

The University of Oxford

114

# Botanic Garden & Arboretum Friends' newsletter

Summer/  
Autumn 2023



# From the Editor

By Chris Thorogood

Front cover: Spring bulbs in flower along the River Cherwell

This time last year, I wrote in the Friends' Newsletter that we were recruiting a new Project Manager and two Community Engagement Officers to support our National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF)-supported project to create a 'Gateway to Nature' at the Arboretum, and work with new audiences and under-represented groups. A year later I'm pleased to report that the team has taken bold steps towards reaching new communities, groups and audiences, for example Age UK, MyVision Oxford, the Berin Centre, the local Ukrainian community, and Active Oxfordshire, to name just a few. The team ran 'Oak Apple Day' on May 29th, which engaged target community groups with activities highlighting the work of the Arboretum. Meanwhile the education team is working with target schools from areas of high level of deprivation, developing new resources and preparing for the introduction of the new Natural History GCSE.

In March we continued our exciting collaborative work with our colleagues at the University of the Philippines, as I describe on page 8. Meanwhile we were delighted to welcome so many of the Friends in person to this year's Winter Lectures for the first time since before the pandemic. In April, our Spring Fair, led by Jo Boyes, was also a great success and saw the Arboretum buzzing with activity, including a popular cake stand by the Friends. We're busy scheduling the Autumn Science Lectures and next year's programme, as well as the long-awaited return of the Christmas Fair at the Botanic Garden. Do check our 'what's on' page for further information.



Ben Haggarty storytelling at OBG

Despite last year's drought, followed by a punishing winter, the collections staff have enjoyed success across the Botanic Garden and Arboretum as you'll read on pages 4 and 5. Visitors to the Botanic Garden are enjoying strolling among the revived medicinal plants collection; meanwhile transformation at the Arboretum is afoot, paving the way for the new propagation facilities - or 'Plant Conservation Hub'.

It's wonderful to see so many staff and students, and diverse audiences from

across the county, all enjoying the benefits our natural oases provide. On May 11th Ben Haggarty - world-leading contemporary storyteller and Visiting Research Fellow in the Creative Arts at Merton College - transported an audience of undergraduate students with his performance. Many had not visited the Botanic Garden before. Storytelling is just one of the many ways people can engage with green spaces and enjoy the wellbeing benefits they offer.

## Contents

<b>From the Editor</b> .....	2
<b>From the Director</b> .....	3
<b>News from the Garden</b> .....	4
<b>News from the Glasshouses</b> .....	5
<b>News from the Arboretum</b> .....	6
<b>Science and Research</b> .....	8
<b>Education at OBG</b> .....	10
<b>Friends' Section</b>	
News.....	11
Events.....	12
Friends' Garden Visits .....	13
The Danby Patrons' Group.....	15
The Bobarts Patrons' Group.....	16



Chris Thorogood with Chancellor Jose Camacho, Jr. (centre) and Professor Pastor Malabrigo Jr. at the University of the Philippines

# From the Director

By Simon Hiscock



Spring finally arrived in May after an unusually cool and wet March and April, preceded by a bone-dry February and the arctic shocks of December and January. No wonder the camellias at the Arboretum did not emerge until March - the latest I can recall in recent years. Everything seemed to be flowering at least a month later than normal and we had to wait until late April/early May for the best of this year's bluebells. Despite the variable weather, visitor numbers have been good across both sites and only slightly down on last year. People are also spending more money this year with shop, Pod and online sales up 11% on the same period last year. This is testimony to the popularity of our unique OBGa range of products, best sellers being Physic Gin, the Oxford Physic Rose range of products, and Harcourt Honey.

On a wet March 9th I was delighted to join a small University delegation invited to Buckingham Palace to make a Loyal Address to His Majesty King Charles III. The delegation, led by the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor, joined 26 other Privileged Bodies invited to make loyal addresses to the Monarch; the last such occasion was in 2012 to mark the Queen's 60th Anniversary as Monarch. The formal event was held in the Royal Ballroom and was followed by a reception at which the King met members

of the 27 delegations. When I met the King, I reported that 'his tree' (the Black Pine he planted in June 2021 to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the Garden) is doing well and invited him to visit the Arboretum in the future. I also reported that OBGa had been involved in the planting of over 600 trees as part of the Queen's Green Canopy initiative.

Progress has been made on the new Arboretum propagation facility after positive discussions with planners from South Oxford District Council and by the time you read this we should have submitted the full planning application. Following the grant of a tree felling license the plantation to the rear and side of the tractor shed has been felled and yews and holly trees transplanted using a pair of huge 'tree spades' (see p6). This has created the space for construction of the propagation facility and has helped enhance the landscape along the section of the Serpentine Ride closest to the tractor shed.

Meanwhile, there have also been some very promising conversations with potential donors for new glasshouses and infrastructure at the Garden. These conversations began at a very successful event held at the House of Lords hosted by Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne who has taken a keen interest in the project. Chris Thorogood and I outlined our ambitions for

new glasshouses and PVC for Development, Professor David Gann, then outlined the benefits of supporting the University through philanthropic giving. As you all know, the old glasshouses need replacing urgently - new glasshouses will enable us to preserve the collections we currently hold and also importantly enable us to grow new and exciting tropical plants that we have never been able to grow before.

