. He has since taken pride in checking on their progress and explaining to students from the lower school, what the bulbs are, why they are there and how they should be looked after. It has been an amazing experience for all involved - we are very grateful to have been gifted the bulbs."*

The school site looks truly beautiful, and the annual reminder of the bulb planting event will be there for many years to come. Knowing they have made a difference to their own school environment, and to feel proud of their teamwork, is a significant achievement for these vulnerable students. Thank you to everyone involved.

To find out more about the GLAM wide partnership with Iffley Academy please see: <https://www.glam.ox.ac.uk/iffley-academy-partnership>



**Bulb planting with Iffley Academy**



## Harcourt Honey

By **Hannah Ryder**

It has not been the easiest year for the bees. An unusually chilly spring meant that the colonies in our Arboretum's hives, in an attempt to conserve heat, have been eating more honey than they've been making! And, really who could blame them? Often bought as a gift, for one's own use - or perhaps to pair with Brass Spoons or Beeble Honey Whiskey (also available to buy in OBGA's shops), our honey has rapidly become a bestseller. And with good reason.

Over the past few years we have acquired four hives at our Arboretum site, and we can pinpoint the exact extraction location to within a few kilometres. In contrast to most supermarket-bought honey, Harcourt Honey is unfiltered, unheated and unmodified, which means that it does not lose natural benefits that honey has to offer, or include additional artificial sweeteners.

*Propolis* is used by bees to construct and repair their hives, as well as to protect them from external invaders. This substance has been used as a natural remedy throughout history for its anti-bacterial and anti-inflammatory properties. Containing vitamins B, C and E, as well as other beneficial enzymes, propolis is often destroyed during the heating process which is not the case with Harcourt Honey.

Folklore suggests that the pollen found in honey - particularly prevalent in the Harcourt brand due to the extraction methods used - can help to alleviate the symptoms of asthma and hay fever. Pollen found in honey is also high in antioxidants. In fact, honey is considered to be so beneficial, that the German Federal Board of Health even recognises it as a medicine.

Fortunately, a slow spring has not stopped the bees. Mo Leen, the beekeeper behind the honey, has reported to us that a colony that previously produced not a single gram of excess honey in the last two years has recently bounced back to life. Similarly, it has not stopped our Harcourt honey from flying off the shelves at both the Garden and Arboretum. Stock is limited, so do grab a jar (or two) when you visit us.



# A Herbal of Iraq

By Chris Thorogood

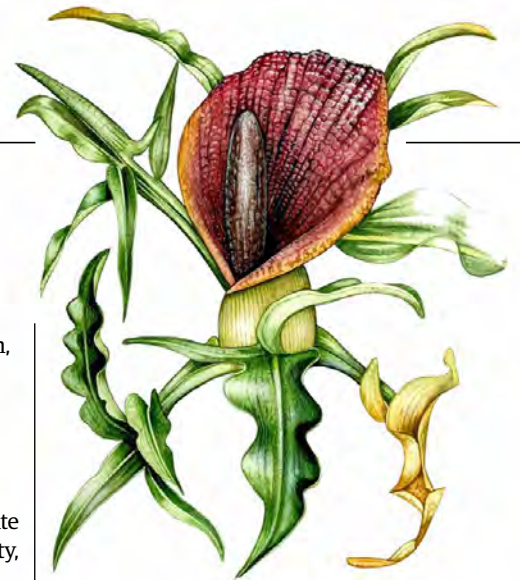


Rana Ibrahim at OBG

Oxford Botanic Garden is leading an interdivisional project focused on developing a herbal, in collaboration with leading authority on Middle Eastern floras, Shahina Ghazanfar at Kew, and Rana Ibrahim, an Iraqi archaeologist, artist, and Founder of Iraqi Women Art and War (IWAW).

Herbal medicine plays a vital role in healthcare in Iraq, with many communities depending entirely upon traditional herbal medicine for the treatment of illnesses. Despite the importance of herbalists in the community, their work is often undocumented, and the rich ethnobotanical heritage of traditional herbal medicine is at risk of being lost.

