



Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust

Celebrating 25 Years

1997-2022

The Newsletter of the Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust

Spring 2023



Dear Members

By the time you receive this newsletter, I hope that Spring will have sprung, and we can get out in our gardens, in my case I need to replace all the plants killed by the extremes of weather we experienced in 2022.

Garden visiting will also start again and if you have not already booked on our visits now would be a good time to do so. Our visit to Hall Barn in May is already fully booked, but if you wish to be added to the waiting list, please contact Rosemary Jury enquiries@bucksgardenstrust.org.uk. We still have places on all other events the first of which is a visit to Batsford Arboretum timed to coincide with blossom season; we hope that the delicate pink cherry blossoms known as 'Sakura' in Japan will put in an appearance.

Members of the council have been working hard on plans for our future, following a successful 25 years we need to ensure that the Trust is in a healthy place to face the challenge of the next 25. Areas we need to consider are, engaging a young audience, networking

with other heritage groups, recruitment of new members and our future finance. We will keep you updated on our new initiatives.

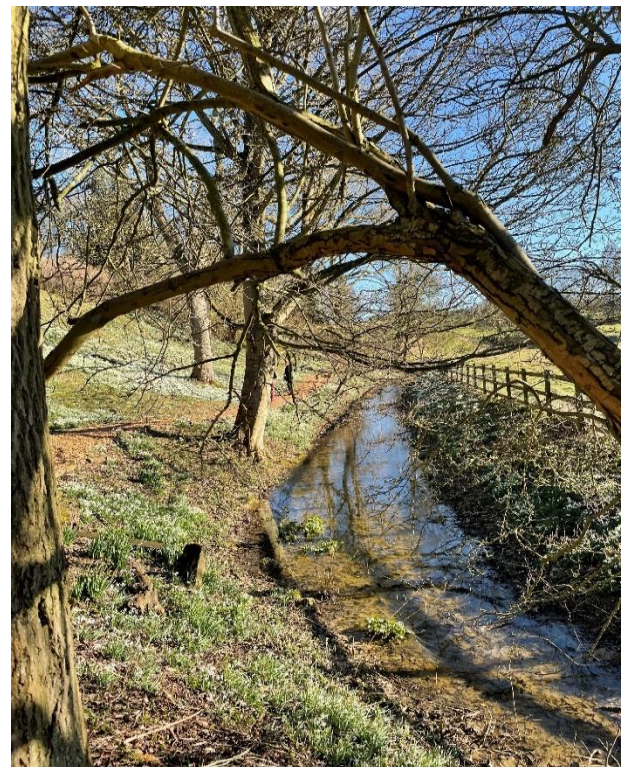
The Gardeners Network is already proving a great success and we now have at least 16 members. Our next meeting is on the 30 March at Turn End, Haddenham so if you know of any professional gardeners in Buckinghamshire who would be interested please let me know.

In the next few months I shall be attending a number of events and giving presentations which will give me the opportunity to talk to members of other heritage organisations. During the summer I shall be judging 'Aylesbury in Bloom' with entries from schools and private gardens which will enable me to engage with teachers and find out what is happening with gardening initiatives in schools.

Please don't worry I shall not be working all the time I am off to Mallorca in May to visit the wonderful gardens on the island!!

Hope to catch up with many of you during the coming months.

Claire de Carle (chair)



Planning Report

Whereas most of us look forward to a restful Christmas and New Year, from a planning perspective, we often see a sudden influx of applications leading up to the holidays which no amount of Christmas pudding can delay.

In the Wycombe Area in late 2022 we were working with Wycombe Abbey School regarding their long-term plans for the school. We submitted early stage advice in response to their initial draft proposals and we have recently received revised proposals which, we hope, have taken our comments into consideration

At Hedsor Park, we were consulted on proposals to convert redundant water tank structures into short term holiday lets. Following our initial objections, revised proposals were submitted and we withdrew our objections. Planning consent has now been granted subject to conditions.

We were particularly concerned with a prior notification for permitted development to site a 5G telecoms mast at the Pedestal Roundabout at the top of West Wycombe Road adjacent to West Wycombe Park and in the setting of West Wycombe Hill with St Lawrence Church and the West Wycombe Mausoleum at the top. We submitted a strong objection to this and we were rather shocked to see that the applicant's Heritage Statement suggested there would be "not detract from the historical importance of and will preserve the nearby heritage assets and conservation area". We were relieved to note that the planning authority determined that prior approval was required and has been refused for this application.

In the Aylesbury area, there have been a number of applications relating to Stowe School and also Stowe Landscape Gardens. There has also been two new applications for Little Yeat Farm which sits close to the Registered Park and Garden at Wotton Underwood. In a response to an influx of applications for this site in 2021/22, we recommended that the applicant conducted a Heritage Impact Assessment so that all of these proposals could be considered properly. We were pleased to see that they have undertaken an HIA which will help inform their development of proposals and the various responses from the planning authority and other statutory consultees to any applications

The most concerning applications in the Aylesbury area has been for a substantial housing development for 535 dwellings with an associated energy park including a solar PV array, a wind turbine on undeveloped former farm land in open countryside adjacent to the Grade 1 listed RPG at Waddesdon. Whilst we are committed to finding solutions to climate change and encouraging new sustainable technologies, such development needs to be done in a sensitive manner with respect for the designated asset. We requested a site visit to assess how the proposals will impact on the Waddesdon RPG and have submitted objections. Such matters will always

be contentious and it is remarkable to see the number of objections submitted from local people weighed against the number of supporting letters from people living as far away as West Sussex and South Shields in Tyneside!

The Milton Keynes area has seen a steady flow of applications relating to home extensions and structures in domestic gardens within larger RPGs but we give these applications a thorough review to assess the impact on the setting and character of the relevant RPG.

The South Bucks area has seen a number of resubmissions of applications where we have previously submitted comments and/or objections so we hope that we are playing a small role in ensuring these applications are being thoroughly considered in terms of their potential impact on the heritage asset. In a number of these cases, we have been very pleased to see that our comments have resulted in revisions to make some applications more acceptable. We were also encouraged to see that a planning appeal for the construction of a new agricultural road from Shardeloes Lake to the Amersham Road was rejected.