Outside at the Botanic Garden, Mark Brent and his team have done a great job reconfiguring and replanting the Medicinal Plant Beds. Expert advice has been provided by Dr Sue Burge and Professor Fran Platt (Head of the Department of Pharmacology) who also joined us in May for a launch of the new collection with the Danby Patrons' Group. Bespoke interpretation boards for the collection will now be designed with the help of Pia Östlund who is just completing the much-anticipated interpretation for the Literary Garden in collaboration with Fiona Stafford (Professor of English Language and Literature).

And finally, I am very pleased to report that our Black Pine Whisky (a 400th anniversary collaboration with The Oxford Artisan Distillery) will be launched later this year. It's taken a while but like all good whisky, worth waiting for.

# News from the Garden

By Mark Brent



Horticultural apprentice Jack Willerton at Villa Rocalia, Sicily.  
Right: Through the Danby Arch



previously worked on projects at Naples Botanical Garden in Florida. He will play a vital role in supporting the new propagation facility, or 'Plant Conservation Hub' which we will be constructing at the Arboretum imminently. Lewis has already achieved some success in germinating a range of endemic species from Sicily. He also worked with Botanical Horticulturist H el ene Tronc to collect material of toothwort (*Lathraea squamaria*) from Wytham Woods to reintroduce it to the Botanic Garden; this local native plant was grown here in the 1600s but has since disappeared from the collection.

In other staff news I would like to congratulate our horticultural apprentices, Jack Willerton and Lucy Hoggett who have successfully gained a Level two qualification in horticulture. Jack achieved distinction in all of his exams and has subsequently gained a place on the prestigious Kew Diploma course starting in September. Recently our horticultural apprentices' experience broadened further at the Villa Rocalia, Sicily where they were kindly hosted by a Friend of OBGA, Alison Richards.

In recent weeks we have refreshed our medicinal plant collection at the Botanic Garden. This collection illustrates the historic origins of the 'physic' garden, traditional medicinal uses of plants, and their importance in modern medicine. Botanical

Horticulturist H el ene Tronc has been working on this area of the Garden with guidance from Friend and medical expert, Dr Sue Burge.

In early June I'm looking forward to visiting Japan. I will be hosted by the Barakura English Garden in Tatehina, where I will be speaking about the work of Oxford Botanic Garden. The owner, Eugene Yamada, has asked me to showcase 'what makes Oxford special'. There will be no shortage of material for me to present.



*Lathraea squamaria* recently added to the OBG collections from Wytham Woods



*Magnolia soulangeana* in the Botanic Garden this spring

The cold, wet weather this spring was frustrating, following a punishing winter that left us with casualties in the collections. That said, at least our rainwater tanks have been replenished. The tulips brought welcome cheer to the Botanic Garden. Our ambition is to improve our tulip displays to highlight past 17th century links between Jacob Bobart the Younger and Mary Somerset, Duchess of Beaufort. The Duchess kept extensive herbarium records of the tulips she grew at Badminton House. I will be sourcing some older historic varieties to augment our displays through our contacts in the Netherlands.

I am pleased to introduce a new member of the horticultural team, Lewis Barrett, who has taken up the post of Senior Botanical Propagator. Lewis joins us from the Eden Project in Cornwall and has a wealth of experience in plant conservation having

# News from the Glasshouses

By Kate Pritchard



*Medinilla speciosa*

This spring staff in the glasshouses moved swiftly from landscaping the Rainforest House to re-soiling and planting the Cloud Forest House. Visitors can now find themselves immersed in a humid, montane flora from South East Asia, writhing with *Nepenthes*. These carnivorous plants grow in humid, tropical environments, and are fundamental to the collections-based research at OBG.

This summer OBG will receive *Nepenthes* plant material from the plant collections at Chester Zoo and the National Botanic Garden of Wales, including *N. ampullaria*, *N. bicalcarata* and *N. hemsleyana* which we will grow for the first time.

Several other taxa have recently been added to the new plantings in the Cloud Forest House. For example, *Medinilla speciosa* will be in bloom all summer with racemes of shocking-pink flowers. We are growing this in a free-draining substrate to mimic the semi-epiphytic conditions this small shrub prefers in the wild.

We are also growing *Chloranthus erectus* - another shrub from Southeast Asia that was once grown widely for its leaves as a tea plant before black tea, *Camellia sinensis*. The roots also yield a dark dye for cloth.

Another useful plant used for tea and now growing in the Cloud Forest House is *Orthosiphon aristatus*. Its leaves are rich in flavonoids and, due to its application in traditional medicine, this species is known as kidney tea. This herbaceous plant produces terminal spikes of delicate white-lilac flowers. Finally, adding punches of colour to the display with tubular red flowers, is the epiphyte *Aeschynanthus pulcher*. When it becomes established, its semi-succulent leaves will tumble over our visitors' heads, with its curious red flowers peeking out from beneath.



