

SUFFOLK GARDENS TRUST



NEWSLETTER 58
AUTUMN 2024

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CONTENTS

From the Chairman	2
News from the Suffolk Gardens Trust	3
Suffolk's Unforgettable Garden Story – Heritage Champions!	
Raring to go with the Research: A Volunteer's Journey Revealed	7
The Humphry Repton Bursary Scheme	8
Other News	9
Exhibition at Gainsborough's House <i>Unforgettable Gardens</i> book Hillier Award, New Chair of PGT, & New Editor of CBM	
Gardens Flowers and Fruit	11
A Visit to Chippenhams Park	12
A View of Holywells	13
Melford Hall - <i>'ther are few the like in England'</i>	17
Cherries at Melford Hall	25
SGT Winter Lectures	26
Book Reviews	29
<i>The Garden Against Time, Flint, and WOW!</i>	
Officers and Council Members	back cover

Disclaimer

Views expressed in this Newsletter are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent those of the SGT. Whilst every effort is made to check the information provided, the Editor and the SGT cannot be held responsible for any inaccuracies contained in this publication.

Front cover:
Helmingham Hall –
Xa Tollemache will be
talking to us about
Helmingham and her
other garden projects
on 12 October.
(Photo: E. Martin).



WE WELCOME

your suggestions for
features, news and
photographs to
include in our
Newsletter.

See the back page for
contact details.

Copy deadline for the
Spring 2025 issue :
no later than
1 February 2025

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From the Chairman



Summer was slow to arrive this year and has been accompanied by more than a little uncertain weather. We started this year's garden visits in June at Ashe Park and were subjected to a terrific downpour just as we were about to begin the visit. Very kindly, Richard Keeling allowed us to take cover in his house until it abated. Luckily, we then had sunshine to enjoy this wonderful garden and a splendid tea to finish. The weather was much more benign for our garden party at Crow's Hall at the end of June, and we were able to enjoy an idyllic evening at this romantic moated paradise. Many thanks are due to Caroline Spurrier for generously hosting us. After our AGM at Orford at the beginning of July we were able to enjoy some of many excellent gardens in this seaside village (and we must try visiting more village gardens!). Fortuitously, we had just finished the delicious tea when rain came in to signal an end to our enjoyment. Many thanks to are due to John and Jill Broome at Corinthians, Timothy Fargher at the Old Rectory, and especially to Libby Archer at the Manor House, who helped to set up the visits and provided the tea. We had about 70 people at both the Ashe Park visit and the garden party, but a much smaller band of intrepid members made it to Little Thurlow in the extreme south-west corner of the county. This visit started ominously with rain showers, but then brightened to a glorious afternoon and culminated in a marvellous tea provided by Robin Vestey and his very helpful staff. But, of course, there was more to our visits than just an enjoyable tea! We were very privileged to have opportunities to see and appreciate two of the finest early-18th-century garden canals in Suffolk, a recently-designated medieval moated garden, and well-designed 20th- and 21st-century gardens.

The SGT's commitment to garden history has been much to the fore recently with our involvement with the Suffolk's Unforgettable Garden Story project. Its formal completion in March brought with it much praise, and the very well-deserved bestowal on the volunteer researchers of a Heritage Champions award by the Suffolk Preservation Society. The researchers were also nominated for The Gardens Trust's Volunteer Award for 2024 and for East Suffolk Council's Quality of Place Award. I think we can say that this project was a success – well done to all those involved! And not just that, two of the researchers – Margaret King and Kate Reddington – have now agreed to join the SGT Council, and another, Patience Shone, has agreed to take on the post of Vice-Chair, to relieve Stephen Beaumont of some of his burdens, though we are most relieved and grateful that he has agreed to remain as our treasurer for another year.

■ *Edward Martin*

Suffolk's Unforgettable Garden Story HERITAGE CHAMPIONS !



The volunteer researchers of the Suffolk's Unforgettable Garden Story project have been given a prestigious award by the Suffolk Preservation Society, with this commendation by Linden Groves, Head of Operations and Strategy, The Gardens Trust:

Working with Suffolk Gardens Trust, the team of passionate and hardworking volunteers from the Suffolk's Unforgettable Gardens Story project have learnt new skills and contributed their time and expertise to research and record over 20 historic parks and gardens.

The result of this important work includes new additions to the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest, through which the sites will be nationally designated and therefore given a better level of protection in the planning system. The intention is to also add research to the Historic Environment Record, helping support those conserving historic parks and gardens in Suffolk.

These brilliant volunteers deserve an award for being so willing to tackle new challenges and make such a significant contribution to the conservation of

Suffolk's historic parks and gardens for future generations. The Gardens Trust is replicating the project in other areas of the country, using the knowledge and experience gathered from the Suffolk volunteers along the way.

The HERITAGE CHAMPIONS award was presented to Linda Robinson and Patience Shone, as representatives of all the volunteer researchers, at a special event at Heveningham Hall on 18 July 2024.



In full, the researchers were: Elizabeth Adams, Sue Andrews, Stephen Beaumont, Gillian Childs, Julie Cooke, Margaret King, Elizabeth Manero, Edward Martin, Kate Reddington, Sheila Roberts, Linda Robinson, Ian Saunders, Patience Shone, Susan Steward, Clarissa Thomas, Jenny Morris, Lindsay Panton, Melanie Taylor and Sue Whiteley

The Volunteer Researchers were also nominated for The Gardens Trust's 2024 VOLUNTEER AWARD. The result was announced at The Gardens Trust's Volunteer Celebration at Sheffield on 15 July and although they did not win, they were highly commended for all the work that they had put into the project.



The volunteer researchers were represented at the Sheffield meeting by Linda Robinson and Kate Reddington, here pictured to the right of Peter Hughes, the chairman of The Gardens Trust.

**The project was also nominated for East Suffolk Council's
2024 QUALITY OF PLACE AWARDS.**

Project Volunteer Elizabeth Manero said: 'It was a privilege to be part of this important project. I learnt a great deal about the history of gardens, and was so pleased to be able to bring the aspirations and ideas of people in the past to life, and to give them recognition through registration as a Historic Park and Garden.'

If you too would like to become a volunteer researcher,
please send an email to:

suffolkgt.research@gmail.com

AND we featured in the Historic Environment Forum's

Suffolk's Unforgettable Garden Story



Suffolk's [Unforgettable Garden Story](#) is a Gardens Trust and Suffolk Gardens Trust project which recruited volunteers and trained them to research and record historic landscapes.

Funded by Historic England, it told the stories of more than 20 Suffolk parks and gardens through detailed research reports compiled by volunteers, including some who had never previously undertaken historic research.

Over 18 months, Gardens Trust worked closely with [Suffolk Gardens Trust](#) to recruit, train and support more than 20 volunteers to research and record local historic landscapes. Gardens Trust wanted to draw on local knowledge and expertise to help ensure that these landscapes at risk are better understood and protected.

The project brought attention to the value of the county's historic designed landscapes and so far has resulted in the registration of seven new sites to the National Heritage List for England, including: Abbot's Hall in Stowmarket, the pleasure grounds of an early 18th century house; Thorpeness Meare, the vibrant and adventurous landscape of Britain's first

purpose-built holiday village; Crow's Hall, an early country house landscape with stunning views; Staverton Park, once owned by royalty; and the Walled Garden at the Royal Hospital School in Holbrook, featuring a distinctive 'crinkle-crinkle' wall.