Finally, you may recall my report on a planning application for the major speculative redevelopment of Wexham Springs? The Bucks Gardens Trust had been asked to provide any information we had on this site although it is not an RPG. I had researched the site at the RIBA Library in London and Annabel Downs from FOLAR researched it at the Museum of Rural Life in Reading

The site is a Victorian garden with a subsequent layer of important mid-20th century development, the 20th century buildings had already been lost but there are key sculptures remaining by William Mitchell and Mitzi Cunliffe and evidence of the landscape designs by Geoffrey Jellicoe, Sylvia Crowe and possibly Bryan Westwood.

With short notice, we were able to provide a strong objection to the outline planning application and requested that the applicant conducts a thorough historic research assessment to establish exactly what remains of the historic landscape. We were very pleased to hear that the planning application was subsequently withdrawn and the case closed as of November 2022. It is highly likely that another application will be made for this site in the future but we hope that our response will encourage the applicants to ensure what remains of the designed landscape is protected as part of any future proposals.

February 24th 2023

Jo Mirzoeff



Paul Rabbitts, Chair of the Parks Management Association, is updating and republishing the excellent 'People's Parks - The Design and Development of Victorian Parks'. The book will retail at £50 and more details are available <https://gofund.me/c6be731a>

Profile of Deborah Kidd – Social Media Officer for Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust



I am no gardener. There, I've said it. I've tried, oh have I tried, but abject failure always ensues. Testament to this sorry fact is the rocky road behind me littered with the corpses of various indoor and outdoor plants entrusted to my "care". I do, however, love gardens. Other people's gardens. The sort of tranquil oases that I know I have it in me to create, one day...

Like many of you, I'm sure, my childhood was spent being taken/dragged to all manner of delightful gardens. For my brother and me, the afternoon teas were the chief delights. No-one does jam and scones quite like a NT property. I fear I am a massive disappointment to my horticulturally-minded family.

I had my excuses, though, for my neglected green spaces. My work meant I spent months at a time out of the country. As a documentary producer, working on blue-chip science, history and current affairs films, I might find myself in China one day and Cambodia the next. Morocco or the US. The Arctic Circle to Africa. Who has the time to water a bedraggled clematis under such circumstances?

Such extensive travel did allow me to see some amazing landscapes, both natural and cultivated. The Garden of the Gods, in Colorado is, forgive me, heavenly indeed. The many hidden Spanish and Moroccan gardens we filmed in were so extraordinary, hidden behind beautifully carved wooden doors, within courtyards of a hushed beauty.

It showed me that a garden can be created in the most unexpected places. Did I mention the goats that inhabit the Argan trees in Morocco? No really, they are likely large hairy fruit, up on the branches...

So I leave the green-fingered work to those who actually know what they are doing. My role is to be supportive on the sidelines and make endless cups of tea and coffee. Or in my current role, to report and applaud their efforts on BGT's online platforms. This role suits my gardening ethos...

Rain is the lazy gardener's watering can.

Socialmedia@bucksgardenstrust.org.uk *Deborah Kidd*

The Future of the Research & Recording Project

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust research and recording project was started at the end of 2012 and has been running for ten years, in this time we have created a considerable body of work which includes more than 100 reports. In the past two years and particularly during the pandemic we have struggled to keep up the momentum and this has been made more difficult by the limited access to the Bucks Archive and the difficulties of obtaining site visits.


Since taking over as chair of the Trust and particularly during our anniversary year I have decided to use my time to focus on other projects, including planning for the Trust's future. We have therefore decided that while we will try and finish all the site reports that are currently underway, we shall not formally start on any new ones. I have made it clear to the researchers that we are not bringing the project to a close we are taking a break and 'parking it' for a while.

We are more than happy for the volunteers to continue with research as many enjoy this aspect of the work. Those members that have the confidence to write reports, with minimal input will be encouraged to do so, we have plenty of sites of local historic interest still to be considered. These can then be added to the Local Heritage List currently being compiled by Bucks Council. Other research can be stored for future reference, used in our newsletter and will be useful for planning application purposes.

For the future we shall keep in touch with the research volunteers, and plan to arrange an in-person meeting in the summer.

Finally I would like to reassure you all that we are not giving up on Research and Recording, as I am sure you will agree the project has been a huge success and Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust has become one of the top trusts in this field!!

Claire de Carle

 Please note that the following dossiers have been added to the Publications category on the website: Amersham Museum. Chandos Park, Denham Mount, Ouse Valley and The Rye. They can be found in Research and Recording → Locally Important Sites and are in alphabetical order

A Saunter Through Snowdrops. Great Brickhill Manor opens its gates.



Every February tiny green shoots push through a crisp layer of leaf litter. Within a few days encouraged by spring-like sunshine, a mass of nodding white miniature bells magically appear.

Great Brickhill Manor opens its wrought iron gates only two days every year to allow a glimpse into this secluded site. Hidden behind imposing brick walls fortified by castle-like battlements and towers, the estate is home to millions of delightful little plants.



We were welcomed outside the church of St. Mary the Virgin. Wandering through the churchyard we soon discovered the first flush of snowdrops scattered between the gravestones.

A waymarked route directs you past historic cedars standing as sentinels above the surrounding parkland. One of these has sent out a low branch which has rooted and is now growing a new tree. Others have lost their topmost branches: victims to strong winds on this exposed site.

The trail wanders through a wild area of deciduous woodland carpeted by countless snowdrops which form a hazy white mist above the fallen leaves. There were millions of these perfect plants. They had

spread everywhere even poking their pointed leaves and tiny bells through the paths.

The route then meanders gently down towards two beautiful tree-lined lakes. Framed by weeping willows and alder trees, the lakes are home to squabbling coots arguing over potential mates, their frantic paddling leaves rippling wakes on the mirror-like lakes. Giant sequoia are reflected in the water. Rushes and reeds were showing signs of new growth, hints of the lush vegetation which would soon fringe these lovely lakes and provide a refuge for a variety of wildlife. In the summer I imagined dragonfly nymphs climbing up the stems ready to emerge into the colourful adult insects which would skim above the water surface and clatter their iridescent wings between the reed stems.

Set high up on the undulating western edge of the Greensand Ridge, the path gives panoramic views northwards across the clay vale. In the distance we could just make out the edge of the city of Milton Keynes, with its beautifully landscaped parks and balancing lakes.