*Chloranthus elatior*



*Aeschynanthus pulcher*

# News from the Arboretum

By Ben Jones

Recently we have been preparing for our new Plant Conservation Hub (PCH), which we will build later this year. It will consist of two greenhouses, two polytunnels, and a potting shed, which will augment the existing facilities and shade frame. The PCH will enable the Botanic Garden and Arboretum to strengthen our plant conservation work locally, nationally, and internationally. The PCH will be located directly behind the tractor shed. Here, with a licence in place, we clear-felled a plantation of grand fir (*Abies grandis*), Lawson's cypress (*Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*) and western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*) which was incongruent with the *Picturesque* landscape of the Arboretum and unmanageable from a tree safety perspective. The work has revealed fifty yew trees.

Over the last four years, we have been focusing on a programme of long-term restoration in the Serpentine Ride. This forms an integral part of our heritage landscape, and is one of the reasons the Arboretum is a Registered Park and Garden, and designated a Grade I Listed Landscape. The Serpentine Ride is 800m long, and in the early 19th Century, it was planted exclusively with Pontic rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*) - now considered a UK invasive. Beyond these, conifers from the Pacific Northwest such as giant and coast redwoods were planted, many of which remain. Since 2018, we have removed sections of Pontic rhododendron and replanted a broader range of rhododendrons, azaleas, and magnolias, whilst maintaining the *Picturesque* landscape style.

William Sawrey Gilpin was an exponent of the *Picturesque* style of landscaping and represents a historic link between Humphry Repton and Sir Charles Barry. Gilpin advised the Harcourt family on the layout of the Arboretum, and in particular the Pinetum and Serpentine Ride. Fundamental to the *Picturesque* style of planting is the careful consideration of distance, middle distance, and foreground. The foreground frames the other two, and should be 'properly dressed', according to Gilpin. Trees and shrubs with striking autumn colour, interesting winter bark, or flowers, against an evergreen backdrop, are a means of achieving this.

Guided by this philosophy, this spring we transformed the first section of the Serpentine Ride. The yew trees exposed by clear-felling the area beyond the tractor shed provided an opportunity to re-establish an evergreen backdrop, framing the foreground of the Serpentine Ride. Working with Heritage Tree Services, we used tree-spades to reposition the yew trees. Watching these trees being lifted out of the ground and repositioned was a spectacle. Once in position, our Arboretum volunteers ensured each tree was mulched and watered using two irrigation bags which were zipped together. Combined, these irrigation bags provide 110 litres of water that seeps out over 24 to 48 hours; the aftercare of these trees will be as important as the transplanting process. Once the yew trees have settled into their new positions and the ground has been prepared in front of them, new plantings will be established for all to enjoy.



The newly planted clear-felled area



Moving an Araucaria using a tree-spade



Repositioning trees by tree-spade

# The Spring Fair

By Jo Boyes

On 22nd April the Harcourt Arboretum welcomed 898 people to the Spring Fair. Activities across the Arboretum included cyanotype printing with the Education Team, memory gathering with the Gateway to Nature project, the ever-popular 'petting zoo' and, for the first time, a merry-go-round. The street band 'Horns of Plenty' performed and the Oxford Florilegium displayed their beautiful botanical illustrations.

At the Woodland Barn, WhatNot Theatre painted many children's faces. As well as the very popular Friends' cake stall, there was food and drink, as well as craft stalls run by a variety of local businesses.

For the first time OBGAs partnered with the Oxford Bus Company to provide a free shuttle bus to the Fair. This proved a great success with 345 journeys and two double-deckers running straight to the site from Redbridge Park & Ride every 20 minutes.



Cyanotype printing at the Spring Fair. Insert: The bus at the Spring Fair

## NLHF Engagement Update

The NLHF Engagement Team continues to develop new partnerships with a variety of community groups throughout Oxfordshire. As the weather has improved we have been able to encourage more visits on site and have a packed summer programme. A few highlights have been:

### A Woodland Wander - partnership with the Ashmolean Museum

This programme of activities responded to the issue of this target audience being unable to visit the Arboretum through the winter due to temperature and the terrain.

There are six visits planned, three to the Ashmolean and then three at the Arboretum in late Spring. The visits focusing on all woodland and forest-based collections including paintings, ceramics, archaeological collections etc.



### Late Spring Age UK - Bereavement Support Group

We have achieved a good relationship with this group. They came to site in December and had a tour by Ben Jones combined with indoor craft activity. They have also been on the Woodland Wander programme and are looking to use the Arboretum during May to celebrate the National Walking month.

We had a wonderful letter from the leaders saying there were a couple of people who they saw engage with an activity and others for the first time. This demonstrates how the outdoors can help mental health and wellbeing at all levels.



### Oxfordshire on the Move

The Arboretum has formed a partnership with Oxfordshire on the Move to promote health and wellbeing and getting people outdoors. There are over 20 organisations that will work together to promote activities.

We organised family walks, free with a YouMove card, funded by the South Oxfordshire District Council.



### Ukrainian Spring Celebration

We held a very successful and moving Spring celebration for the Ukrainian community. Over 60 people attended and enjoyed the Arboretum guided walks, craft activities, Ukrainian music, food and storytelling for all ages. We received wonderful feedback.

‘Thank you so much, Caroline and Catherine and all the wonderful volunteers of the Arboretum *Gateway to Nature* team for making it such a memorable gathering! Big thanks to Ben Haggarty <https://www.merton.ox.ac.uk/people/ben-haggarty> for telling us quite a story about the lark.