Volunteers in Suffolk are keen to continue recording sites and will continue their campaign to add more historic designed landscapes to the National Heritage List for England. In addition to conducting ongoing research, the group will be continuing to meet in person and visit landscapes in Suffolk as often as possible, keeping the research group active for the long term. For more information, [email here](#).

The project is also being replicated across more counties in England, most recently in Nottinghamshire. If interested in running an Unforgettable Garden Story research and recording project in your area, email this [contact](#).

Image 1: The volunteer team, with Project Officer Karina Flynn, recently attended a project celebration event at the Food Museum in Stowmarket. ©The Gardens Trust. Image 2: The early country house landscape at Crow's Hall in Stowmarket is now Grade II registered thanks to the volunteers' research. ©Historic England.

76

<https://historicengland.org.uk/content/heritage-counts/pub/2024/historic-environment-overview-2023-24>

Raring to go with the Research: A Volunteer's Journey Revealed

Gillian Childs



I only discovered the Suffolk Gardens Trust in October 2022 and went along to my first garden visit. It was here that Karina Flynn gave a presentation about a forthcoming research project – Suffolk's Unforgettable Gardens Story. Having some new-found spare time, I decided to find out a bit more. Never having done any research or written a thesis, I was a little apprehensive about whether I would have the skills to do the project justice. However, Karina and her team provided regular online meetings and visits to Suffolk's archives at The Hold in Ipswich to explain the process and, gradually, I gained in confidence.

I was very fortunate with the first garden I selected to research, Abbot's Hall, as a huge amount of work had already been done by Linda Robinson who had based her recent dissertation on this very garden. Her first-hand knowledge and experience of what was required and how to present everything stood me in good stead for the other two gardens I had chosen.

All of this was very new to me but the support provided by the Gardens Trust and Suffolk Gardens Trust gave me the confidence to tackle the other two gardens I had selected: Stowlangtoft Park and Thornham Park.

I enjoyed volunteering with others, so the research and visits to the archives could be shared. I teamed up with Liz Adams for the second garden I researched, Stowlangtoft Park, and this has been



Gillian doing research at Stowlangtoft Park

equally rewarding. Her knowledge of architecture, trees and, crucially, her local knowledge was extremely useful. As she lived nearer to the site's local archive office, and I to The Hold in Ipswich, we were able to split the research easily. My experience researching with Linda on Abbot's Hall really helped with how Liz and I planned our research and, most importantly, we remembered to take lots of photos and annotate a map of where they were taken. We cracked on with this garden quickly and were able to complete it in good time.

When researching Thornham Park, my third garden, I didn't have a fellow researcher, but I was beginning to understand what was needed and recruited Tony, my husband, to make notes of all the photos I took.

With all three of 'my' gardens completed, I am now looking at another garden which is local to me as the research bug has bitten!



Researching Thornham Park

The Humphry Repton Bursary Scheme



The SGT's Humphrey Repton Bursary Scheme, named after the famous Suffolk-born garden designer and landscape gardener, welcomes applications from Suffolk-based students. Two £500 bursaries are awarded every year and can be used for approved course fees, as well as incidental course costs, such as books, travel, stationery or equipment. See our website for an application form. It is important that the courses offer recognised awards, such as the Royal Horticultural Society's Certificate and Diploma.

If you are interested in applying for a bursary in 2025, we would be pleased to hear from you – please contact Judith Gowland at sgt-bursaries@hotmail.com.

Other News

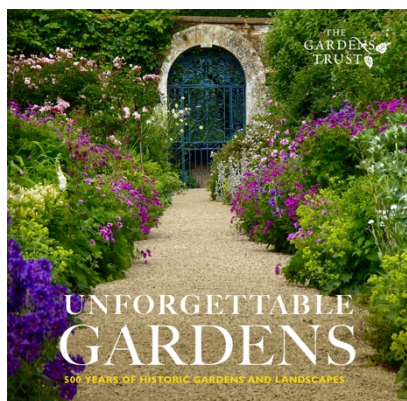
'Revealing Nature: The Art of Cedric Morris and Lett-Haines', exhibition at Gainsborough's House, Sudbury, till 3 Nov.

This exhibition is the first to chart the artistic careers of Cedric Morris (1889–1982) and Arthur Lett-Haines (1894–1978), who were partners in life and art for 60 years. Over 80 loans from Tate, the National Portrait Gallery and private collections, demonstrate the range of their art: Morris not only for his flower paintings and still lives but also for portraits and landscapes, and Lett-Haines is revealed as an important figure in developing Surrealist art in Britain. Their paintings, drawings and sculptures are highly distinctive and have a unique place in the history of 20th-century art.



Based in Suffolk for most of their lives, primarily at Benton End, they established the East Anglian School for Painting and Drawing in 1937 which taught a generation of artists including Lucian Freud and Maggi Hambling. The exhibition is accompanied by a book, *The Art of Cedric Morris and Lett-Haines* featuring essays by Richard Morphet, Sean Burns, Emma Boyd and exhibition curator, Dr Patricia Hardy, with an interview between Calvin Winner and Maggi Hambling,

priced at £22.50 published by Gainsborough's House



Unforgettable Gardens, edited by Susannah Charlton, published by Batsford for The Gardens Trust. Due out in November, price £30.

Arranged chronologically, this covers around 60 individual gardens, specially selected to give a broad historical overview of British garden design over 500 years. Each chapter also includes an essay, exploring the wider changes in social context, taste and style in each period. Entries include

Elizabethan splendour at Kenilworth Castle, 18th-century gems such as Wrest Park in Bedfordshire and the Painswick Rococo Garden in Gloucestershire, and 19th-century wonders at **Shrubland Hall in Suffolk**, and Athelhampton in Dorset.

Hillier Award

Chris Trimmer, who manages the National Trust's Plant Conservation Centre (PCC) in Devon, was recently awarded the Sir Harold Hillier Award presented by the Royal Horticultural Society's Woody Plant Committee in recognition of significant personal achievement relating to hardy trees and shrubs. The PCC was established by Chris 40 years ago and he has managed it ever since. The PCC has attracted news attention recently for its role in successfully propagating seedlings of the felled Sycamore Gap tree. To date 6,146 different species and cultivars have been successfully propagated at the PCC, all peat free – everything from the ancient



The first Sycamore Gap tree seedling to grow after the tree was felled last Autumn has been gifted to His Majesty King Charles to help mark Celebration Day.

Photo: Ann-Marie Powell

Ankerwyck Yew to Newton's apple tree, extremely rare narcissus bulbs and native black poplars.

New chairman for the Professional Gardeners' Trust



Stephen Anderton, Garden Writer for *The Times* since 1993 and former National Gardens Manager for English Heritage, has become Chairman of the Professional Gardeners' Trust (PGT). The PGT was set up to help fund training for working gardeners who wish to further their careers and skills. The Trust celebrates its 20th anniversary this year, having provided support to almost 800 gardeners through the generosity of the horticultural charities and individuals which support it.