Turning uphill towards the church again we came across drifts of double snowdrops interspersed with aconites, their little yellow blooms surrounded by a frill of bright green leaves.

After an hour of admiring the profusion of plants we returned to the church where we were served hot drinks and delicious home-made cakes. Roll on next year when I hope Great Brickhill Manor grounds will be open to another group of galanthophiles.

Meanwhile many of the flowers can be spotted from the road (Galley Lane) which goes quite steeply downhill from St. Mary's Church past a former entrance to the estate and the two middle lodges.

In 2017 Sarah Tricks produced a fascinating dossier on this historic designed landscape and I am grateful to her for interpreting these confusing grounds.

Sheila Meekums

21st Century Women Gardeners



Franzi Cheeseman MHort (RHS) CHort Head Gardener of The Stoke Poges Memorial Garden

I was lucky enough to grow up in central Switzerland in a small town near Lake Lucerne. From age five I knew that I wanted to be a gardener. We didn't have a garden as we lived in a flat in the middle of town. However, my mother grew lots of things with us children in window boxes and containers on the balcony, the most memorable being little round carrots – just enough for a mouthful! It was enough to hook me for life and when I finished school, I went on to do a three-year apprenticeship in horticulture. After that, I worked at an organic market garden, trialling lots of old and new techniques in organic gardening – and growing lovely fruit and veg.



Franzi as a young gardener

A one-year stay in the UK to work as an au-pair, turned into many more when met a lovely man who is now my husband and ended up staying rather longer than I had originally planned!

I started my own garden care business and later diversified into garden design upon completion of an HNC in Garden Design and Plantsmanship at the Berkshire College of Agriculture. My apprenticeship had equipped me with all the basic skills I needed to be a successful horticulturist including lots of plant knowledge. The design course and my work experience built on this, and I've been able to continue to expand my knowledge and practical skills over the years. One of the great joys in horticulture is that there is always more to learn! More recently I completed the degree level Master of Horticulture with the RHS and I am a Chartered Horticulturist.



Stoke Poges Memorial Garden in Spring

I would definitely recommend horticulture as a career. There are so many areas to choose from; production, design, history, science, sustainability, conservation, psychology, technology and more. What an amazing industry to work in!

I've been working as Head Gardener of the Stoke Poges Memorial Gardens since 2012. The Gardens were designed and built in the 1930's and are Grade 1 registered. Apart from looking after a beautiful place, which holds significance for many people who come to visit their loved ones, I love the historic aspect of the gardens and the surrounding area. It gives the garden a tremendous sense of place. Over the last couple of years I've been able to design an extension to the Memorial Gardens. The design draws on a number of models used in bereavement counselling and aims to help visitors think and work through some of the emotions encountered after a loss.

The Memorial Gardens are open every day of the year. We also open under the National Gardens Scheme on Sunday, 14th May 2023 from 1.30-4.30pm. There will be guided tours of the gardens and refreshments will be served. Entry is £5 per person.

Franzi Cheeseman



Poges Memorial Gardens in Summer

We host a number of events throughout the year including an Insect Day, Heritage Open Day, Bat Walk, Fungus Foray and Bereavement Cafe. Our volunteer groups, the Friends of the Gardens and the Garden Ninjas are always looking for more members. If you're interested in any of these, please get in touch for more information

Photographs © SPMG Head Gardener

Franzi.cheeseman@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

21st Century Women Gardeners



Jackie Hunt © Paul Wilkinson Photography

Jackie Hunt – Gardener at Turn End, Haddenham

I am the Gardener at Turn End in Haddenham, the home and garden of world-renowned architect Peter Aldington.

My introduction to horticulture began with my grandparents. My maternal grandmother had a magical garden behind a 1930's semi in Amersham, with deep, dark borders and huge trees. A tiny stone

path snaked across a rockery to an informal pond, around which grew yellow *Mimulus*. I made miniature ballerinas from the scarlet and amethyst-skirted flowers of *Fuchsia magellanica*, topped with a *Calendula* petal as golden hair.

My father's parents had a formal, hilltop garden in Chesham. The low privet hedges, tiered levels and steep paths made an excellent obstacle course for my brother, cousins and I. There was a gnarly old cooking apple and patch of blackberries from which my grandmother made luscious fruit tarts.

My own childhood efforts included sowing wild flowers for a 'meadow' and crafting miniature seed tray gardens with ponds made from compact mirrors and lawns made from moss for the Holmer Green Horticultural Society shows. When I purchased my first house in Marlow I became very enthusiastic about researching - and buying - plants for the different aspects and soil conditions by visiting garden centres and reading plant encyclopaedias.

I studied Archaeology and my first career was as a museum curator, in London, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, mainly at Wycombe Museum where I loved the furniture collection. Gardening remained a passion and I attended evening classes for the RHS General Certificate and Level 3 Diploma and volunteered at Hughenden Manor. I took the plunge to change career and spent 3 years full time studying all the subjects that I was fascinated by - a National Diploma in Horticulture at Kingston Maurward College in Dorset, photography evening classes and an MA in Furniture Design at Buckinghamshire New University. Alongside, I worked as a seasonal gardener at Greys Court and undertook garden design and maintenance for friends. It is thanks to the knowledge and support of Lindsay Engers at Bucks Adult Learning, Frank Parge at Hughenden Manor and Rachel Roncon at Greys Court that I was able to start my own career in horticulture.

My MA thesis explored furniture within garden design and I interviewed Peter Aldington at Turn End as a case study. We kept in touch and he offered me the job here as Gardener in 2010.

What I enjoy and value at Turn End is the variety of work in this small but complex garden, constant opportunities to learn new skills, freedom to plan my work and being innovative with modest resources! The rhythm of the seasons is both joyous and grounding and it is rewarding to gradually evolve and expand our plant collection whilst staying true to Peter's original design. I also help manage the properties and love sharing my enthusiasm for Turn End through group visits, a growing programme of public events and developing new collaborations with local partners. I currently work with Turn End Trust on fundraising and future strategy, as Turn End's creators Margaret and Peter Aldington step back after 60 years of welcoming visitors from across the globe to their home and garden.

I've been fortunate to work with and share friendships with many women gardeners. Common to all is an incredible passion for plants, impressive work ethic and generous sharing of knowledge (and plants!).