During periods of war and political turmoil, when communities were reliant on plants for healthcare, the late father of Rana Ibrahim, Jaleel Ibrahim Quragheely, documented the country's flora and its uses in ethnobotanical medicine and dispensed herbal medicines to communities. He compiled a herbal flora



*Eminium spiculatum*, a plant used in herbal medicine in Iraq

of the country in three volumes which contain a wealth of information on 834 plants and their traditional uses. Tragically, he was killed during a terrorist attack in 2009. His flora, and its wealth of knowledge and cultural heritage, survive: they were bequeathed to Rana in Syria (the only safe meeting point with her mother in 2011) for safekeeping; now the only surviving copy is in Rana's care, in Oxford. Our project seeks to authenticate, publish, and disseminate the flora, both in Iraq, where it will be of importance to rural communities, as well as in the UK. Its publication will help safeguard the continuation of traditional Islamic medicine, and its profound importance in the treatment of disease, in areas where due to war, the knowledge of generations has been lost.

In July we held a picnic at OBG to celebrate progress made on the herbal. We anticipate its publication in the spring of 2022.



*Glossostemon brugueri*, a plant used in herbal medicine in Iraq



A picnic at OBG celebrating progress on the Iraqi Herbal



# Fairy Lanterns in the forest

By Chris Thorogood

Oxford Botanic Garden and Arboretum focuses on research into, and conservation of, plants that are neglected from cultivation; for example parasitic plants. Recently we have worked with scientists in Malaysia on so-called 'fairy lanterns' (genus *Thismia*), examining their diversity and describing a new species.

Fairy lanterns are among the most extraordinary-looking of all flowering plants. They grow in the darkest depths of remote rainforests where they are seldom seen. There are about 90 species worldwide, distributed across the forests of Asia, Australasia, South America, and the USA. They all lack true leaves and chlorophyll, instead obtaining their food from root-associated fungi shared with other green plants. Their mysterious flowers emerge just briefly, and often under leaf litter, so few people are lucky enough to encounter them.

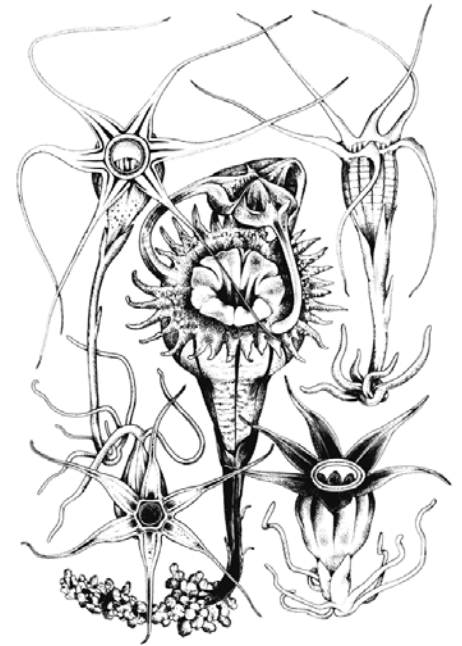
This year, together with Siti-Munirah (Research Officer at the Forest Research Institute Malaysia) and rainforest explorer Dome Nikong, we recently described a species of fairy lantern. It was discovered in 2019 by Dome Nikong, who, astonishingly, found the plant growing along a popular tourist track on Gunung Sarut - a mountain located in the Hulu Nerus Forest Reserve in the state of Terengganu. In February 2020, Dome Nikong was joined by a team of botanists including the researcher Siti-Munirah. To their dismay, the only known 'fairy lantern' plants had been destroyed by wild boars except for a single fruiting specimen.

Examining the little material amassed from the two trips, we were able to describe and illustrate the species and show that it was new to science. We examined the architecture of the flower - its shape, colour and surface characteristics. We found that it has a unique and peculiar orange, lantern-like flower with pillars holding up a so-called 'mitre' - an umbrella-like structure, the function of which is a mystery. Together, we named the plant *Thismia sitimeriamiae* after Dome's mother Siti Meriam, honouring the support she has given his life's dedication to conservation work in Terengganu, Malaysia.