New editor for Curtis's Botanical Magazine

John Grimshaw MBE, editor of @ids.treesandshrubsonline, has been appointed Editor-in-Chief of *Curtis's Botanical Magazine*, which he will take over from Martyn Rix in October. Curtis's is the longest-running botanical publication and John will be its 19th editor. John leaves the Yorkshire Arboretum, where he has been director for the past 12 years.

Gardens Flowers and Fruit

Barbara Segall

The theme for the Oxford Food Symposium (OFS) 2024 was Gardens Flowers and Fruit. The subject seemed a perfect match for my combined garden and food interests and so I pitched a proposal at the end of December 2023 and was delighted that it was accepted. Then the hard work began. The 5,000-word paper entitled 'Three inspirational women who have brought the kitchen garden into the kitchen', had to be written, and a video was needed. Suffolk-based film maker Ade Sellars (@adesellars), whose exceptional videographic skills made me sound and look good! A slide presentation was next, to be used during the 'in person' weekend symposium.

I was also invited to take part in a panel discussing 'What is a garden?'. Definitions, philosophy and history, boundaries, size and maintenance including 'no mow' May and rewilding were all referenced.



I delivered a summary of the paper with a slide presentation to an audience of about 50. I spoke about the three women – garden and food writers – who have been important and inspirational in my writing in and out of the garden and the kitchen. Through their writing, research and practical horticulture Joy Larkcom, Joan Morgan, and the late Susan

Campbell, inspired me to bring the kitchen garden into my kitchen and onto my table.

Susan Campbell, co-author of *Poor Cook*, went on to write many books on kitchen gardens including *The History of Kitchen Gardens* and founded The Walled Kitchen Garden Network; Joy Larkcom (a former resident of Suffolk) brought edible landscaping to the readers of her books on ornamental kitchen gardens and who was instrumental in re-introducing many old and forgotten salads, salad-growing techniques and later a whole range of Chinese vegetable seeds; and Joan Morgan, whose books on apples and pears are unrivalled. *The Book of Pears* was the Garden Media Guild Reference book of the year in 2016 and also in 2016 it was awarded the Guild of Food Writers Food Book of the Year

All three women received the Veitch Memorial Medal from the Royal Horticultural Society. Joy received the Garden Media Guild Lifetime Achievement Award in 2003 and a photographic portrait of her by Tessa Traeger is in the National Portrait Gallery. Joy's archives are held at the Garden Museum in London.

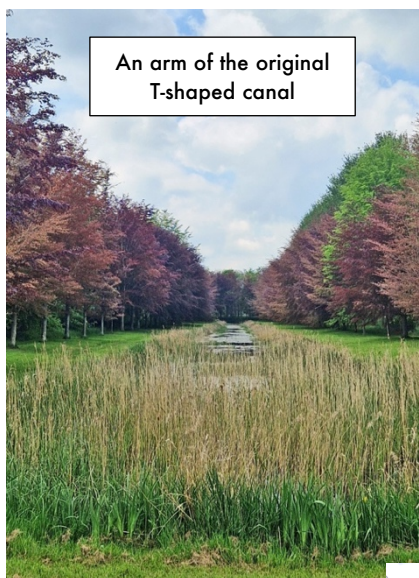
My paper will be published in 2025 as part of the *Proceedings of the Oxford Food Symposium*. Recent previous symposia with a horticultural or garden theme were: 2017 Food & Landscape, 2018 Seeds and 2020 Herbs & Spices. The theme for 2025 is Poverty Foods – www.oxfordsymposium.org.uk.

A Visit to Chippenham Park

Justin Farrow

SGT editor and Perennial Trustee, Barbara Segall, arranged for Justin Farrow and Lauren Boyd, trainee gardeners at Fullers Mill Gardens (one of Perennial's gardens), to attend an International Dendrology Society visit to Chippenham Park, near Newmarket, earlier this year. SGT Chairman Edward Martin gave a talk on the history of the garden and its features.

Justin writes:



An arm of the original
T-shaped canal

This was my first visit to Chippenham Park, and what a stunning sight greeted us on arrival as we entered the rear car park of the beautiful Georgian house. We started the day with some refreshments, brief introductions and then swiftly headed into the garden to listen to Edward Martin make a brilliant lecture on the history of the garden canal, along with the walled garden and some of the other garden features. I did my best to focus and listen to the talk, but the garden's backdrop was quite the distraction.

The canal itself was created around 1702 by Admiral Edward Russell, the 1st Earl of Orford. Canals at the time were

on trend after King Charles II had imported the idea from France. The more canals that were created, the less trendy they become, and serpentine lakes started to appear more and be commonly seen as the new landscape feature to have. What was once Chippenham Park's T-shaped canal was carved out to create a serpentine lake.

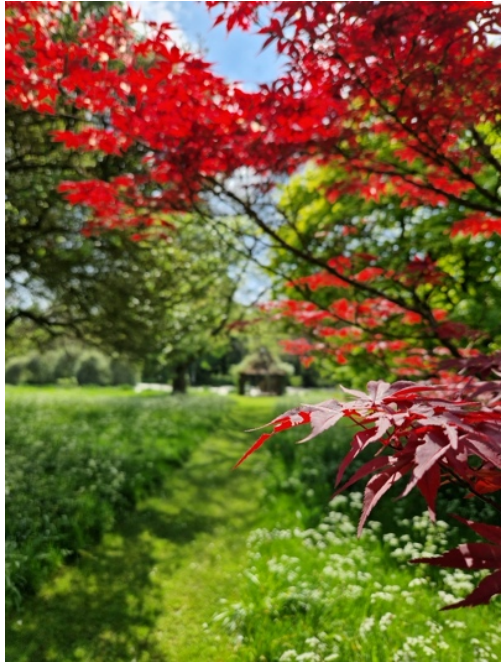


The canal reformed as a serpentine lake, enhanced by a bridge entwined with wisteria

Today the lake is just behind an area called the Wilderness and is lined with copper beech trees (*Fagus sylvatica* f. *purpurea*).

Edward also talked about the brickwork, such as the white brick used for the Walled Garden and explained that they were all made locally in Culford, just outside Bury St Edmunds.

After the talk we moved into the Wilderness, an area of the garden filled with very mature trees and shrubs, such as the beautiful then in-flower dogwood (*Cornus* 'Eddie's White Wonder') and a collection of colourful acers along the lake. The view across what used to be the T-shaped canal was stunning, with a bridge dripping in wisteria and further on, the beautiful handkerchief tree (*Davidia involucrata*) in full show, with its large pearl white bracts.



Glorious colour in the garden

A View of Holywells

Margaret King and Linda Robinson

Holywells Park is one of Ipswich's finest parks and is described on Ipswich Borough Council's website as 'a County Wildlife Site, a Conservation Area with two listed buildings – the Stable Block and Conservatory – and is on the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest'. But, while it is true that two of Ipswich's other parks – Christchurch and Chantry – do feature in Historic England's Register of Parks and Gardens, Holywells actually does not (as yet!). The Suffolk's Unforgettable Garden Story (SUGS) project, with the support of the Friends of Holywell Park, is hoping to change this.

