

Dear Friends.

At last the Spring Newsletter is flying into your inboxes! Apologies – but it is certainly worth the wait with so many interesting articles from members across the UK. We know gardens are continually evolving and it is exciting to see so many new developments described in your submissions to this newsletter.

We do seem to be edging towards spring though in a rather dull, damp and windy fashion. The plants seem to know it is time to start putting on a show, and certainly, at the RBGE in Edinburgh, the Rhododendrons and Magnolias are really getting going in their 'blousy' way! On the right here is *Rhododendron calaphytum*. If you visit the Edinburgh garden, entering via the East Gate, have a look at the stunning gate which draws on its inspiration from this particular rhododendron!



The Forum had their winter meeting in January – at which we learnt that Martin Green was standing down as representative of Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum. Gay Dent from University of Leicester Botanic Garden Friends also intimated that, not only was he stepping back from the Forum, but he was also retiring from the Friends group after many years. I am indeed very grateful to both for their active involvement with the Forum and hope they are able to continue to enjoy their respective arboretum/garden. Jane Annett, University of Oxford BG, is standing down after a brief spell as their representative and I am delighted that she has been able to find a replacement in Jane Thrift. You can read about Jane and the other new representatives in this newsletter.

Since our meeting, the Forum has contributed to the planning of a series of webinars, hosted by Plant Network and Sheffield Botanical Garden. Representatives of the horticultural teams at Inverness BG, Swansea BG and Sheffield BG were involved with the initial presentations and the subsequent discussions were found to be useful, hopefully leading to future networking opportunities in the future. I must thank Laura Alston, Education and Engagement Co-ordinator, Sheffield BG for taking the lead with this initiative.

I would like to formally welcome a new member to the Forum – the Liverpool Trust. Stephen Lyus wrote an initial piece about their historical plant collection in our last newsletter. This newsletter sees the story continue up until the present day. I am delighted that the Trust has joined our network, and I look forward to meeting Stephen at our AGM in May.

Margot Greer and Jane Down had a busy January finalising the plans for our AGM at the National Botanic Garden of Wales. Final payments will be requested at the end of March. It is still possible to sign up to attend in person, though, at this late stage, accommodation might be an issue locally.

Look forward to seeing you in May either in person or virtually!

Best wishes

Shiona Mackie

Front and Back pages: Photos: Kibble Palace, Glasgow Botanic Garden – Robert Jamieson

This page: Rhododendron calaphytum - Shiona Mackie

Welcome to our new representatives!

Lorraine Milne

Friends of the Botanical Gardens, Sheffield (FOBS)

As I contemplated retirement in November 2021 after 43.5 years in the public sector, working in Central Government, I turned to thinking about what I might want to do. And, yes all the usual activities sprung to mind: more travel; studying; more reading. I didn't want to do anything that required a 'mate', I wanted to do something new, and something for me. I wanted to meet new people and make some new friends. So having spent the months during lock down walking to and from, and around the Botanical Gardens in Sheffield I decided to join FOBS. After all £20pa was a small price to pay for what the Gardens did for my health & mental wellbeing. I joined in December 2021, attending the first January meeting in 2022. Having been so warmly welcomed by the Membership Secretary, I went back later to the next January meeting. At that point, I spotted a request for 'stewards' to help with the monthly garden tours and, knowing I wasn't going to become a volunteer gardener, I decided this might be for me. I went along to the training and supported our two Guides during that summer. I subsequently became a fully fledged Guide in 2023, leading a variety of tours, including one tour on textiles and dying. I'm very proud



of the fact I helped to raise nearly £2k last summer for the Gardens from our tours alone. The Membership Secretary then asked would I "organise a one-off day trip". A 'one-off 'became six very successful days' out and this year I'm organising double that figure. I have never done anything like that in my life, although having spent many years as a project manager .those skills were soon put to use.

In October 2022 I was asked if I would join the Executive Committee and by this stage what else was left for me to do? I'm very happy to say that I can bring my years of working with 'official' processes and procedures to the table and I am currently redrafting FOBS financial arrangements and helping to put in place some robust governance arrangements.

I don't think I ever envisaged that FOBS would give me so much for such little investment!

Bekki Gordon

University of St Andrew's Botanic Garden

Through her role as St Andrews Botanic Garden's Engagement Officer, Bekki is responsible for supporting the St Andrews Botanic Garden community, including Friends Members and volunteers. SABG has a active community of



supporters, including around 1000 Friend members and 80 volunteers who take part in a huge range of projects and events including a lecture series, socials, weekly gardening sessions and support at events. SABG has recently transitioned from two separate registered charities (St Andrews Botanic Garden Trust and Friends of St Andrews Botanic Garden) allowing for members of Trust staff to take on the responsibility of membership administration and finance, and allowing Friends to focus on other contributions to the Garden. Throughout 2024, Bekki will be continuing to support this transition, reworking Friends communications and membership packages, and also organising an exciting events series for Friends - including lectures, coffee mornings, open days and maybe even a ceilidh!