Studio at Turn End, Haddenham © CdC



Dry Garden, Turn End, Haddenham © CdC



Whych walls, Turn End, Haddenham © CdC

We are looking forward to welcoming the new Buckinghamshire Gardeners Network to Turn End on 30 March and partnering with Bucks Gardens Trust for 'Tree Treasures' walks on 30 May.

Find out more about forthcoming events at Turn End and our visits to other special gardens:

turnendgarden@gmail.com

Friends scheme visit website: www.turnend.org.uk

Or email us at turnendtrustevents@gmail.com to join our mailing list

Jackie Hunt

21st Century Women Gardeners



© Anna Tolfree

Anna Tolfree – Senior Gardener at Stowe

My passion for gardening started at an early age and I remember helping my grandfather in his greenhouse prick out and pot on his seedlings, I think he valued my small hands. I was about 10 when my parents gave me a piece of the garden to grow flowers and vegetables on and by the age of 12 I had my first greenhouse. This really was a turning point in my life as I realised I wanted a career in horticulture but it wasn't until I turned 30 that this became a reality.

In 2010 I had started volunteering in the garden at Wrest Park (English Heritage) in Bedfordshire and the opportunity came up to be one of 4 new Apprentice Gardeners on a 2 year contract. We had practical training in the historic gardens, learning about the daily maintenance and restoration work and studied for our RHS Level 2 and 3 in Horticulture once a week. We were also awarded funding through LANTRA for training that was specifically aimed at women as they had themselves noticed a shortfall in the amount of women training in the horticulture sector and wanted to address this balance, this was used to fund our NPTC Tractor training and also PA1 & PA6 Spraying certificates.

In 2012 I was successful in securing a new job at National Trust Stowe as a Gardener. When I started I was given the Western Garden to look after, which was around 60 acres. My first project was to restore

an area called the Labyrinth which involved tree felling, designing planting plans using the original plans of the area, contract management of the hard landscaping and eventual planting of the area with the help of staff and volunteers. In 2019 I secured the job of Senior Gardener at Stowe and since then have been involved in lots of different restoration projects including the removal of the golf course and the subsequent expansion of Sleeping Wood and restoring Queens Theatre and its planting.

Eranthis Hyemalis (Winter Aconite) & Galanthus Nivalis (



Snowdrop) around the base of Metasequoia Glyptostroboidea (Dawn Redwood) in the Elysian Fields at Stowe© M Hunt

When I think about the future I want to focus on sustainability, climate change and Nature at Stowe as these are very important areas that we should as an industry be focusing on as they affect all of us and am always working on ways to reduce our need for plastics and reduce our impact on the environment around us. Climate change is also a big concern, and I am working on what it means for us at Stowe and the future planting we do as our native tree species are suffering the effects of climate change and I need to find other species of trees that still give spirit of place within the Grade 1 listed landscape but will withstand our new climate for generations to come.



Apple Orchards Stow

Anna Tolfree

Can you help with the Local Heritage Listing?

Buckinghamshire's LOCAL HERITAGE LIST

Buckinghamshire has a rich heritage. Many of our key sites and buildings benefit from statutory protection as listed buildings or scheduled monuments. However, locally-important heritage assets, which contribute positively to the character and identity of Buckinghamshire, often have little or no protection, and over time these special places can be lost.

The Local Heritage List Project aims to identify and celebrate some of these important heritage assets.

Can you help us?

You can help by:

- Nominating a building, site or feature to be considered for inclusion on the Local Heritage List
- Volunteering to assist us with survey and assessment work

Our Project Officer may also be able to help with additional information on

Many members of Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust have already contributed significantly to the Buckinghamshire Local Heritage list, which includes the Research and Recording groups 100 dossiers.

<https://bucksgardenstrust.org.uk/research-and-recording/local-heritage-listing/> The list is extensive and covers locally significant heritage sites, buildings, street furniture, public open spaces, public works of art, monuments etc. To date only five counties have been involved but the intention is that it will apply to all counties and be an **essential tool for planning**.

Julia Wise, a Bucks GT member has been involved in the process of setting up the list as the HER (Historic Environment Record) Officer. Claire de Carle and Dr Sarah Rutherford have also offered their expertise on the panel that considers nominations for the list.

If you have not looked at the details of what the list covers then have a look as it will probably include a number of local heritage sites near you: search [Buckinghamshire Local Heritage List website](#).

It is important that our local heritage is recognized and listed as there are a number of important changes in planning which are about to be actioned eg *Levelling up Regeneration Bill*

Register to take part: <https://local-heritage-list.org.uk/buckinghamshire/Account/Register>

To date there have been more than 2,653 nominations for inclusion on the list and 771 of these sites are now being brought forward for adoption in Phase 1.

The Local Heritage List identifies locally significant heritage sites and celebrates their contribution to local identity and character. These sites include historic buildings (houses, chapels, agricultural and industrial buildings), archaeological sites (upstanding earthwork remains and buried sites), formal gardens, public open spaces, public works of art, monuments and street furniture.



Postcard from A Scotsman's Botanical Garden on Lake Maggiore

Dear Bucks GT Members,

The Giardini Botanici Villa Taranto is located near Pallanza on a promontory on the western shore where the mountains rise towards the Swiss border. The gardens were established 1931-1940 by wealthy Scotsman Captain Neil Boyd McEacharn MBE (1884-1964). He was commissioned into the Kings Own Scottish Borderers in 1911 and served throughout the First World War.

In the late 1920s, he bought an existing villa and estates of 16 hectares, cut down more than 2000 trees and undertook substantial changes to the landscape, including 8 km of pipes for major water features in this garden in the English style. The name Villa Taranto honours a MacDonald ancestor, Duke of Taranto by Napoleon. The gardens were gifted to the Italian State and opened to the public in 1952.

Today the gardens contain nearly 20,000 plant varieties, representing more than 3,000 species providing colour all season long. Among Scottish conifers and more exotic palms are collections of azalea, cornus, greenhouses of Jeremy Fisher lily pads of *Victoria cruziana* and 300 types of dahlias. Formal beds surround the mausoleum. I visited in August and saw a 'lake' of Lotus flowers but would love to see the Spring flowering cherries. Sarah Grey



The Poetry of Gardens



William Cowper Portrait © Cowper & Newton Museum

On the Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust website can be found a series of fascinating articles called **Artists and their Gardens**. Buckinghamshire gardens and countryside, however, have also inspired their fair share of poets and writers to convey their appreciation of nature in words rather than in paint. A flavour of the life of one is offered below, as the first in a series of essays to introduce them.