Springs, hidden deep in a valley close to Nacton Road, are central to the story of Holywells. Water from the springs, purified by the natural sands and gravels through which it flowed, was used to supply the people of Ipswich, and in the 1740s Thomas

Cobbold transferred his brewery from Harwich to a new site on The Cliff in Ipswich to take advantage of this water supply. A panoramic view by Thomas Gainsborough, c.1748-50, depicts this landscape (a bit idealized) with a sequence of eight ponds, through which the water flowed to a canal which delivered it to the brewery.¹



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In 1811 Thomas's son, John Cobbold (1746-1835), purchased this land, then known as Pitt's Farm, and by 1814 had reshaped the old farmhouse into a mansion on the high ground overlooking the park. The land was originally a part of the

manor of Wykes Bishop, owned by the bishops of Norwich, and in 1817 John added to his park a moated site that may have contained the house used by the medieval bishops when visiting Ipswich, though no trace of it now survives.² The water in the moat was connected to the flight of ponds and in 2006 desilting revealed wooden water pipes at the base of the east arm of the moat.³ By the 1880s an orchard had been planted on the moated site, but nowadays, more prosaically, the moated site is a children's playground and the moat itself is dry.

¹ Now in the Wolsey Art Gallery, this picture, when purchased in 1991, had no known history before 1940 and bore a label on the back of its frame inscribed 'The Nine Ponds at Hampstead'. It had been catalogued in 1982 simply as 'Extensive Landscape with Reservoirs, Sluice Gate House and Seated Figure' (J. Hayes, *The Landscape Paintings of Thomas Gainsborough*). It was only identified as Holywells in 1991 by the Suffolk historian Norman Scarfe (E. Joll, 'Museums in the UK' in *Agnews 1982-1992*, pp. 30-31).

² Trial trenching in 2006 failed to find any structural remains on the moated platform, but medieval pottery was recovered (J. Meredith, Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service Report no. 2006/107). There is a hint of an earlier park at Wykes Bishop, as it is recorded that in 1315 a gang of 48 men 'broke the bishop's park there' and took away a horse – *Cal. of Patent Rolls 1313-17*, p. 404.

³ M. Summers, Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service Report no. 2007/210.

Two remarkable women helped shape the park. The first was Elizabeth Knipe, the second wife of John Cobbold, whom she married in 1791. She was a 'Georgian polymath' with expertise in the arts and in science, and her portrait hangs in Christchurch Mansion's Wolsey Art Gallery in Ipswich.⁴ The park area contained land called *Holwell Hill*,⁵ and this seems to have been the inspiration for her poem entitled 'Holy Wells, a Legendary Tale', that was published in *The Suffolk Garland* in 1818. This tells of the healing power of the 'holy rill' and also of 'a bishop's stately palace' on a 'moated square'. By 1816 Pitt's Farm had become Holywells.⁶ Under her, Holywells

became a centre for literature, theatre, music and painting (her influence and connections were of great importance to young artists such as Constable), as well as being renowned for extravagant Valentine's Day parties.⁷



The 19th-century Orangery and the clock tower
(photo: L. Robinson)

A formal garden with a series of circular, converging paths and a garden pavilion was created close to the Cliff. However, it was not until the 1860s that there was significant landscaping of the 67-acre estate, when the energetic John Chevalier Cobbold created a walled park with formal lawns, Victorian flowerbeds and an 'Italianate' terrace; woodland walks through the estate; a serpentine carriage drive from Myrtle Road; and eventually an Orangery, heated by boilers deep underneath the stable block, for exotic plants. Fountain Cottage to the west of the estate boasted its own small ornamental garden with fountain, orchard and croquet ground.

In the early 20th century, Lady Evelyn Murray, daughter of the Earl of Dunmore, played a lead role in the garden design at the park. She had spent most of her childhood in Cairo, and in 1891 she married John Dupois Cobbold, who was to be the last Cobbold to own Holywells. They set about redesigning its Victorian gardens

⁴ A. Mallen, *Elizabeth Cobbold Georgian Polymath*, The Cobbold Family History Trust, 2019

⁵ Suffolk Archives, Ipswich: GF419/FLS1849/3/2/61. It is possible that this land took its name from one of the people surnamed Holwell who are recorded in 17th-century Ipswich.

⁶ *Ipswich Journal* 31 Aug. 1816, p. 4.

⁷ Emma Roodhouse, Collections and Learning Curator, Colchester and Ipswich Museums Service, 'Creating Constable Exhibition', 2020

and creating what has been described as 'Arts & Crafts'-style gardens with long flower beds to the south of the house, an 'Italian' garden with a paved ornamental pond, and a sunken garden with seats and statuary; and also 'wild gardens' in the valleys. A vivid picture of the gardens is given in her biography:

For the first time Evelyn was in a position to instruct her own gardener, and together they created an impressive arrangement combining formal layouts with freer and more artistic herbaceous borders. Many of the photographs in the family albums convey the pride she felt in her horticultural efforts, which would have afforded her some relief from the boredom she was doubtless beginning to endure. A large, lily-clad lake lay not far from the back of the villa, surrounded by mature oak, chestnut and towering cedar trees. From here one could walk through a thicket of rhododendrons, over a sweeping lawn and up onto the verandah at the back of the house that ran the whole length of the ground floor. Evelyn is pictured here alone, reading a small book, Clematis and roses frame her view over the patio, across the lawn and down to the lake and woods beyond. Beside the verandah was a large conservatory bursting with exotic palms and plants, including giant ferns, lilies and geraniums.⁸

Lady Evelyn separated from her husband in 1922, converted to Islam and was the first British woman (known as Lady Zainab) to make the Hajj. The estate was purchased by Arthur Churchman, Lord Woodbridge in 1935 and gifted by him to Ipswich Borough. It opened as a public park a year later.

The house was demolished in 1962-3 due to dry rot, but the white- and red-brick stables with its five-storey clock tower (c.1870) and the late-19th-century Orangery were saved. After a period of neglect and vandalism, a conservation management plan was prepared in 2012, and some wonderful archive photographs of the park and gardens can be seen in its appendices.⁹ Much of the park's heritage landscape has now been restored including the pond network, part of Lady Evelyn's garden, the terrace supporting the historic views of the park, and new wrought-iron gates were erected at the Bishops Hill entrance.¹⁰ The park can easily be explored, with suggested walking routes, including a 'tree walk' highlighting 24 different species, and information plaques scattered around. It supports a variety of habitats with the ponds, fields, woodland (some of which is ancient), orchard and formal gardens. Indeed, a rare European otter was recently seen taking a swim in one of the ponds. With such a pedigree, surely Holywells deserves a listing.

⁸ W. Facey and M. Taylor, 'From Mayfair to Mecca: The Life of Lady Evelyn Cobbold', in Lady E. Cobbold, *Pilgrimage to Mecca*, 2009 edition (www.academia.edu/42043407/). Evelyn's book was first published in 1934.

⁹ www.ipswich.gov.uk/sites/www.ipswich.gov.uk/files/Conservation_Management_Plan.pdf

¹⁰ Holywells's 'Park for People' project, 2012-15, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Big Lottery Fund.

Melford Hall – ‘ther are few the like in England’

Edward Martin



Melford Hall is one of Suffolk's architectural and garden history gems, being a Grade I Listed Building set in a Grade II* park and garden. It lies on the eastern edge of Melford Green in Long Melford, a former market town on Suffolk's southern border with Essex. It has been called 'long' since the early 16th century as the settlement is indeed long – its large triangular green runs downhill from the medieval church to the eponymous ford beside Hall Mill, and then continues as a linear built-up area that straddles Hall Street.