Jane Thrift

Friends of University of Oxford Botanic Garden

For the past two years I've been working for the Friends of Oxford Botanic Garden and Arboretum (FOBGA) as a volunteer garden visits organiser. Visiting gardens has been something that I have enjoyed for many years, and the opportunity to develop this interest has been a wonderful experience for me. For many years I was an art teacher and led a large art department in a girls' school. Towards the end of my teaching career I was a coordinator for Partnership projects within the community and between very different schools, education in the widest sense is something that I continue to be interested in. I continue my own work as a printmaker - and of course gardens and plants provide the starting point for many of my prints!



Mary Campbell

Friends of the University of Leicester Botanic Garden



My first contact with the Botanic Garden was when I was recruited as a guide for tours in the garden, something I still enjoy doing. I volunteered on the Catering team for several years before becoming responsible for co-ordinating the refreshment team on the annual Plant Sale and Family Day. This role took me on to the Committee of the Friends, and I then volunteered to become Co-Chair when our existing Co-chair had to resign because of a serious illness. I represent the Friends on the University's Botanic Garden Board, and this has enabled me to begin to understand the University's structures and how they impact on Friends events. A key part of my role at the moment is maintaining the morale of Friends and volunteers in a Botanic Garden with no Director, and no Administrative Support.

I've hugely enjoyed being part of the Forum and linking with others facing similar challenges.

Reminder:

Friends of Botanic Gardens Forum

AGM

Saturday, 11th May— Sunday 12th May

National Botanic Garden of Wales

AGM 10.30

Tours of NBGW 14.00

Sunday: Aberglasney AM; Swansea Botanic Garden PM



Friends of Thwaite Gardens

We held our Annual General Meeting and Autumn Meeting on October 22nd 2023, at the gardens. Previously, these meetings have been held in the evening in a local church hall, so this was the first time we had held them at the gardens themselves, on a weekend and in the daytime. As well as the AGM we had a visiting speaker, refreshments and time to enjoy the gardens.

The shift in timing has proved to be popular and we will also hold our Spring Meeting in the daytime at the gardens in March.

The gardens are being used more by the University for teaching and research and also by local schools and the U3A.

We had a visit from the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) to do random plant health checks both in the glasshouses and gardens outside. They were very impressed with the plant collections and their health. So much so that they also enquired about using the Gardens and classroom for their training courses.

Our volunteers continue to do a sterling job to maintain the gardens and there are currently plans under way to extend the winter and Australian beds.

Lindsey Atkinson

The Winter Border at Thwaite

Winter borders are a frequent theme in gardens today now that garden visiting is popular at all seasons. This was one of the very first projects undertaken by Thwaite Friends volunteers over twenty years ago, when in fact there were only two physical volunteers – myself and our then secretary, Pam Bailey. Meeting on Fridays we became the founding members of a group that has since grown considerably in number and now convenes twice a week maintaining most of the garden.

Our winter border had very small beginnings, partly because of our limited physical labour at the time but also because the powers that be seemed reluctant to allow us to do it. It began as a small corner dominated by old laurels and conifers. The laurels were too big to dig out by hand so they were coppiced. The Portuguese laurels were allowed to regrow, clipped into pyramids for a few years to form a feature but the cherry laurels were ruthlessly cut until they gave up. This left stumps and one or two big conifers which were subsequently infested with honey fungus and died. It did clear them out but honey fungus has been a hazard in the winter border ever since.

Our first additions were three shrubs of *Photinia* x *fraseri* 'Robusta' – now small trees – which have bright coppery early foliage. These were planted with a number of other cheerful evergreens like *Choisia* 'Sundance', *Mahonia* x *media*, *Euonymus fortunei* c.vs; together with *Narcissus* 'January', *Crocus, Primula* and winter heathers for coloured flowers and *Sarcococca* for scent. Most of these are still present, though the *Photinia* dominate and have been crown lifted. The border has now expanded considerably since we convinced the management of Thwaite that we knew what we were doing and could be trusted but it has been a slow process. This winter we added an entirely new section.

To be fair, the term 'winter border' is a rather broad term and in our case at least, really means 'winter half of the year' – i.e. from October to April. So our display begins in autumn with things like *Calicarpa* berries, *Mahonia* flowers and leaf colour like *Euonymus alatus*.