William Cowper (1731-1800)

Born on 26th November, 1731, in Berkhamsted in neighbouring Hertfordshire, William Cowper (pronounced *Cooper*) was, in his day, one of the most widely read and respected poets. His verses expressed a sympathetic engagement with, and appreciation of nature and the everyday, and was influential on many a writer coming after, notably Coleridge and Wordsworth. Robert Burns carried a copy of Cowper's poem, *The Task* in his pocket, and Jane Austen quotes him in three of her six novels.

His earliest surviving poem, '*Verses...on Finding the Heel of a Shoe,*' was written when he was 17 and Cowper continued to write throughout a life which took him from Hertfordshire to London, and then, for a short period to Huntingdon. It was here, from the evidence of letters to his friend, Joseph Hill, that his love of gardening began: '*Having commenced gardener, I study the arts of pruning, sowing, planting, and enterprise everything in that way, from melons down to cabbages. I have a large garden to display my abilities in.*' His next move, in September, 1767, was to Olney, north Bucks, where he lived for nearly 20 years before moving to the nearby village of Weston Underwood. Cowper died on 25th April,

1800, of 'a worn out constitution.' He was sixty-eight.

The life which had so worn down Cowper's health was, sadly, one fraught with bouts of depression complicated by an acute fear of public speaking which conspired to land him in a series of predicaments. These came about as he struggled to accommodate the requirements and desires of others and to reconcile them with his own emotional needs. Such events frequently led him to contemplate - and on occasions, to attempt - to take his own life, and the gentle humour of his verse could not completely mask the bleakness of his outlook on life.

His parents, Reverend John Cowper and wife Ann, produced 7 children of which William was the fourth. Only he, and their seventh child, John, survived. With John's birth, his mother Ann died, a few weeks before William's 6th birthday, an event which remained vivid in his memory. Over 50 years later, he composed the poem: '*On the Receipt of my Mother's Picture*,' in which he recalls the sound of the church bell tolling and the sight of her hearse departing. He eulogises her protective and 'constant flow of love that knew no fall' and describes how the maids, out of concern for the depths of his grief, assured him his mother would soon return. His inevitable and devastating disappointment in this he cites as the root of an intractable tendency to pessimism that dogged him throughout life.

Cowper was not yet 8 years old when, at school in Bedfordshire, he became the target of a brutal bully 7 years his senior. He wryly described this experience as one in which he: '*knew him by his shoe buckles better than by any other part of his dress*.' He was fortunate to escape this ritual humiliation when unusual specks on his eyes caused sufficient concern for him to be sent to live at the home of Mrs Disney, an oculist. His eyes did not improve under her care, but his quality of life did. The condition later resolved itself, to a degree.



Main entrance to Dean's Yard Westminster School & College Garden (purported to be oldest garden in England)-Wikimedia

Despite his earlier experiences, he was thrust back into the harsh and competitive environment of Westminster School where, again, he was witness to - and doubtless sometimes the victim of - further bullying, but mercifully, he seems not to have become a central target as before. He thrived, coming

third in his year and making many lasting friendships. He also discovered Homer's *Iliad*, *The Odyssey* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, giving rise to a life-long love of, and involvement in literature.

With his education complete, his father decreed that he should become a barrister, a profession he was fundamentally unsuited to with his terror of public exposure. However, afraid to go against his father's wishes, on 29th April, 1748, Cowper was admitted to the Middle Temple (and later the Inner Temple) while his friends were heading for Oxford and Cambridge. His first reluctant post as an articled clerk in a solicitor's office in London engendered in Cowper a strong dislike for law and its practitioners and he began to spend time at the home of his uncle, Ashley Cowper, barrister and clerk to the Houses of Parliament, in Southampton Row, for: '*...giggling and making giggle*' with his cousins as an antidote to his work life.



Middle Temple Hall Exterior © Wikimedia Commons

Cowper and his cousin, Theadora, fell in love. Their three-year relationship was somewhat stormy, from the poems Cowper wrote at the time and, in 1753, Cowper suffered a bout of depression with the stress of it and his faltering career. His uncle would not countenance marriage between them as Cowper could not adequately support his daughter, and the tendency of both to melancholy did not bode well.

Sometime later, seeing his daughter's subsequent, on-going unhappiness, he tried to promote Cowper's prospects by pushing him towards a professional opportunity in the House of Lords. However, with competition for the role, to secure it, Cowper would first have to prove his suitability, and he crumbled at the prospect of the public performance involved. Seeing opportunity escape him, he could not muster the courage to propose marriage to Theadora again, for fear she would reject him.

He sank into an abyss of gloom, making a series of inept suicide attempts: he tried to poison himself with laudanum, but could not swallow it; planned to drown, but instead stabbed himself with his penknife which broke; tried to hang himself with a garter which snapped as he drifted into unconsciousness. His subsequent night terrors and self-loathing were such it was decided to send him to an asylum in St. Albans where he remained for 18 months. A visit

from his brother, John - more successfully pushed by their father to be a clergyman - prompted him to pick up a bible whereupon he underwent a conversion, giving himself to the mercy and salvation of Jesus Christ, and his recovery was initiated.

Determined never to return to London and his ineffectual legal career, Cowper took lodgings in Huntingdon, where he became acquainted with William Unwin, a Cambridge graduate preparing to take holy orders. With scant funds to support himself, Cowper was invited to board with William's family but, not long after moving in, the father, Reverend Morley Unwin, died in a riding accident. Mrs Unwin decided to move the family to somewhere '...under the Sound of the Gospel.' This was Olney, where the Reverend John Newton was curate under the patronage of an old school fellow of Cowper's, by now the Earl of Dartmouth. Cowper went too.



Orchard Side © Cowper & Newton Museum

They took up residence in a house called Orchard Side near to the vicarage and a friendship quickly developed between Cowper and Newton. Newton encouraged Cowper to write the account of his conversion and involved him in evangelising the people of Olney. This led to Cowper composing sixty-six devotional poems which form part of Newton's well-known *Olney Hymns*. One of these, Newton's *Amazing Grace*, was celebrated in Olney on 1st January 2023, having been written 250 years earlier to the day. Phrases from others written by Cowper have become commonplace, such as: 'God moves in mysterious ways.' Both Newton and Cowper were abolitionists and it was around this time that Cowper wrote the poem, *The Negro's Complaint*, to be quoted nearly two centuries later by Martin Luther King.