The plant's unique and remarkable 'mitre', colour and surface texture make *Thismia sitimeriamiae* among the most eye-catching plants ever described from Peninsular Malaysia. The extraordinary architecture of the flower also raises questions about how it is pollinated. Other species of *Thismia* are pollinated by little fungus gnats, but we know little about the ecology of these plants. What is certain is that our new species is exceptionally rare - it has only been seen twice and may already be extinct - attempts to relocate the plant have failed. For these reasons, we have assigned the species a conservation status of Critically Endangered (CR).

Our work featured in *New Scientist*, *Nature*, and *National Geographic*, bringing this obscure little plant right out of the shadows. Whilst we are not able to grow *Thismia* yet (it has very complex ecological dependencies that cannot be replicated in cultivation) you will see that we have enjoyed great success with

other parasitic plants at the Garden this year (p.7). We plan to collaborate further with our colleagues in Malaysia to extend our work to other plant groups in the future.



Species of *Thismia* from Malaysia and Borneo



The new species, *Thismia sitimeriamiae*



*Thismia kelantanensis*  
photo by Siti Munirah

The new species,  
*Thismia sitimeriamiae*

*Thismia domei* photo  
by Siti Munirah

You can read more about the work (and watch a video in the rainforest) via the following links:  
<https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2021-06-29-botanists-name-astonishing-new-species-fairy-lantern-malaysian-rainforests>  
<https://nph.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ppp3.10217>



# Friends' Section

## News

From the Friends' Chairman,  
Sarah Taylor

It has been a joy over the last few months to see an accelerating return to 'normal', with events such as the Danby Mediterranean evening, the Friends' 30th birthday party in the Garden, the Bobarts' tour of Norfolk and a full programme of garden visits resuming. Looking ahead to 2022, next May will be a busy month, all other things being equal, with May Morning then the next BIG EVENT on the Friends' calendar, the Plant Sale on May 14th, 2022. I want to highlight the message repeated elsewhere in the newsletter that you should all bear the sale in mind when dividing, potting up, sowing in the current months: everything is welcome, from the unusual to the common, from perennials to shrubs to vegetables to herbs.



Rebecca Mather

### Rebecca Mather

After a break, I am returning to my series of articles about the extraordinary team who run the Friends, focusing on Rebecca Mather who is a director and in charge of membership, inter alia.

Rebecca was brought up on the Wirral and tells me that she still misses being by the sea and the proximity to the mountains of North Wales and the Lake District. Her parents had a garden, modest but enough to sow the seeds of a lifelong love of gardening.

Rebecca read Medicine at Oxford and it was during her time as a medical student that she became interested in psychiatry: she loved the interaction with the patients and their families, the academic discipline, the opportunity to use psychological treatments and the team-working. She first met my predecessor as Chairman, Richard Mayou, as a student. She had rather intimidating

Formulation Meetings on a Friday morning, presenting cases to an august triumvirate of Professor Michael Gelder, Dr Dennis Gath and Dr Richard Mayou!

Rebecca went on to train in psychiatry on the Oxford Regional Training Scheme and eventually decided to specialise in Older Adult Psychiatry as this embodied all the aspects that she enjoyed. The service was developing in an interesting way at that time, as it was throughout the country. By then, she was married to Rob, a GP in Oxford, and had three small children, so she and a colleague applied as one of the very first job shares. This was in 1990. After 10 years Rebecca became full time and worked in North Oxfordshire and West Oxfordshire. She retired from clinical work in 2013 but continued for some years as Associate Dean at the Oxford Deanery with responsibility for Flexible Trainees, enjoying promoting Flexible Training and job shares and managing the particular issues brought by flexible trainees.

The Mathers moved five years ago to Old Marston where they have an acre of garden in the middle of the village, which Rebecca loves. It had been a bit neglected when they arrived but that was a good challenge, as she is a plantaholic: she admits to being thankful that there is a good basic structure to contain her impulse buying.

Rebecca and Rob have been joint members of the Friends for years and Rebecca got involved with running events when she first retired. Richard, a past master at allocating tasks, asked her to become Membership Secretary, a challenging role to say the least. The wonderful reward for her has been seeing numbers growing during the pandemic (now over 3600!) and knowing how much people have valued the spaces of the Arboretum and Garden which provide the opportunity to be in touch with nature, to see growth and the changing seasons, to be able to meet up or be quiet in such beautiful places.