# Growing the Ungrowable

By Chris Thorogood

I was delighted to be made the first Visiting Professor of the Department of Forestry at the University of the Philippines Los Baños, in March, where I received a warm welcome from Chancellor Jose Camacho, Jr. Vice-Chancellor Nathaniel Bantayan, and their colleagues from the Chancellor's Office. During my visit, I delivered a series of public, undergraduate and postgraduate lectures, and developed plans for collaborative research with Professor Pastor Malabrigo Jr. (Pat) and forester Adriane Tobias.

In the last edition of the Friends' Newsletter I wrote of an expedition to Indonesia where my colleagues from the Philippines and I were taught how to propagate *Rafflesia* - the genus possessing

the world's largest flowers - at Bogor Botanic Garden. Most species are threatened with extinction but these parasitic plants are extremely difficult to cultivate, making their conservation challenging. The Philippines is home to the largest number of *Rafflesia* species of any country; most are severely threatened there. Armed with the knowledge from our colleagues at Bogor, Professor Pat, Adriane and I are establishing the Philippines' first conservation strategy for *Rafflesia*.

With permission, we climbed Mount Makiling, alongside a group of foresters, to collect *Rafflesia*-infected vines for conservation. Along the summit trail we encountered wild jade vines (*Strongylodon*

*macrobotrys*); their blossom formed bolts of electric blue slicing the canopy. Mount Makiling is their *locus classicus* - the place from which they were first described. After a few hours, we found a population of *Rafflesia panchoana* nestled in the vines, from which we carefully selected samples of the correct age and proportions in a way that wouldn't damage the existing population.

The next day we transported our samples to the UPLB Sierra Madre Land Grant, an extensive forest reserve directed by Professor Pat. Joined by a team of foresters and guards, Pat, Adriane and I trekked to the heart of the reserve where an ideal location for a *Rafflesia* propagation experiment had been identified the week



Chris Thorogood with students from UPLB



Mount Makiling - where *Rafflesia panchoana* grows

before my visit. Carefully we grafted our infected vines (called scions) onto the new rootstock, referring to our notes from Indonesia. After binding the grafted roots, we covered the plants with handfuls of leaf litter, and Pat said a few words to the forest gods.

It will be two years before we know if our experiment was successful. If it is, this will be a bold step forward for the conservation of a plant in peril. We will be able to extend this work to other *Rafflesia* species - some of which are on the brink of extinction.

This is the start of an exciting programme of work that we look forward to progressing with our colleagues in the Philippines and Indonesia.



*Rafflesia panchoana*



A wild jade vine growing in the *locus classicus* of Mount Makiling



The team, grafting *Rafflesia* at the Sierra Madre Land Grant

# Education at OBGA

By Lauren Baker, Rodger Caseby and Catherine Vivian

## Winter Lectures

The Winter Lectures resumed in person for the first time since before the Pandemic, and over 1,000 people attended. The series began with an inspirational talk on garden design from Sarah Eberle; conversations are underway to collaborate with Sarah on a new school educational resource based on her Mars Garden. Deputy Director of OBGA, Dr Chris Thorogood, was our second speaker and wowed the audience with tales of his global excursions seeking out the dragons, carnivores and vampires of the plant world. Meanwhile Professor Dave Goulson's talk was a sell-out, with over 300 attendees. Dave advised on how best to support insects and biodiversity in our back gardens. Our final speaker was Curator of Harcourt Arboretum, Ben Jones, who gave a talk on the flora of Japan, highlighting some of the unique research and conservation work taking place at OBGA. Naoko Abe was scheduled to speak on the life of Collingwood 'Cherry' Ingram but unfortunately she was unwell; we look forward to welcoming back Naoko Abe in 2024.



Above: Dr Chris Thorogood's Winter Lecture, 'Chasing Plants'. Right: Testing out VR headsets in the workshop led by RGBE during the BGEN conference



## Access visits

A number of 'access visits' took place at the Botanic Garden in recent months. Access visits are organised in collaboration with the University Colleges and are for pupils from areas of high level of deprivation (POLAR4 Q1&2 rating) and with low levels of young adults choosing to pursue higher education. The visits are designed to inspire young people and show the options available to them. During their visits, pupils are given a tour of the Botanic Garden covering history, medicinal heritage, and the role of botanic gardens in 21st century horticulture, research and conservation. Feedback from the students was positive and we were frequently referenced in the feedback forms:

*"The botanical gardens was the most enjoyable taster session we did...", "the botanical garden was an amazing experience!"*



Students enjoying part of their tour of the Botanic Garden during the Queen's College access visit

## BGEN conference

In mid-January Lauren Baker attended the Botanic Garden Education Network (BGEN) conference at RHS Wisley. The conference was the first to be held in person since 2019, and was an opportunity to reconnect with peers from botanical and zoological institutions. Topics included the incoming Natural History GCSE, increasing accessibility of interpretation within garden settings, and youth engagement through management and digital engagement. The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RGBE) led a session on technological advances for public engagement, such as using VR in outreach visits.

We look forward to visiting them in July this year to discuss a possible collaboration on this project. Since the conference, Lauren Baker has joined the Board of Trustees of BGEN.