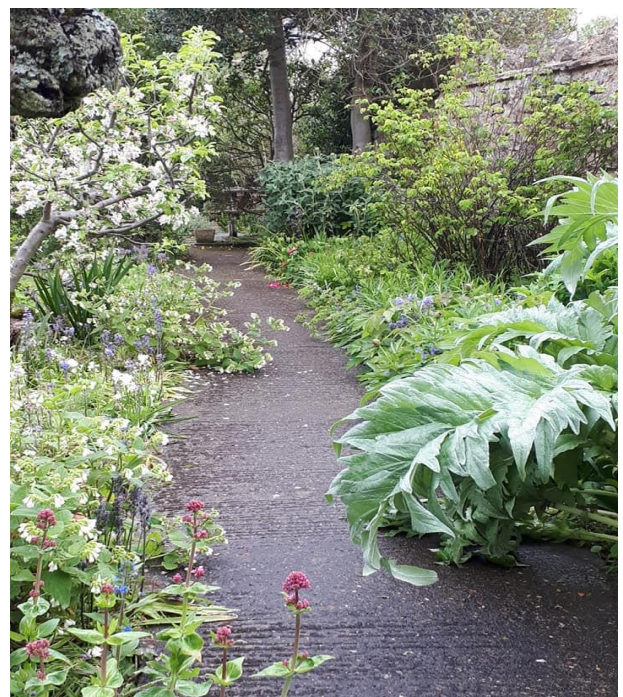
Summer House Garden in Summer © Cowper & Newton Museum



Flower Garden & Summer House © Cooper & Newton Museum

Meanwhile, Cowper indulged his new interest in the garden of Orchard Side and recorded his activities in letters to friends. The owner of a medicinal garden at the rear of Orchard Side, Thomas Aspray, died, in 1775 and by 1778, Cowper had successfully annexed the garden to his own, giving easy access to the vicarage garden. It included a 'smoking house' which became his refuge and retreat, he described it as his 'verse manufactory,' where he was inspired and was: *... regaled with the scent of every flower in a garden as full of flowers as I have known how to make it. We keep no bees, but if I lived in a hive I should hardly hear more of their music.*

Cowper wrote to friends that: 'Gardening was of all employments that in which I succeeded best.'



Flower Garden path to Summer House garden © Museum

Their next move came about as the result of a lengthy visit from an old friend of Cowper, Lady Hesketh. Finding Orchard Side too cramped and dilapidated, she proposed a better house in Weston Underwood owned by her friend, Sir Robert Throckmorton, Lord of the Manor. She offered to pay the moving costs and buy some new furnishings and Cowper and Mrs Unwin moved there on 15th November, 1786. Here Cowper found new inspiration in long walks on the parkland of the estate of Weston House, and new friendship with the Throckmortons.

In 1795, when Mrs Unwin's health was in decline and Cowper had succumbed to a deep melancholy, concerned relatives on his mother's side persuaded a reluctant Cowper that they should move to Norfolk to be cared for by a cousin. Here, Mrs Unwin died later that year. Cowper survived her by five years during which time, encouraged by his cousin, he wrote a revision of Homer, translated from Latin the poems of his old schoolmaster, Vincent Bourne, and writing some new ones of his own. **Catherine Youd**

The Poplar Field

*The Poplars are fell'd, farewell to the shade
And the Whispering sound of the cool colonnade,
The winds play no longer and sing in the leaves,
Nor Ouse on his bosom their image receives.*

*Twelve years have elapsed since I last took a view
Of my favourite field and the bank where they grew,
And now in the grass behold they are laid,
And the tree is my seat that once lent me a shade.*

*The black-bird has fled to another retreat
Where the hazels afford him a screen from the heat,
And the scene where his melody charm'd me before,
Resounds with his sweet-flowing ditty no more.*

*My fugitive years are all hasting away,
And I must ere long lie as lowly as they,
With a turn on my breast and a stone at my head
E'er another such grove shall arise in its stead.*

*'Tis a sight to engage me if anything can
To muse of the perishing pleasures of Man;
Though his life be a dream, his enjoyments, I see,
Have a Being less durable even than he.*

William Cowper, 1785

Sources:

Encyclopaedia Britannica www.britannica.com
Bucks Garden Trust/Dossiers bucksgardenstrust.org.uk
Cowper and Newton Museum, Olney
cowperandnewtonmuseum.org.uk
Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
www.oxforddnb.com
Poetry Foundation www.poetryfoundation.org

Photographs: courtesy of the museum. Orchard Side and its garden now form the Cowper and Newton museum, Market Place, Olney, Bucks, MK46 4AJ.

Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project

The following dossiers have been added to the Publications category on the website: Amersham Museum, Chandos, Denham Mount, Ouse Valley and The Rye. They can be found in Research and Recording → Locally Important Sites and are in alphabetical order.



Pann Mill ©Liza Wormell

The Rye

All 100 dossiers/reports have been published in the *Buckinghamshire's Local Heritage List* and this report on The Rye is our most recent. The researcher recorder & photographer is Liza Wormell. Each dossier follows a set format and this is an extract which includes the Statement of Significance, Historic Development and Site Description. <https://bucksgardenstrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/The-Rye-BGT-RR-dossier-28-Sep-22.pdf>

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Overview

A large market town recreation ground in an urban area of the Chiltern Wye valley near the heart of the town. In its present form it originated as common land and was established as a communal open space by the early C19. Various historic features include a pumping station, swimming pool, site of a Roman villa, ancient mills, and the River Wye. It abuts Capability Brown's masterly and sly Wycombe Abbey lake (c.1760s, Registered Park & Garden), The Dyke, perched to the south above the open land, The Rye containing the north dam which slopes down in the open area.

Archaeological interest

The site has considerable potential for archaeological evidence from the earliest times onwards. It lies close

to the historic core of the town and has been occupied by communities from many periods. The extensive Roman remains suggest a centre of activity in the area, followed by Anglo-Saxon occupation, and potential for evidence related to the various mills and control of the water courses as well as Civil War skirmishes. Potential also exists for evidence related to the later C18 parkland of Wycombe Abbey particularly relating to Brown's lake, The Dyke, its dam to the north which extends into this site, and related water management.