Rebecca also has a garden in Cornwall (frustrating during lockdown) where, and I can testify to this, she grows the most beautiful camellias.

She is also Chair of Trustees of a youth organisation in Rose Hill, which if anything keeps her even busier than the Friends at times. As well as gardening, she enjoys walking, art and architecture, painting, cooking, travelling, cinema and the opera: what she describes as the 'usual things', but which I would qualify as being unusual in their quantity and range.

You will have gathered from this article that Rebecca is yet another of those extraordinarily gifted, highly intelligent people that we are so fortunate to have running the Friends. Her professional skills in understanding people are invaluable as is, I have to say, her talent in the kitchen which has contributed hugely to Friends' enjoyment of the many events she has helped to organise, whether it be fund raising dinners or, recently, the very popular Friends' 30th party.

### Membership and Friends' Gardens for Friends

By Rebecca Mather

The number of Friends has continued to rise during the period of the pandemic, with people appreciating the opportunity to visit the Garden and Arboretum and have unlimited access during these times. As you know, the financial support that Friends give to OBG is vital, raising £3 million over 30 years. Please think about giving a Gift Membership to friends and family at Christmas and throughout the year.

Next year I should very much like to organise visits to Friends' gardens for Friends. This is an opportunity to appreciate each other's spaces and to enjoy tea together. There are lots of volunteers to help with teas and people love getting together. If this something that you would be interested in doing, please contact me: [rebecca.mather28@gmail.com](mailto:rebecca.mather28@gmail.com)

From March 2022 there will be a slight increase in fees as there is every two years in line with inflation.

### Friends of Botanic Gardens Forum (FBGF)

By Harriet Bretherton

The website of the Friends of Botanic Gardens Forum (FBGF) is now fully functioning. Just type 'Friends of Botanic Gardens Forum' into Google and the website will appear.

The fourth Newsletter of the Friends of Botanic Garden Forum is available: <https://fbgf890441273.files.wordpress.com/2021/08/newsletter-summer.2.-2021.pdf>.

The Newsletter includes news from several botanic gardens, including Westonbirt, recently joined, and the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, a founding member.



# Events

## First Friday of the Month Coffee Mornings

Coffee mornings normally take place in the Garden or at the Arboretum on the first Friday of every month (except January) and are an opportunity for Friends to get together. Coffee mornings begin at 10.30am.

For upcoming coffee morning dates, please check the website: <https://www.botanic-garden.ox.ac.uk/>

## Friends' Plant Sale

We are delighted to say that, after having been unable to hold the Plant Sale last year, we are planning an event for May 2022; the date proposed is Saturday May 14th. Please make a note of this and start taking cuttings and dividing your plants for sale. It is an event which requires a large number of volunteers and so if you would like to take part, please contact Seonaid Danziger ([seonaidscd@gmail.com](mailto:seonaidscd@gmail.com)) to register your interest.



# Friends' Garden Visits

By Harriet Bretherton, Pauline Coombes, Jane Annett, Diana Naumann and Jane Thrift

Welcome to our 2022 February to April garden visits programme which heralds the continuation of the Botanic Garden's 400th Anniversary year. We hope that you will enjoy visiting some 'old friends' and making the acquaintance of new ones.

And, at the start of the year, there's a welcome as well as a goodbye because Esther Whiting is moving on, after having arranged some memorable visits for you and a welcome to Jane Thrift who is joining the team. So many thanks to Esther and welcome on board to Jane who's looking forward to organising future garden visits.

**Booking tickets online:** We had hoped to offer online booking at the start of 2022. However, this will hopefully be in place for the summer visits.

**To book visits see enclosed Booking Form**

**Dogs and Garden Visits:** Our visits follow the Botanic Garden's policy that dogs are not permitted unless they are registered assistance dogs.