In the years immediately before the Norman Conquest a noble named Ælfric son of Wihthgar gave Melford to the abbey in Bury St Edmunds and it remained in the abbey's possession until its dissolution in 1539. The last abbot, John Melford alias Reve, was, as his name suggests, a native of Long Melford and he is said to have favoured his manor here. At a Visitation of Bury Abbey in 1536 it was said of Melford that 'he delights in the company of women and in sumptuous banquets; he delights in cards and dice, lives much in his granges, and does not preach'. Similar comments had been made in 1535 that he 'laye moche forth in his granges: that he delited moche in playing at dice and cardes, and therein spent moche money, and in building for his pleasure. He did not preache openly'. In 1534 he let Melford Hall 'with all the Howses Buildings, gardyns and yerdes' for 30 years to Dame Frances Pennington, but 'reservyd unto the seyd Abbott and hys successors on of the best Chaumbers within the seyd manour with ffree ingate and outegate into and fro the same at all tymes at

hys pleasure'. Frances was a cousin of Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, and one of the ladies-in-waiting to his wife, Mary Tudor, Dowager Queen of France. Her husband, William Pennington, had unfortunately been murdered in 1532 in a quarrel outside the Law Courts in London, and she became a dependent of Brandon, living largely in his household.

In 1545–6 a lease of the Hall is said to have been granted to a rising lawyer named William Cordell, which was converted into a full grant in 1554. He too had been born in Melford and rose to be Solicitor-General to Queen Mary in 1553, becoming Master of the Rolls in 1557, Speaker of the House of Commons in 1558, and was knighted the same year. In August 1578 Melford Hall was grand enough to receive Queen Elizabeth on a visit. Sir William died without surviving children in 1581 and lies under a magnificent tomb by Cornelius Cure in Melford church. His widow Mary died in 1584 and the Hall passed to Sir William's sister Jane, married to Richard Alington of Horseheath in Cambridgeshire. She died in 1603 and her heir was her young grandson, Thomas Savage (c.1580–1635). He succeeded his father, Sir John, as a baronet in 1615 and was created Viscount Savage in 1626.

There has been much debate over the years as to who built the red-brick Tudor mansion that is Melford Hall – was it Abbot Melford or was it Sir William Cordell? As is frequently the case, the answer is complicated, in that more than one phase of building can be discerned. A ground plan by the noted architect and surveyor John Thorpe, c.1606, shows a square courtyard-plan building that took form in at least three phases. The east wing, referred to as the 'Gatehouse' in 1635, was the entrance-way into the central courtyard. This was demolished around 1730 turning the layout into an E-shaped one, with the existing porch at its centre – this porch bears the initials W and C for William Cordell, so that, at least must have been built by him. Perhaps significantly, the 1534 lease to Frances Pennington stated that the abbey was to be responsible for the maintenance of the Hall, but Frances was to 'fynde all maner of cley and strawe made and layde redy for the same', and to 'cary all tymbre' for the reparations. This seems to suggest a timber-framed structure with clay daub infill in its walls, and possibly with thatched roofs. An estate map of 1580 only has stylised images of the house, but does show a large building called 'Melforde Hall' with a



Sir William Cordell
Sculpted by Cornelius Cure, Master
Mason to Queen Elizabeth I

much smaller building beside it. Cordell, in his will of 1581, after mentioning his mansion house called Melford Hall, refers to that 'house commonly called the Old House, adjoining to the said capital messuage', which could be the earlier hall.

The 1580 map, which is displayed in Melford Hall, was made for Cordell by Israel Amyce, a Cambridge-educated gentleman of Barking in Essex (according to this map) but also of Tilbury Hall in Tilbury-juxta-Clare, five miles to the west of Melford. His map shows the Hall and a smaller building (as noted above), both with pennons on their chimneys, set within a square enclosure adjoining the east side of Melford Green. The entrance is via a tree-lined way on its north side, with two unidentified buildings and a 'Hoppe garden' on its east side, and, to the south, in the 'ponde yarde', three ponds and a small building. Much of this is in accordance with a survey of 1442 in which the manor house with its 'moats, ditches, gardens, and pastures, was said to lie 'between the road which leads to the said house on the north and the bank of the Abbot's stream on the south, and abutting on the king's highway towards the west'.



Much more detail is shown on a very fine map made for Thomas Savage in 1613 by Samuel Pierse of Maidstone in Kent (private collection). This shows a courtyard-plan house, that correlates with that on the Thorpe plan, set near the centre of same square enclosure as on the 1580 map, but the added detail indicates that this was walled and surrounded on its south, west, north and part of its east sides by a thin wet moat (now a dry ditch).

The entrance was still on the north side and led in a theatrical way around a

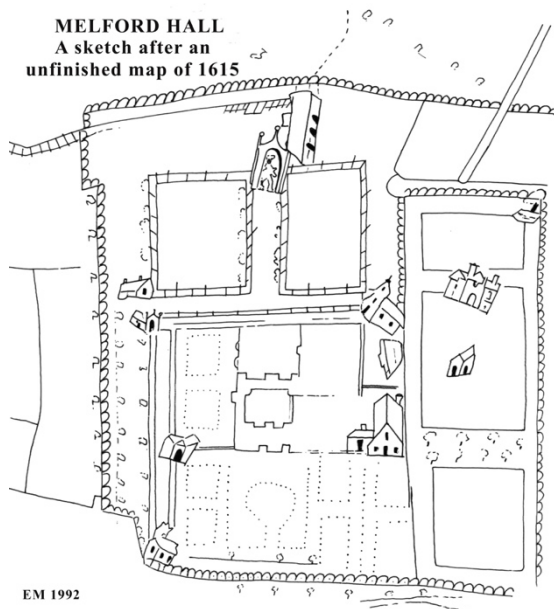
rectangular walled forecourt, then through a gate, aligned on the central axis of the house, to a corridor, fenced on both sides, leading to a larger gatehouse on the east side of the square house enclosure; on the inner side of this a small walled court gave access to the entrance in the gatehouse-wing of the house, which, in turn, gave access to the inner courtyard and to the porch that, finally, would have given entry to the house. To the south of the, other buildings, probably with service functions, are ranged around courtyards. To the west and north of the house various gardens are shown – all rectangular except for a circular one immediately in front of the west, rear, door of the house. A terrace is shown on the northern edge of the square enclosure, with an ornamental structure at its western end, which an inventory of 1635 identifies as a 'banqueting house', containing 'one marble table & five guilt wooden chaires'.



The Melford Hall Banqueting House



This octagonal red-brick building with its many gables and pinnacles is not shown on the 1580 map and has been assumed to post-date it, however the stylised portrayal of buildings on that map undermines this conclusion. In its gables and pinnacles it does resemble the conduit house (left) on Melford Green, which does appear on the 1580 map. The windows of the heated upper room of the banqueting house were updated to sashes in the 18th century, but must always have been intended to give private views over the



garden wall into the public world of Melford Green. A blocked mullioned window (now hidden) over the entrance door suggests what the original windows were like. The lower room, now used for storage, probably always had a service function. Its position on the terrace led the building to be called the 'bowling green house' in the 19th century.