Dyke looking East ©Liza Wormell



Dyke looking South ©Liza Wormell

Architectural interest

The site contains or is closely related to scattered historic buildings which contribute to the ornamental interest, including the Pann and Rye Mills with ancient origins, and civic buildings of the C20 particularly commemorative War Gates on Wendover Way, Wycombe Rye Lido building and pool, the former health centre and the old pumping station.

Artistic interest

The largely open site is a typical urban recreation ground which is of artistic interest for the historic structures scattered within or adjacent to it and for its integral relationship with the Dyke, Capability Brown's sinuous ornamental lake which formed the centrepiece of his parkland work at Wycombe Abbey adjacent. The very long and subtly contoured north dam of this lake grades into the Rye. On the north

side the River Wye forms a naturalistic feature overlooked by the prestigious merchants' houses on the far side of the London Road and the entrance front of the United Reform Chapel.

Historic interest

The Rye is of high historic interest for its communal origins as common land with water sources used for various types of milling, and for its contribution to the civic and communal life of High Wycombe.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Rye was a good place for settlement as it had pure water, good agricultural land, availability of flint for tools and trees for shelter and fuel. Earthenware has been found dating from more than 3000 years ago along the riverbanks and the bones of a woolly rhinoceros and a mammoth have been discovered in the soil of the Rye (Buckinghamshire Historic Towns Assessment Report). Neolithic and early Bronze Age pottery was found beneath the Roman villa.

The Roman villa site, c.150-170AD, beneath the east end of the swimming pool complex, which is located adjacent to the south boundary, was occupied for about 200 years. The 30m by 20m ruins were uncovered in 1722, with hypocaust heating and a gatehouse flanked by two small lodges (HER). The bathhouse under the car park east of the pool had cold, tepid and hot rooms that were enlarged 100 years after the building of the villa. Evidence found includes hypocaust tiles, and Roman pits and bricks when the swimming pool was refurbished (HER). The villa was abandoned in AD350 after the Romans left Britain. Major excavations in 1862, 1932 and 1952 found artefacts including a Romano-British mosaic floor. Excavations at (Great) Penn Mead, by the lido in Holywell Mead found remains of a Roman settlement of some importance.

The Anglo-Saxons left evidence at the spring known as the round basin on Holywell Mead (Parker). This lies 95m north of the swimming pool and on a North West to South East Axis across the site it is located 680m from the entrance on Abbey Way and 490m from the main entrance on Bassetsbury Lane. In 1929 bodies of Celtic origin were discovered close to The Dyke.

Six watermills are mentioned in 1086 (Domesday Book, Utley) one of which may have been Pann Mill. The remains of the mill lie on the north boundary of the site just south of the A40, east of the pumping station.

A record of a market in 1222 cites Alan Bassett, whose land at Bassetsbury Manor adjoins Holywell Mead. Mediaeval fairs and latterly circuses were held on the flat ground (Utley). The Rye was a charitable property belonging to the Hospital of St John the Baptist. It passed permanently to the Corporation in 1562. It was acquired by the Borough Council in 1923. The Rye and Holywell Mead are made up of a patchwork of land with different covenants. (HWS p5)

The open space was used for pasturage, recreation and special events; "Here the common cattle were pastured here in old days and here the 'law days' were held." (Utley). The Hay Ward was responsible for checking that burgesses pastured no more than 2 cows and a heifer. The cattle were housed in the burgages leading off both sides of the High Street. In the evening the cattle could be seen walking home along the road without supervision to properties along Easton Street and the High Street, where they were kept until the next morning. Regulations about cattle were enacted by the Corporation in 1881, and this right was ended by a local Act of Parliament in 1927 due to the growth of traffic and the increasing demand for recreational use (HWS p 3). Hayward Cottage, demolished in the 1960s, was a dwelling between the river and the London Road close to the entrance to The Rye near Pann Mill (Goodearl).



Looking west with the A40 to the right

Cromwell had a strong following in High Wycombe and in 1642 and 1643 encounters on The Rye included a skirmish with Prince Rupert on the eve of Chalgrove Field (High Wycombe Society). In 1736 two men were hanged on a gibbet on the Rye.

The first written reference to organised games on The Rye was a game of cricket between the gentlemen of Buckinghamshire and the Gentlemen of the Risborough club in 1744. The first record of football matches is in 1884. Swimming, walking and fishing have always taken place (HWS p8).



The Cascade at the SE end of The Dyke



The blocked up grottoes to the south of the pool fed by Cascade

In the C18 the long sinuous lake known as The Dyke, perched above the open space, was laid out as part of the grounds of Wycombe Abbey, designed by Lancelot (Capability) Brown. Late C18/early C19 improvements were perhaps made by Humphry Repton (Historic Towns Assessment).

By 1768 (Jefferys) an avenue bordered The Dyke. In 1825 (Bryant) the Wye, pre-culvert, entered the Rye at the north-west corner of the Dyke, flowing north-east to the Turnpike (A40) and then in on its current course south-east.

By 1812 (OSD) the Wye entered The Rye from the west, curving south before flowing north to Pann Mill. The 1883 1st edition OS map shows the round basin and a fortress NE of the spring.

By 1923 a pumping station stood west of Pann Mill, outside The Rye. In 1938 (OS) watercress beds lined the path of the spring. The site remains a public park managed by Buckinghamshire Council.



Pumping station, south facade

SITE DESCRIPTION



Changing rooms, public lavatories and Lido complex

The site is roughly rectangular running from North West to South East. The lido and sports complex on the south boundary, within Holywell Mead, is the main building. The cafe and remains of Pann Mill are within the boundary, as is the Busy Bees nursery in the 1930s former health centre.