The barest period is generally mid-December, after the *Mahonia* finish, to mid-January and here we rely on the well- established bark repertoire of *Cornus alba* and *C. sanguinea* varieties, along with the Coral Bark maples or the more subtle *Salix fargesii*, as well as the brighter evergreens and interesting structures like *Euphorbia characias*. Depending on the season, flowers begin to creep in through January – star turns being *Cyclamen coum*, *Hamamelis* and then the superb *Daphne bholua* which is always taken as something of a landmark of hope after New Year, flooding the vicinity with perfume, swamping the earlier aroma of *Chimonanthus* and

Viburnum. Winter Cherry - Prunus subhirtella 'Autumnalis' is eye catching as long as the weather remains reasonably mild.

Once into February, things really seem to take off with the hellebores, snowdrops, aconites gradually joined by more and more. Catkins of willows like *Salix gracilistyla* 'Melanostachys' are a treat. We have one or two rarer characters like *Stachyurus* with its pearly chains of bells, *Oemleria* with discreet almond scent and the startling *Edgeworthia* which get going in March, each of which make large shrubs.

Our new section has been created alongside the original with a grass path between to allow greater immersion. Some plants will be repeated but we are also going to make more of conifers and things like *Phormium*. Rightly or wrongly, we do not allow much out of season interest (i.e. summer) in the winter border which draws some criticism and may seem unnecessarily pedantic. But I think it is important to stick to themes once they are adopted otherwise everything just becomes 'A.N. Other' border. Themes help decide what to leave out which is at least as important as what to include. There is plenty of interest elsewhere off season.



John Killingbeck

Photo: Anne Bourton Card

Projects funded by Friends of RBGE

The residual funds raised by the Friends of the RBGE over the past 32 years have been allocated to the following projects: -

Edinburgh:

Digitisation of herbarium specimens.

Funding of 3-4 horticulturists to go to Norway in 2024 to collect seeds from three threatened Scottish plant species (Alpine blue-sowthistle, Whorled Solomon's Seal, Small cow-wheat) as part of the Scottish Plant Recovery Project.



Dawyck: Renovation of stone steps in the northeast of the garden. The treads have been regularly maintained over the years, but the balustrades and decorative spheres need repairing and cleaning.



Benmore: The purchase of a new Benmore Explorer which will be used to assist visitors with mobility issues to access the higher areas of the garden

Logan: creation of a new flexible exhibition space for workshops, creative exhibitions and visiting groups.

All funds raised by any volunteer initiatives outwith the RBGE Edinburgh will be directed to the restoration of the Palm Houses. Funds raised through initiatives by Benmore and Dawyck Volunteer Groups will support their respective gardens.

Shiona Mackie

Photos: RBGE

St Andrew's Botanic Garden

The Unique Power of Collaboration between Botanic Gardens as a Gateway to Inspiring Young People

Botanic gardens have a key role in the learning landscape as a resource for communicating key issues, such as the biodiversity crisis, to the visitors, pupils and their families that they engage with. They have huge potential to demonstrate the relevance of the biodiversity crisis to young people in Scotland, by sharing the research carried out in Scotlish botanic gardens, providing local and relatable examples for pupils to be inspired by.

Over this last year, education and community teams from across St Andrews Botanic Garden, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh and University of Dundee Botanic Garden have embarked on a new partnership –

developing a brand-new biodiversity-focused workshop to be delivered collectively, reaching hundreds of pupils across Scotland. This is the first time all three education teams have come together for a project of this extent of collaboration and reach.

This hands-on, curriculum-linked workshop will be delivered to schools around Scotland, as well as at public events and workshops. It will focus on sharing how botanic gardens and their partners are taking action to tackle the biodiversity crisis, using exciting and engaging activities, providing relatable case studies and role models for young people find inspiration from.



As well as working in partnership to develop workshop content, our team at St Andrews Botanic Garden have been busy applying for travel funding to support schools in attending this workshops, targeting schools in areas of socio-economic deprivation to reduce the gap in opportunities for these pupils.



Our new schools workshop will launch in March 2023, with a special two-week programme of school visits, celebrating both the launch of our collaborative biodiversity workshop and British Science Week. This celebration will culminate in a community weekend, with events for families to attend together, allowing pupils to share their learning with their whole family unit and encourage continued learning at home. St Andrews Botanic Garden will also join the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh's team onsite at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh for events as part of Edinburgh Science Festival 2024, engaging new audiences with our work

here at the Garden and sharing the new biodiversity workshop.