## Looking ahead

We are collaborating with the Oxford University Museum of Natural History and Wytham Woods to create resources in preparation for the Natural History GCSE. We will provide teacher training and school sessions to support the delivery of this new qualification. Finally, we are working with the Department of Chemistry, Alnwick Poison Garden, Wadham College, Balliol College and Hertford College to run an intensive five-day programme called Building Bridges in the first week of July. The programme will see over 500 students from Years 6 and 7 from the most deprived areas of Gloucestershire visit Oxford for a day where they will rotate between the chemistry labs, the Botanic Garden and the colleges. We are developing pre-visit resources examining the carbon footprint of food, scent matching activities, and growing your own herbs and medicinal plants, in preparation for their visit.

## Half term activities

During February half term, we ran a drop-in workshop called 'Amazing Adaptations' at the Botanic Garden. Over the four days, 344 visitors learnt about the adaptations of carnivorous plants, aquatic plants such as water hyacinth (*Pontederia crassipes*), and drought tolerant plants. We also showed a cross section of the pseudostem of ensete (*Ensete ventricosum*), giving visitors the opportunity to learn more about this staple food crop of Ethiopia and discuss future foods.

## School sessions

During the spring, many primary classes came to visit the Garden, exploring themes of 'A Plant's Life' and 'Rainforest Experience' to compare and contrast plants from different climates. At the Arboretum, the school sessions have been focused around the changing seasons and the trees and flowers that look especially cheerful at this time of year. For secondary visits, sessions have focused on adaptation and agriculture, and taxonomy and classification. We have also tested a new plant evolution and seed dispersal session, 'Spores to Seeds'. The resource was created with PhD student Annabelle de Vries and has proved very successful. It will be refined and incorporated into our annual schools offering.



'Amazing Adaptations' drop-in session set up in the Conservatory

# Friends' Section

## News

By the Chairman,  
Sarah Taylor

### 'History and Entertainment'

As you all know, the Friends make an invaluable contribution to the work of the Oxford Botanic Garden & Arboretum. In recognition of that, a number of events are organised for the Friends by an indefatigable team of volunteers, and I am going to highlight a couple of these here.

#### May Morning

May Morning is one of Oxford's best loved traditions, thought by some to go back 500 years to the installation of bells in Magdalen Tower in 1504-5. The celebrations have swung between the pagan and the Christian over the centuries. Originally, according to the antiquary Anthony Wood writing in 1674, the choral ministers saluted Flora with 'vocal music of several parts', this being a joyful occasion. The ceremony then apparently becomes associated with the gift to Magdalen College in 1484 of the advowson (the right to nominate a priest) of the living of Slimbridge in Gloucestershire, in return for daily prayers being said for the donor, Lord Berkeley. After his death this reverted to King Henry VII and the prayers, or sung requiem, were then required to be said annually, funded by £10 a year received from the Slimbridge tithes. By 1749, the event had become a merry May Day concert.



The ceremony now consists of the choir of Magdalen College singing the anthem 'Te Deum patrem colimus' from the top of Magdalen Tower at 6.00 o'clock in the morning of 1st May. It was written by the organist and choirmaster Benjamin Rogers (1665-86) and assumed a central role on May Morning by the 1790s, at which time it was also said that the ceremony had become unruly and irreverent. More regimented rules were implemented in 1844 and by the 1860s

it had become a notable social event, with tickets being introduced to limit numbers.

May Morning also at times became an occasion for town and gown disagreements, with reports of the choristers throwing rotten eggs at the population below who retaliated by playing May horns to drown out the singing. By the end of the 19th century the police had clamped down on some of the wilder practices and some of the more traditional May Day practices such as children wearing garlands and the presence of 'Jack-in-the-Greens' took place at ground level instead. Morris dancing was introduced in 1923.

Certainly, now, May Morning is enjoyed by town and gown (with students often starting the celebrations the night before and staying up all night to greet the dawn - and at one point jumping into the river Cherwell, a dangerous practice now outlawed) with entertainments of all sorts spreading throughout the nearby city.

The opportunity to watch May Morning from the privileged position of the Botanic Garden is one reserved for Friends and is arguably one of the most treasured advantages of being a Friend. The volunteers who organise the event arrive before 4.00 am to put on the coffee, collect the delicious croissants and be on hand to greet guests. Morris dancers and music are laid on to add to the festive atmosphere. It really is a very special and exclusive event - which was attended this year by over 300 people.

#### Annual Friends' Party

Every year, the Friends are invited to attend a party on a summer's evening, to enjoy a glass of sparkling wine and home-made canapés in the glorious surroundings of the Garden. Guides are on hand to take people round and explain the latest developments. This year is the 60th anniversary of the acquisition of the Harcourt Arboretum by the Garden and, exceptionally, we plan to hold the party at the Arboretum instead.

#### Brief history of the Arboretum

In 1835, Archbishop Vernon Harcourt commissioned artist and landscape designer William Gilpin to create an eight-acre pinetum and Serpentine Ride in the parkland next to Nuneham House, where the Harcourt family lived. In 1947, the University of Oxford purchased the entire estate and created an arboretum that has grown over time to 130 acres. It was acquired by the Botanic Garden in 1963. It was designed as a place of beauty, to preserve the collection of North American conifers, and to grow trees for which the Oxford Botanic Garden was too small or the soil too alkaline.