**We look forward to welcoming you at the beginning of a new year of garden visits.**



The garden visits team (from l to r): Pauline, Harriet, Jane A, Diana and Jane T

## Tuesday 1st February, 1.30pm

### Private visit to Cotswold Farm Arts & Crafts House & Garden

Cotswold Farm, Duntisbourne Abbots, Glos GL7 7JS

By kind permission of John and Sarah Birchall

Cotswold Farm is an historic Arts & Crafts house near Cirencester designed by Sydney Barnsley and Norman Jewson in the 1920s. The beautiful Arts & Crafts garden overlooks a quiet valley on descending levels with

terraces also designed by Jewson in the 1930s. Enclosed by Cotswold stone walls and yew hedges, the garden has all year-round interest including an established snowdrop collection. There are over 80 varieties, named and naturalised, in the borders and along the woodland paths. There are stunning views across the valley to the Marlborough Downs. The visit will include a guided tour of the House. The garden is to be explored by yourself. Tea and cake will be served.

- Friends £22, guests £27
- Maximum 40



Cotswold Farm and garden





© Colesbourne Estate

*Galanthus nivalis*

Friday 11th February, 11.00am

**Private visit to Colesbourne Park**

Colesbourne, Nr Cheltenham, Glos GL53 9NP

By kind permission of Sir Henry and Lady Elwes

The gardens at Colesbourne Park are renowned for their magnificent display of rare snowdrops. Started by Henry John Elwes FRS (1846-1922) with the outstanding *Galanthus elwesii*, the collection has been greatly enhanced and extended in recent years by his great grandson, Sir Henry Elwes and his wife, Carolyn, and is now considered to be one of the best in the whole country. The tour includes a short presentation on the history of Colesbourne Park and the Elwes family and a brief introduction to the amazing diversity of snowdrops. This is followed by a guided walk around the grounds, giving the opportunity to see both the massed plantings and the collection of rare snowdrops. Morning coffee and homemade cakes served on arrival. Snowdrops and other winter-flowering plants will be for sale.

- Friends £20, guests £25
- Maximum 45

Wednesday 30th March, 10.00am

**Private visit to Wadham College Gardens**

Wadham College, Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3PN

By kind permission of The Warden and Fellows of Wadham College

Previously visited in summer 2018, we hope this end of March return visit will offer an interesting opportunity to explore the varied structural 'skeletons' of the many magnificent Wadham College trees, alongside early spring bulbs. The Head



Fritillaries at Magdalen College

Gardener, Andrew Little, will take us round the different gardens within the grounds, mixing his extensive knowledge with anecdote. Originally a series of orchards and market-gardens carved out from the property of the Augustinian priory, Wadham's gardens have been significantly modified over the course of the last four hundred years. Numbered amongst Wadham's tree collection are a holm oak, silver pendant lime, tulip tree, ginkgo, dawn redwood, tree of heaven, incense cedar, Corsican pine, Wollemi pine and rare Chinese gutta-percha. Among other

curiosities are an eighteenth-century 'cowshed' set into the remnants of the Royalist earthworks of 1642, and a sculpture of Sir Maurice Bowra (Warden, 1938-70) by John Doubleday. And in the greenhouse, a 200-year-old dessert Black Hamburg vine, dating back to the Napoleonic wars, still provides the college with grapes though none will be hanging in tempting bunches at the time of our visit! Refreshments on arrival in the college ante-chapel.

- Friends £15, guests £20
- Maximum 30



Wadham College



**Tuesday 12th April 10.00am  
and 2.00pm**

## Fritillaries at Magdalen College

Magdalen College, Oxford OX1 4AU

By kind permission of The President of Magdalen College,  
Dinah Rose QC

One of the wonders of Oxford is the Magdalen College Water Meadow in April alive with fritillaries. David Craft, Head Gardener, will take us along Addison's Walk and into the Fellows' Garden which at that time will be awash with spring flowers - anemones, species daffodils, scillas, crocuses. Refreshments included.