The 1613 map also shows an indistinct dark-coloured structure standing against the terrace at about its midpoint – this is more clearly shown as a roofed building on a sketch map of 1615. Another similar-looking structure is shown on

the 1613 map at the east end of the terrace.

To the south of the square enclosure three large rectangular ponds are shown, divided by causeways – the western one has a circular garden feature on it, and the eastern one has a small building on it, almost certainly a dovecote. In the centre of the middle pond is an uncertain mark which is drawn on the unfinished map of 1615 as a



Melford Hall viewed from across Square Pond

small roofed structure. In 1885 the Ordnance Survey prosaically named the westernmost pond as 'Square Pond' and the other two, now combined into one and minus all buildings, as 'Horse Pond'.

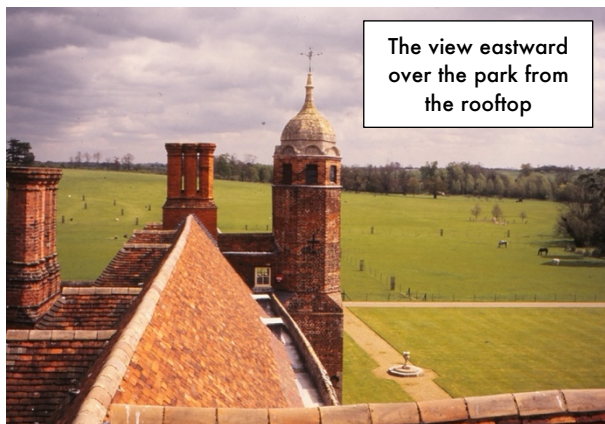
Immediately to the east of the house and its gardens, the 1613 map depicts the wooden paling surrounding a large deer park. Sir Thomas Savage had a royal licence for a park of 340 acres here in 1612 which was 'now enclosed with pales, ditches and hedges', suggesting that it had already been set up. In 1580 the area closest to the Hall was still two fields, called 'Upper Home fielde' and 'Nether Home fielde', and the boundary between them is still shown as a line of trees on the 1613 map. The area with densest trees in 1613 was an earlier small park, named on the 1580 map as 'Little Parke' (though with rabbits rather than deer depicted), plus a wood called 'Copy Grove'. Within this area the 1613 map depicts a probable timber 'standing' or viewing place with large openings in its upper parts, set within a fenced compound, and a sort of treehouse accessed by a ladder. A similar treehouse and standing are also shown on the edge of the more open area to the north, which was named as 'The Warren' in 1580. A more substantial structure more centrally placed in this area was probably a warrener's lodge. The map shows a hunt with dogs and horsemen in progress around it.

In March 1621 the author James Howell (c.1594–1666) was there as a tutor to Sir Thomas Savage's sons and wrote a letter to his friend Daniel Caldwell (published in *Epistolæ Ho-Eliaenæ: Familiar Letters* in 1650) in which he described the park and the gardens:

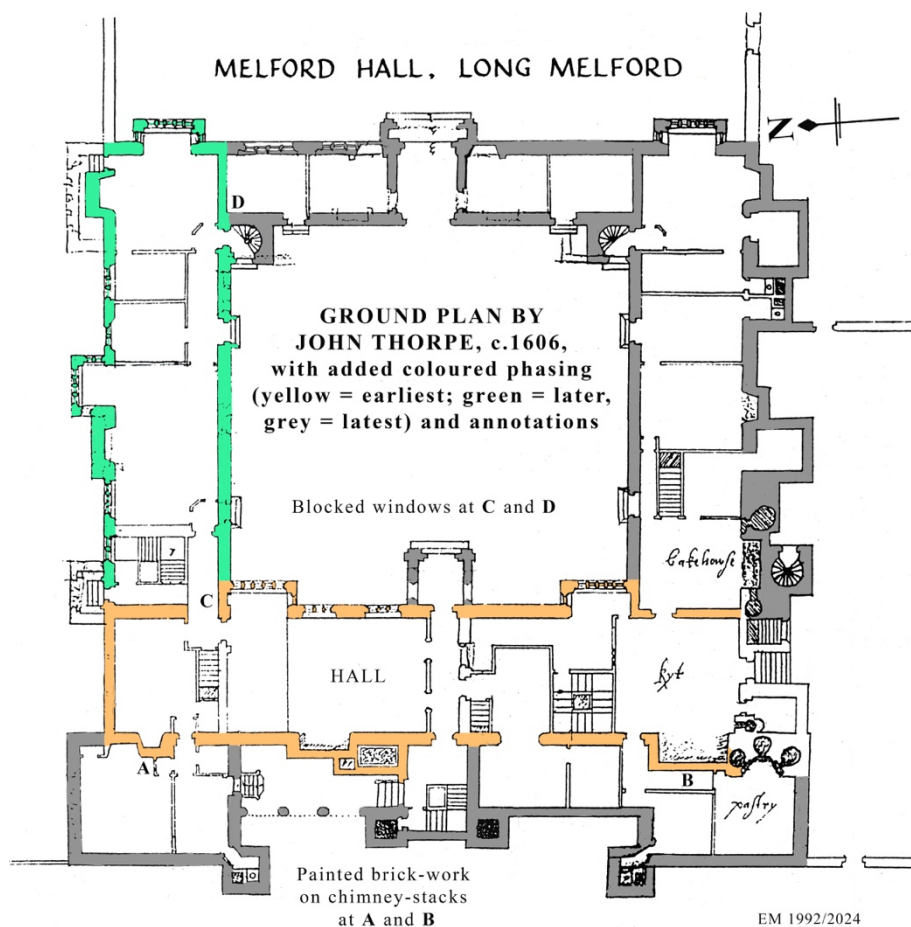
The stables butt upon the Park, which for a cheerfull rising ground, for groves and browsings for the Deer, for rivulets of water may compare with any for its bignes in the whole land; it is opposite to the front of the great House, whence from the Gallary one may see much of the game when they are a hunting. Now for the Gardning and costly choice flowers, for ponds, for stately large walks green and gravelly, for orchards and choice fruits of all sorts, ther are few the like in England: here you have your bon Christien pear [now better known as the Williams' Bon Chrétien pear] and Bergamot ['bergamot orange', *Citrus bergamia*] in perfection, your Muscadel grapes in such plenty that ther are som bottles of wine sent every year to the King'.

The mention of Bergamot and grapes strongly suggests that there must have been some form of hothouse in these early 17th-century gardens.