Following these workshops, participants will be able to continue their learning using the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh's Plant Kind resource – an interactive online platform which creates a network of people taking action to protect plants and biodiversity by encouraging schools, community groups and individuals to share what they're doing to protect plants. The biodiversity workshop, developed in collaboration with University of Dundee Botanic Garden and the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, will also become part of our schools programme for lots more classes to be inspired by and enjoy!

Bekki Gougon

Photos: St Andrew's Botanic Garden

Friends of Treborth Botanic Garden

We have had several events over the autumn and winter that make good use of the natural flora (and fungi) growing in the garden. The annual fungus foray was a great success, despite the rain, which does not seem to deter the keen mycologists of all ages. The mixed habitats at Treborth, particularly the woodland, grassland and meadows, always give rise to a wide variety of interesting fungi. Our 15 ha of woodland is part of Wales' Celtic Rainforest and is rich in lower plants such as mosses and liverworts. The Friends of Treborth were involved in our celebration of National Moss Day last October. Members of the public were invited to be led around our new Moss Trail, and then came inside to examine mosses under microscopes and see their beauty close up. There was a lot of interest in this, and many people were disappointed that there was not enough room for them to join on the day. So one of members, a bryology expert, ran another event in February, and will also do one for students.

We enjoy scouring the Garden for holly, ivy and other greenery for our Christmas Wreath workshops, which we held last December. With the added attraction of mulled wine and mince pies, this is always a popular event!



Several areas of the Garden are being re-landscaped at the moment, which I will report on in the future, but one project is nearing completion, which is the re-development of the South African border. It was first laid out over a quarter or a century ago, under the supervision of a member of the Friends who was particularly knowledgeable about South African plants, having worked in one of their botanic gardens for many years. As we all know from our own gardens, plants often do not behave themselves, and some of the more vigorous genera, such as the *Crocosmia*, gradually spread through the border. Therefore, in 2021 a process of digging out the border started, with staff, volunteers and students carefully lifting all but the very biggest (eg large Agapanthus) plants and potting them up. The bed was then then thoroughly dug over, and the plants replaced. There were some additions, including some new *Dierama* and *Restio*. We know we would not have been able to clear the ground of every tiny bulb or cormlet, so we will keep looking out for unwanted seedlings. We are planning to add more herbaceous plants to extend the flowering season, including some of the hardier Pelargoniums. The hard work has all been worth while, with the bed being bright and colourful for the last two summers.

Sarah Edgar

Photos: Erle Randall

Birmingham Botanical Gardens

Life continues to be very busy at Birmingham Botanical Gardens as we progress into 2024. Of particular interest in February was the focus on the National Collection of Cyclamen together with our new Cyclamen Trainee, Ruth Davis.

Birmingham Botanical Gardens Cyclamen Collection was awarded National Collection status in 2016. A 12-month traineeship at Birmingham Botanical Gardens (BBG) is not only helping Ruth Davis discover a new career path, but also care for and maintain BBG's National Collection of Cyclamen.

In addition to caring for the *Cyclamen* located throughout the grounds and in a number of the <u>glasshouses</u> at BBG, it is Ruth's role to catalogue this nationally significant collection. Her post as Cyclamen trainee is vital in helping BBG maintain the



Ruth in the Mediterranean House

health of the collection, as well as putting it on display for the first time in almost 10 years. Ruth is supported in her paid traineeship by two volunteers from the Cyclamen Society, who help her in her work to look after the extensive collection. In turn, she is working with several other volunteers who are also helping to care for the Cyclamen Collection at BBG. Ruth's traineeship is the first of its kind in the UK and jointly funded by BBG and the Cyclamen Society.

The National Collection was on display in the Mediterranean House from 10th – 18th February, with Ruth giving a number of drop -in talks on the history, cultivation and significance of cyclamen within the Botanical world.



Ruth driving the tractor with a trailer full of cyclamen ready for the Mediterranean House with Bethan Collecton our new Alpine Senior Horticulturist assisting with the decant.

Birmingham Botanical Gardens (continued)

Composting!

Of equally important news was the completion of our "Spread the Composting Campaign!'. Our 60-year-old compost system had collapsed and was no longer fit for purpose. Thanks to several funders and supporters, to whom we are very grateful, we now have a new composting system in place and fully operational. The compost bays will allow Birmingham Botanical Gardens to responsibly manage its green-waste with a small team working hard to maintain this 15-acre Grade II* listed landscape. The compost will be used on site to mulch the herbaceous borders and the compost leachate will be collected in a leachate tank. The composting now allows us to: feed and nurture our soil in the context of topsoil loss; sequester carbon; sequester nutrients; supress weeds; aid moisture retention to reduce irrigation; reduce leaching across the site; provide compost for the Glasshouses; reduce carbon footprint shipping mulch in and feed production; and feed the soil microfauna – beneficial soil critters for plant and tree health. One of the key features of the facility is the inbuilt underground storage leachate tank with electronic pumping system.