- Friends £15, guests £20
- Maximum 20

**Tuesday 26th April, 2.00pm**

## A welcome return visit to Evenley Wood Garden

Evenley Wood Garden, Brackley,  
Northants NN13 5SH

By kind permission of the Whiteley family

Set in Northamptonshire countryside, Evenley Wood Garden, created by Timothy Whiteley in 1980, is an extensive woodland garden containing a large and notable collection of plants and trees. The unusual band of acid soil, in this otherwise predominantly alkaline area, provides the opportunity to cultivate plants such as rhododendrons, camellias and magnolias, which would not ordinarily thrive in this location. A guided tour in the company of Head Gardener, Dan Winter, begins your visit. Springtime usually finds a 'stream' of scillas, white fritillaries, late narcissus and carpets of blue, pink & white bells, with some 100 magnolias beginning to flower. Sensible footwear advisable. If ground wet, paths not ideal for wheelchairs. Accessible toilets. Refreshments, not included, are available on a free flow basis.

- Friends £15, guests £20
- Maximum 30



Magnolias in Evenley Wood Garden

# The Danby Patrons' Group

By Maura Allen

Despite the lack of events during 2020 and much of 2021, our Patrons have remained very supportive and we are also delighted to welcome several new members into the Danby group which supports both the Herbaria and the Botanic Garden and Arboretum.

It was a huge relief finally to host an event for the group showing off the newly developed Mediterranean area with accompanying wines and food. Despite the weather not showing much Mediterranean warmth our guests enjoyed bubbles whilst meeting old and new members and friends. In keeping with the traditions of the last year the guests were welcomed by our chairman, Sarah Taylor, and the Director of the Garden, Prof Simon Hiscock and Dr Chris Thorogood, deputy director. The curator, Mark Brent, then led the way through the newly laid out and already flourishing plantings with wonderful explanations of the concept, planning and completion of this most important addition to the Oxford Botanic Garden. After this enlightening and very special tour of the area our guests returned to the tent before the ensuing rain became too heavy and enjoyed beautiful French and Italian wines supplied by Bernard Taylor and some excellent food to accompany it.

We were also able to host a joint event with the Bodleian Patrons viewing the 'Roots to Seeds' exhibition with the curator Prof Stephen Harris. As always, our evening was accompanied by excellent refreshments. Our Patrons enjoyed many insights from Prof Harris into the formulation of an exhibition which highlights the importance of Botany in Oxford and the role of the Botanic Garden and Plant Sciences in their intertwined

*Pinus nigra*  
*ssp nigra* by  
Rosemary Wise

history. The Patrons' group was instrumental in providing financial support for the book that accompanies the exhibition, something which fits neatly into their remit.

We are looking forward to an event in November in St John's College for a private viewing of the Oxford Botanic Garden and Florilegium Group's recent work and demonstrations and talks by the founder, Rosemary Wise. Rosemary has worked with Plant Sciences for over fifty years and is the recipient of many awards including Jill Smythie's medal from the Linnean Society of London for published botanical illustrations and the Sibthorp medal from Oxford University Plant Sciences for 'Lifetime Services to Botany'.

The small and intimate events we plan for our Patrons give an excellent opportunity to hear, talk to and question personally people who are leading exponents in the field of plant sciences and horticulture. It also gives very important support for extra projects within both institutions.

During 2022 we hope finally to go ahead with our Sicilian trip to explore the gardens and research being done in the foothills of Mt Etna. Our special visits to the Herbaria will resume and we are planning a wonderful outing at the Arboretum and possibly to another external venue yet to be finalised.

Best wishes from the beautiful temperate rainforests of Tasmania.

## Don't forget your membership card

when you come to visit the Garden or Arboretum. Our ticket office staff do not have access to the membership database (for data protection reasons) and can't let you in free of charge if you don't have your membership card!

## Message to all email users

If you are not receiving regular e-bulletins with news of Friends' events by email, it will be because, for some reason, we do not have your current email address. Please send an email with your name, to the Friends' Administrator at [friends.administrator@obg.ox.ac.uk](mailto:friends.administrator@obg.ox.ac.uk).