The Rye was formerly common land which passed to the Corporation in 1548 (HWS p4) and Holywell Mead, Pound Mead and Great Penn's Mead are separately identified in a map of 1752. The dividing line between The Rye and Holywell Mead is a footpath that used to be the eastern boundary of High Wycombe town, so that Holywell Mead was outside the town. Watercress beds also formed part of the boundary. Holywell Mead supported watercress beds and cottages (Management Plan 2.1). The 1558 charter describes 'a certain meadow called Holywell mead situate at the end of a certain common pasture called Rye mead'. The dividing hedge was removed in the 1950s to open up the area (Environment Centre). Holywell Mead was purchased by the Borough Council in 1937 (HWS p9) and Pound Mead and My Lady's Mead have been incorporated. The two areas, now known collectively as The Rye were made up of separate covenants. Some land, now part of The Rye, used to be part of the Wycombe Abbey estate until gifted to the Borough in 1923. Although the various parcels of land form one visual entity, they have separate legal statuses. The Rye has protection under the Chepping Wycombe Corporation Act 1927 but Holywell Mead is not covered by this.

High Wycombe sits in a steep-sided valley and spreads over the adjacent hillsides with the River Wye flowing along the north boundary, along the flat valley bottom. It adjoins woodlands in Wycombe Abbey parkland called Keep Hill and Warren Woods to the south. Utley describes the area as King's Mead and states that there was no public access from 1st April to 1st August until after haymaking. The 29 ha. site stretching from Wendover Way in the west to Keep Hill Road in the east, comprises The Rye with Holywell Mead, here referred to as The Rye.

The Rye is located just east of the centre of High Wycombe town, bordered by the main London to Oxford Road (A40) to the north. It is a short walk east from the High Street but retains a rural character and has avoided dominating urban development.

'High Wycombe has certain inestimable boons, and one of these is the Rye, about thirty five acres of meadow land which belongs to the town. It stretches by the river Wye, with the road running by its side and the woods behind it, forming a lovely piece of green land.' (Utley)

The word Rye could mean a drained meadow or be a corruption of Eyot, an island. Both reflect the character of the land as a water meadow. Early uses of the word here include "Atte Reye" (1372) and The Reye (1451) (Sparks, *History of Wycombe*).

The park includes the grassland formerly known as Rye Mead, and additional areas that were formerly part of the Wycombe Abbey Estate once owned by the Carrington family, and the area of Holywell mead, the site of the roman villa, former watercress beds, cottages and the main spring and Round Basin. Holywell Mead forms part of the Environment Agency's flood defence for High Wycombe as the area is liable to flooding.



An area of the park (adjacent to the south boundary of this site) is registered as part of the English Heritage Wycombe Abbey historic landscape of national significance.

This includes the entire Dyke, an area around the boat house and, the east end, by the cascades area. Originally The Rye extended west as far as Bridge Mill. On the south it was bounded by the Windsor Way, the ancient road to London...Eastwards, The Rye was increased by the acquisition from the Marquess of Lansdowne of My Lady's Mead, some arable land around the spring, and Pound Mead. The Rye extended to the north to the Hospital of St John before the creation of Easton Street cut through.

The setting to the south and east is hanging, mainly beech woods, in Keep Hill, Warren and Dean Garden Woods in Wycombe Abbey RPG. The setting to the north is the busy London Road overlooked on the north side by prestigious town houses and villas with front gardens. The United Reform Chapel is a strong feature at the west end of London Road on the north side.

The character of the use of The Rye has changed over the centuries. There is no access for cattle. The well and stream have been capped and the margins of the Marsh Brook have returned to a natural form to mitigate flooding and encourage wildlife. The topography has not changed significantly since the building of The Dyke by Brown in the 1760s.

Liza Wormell



Prunus Cerasifera Atropurpurea (pizzard plum) M> Hunt

Members: Welcome to New Members:

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust is delighted to welcome the following new members John Chilver, Sarah Porter, Colin Hayfield and Nicola Bishop. We look forward to meeting you at lectures and events.

Events:

Spring

Saturday 18th March 2.20-4.00

Talk “Arts and Crafts Architecture in Amersham” -Alison Bailey £5.00

Wednesday 26th April 10.30 for 11am

Batsford Arboretum, Moreton in the Marsh . Spring walk with Michael Hunt. £15.00

Saturday 29th April 2.30-4.00

Talk “Recreating Apollo & the Nine Muses at Stowe”- Gillian Mason . £5

Saturday 18th May Hall Barn. Visit. Fully booked. Waiting list.

Tuesday 30th May 11.am and 2pm

Walk “Tree Treasures Walk” a joint event with the Turn End Trust. Guided walk Michael Hunt £15.00

Summer

Tuesday 13th June 2pm

Visit Church Gardens, Harefield – Kay and Patrick McHugh £20.00

Wednesday 12th July 2pm

Visit: Lindengate, Wendover Road, Aylesbury. £15.00

Saturday 22nd July 2pm

Annual General Meeting – at St Dunstan’s Church Monks Risborough.

FREE – please book

Following the formal business of the afternoon, the Revd. Peter Godden has kindly offered to give a short tour of the church and to tell us about its interesting history. The church is 11th century Grade I listed.

Jo Mirzoeff has written a very interesting article about the Monks Risborough and St. Dunstan’s Park which features an unusual example of a dovecot which John Nash drew when he lived nearby. The article can be accessed at <https://bucksgardenstrust.org.uk/our-news/st-dunstans-park-monks-risborough>

After the AGM tea/coffee and cake will be provided and then you are free to have a walk around the village and visit the Dovecot in the nearby park. The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust is a Registered Charity

Non- members are welcome to join us at 2.30pm.

Autumn

Saturday 30th September at 10.30

FREE – please book as usual.

Ellie Broad will be doing a guided walk around the now completed restoration work of Great Linford. Bring a picnic

Wednesday 27th September at 5.30 for 6 pm

Visit: Bekonscot oldest surviving model village in the world. Tea & coffee & short talk for this evening visit £10

Bookings should be made through:

www.ticketsource.co.uk/buckinghamshire-gardens-trust You can book all your events with a ‘shopping basket’ and then pay online by card.

If you are having problems then contact Rosemary Jury via email enquiries@bucksgardenstrust.org.uk

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Community Champions

Garden History Lucky Dip events



Members, if you are running a community event between April and August this year Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust can offer a one off ‘Garden History Lucky Dip’ activity. The aim of this activity is to share garden history stories with new

audiences and help to promote the importance and wonder of these historic spaces with more members of the public.

Contact Gwen Miles: websiteadmin@bucksgardenstrust.org.uk

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Copy Dates for 2023 Newsletters

Summer Sunday 28th May
 Autumn Sunday 27th August
 Winter Sunday 26th November
 Email to newsletter@bucksgardenstrust.org.uk

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