The Garden's experts travel the globe to find rare trees, collect their seeds and grow them in the Arboretum, ensuring the species survive outside their threatened natural habitats. Today, visitors can discover trees from around the world growing alongside tranquil British woodland and open meadows. This includes some of the oldest redwoods in the UK. Seasonal highlights include wildflower meadows, rhododendrons and bluebell woods.

#### New developments at the Arboretum

Development funding of £191,420 has been awarded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund to help Harcourt Arboretum develop a new Visitor and Learning Centre. Made possible by the National Lottery players, the project aims to unlock the site's unique natural heritage, landscape and collection of threatened trees.

The project aims to build partnerships with local communities, and work with Oxford University's Department of Psychiatry and social prescribing partnership to increase wellbeing from access to nature. The aim is to create new all-weather education facilities, café and shop and transform the visitor experience. A key benefit of the project will be an increased awareness of the importance of plants and biodiversity in addressing global challenges, heritage landscape, and crafts, through inspiring interpretation.

This will lead to phase 2 of the application to the NLHF. Closely linked to this project is the Friends' appeal to raise £750,000 to improve the self-binding gravel path network at the Arboretum, allowing better viewing of its exceptional trees by all visitors, whether mobile or not. So far, we have raised £450,000 of our target - £300,000 still to go!

We look forward to seeing many of you at the Arboretum on 7th September.



# Friends' Events



## May Morning 2023

This year saw the team of volunteer Friends serving hot drinks and warm croissants to a record number of early risers. It was worth it. The clouds broke at 6.00 as the Magdalen College choir sang - their singing seemed quite exceptionally beautiful. It would be wonderful to see that same record number of Friends at the Friends' Annual Party at the Arboretum.

**7th September,  
5.30-7.30pm**

## Friends' Annual Party

Education Glade, Harcourt Arboretum  
OX44 9PX

It is always fun to celebrate - this time it will be the fact that it is 60 years since the Arboretum became part of the Oxford Botanic Garden. For this reason, we are

inviting you to what used to be known as the Firs and Ferns Glade, now more practically called the Education Glade, at the Arboretum. It is a lovely open space, as you can see, surrounded by huge trees planted in the 1830s by William Sawrey Gilpin at the start of his renowned, picturesque 'Serpentine Ride'. This area has the advantage of accessibility - it is very close to the entrance, the car park and all the facilities.

We will serve drinks and canapés (made by the team), and entertain you with speeches from our leaders, including Simon Hiscock, the Director, Sarah Taylor, the Friends' chairman, and Ben Jones, Curator of the Arboretum. In addition, we will have the pleasure of a variety of music from the well-travelled cello of the ecologist William Sutherland from Northumberland. This will be an ideal opportunity for us to explain the need for, the very careful choice of appropriate materials, and progress being made with the paths. As you will by now know, these have been the subject of our major fund-raising drive - The Friends' Paths Appeal.

All the booking, and further details will be available online but anyone who has difficulty with this process should contact the Friends' Administrator.

There is ample parking at the Arboretum, and there is also a regular bus service, the River Rapids X40 between Oxford and Reading.

- **Friends £10.00, Guests £15.00,  
Children under 16 free**



The Education Glade, formerly the Firs and Ferns Glade

## First Friday of the Month

### Coffee mornings

Coffee mornings are held on the first Friday of each month, except August, from 10.30- midday. No booking is needed but do remember to bring your membership card. The dates for this year are:

**7th July / 1st September  
at the Oxford Botanic Garden**

**6th October at the Harcourt Arboretum**

**3rd November / 8th December  
at the Oxford Botanic Garden**

Please check the website for up-to-date information.

<https://www.botanic-garden.ox.ac.uk/>

## Saturday 14th October

### Friends Cake Stall and Tombola at the Autumn Fair

The Friends ran a very successful Cake Stall at the Spring Fair, made possible by the fact that so many of you contributed wonderful looking cakes - for which we must extend our thanks!

For the Autumn Fair we will be running both a Cake Stall and a Tombola. Note the new banner on the Gazebo, designed to publicise the Friends! Every penny made by these stalls is currently going towards the Friends' Paths Appeal.



## The Friends' Opera

The Opera should not be left out but by the time you receive this Newsletter this year's performance will be over. Look out for the opera next year - it takes place in early July, in the Warden's Garden at New College, after a reception in the Cloisters.



# Friends' Garden Visits

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

We hope the descriptions for the five autumnal gardens - some new, some previously visited at a different time of year - will make you wish to visit them with us.

**Booking Garden Visit Tickets:** Online AND postal booking form with cheque

1) Online: You can now book and pay for garden visits online - please visit [www.obga.ox.ac.uk/friends-visits](http://www.obga.ox.ac.uk/friends-visits)

2) By post with cheque: please be assured you can still book and pay for garden visits by post with cheque. A Booking Form is enclosed in this Newsletter. PLEASE NOTE: The form should only be used by those who wish to book by post with cheque.

Now that the online & postal system is in place, timely thanks to our Ticketing Administrator, Freya Jones, who has been an invaluable colleague supporting both our Friends and the volunteer team who organise the garden visits. Without Freya's input, visits would not have run so smoothly.