Viscount Savage died in 1635 and his widow Elizabeth had the continued use of the house and park. The couple had married in 1602 and, despite being the mother of 19 children, Elizabeth had become a favoured lady-in-waiting to the Queen in the 1620s, not least because she too was a Roman Catholic. She was also a great heiress, inheriting St Osyth's in Essex from her father, Earl Rivers, and Hengrave Hall in Suffolk from her mother, Mary Kitson. Early in 1641 her son John was created Earl Rivers and she was made Countess Rivers for life. But in spite of titles and lands they were short of money and Melford was mortgaged in November 1641 for £15,000 to John



The view eastward
over the park from
the rooftop

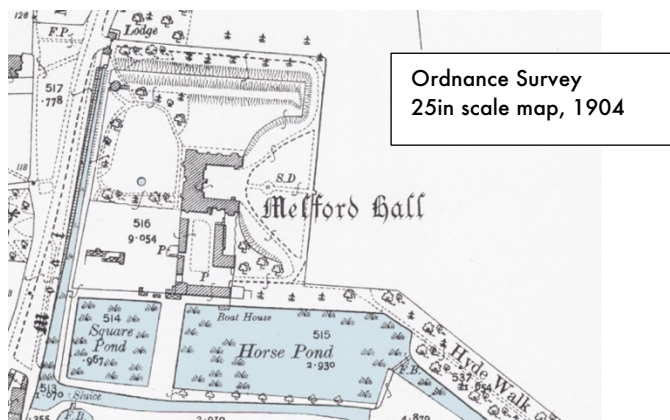


EM 1992/2024

Cordell, alderman of London, and his son Robert – descendants of Sir William's grandfather.

In the late summer and autumn of 1642, the worsening political situation led to attacks on Catholics in the Colchester area and Countess Rivers was attacked at St Osyth's by crowds who ransacked and plundered her ancestral home. She fled to Melford Hall but the crowds followed her, forcing her to flee onwards to Bury St Edmunds as they broke in. The house was looted and seven years later Ralph Josselin, the Essex cleric, noted in his Diary 'I saw the ruines of that great [house], plundered out and desolate without inhabitants'. In 1649 Melford was sold to Robert Cordell in settlement of a debt of £20,488 plus an additional £8,511.

Robert Cordell was created a Baronet in 1660 and was taxed on 49 hearths here in 1674. His great-grandson, Sir Cordell Firebrace, 3rd Bt. (1712–1759), inherited Melford as a minor in 1727 and seems to have undertaken considerable works to his inheritance when he came of age in the 1730s. He probably demolished the east wing to the house and changed the windows to sashes on all the fronts except the east. He may also have added the curved drives and walling on the approach to the east front, though this could well be later – it was in place by 1818. It is also probable that he commissioned a very ambitious plan (but never implemented) for the redesign of the whole estate. This plan is unsigned but is likely to be by Charles Bridgeman (1690–1738), the Royal Gardener to King George II. Sir Cordell left the estate to his widow Bridget, who remarried Lord William Campbell (the brother of the duke of Argyll) in 1762 and died in 1782. Campbell sold Melford in 1786 to Sir Harry Parker, 6th Bt. of Honington Hall in Warwickshire, whose descendants now share it with the National Trust. In 1813 the London architect Thomas Hopper (1776–1856) undertook works here for Sir William Parker, 7th Bt., and again in 1840 for Sir Hyde Parker, 8th Bt. The entrance lodges were designed in 1838 by 'Colonel' Robert Rushbrooke (1779–1845) of Rushbrooke Hall, an antiquarian and amateur architect, for Sir Hyde Parker. The crinkle-crackle walls to the south and east of the Hall are likely to date from the early 19th century and were certainly there by the 1880s. The north wing was gutted by a fire in 1942 and restored by Professor Sir Albert Richardson.





Cherries at Melford Hall



The outer walls of the gardens of Melford Hall can appear to be rather daunting and fortress-like, especially when viewed from Melford Green (left). However, there are indications that they once were bedecked with cherry trees. Metal labels still survive, nailed onto the brickwork.



'**Black Heart**' is thought to be one of the oldest cherries under cultivation, but has been grown the world over. It is mentioned by John Rea in his *Flora* of 1665 as 'a fair, large, blackish red Cherry, in taste sweet and good'. In 1906 this variety was described as: '*Fruit, rather large, bluntly heart-shaped, often irregular, colour deep black-red, mottled, skin shining; flesh, rich and firm; stone, spoon-shaped; stalk, long and thin; foliage, dark green, spoon-shaped; growth, robust, but rather spreading. A very fine variety. Season, late mid-season*' (G. Bunyard & O. Thomas, *The Fruit Garden*).



'**White Bigarreau**'. The bigarreau group of cherries take their name from a French word meaning variegated' or 'bi-colour'. This one is recorded by name in 1822. According to Thomas Rivers of Sawbridgeworth in Herts. (*Descriptive Catalogue of Fruits*, 1853) 'An old tree of this variety exists here in the last stage of

decay, but it still bears very fine fruit. The tradition is that the scion which produced it was given to my grandfather by Baron Dimsdale, who brought it from Russia on his return from inoculating the Empress Catherine' [Thomas Dimsdale, an English physician, inoculated the royal family against smallpox in 1768 and was rewarded with a Russian barony]. Rivers says this bigarreau was 'Large; very rich and excellent' and was 'sold in the streets, often very cheaply'. According to *The Gardeners' Chronicle* of 1890, 'The White Bigarreau is the Cherry grown for the markets in Kent, the orchards being said to realise fabulous profits'.

■ Edward Martin

SGT Winter Lectures – *Live and on Zoom*

Live talks on are Saturdays at 2pm, tickets £9.00 – email or write to the Chairman to book a place. These will all be at **Earl Stonham House, Church Lane, Earl Stonham, IP14 5ED**, by kind permission of Andrew Deacon.

Zoom talks are on Thursdays at 6pm. These are **free** to members, but we are currently limited to 100 participants for each talk. Zoom links will be sent to members before each lecture; no booking is required – first come, first served!



Live talk: Saturday 12 October 2024, 2pm in the Music Room at Earl Stonham House
A GARDEN WELL PLACED. A DESIGNER'S HARMONY BETWEEN HOUSE AND GARDEN
By Xa Tollemache

An exploration of Xa's garden design work, which started at Helmingham Hall here in Suffolk, her home

from 1975 to 2017, but developed after 1996 to include many wonderful gardens in this county, Europe, and the United States.

Xa, Lady Tollemache, is one of Suffolk's best-known garden and landscape designers, winning a Gold Medal at Chelsea in 1997 and two subsequent Silver-Gilt medals. Her book, A Garden Well Placed, was published in 2022.

Live talk: Saturday 30 November 2024, 2pm in the Music Room at Earl Stonham House
THE BOTANIC GARDEN IN BURY ST EDMUNDS
By Paul Marsh

Paul will talk on the history and changing nature of the

Botanic Garden, Bury St. Edmund's.

THE Lessee of the Abbey Grounds respectfully announces his intention of publishing on the 24th inst., a revised list of the Nobility, Gentry and Subscribers in general, who patronize the Garden.

Arrears of subscriptions are requested to be paid as early as convenient, and any additional names will be thankfully received at the Curators Lodge, or at the Bank of Messrs. Oakes, Bevan and Co., and of Mr. A. Wade, where lists may be obtained.

The Bury and Suffolk Herald.

10 JUNE 1835

Bury Botanic Gardens, from its founding in 1820 by Nathaniel Shirley Harness Hodson until Hodson's death in 1861. He will give insights into the life and times of Hodson, the sole proprietor and superintendent of the garden, and his connections with the world of botany, horticulture and gardening, using some examples of his (and his employees) contributions to journals, newspapers and local life.