## Special message to all gmail users

Gmail has a disconcerting way of filtering messages into different categories. You may miss emails from us because they have been filtered into the Promotions or Update categories. It is advisable to apply a filter to move any emails from Friends' Administrator to force them into your Personal or Primary Inbox. In particular you may not receive your emailed copy of the newsletter magazine that is published three times a year. The dates this is usually sent out are as follows:

Mid-March / Early July / Early November

If you need any help with applying a filter to move our emails into your inbox then do contact the Friends' Administrator: [friends.administrator@obg.ox.ac.uk](mailto:friends.administrator@obg.ox.ac.uk)



# The Bobarts Patrons' Group

By Helen Potts



Bobarts members at Hunworth

Since the last newsletter the Bobarts have enjoyed getting out and about once more, both across the region and on a three-day trip to gardens in North Norfolk. The camaraderie amongst our members, always a strong feature of the Bobarts Patrons, has been more noticeable than ever this year, evidenced by the enthusiastic smiles, horticultural chatter and sharing of knowledge across the group.

In early June our exclusive visit to the gardens of Woodperry House in Stanton-St John was led by the very knowledgeable Head Gardener and took in Tatler's Country House Croquet Lawn of 2020, surrounded by majestic beech and cedar of Lebanon trees. Lunch at the village pub led to an afternoon visit to the nearby College House. Romantic grounds showcased glorious roses, a walled garden, and a ha-ha looking over grazing sheep. A delicious tea including freshly picked asparagus completed a perfect summer's day.

A mid-summer evening with drinks reception in a garden by Iffley lock was followed by a return visit to the gardens of designer Candy Kelly, which she continues to develop with enormous flair. Using interesting plants and shrubs in the long borders Candy also gains maximum impact from extensive vistas over the surrounding landscape.

In September 22 Bobarts members made the journey to Norfolk where five amazing gardens, all with contrasting individual styles, combined with glorious weather to make for a very successful trip. Our hosts were all very welcoming and delighted to share their gardens with us. Water was a major theme, with two moats, a canal and a large pond. We saw an early Arne Maynard design, incredible topiary and a most fantastic plantsman's garden.



Canal at Hunworth

The year closed with our Bobarts' Day visit to the Arboretum led by Curator Ben Jones at the end of October.

Our 2022 programme is in the planning stage but will include a visit to a member's garden below the windmill at Brill, to Bledlow Manor, home of Lord Carrington, and a trip to gardens in London.

Do consider joining this special group and in doing so give extra support to the Botanic Garden and Arboretum. Our members, and the Danby Patrons' Group, enjoy all the benefits of the Friends plus a programme of small group visits to the University collections and to some of the best gardens and estates in the area. We aim to visit as wide a range of gardens as possible in terms of style, size and location and are very grateful to the generosity of those garden owners and their teams who welcome us, sharing their time and knowledge with us.

## Calendar

### 2021

Please check on the website: <https://www.botanic-garden.ox.ac.uk/> for the latest news regarding forthcoming events.

### 2022

#### February

Tuesday 1st February, 1.30pm  
**Private visit to Cotswold Farm Arts & Crafts House & Garden**

Friday 4th February, 10.30am  
**Coffee morning, Botanic Garden**

Friday 11th February, 11.00am  
**Private visit to Colesbourne Park**

#### March

Friday 4th March, 10.30am  
**Coffee morning, Botanic Garden**

Wednesday 30th March, 10.00am  
**Private visit to Wadham College Gardens**

#### April

Friday 1st April, 10.30am  
**Coffee morning, Botanic Garden**

Tuesday 12th April, 10.00am and 2.00pm  
**Fritillaries at Magdalen College**

Tuesday 26th April, 2.00pm  
**Return visit to Evenley Wood Garden**

**The Friends of Oxford  
Botanic Garden and Arboretum,**  
Rose Lane, Oxford OX1 4AZ.

All Friends' enquiries, including those about Friends' events, should be made to the Friends' Administrator.

Tel: 01865 610303

E-mail: [friends.administrator@obg.ox.ac.uk](mailto:friends.administrator@obg.ox.ac.uk)

Web: [www.botanic-garden.ox.ac.uk](http://www.botanic-garden.ox.ac.uk)

The Friends Office is staffed on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. This Newsletter was edited by Chris Thorood and Carol Maxwell with help from Helen Elliott. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the policies of the Board of the Friends or the Visitors of Oxford Botanic Garden.