In future, should you have any queries please contact our Friends' Administrator who now supports the work we do in arranging our programme of garden visits: [friends.administrator@obg.ox.ac.uk](mailto:friends.administrator@obg.ox.ac.uk) / 01865 610303

**Before booking a visit:** Please be aware that some gardens we visit may be a bit challenging should anyone have mobility or health issues.

**Dogs and Garden Visits:** Following Botanic Gardens policy, dogs are only permitted if they are registered assistance dogs.

And if you've visited any gardens you'd like other Friends to know about through our visits programme, please email details to: [harriet@brethertonfamily.com](mailto:harriet@brethertonfamily.com).

**Friday 8th September, 2.00pm**

## Private visit to The Cotswold Wild Life Park and Gardens

Bradwell Grove, Burford, Oxfordshire  
OX18 4JP

By kind permission of Mr R Heyworth and the Head Gardener

This is a rare opportunity to visit behind the scenes of these outstanding gardens. The Park is well known for its beautiful planting around the animal enclosures and has won national awards. This visit will show how the gardeners organise the complicated designs which are planted each season. They try to match the plants

from where the animals originate. After the visit, a cream tea will be served in The Orangery and Friends will be free to wander in the Park until closing time. We do hope you will take the chance to privately visit these unusual gardens.

- Friends £20, Guests £25
- Maximum 30



Cotswold Wildlife Park and Garden

Thursday 28th September,  
10.00am & 2.00pm

**A private visit to Wytham Woods,  
the Laboratory with Trees**

Wytham Woods, University of Oxford,  
Sawmill Yard, Wytham, Oxford OX2 8QQ

By kind permission of Nigel Fisher,  
Conservator of Wytham Woods

A guided walk through Wytham Woods with the Conservator, Nigel Fisher. A chance to learn about the plants, ecology and research activities located within this 1000-acre woodland. The Woods are one of the most studied areas of land in the world with projects dating back to 1947 and new research areas being introduced each year. The walk will take a maximum of two hours. The terrain is hilly in places but will be taken at a slow pace. Refreshments will be provided.

- Friends £15, Guests £20
- Maximum 30

Thursday 5th October, 2.30pm

**A private visit to a north  
Cotswold garden to see autumn  
planting**

Confidential address details will be sent  
to Friends booked on the visit

A welcome private opportunity to visit a garden north of Chipping Norton created by two well-known gardeners - Celia for her work with snowdrops and Walter, who used to be the Oxford University Parks Superintendent. In describing their garden, they say "We garden our space together. It reflects our personal plant interests. Plantings are multi-layered to provide as much colour, form and texture throughout the year." Tea included. Only those booked to attend will be sent the confidential address details. This is a rare opportunity to visit this wonderful small garden.

- Friends £25, Guests £30
- Maximum 30



The Secret Garden



Wytham Woods

Wednesday 11th October,  
2.00pm

**Private Tour of St Catherine's  
College Gardens**

Manor Road, Oxford OX1 3UJ

By kind permission of The Master and Fellows of  
St Catherine's College

This is a private visit to St Catherine's College, built in 1962 by Danish architect Arne Jacobsen. His vision was to build an entirely modern solution to the challenge of creating an integrated environment which would be both practical and aesthetically

pleasing. The skeleton of Arne Jacobsen's original garden design is largely unaltered and is set out as a series of spaces or rooms defined by yew hedges, brick walls and covered walkways which connect the strong lines of the buildings. The garden's abiding strengths are in its architectural qualities set against simple plantings of carefully chosen trees and shrubs. It is planned to be at its best in June and October and Friends will have a guided tour by the Head Gardener, Paul Shapter. The visit will end with tea and cakes.

- Friends £15, Guests £20
- Maximum 40



St Catherine's College & Garden

Monday 23rd October, 2.30pm

**Private visit to Lime Close,  
a dendrologist's paradise**

35 Henleys Lane, Drayton, Abingdon OX14 4HU

By kind permission of Marie-Christine de Laubarède

This new garden visit is to a four-acre mature plantsman's garden with rare trees, shrubs and roses. The herb garden was created by Rosemary Verey, and the Cottage garden was designed by the owner, MCL Garden Designs. There is a new arboretum planted by continents with rare and exotic trees from Asia and America. We will be given a guided tour of the garden and arboretum by the owner. Refreshments are included.

- Friends £20, Guests £25
- Maximum 30



© Marie-Christine de Laubarède

North American Black Walnut Tree

**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 you have not signed up to receive them. If you wish to sign up, 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).

**Dates for the Newsletter**

The newsletter is published three times a year. The dates this is usually sent out are as follows: Mid-March / Early July / Early November

# The Danby Patrons' Group

By Sarah Taylor

We have had three events since the last newsletter. On the first, Professor Harris showed us some highly amusing examples of illustrations of mythical plants (such as Boramez, or Vegetable Lamb of Tartary), rather realistic and basic direct human 'fertilising' at work, and real plants given the surreal touch through early interpretation.

On the second, Dr Thorogood gave us a hair-raising account of his search in Indonesia for the largest flower in the world, Rafflesia, a parasite of a tropical vine (so far only in existence at the Garden in model form - but we hope one day for a real one). He climbed near-vertical cliffs and encountered dangerous insects and snakes, as well suffering from food poisoning, all made worthwhile by sightings of four different species of this extraordinary plant.