Paul is a volunteer gardener and member of the Abbey Gardens Friends committee who work alongside the professional gardening team at West Suffolk to ensure the Abbey Gardens are, and will, remain a joy to visit. He has delved into the history of the Bury Botanic Garden and confesses that he has become slightly obsessed with it all. He gives talks and helps raise funds to promote its successor, the Abbey Gardens.



Live talk: Saturday 18 January 2025, 2pm in the Music Room at Earl Stonham House

FULLERS MILL – A PLANTSMAN'S GARDEN
By Jude Law

The Fullers Mill garden at West Stow, near Bury St Edmunds, was created by the late Bernard Tickner MBE from rough scrub and woodland.

The seven-acre garden on the banks of the River Lark and the Culford Stream has a plantsman's collection of unusual shrubs, perennials, lilies and marginal plants. The garden is now owned by Perennial, the charity that helps people in horticulture. Fullers Mill was the RHS's Partner Garden of the Year for the Midlands and the East in 2022, and the SGT made a visit to the garden in 2023.

Jude is the Volunteer Plant Record Curator for the charity Perennial at Fullers Mill. Perennial is another name for the Gardeners' Royal Benevolent Society. Founded in 1839, it supports both working and retired gardeners, as well as maintaining gardens of historic or aesthetic importance – see <https://perennial.org.uk>.

Zoom talk: Thursday 6 February 2025, 6pm. DESIGNED FOR DISPLAY: MEDIEVAL AND TUDOR MOATS IN SUFFOLK AND BEYOND. By Edward Martin

Providing a romantic backdrop to our recent Garden Party, Crow's Hall is one of most recent additions to Suffolk's growing list of nationally-important heritage gardens. Moated houses may have been conceived in imitation of castles and their defences,



but from very early on they became vehicles for the display of status and wealth, with decorative embellishments and additions reaching a climax in Tudor times. Suffolk, with more than 900 examples, has one of the greatest concentrations of moats in England, and it will form the focus of this exploration of the origins of moats and their development as decorative settings for houses.

Edward is an archaeologist and landscape historian who is the chairman of the Suffolk Gardens Trust and a vice-president of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History.



Live talk: Saturday 15 March 2025, 2pm in the Music Room at Earl Stonham House

BRINGING THE KITCHEN GARDEN INTO THE KITCHEN: THE RESEARCH AND WRITING OF THREE INSPIRATIONAL WOMEN

By Barbara Segall

Women are not centre-stage in many disciplines, and it is similar in horticulture and food history where many have lacked the appropriate recognition. This talk focuses on three women, Susan Campbell, Joy Larkcom,

and Joan Morgan, whose writing and research into kitchen gardens, salads and Japanese/Chinese vegetables, fruit, growing techniques, and cooking is important and inspirational to gardeners and cooks alike. Barbara presented this as a paper to the Oxford Food Symposium in July 2024 and the full paper is due to be published in the 2025 *Proceedings of the OFS*.

Barbara is the editor of the Suffolk Gardens Trust's Newsletter, but is also a much-acclaimed garden writer and received the Garden Media Guild Outstanding Contribution Award for 2023. Her latest book, *Secret Gardens of the South East*, was published by Frances Lincoln in 2022. You can follow her on her website: thegardenpost.com.

Book review



The Garden Against Time. In Search of a Common Paradise

By Olivia Laing

Published by Picador, 2024. £20.

ISBN 9781529066678

As the title clearly lays out, this is much more than an account of the author's restoration and resurrection of her longed for and newly acquired garden. Although the central narrative draws beguilingly on her own garden and plant diary which was written while cloistered by pandemic lockdowns, these beautifully crafted passages serve to lead us to consider wider issues.

Some of you may have visited Olivia Laing's garden in Yoxford when it was open for the NGS. She has developed and restored the garden that Mark Rumary, chief garden designer at Notcutts and former assistant to Lanning Roper, laid out in the 1960s in a series of rooms including a paradise garden. The concept of a Paradise Garden fuelled the quest to understand not just the history of the garden and its designer, Rumary, who had lived with his partner Derek Melville in the 18th-century house until his death in 2010, but also the concept of Eden. Her wide research (there are comprehensive references and a bibliography at the end of the book) into earlier owners of the house, and other local characters along with various historical, biographical and geographical links she discovers lead her to discuss the ethics, politics and economics of gardens such as that at Ditchingham, and the creation of landscape parks. In this context the Middleton family's profits from slavery are investigated with regard to Shrublands Hall, John Clare's wonderful work is examined and John Milton's *Paradise Lost* related to the practice of land enclosure. Various historic treatises and movements urging a greater equality of landownership are outlined.

Her past relationship with gardens and nature, her family history and years of involvement in environmental movements are all looped into the narrative. Derek Jarman's *Modern Nature* influenced her to study herbalism, and, amongst other things, John Gerard's *Herball* and the pernicious effects of homophobia are woven throughout. The book is a fascinating elaboration on her belief that: 'While the spell of the garden does lie in its suspension, its seeming separation, from the larger world, the idea that it exists outside of history or politics is not a possibility. A garden is a time capsule, as well as a portal out of time.'

■ Patience Shone



FLINT. A Lithic Love Letter

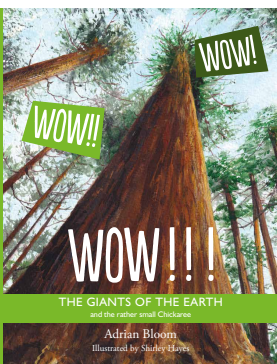
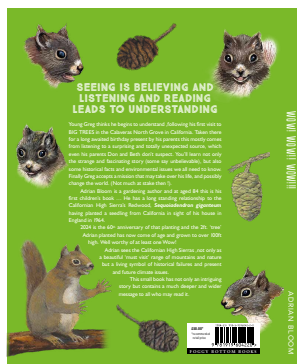
By Joanne Bourne

Published by Eye Books Ltd, 2024,
£14.99. ISBN 9781785634086

This is not a gardening book, but it is one that evokes a landscape, a particular sort of English landscape where flint is a constant presence. For Joanne, this is the chalk downland of Kent, but there are distinct resonances with our Suffolk landscape. As the book title indicates, this is an ode to flint. She is an archaeologist and she writes with an easy but obvious knowledge of her subject, but never allows it to become too overwhelming. Rather, it is her infectious love of her subject that is transmitted to the reader – you start wondering the fields with her, and, like her, you start to observe what is often

unconsidered. Though often disregarded, flint is a unique substance which has played an important part in our human history. So next time you see a flint wall, or trip over a flint in a field, have a closer look and you too may find that you are touching history!

■ Edward Martin



WOW! WOW!! WOW!!!

The Giants of the Earth

By Adrian Bloom

Published by Foggy Bottom
Books 2024. £50.

ISBN 9781919604220

Adrian Bloom, of Blooms of Bressingham fame, is 84 and this is his first children's book. It arises from his long-standing relationship to the Californian

High Sierra's Redwood, *Sequoiadendron giganteum*, having planted a seedling from California in sight of his house in Norfolk in 1964. 2024 is the 60th anniversary of that planting and the two-foot tree he planted has now come of age and grown to over 100ft! He sees the Californian High Sierras not only as a beautiful 'must visit' range of mountains and nature but a living symbol of historical failures and present and future climate issues.

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