Finally, on an evening where the weather was predictably 'British' a number of Patrons were able to enjoy a presentation on the re-imagining of the Botanic Garden's medicinal plant collections which have undergone considerable change in recent months.

Initially the Curator, Mark Brent, described the design process. The collection had become rather moribund, neglected and indeed using the previous layout based on 'ailments' somewhat outdated. Some of the plantings were based on species which were no longer used in current medicine or research.

The general brief has been threefold: to create a design which references the Garden's heritage and is distinct from the adjacent taxonomic beds,

to represent a timeline of plants in medicine and to recognise notable Oxford physicians, one of whom, the 17th century Regius Professor of Medicine, Thomas Clayton, was a founder of the garden and also Earl Danby's physician.

Professor Fran Platt, Head of the Department of Pharmacology, spoke of her work developing the drug Miglustat which was derived from compounds found in Mulberry, *Morus nigra*. Initially her research was based on finding a treatment for HIV but has subsequently led to the development of the approved drug for glycosphingolipid storage disease therapy.

Finally Dr Sue Burge took the Patrons on an engaging tour of the plant collection where she was able to describe the basis for modern medicine, the publication of the Pharmacopoeia Londinensis which coincided with the foundation of the then Physic Garden. Various plants were highlighted during Sue's tour which reminded everyone of the delicate balance in prescribing medicine in the 17th century, many having fatal consequences if the dose was excessive. However, plants remain a vital source of drugs and again Sue was able to show examples where they have been used in recent medicines.

All of these evenings were complemented by sparkling wine, engaging conversation and delicious canapés prepared by Rebecca Mather, the Friends' answer to Masterchef.

Vegetable Lamb of Tartary



# The Bobarts Patrons' Group

By Helen Potts



The Harcourt Arboretum in Autumn

The English weather and its unpredictable variety are aspects of gardening we can all find both a challenge and a pleasure. And Bobarts Patrons were reminded of this during a very soggy visit to the otherwise splendid gardens of Lower Bowden Manor, near Pangbourne in April. As I write this in the week of the Chelsea Flower Show it finally feels as if summer is on its way and we can look forward to our programme of visits for the rest of the year. New members will always be welcomed by this sociable and enthusiastic group. We don't need shared downpours to bond. Our Patrons gladly share their friendship, knowledge, and love of all things horticultural.

The May sunshine made for a delightful all-day visit to Langford, near Lechlade, beginning with the garden and former home of royal couturier Hardy Amies. Lunch was followed by a tour of the village's Saxon church with a larger beautiful garden rounding off the afternoon. Just one example of the fact our visits are not just about gardens. This year's four-day trip to some very

special gardens in Dorset also included a visit to the fascinating fossil museum, The Etches Collection, housing the marine life of Jurassic Dorset over 157 million years ago. A welcome change perhaps, though some members may believe there's no such thing as too many fabulous gardens!

Before the summer break we will return to the important Gertrude Jekyll garden of Upton Grey, rediscovered in 1984 by the unsuspecting buyers who have since dedicated themselves to recreating the entire garden. Our final visit before the summer is to St Hilda's College to see how the new buildings have been integrated into the site with skilful planting. We will also learn about the challenges of rooftop planting as we admire the view over our own Botanic Garden!

The programme for the second half of the year will include a visit to the gardens of Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons and a visit to botanical art in London. We will enjoy our Bobarts' Day reception at the Arboretum as Autumn begins.

Do consider joining this group. Our loyal Patrons provide extra financial backing to support the valuable work of 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.

**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. The Friends' Office is staffed Monday-Friday, 9.00am to 5.00pm.

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)

This Newsletter was edited by Chris Thorogood and Carol Maxwell. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the policies of the Board of the Friends or the Visitors of Oxford Botanic Garden.



## Calendar

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

### 2023

#### July

Tuesday 4th July, 3.30pm

**A private visit to Bridewell Gardens**

Wednesday 5th July, 6.30pm

**'La Frascata' - New Chamber  
Opera**

Friday 7th July, 10.30am

**Coffee morning at the Oxford  
Botanic Garden**

Friday 7th July, 2.00pm

**Private visit to Lords Wood garden**

Tuesday 11th July, 1.30pm

**A private guided tour of Roche Court  
Sculpture Park and Gardens**

Tuesday 18th July, 2.00pm

**Private visit to Worcester College**

#### September

Friday September 1st, 10.30am

**Coffee Morning at the Oxford  
Botanic Garden**

Thursday 7th September, 5.30pm

**Friends' Annual Party at the  
Harcourt Arboretum**

Friday 8th September, 2.00pm

**Private visit to The Cotswold Wild  
Life Park and Gardens**

Thursday 28th September,  
10.00am and 2.00pm

**A private visit to Wytham Woods,  
the Laboratory with Trees**

#### October

Thursday 5th October, 2.30pm

**A private visit to a north Cotswold  
garden**

Friday 6th October, 10.30am

**Coffee Morning at the Harcourt  
Arboretum**

Wednesday 11th October, 2.00pm

**Private Tour of St Catherine's  
College Gardens**

Saturday 14th October

**Autumn Fair at the Harcourt  
Arboretum**

Monday 23rd October, 2.30pm

**Private visit to Lime Close**