The old and the new!

Watch this space!

As part of our 'Growing our Green Heritage' project we're delighted to announce the return of the giant water lily! You'll see preparations of the pond happening and the germination of the water lily; *Victoria cruziana* is underway!

Stay tuned for all the latest updates as we embark on this exciting botanical heritage journey!

Caroline Clutton-Brock

Photos: Birmingham Botanical Garden

Friends of the University of Bristol Botanic Garden

In the September 2023 newsletter I wrote at length about the development of the Guangzhou Garden at the University of Bristol Botanic Garden. Finally after much adaptation of the original plan to fit the site the garden will be open to visitors at Easter when the majority of the planting has taken place. A formal opening takes place in May by the University of Bristol Vice Chancellor, Evelyn Welch, and Deputy Vice Chancellor and Provost, Judith Squires.



In January we enjoyed a fascinating lecture by the two directors of Grant Associates who designed the Chelsea exhibit, Peter Chmiel and Chin-Jung Chen. They had worked on many prestigious projects such as the famous Gardens by the Bay in Singapore with their 'super-trees' and it was interesting to learn of the process behind their design and the problems incurred, especially with all the plants they had sourced, due to the postponement of the original show from May to September 2021. In Bristol the original plants have not been used but suitable plants have been sourced, some already growing in the Botanic Garden as well as from other suppliers in the UK, all of which will give the realistic character of a subtropical landscape. The building of this

project has been funded by the University of Bristol, and the Friends have provided the funding for interpretation boards and labels with the name of the plant in both Chinese and English. The volunteer guides are looking forward to learning more so that they can guide visiting tour groups.

There has been much discussion amongst Forum members about the frequency and publication of newsletters due to the ever-increasing costs of printing and postage, as well as the rise of social media. In 2024 we are reducing the frequency from 4 issues to 3 per year. The spring issue is in the course of preparation to publicise the Easter Sculpture Festival, but we will no longer publish the June issue, and the next one will be in August, prior to the Bee and Pollination Festival. This is to ensure maximum awareness of the two big Festivals which are important for fundraising and member recruitment. We have a regular enews which updates and reminds of other events.

We are also looking at major changes to our membership records to a more automated online system, and although we have been considering this for some time it has been accelerated by the move away from Bristol and resignation of our Membership Secretary. She has been replaced by a team of volunteers to try and even out the workload and time but we are still trying to recruit a further member to assist.

My term of office comes to an end at the Friends' AGM in March and I will not be standing as Chair again. I have had the great privilege of representing the Friends for the past 10 years, as well as for a further 6 years during the move of the Garden in 2005. I am proud to have played my part in what the Friends have achieved. Since being formed in 1975 with a handful of supporters, we now have some 2,500 members and been able to benefit the Garden in many projects as well as to fund trainee horticulturists. I am delighted that Lucy Davies has agreed to take up the position of Chair and has already joined the Forum. I will remain on the Friends' committee and the Forum for the time being to ensure a smooth transition. I know that everyone will give Lucy the same support I have received and I wish her well and hope that she enjoys it as much as I have. We are both looking forward to meeting everyone at the Forum AGM at NBG Wales in May.

Pat Davie

Photo: Nick Wray

Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society

Finding happiness through gardening

In October 2023, Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society, as a completely new departure from our usual fund-raising and social activities, staged an innovative and entertaining production for a large and rapt audience in St Catherine's Church in Ventnor. Our *Ventnorensis* editor, Ros Whistance described it in the winter edition:

"You wouldn't expect a play about gardening to have the audience fumbling for a tissue; or indeed a show about poor mental health eliciting a laugh-out-loud response. But a theatrical show about how gardening can help mend a troubled mind achieved both these things.

'The Head Gardener' was written and performed by two Island brothers, Jake and Warren Oldenshaw, a professional actor and a horticulturalist and garden designer respectively, who explored the theme through their own experiences. Using song, scent (gorgeous

Untied Artists present

BLOOM
GREAT
HEATR

Living proof that gardening is good for you'
Alan Titchmansh

untiedartistsinfo

#theheadgarden

lavender wands were distributed), interactive graphics and comic costume construction, the brothers painted a picture of how Warren's mental health reached all-time lows, but was rescued by working with plants. It also interweaved other true stories of volunteers at community gardens in the Midlands, where Jake now lives, in which the brothers have been involved. Being around plants, in the open air, and working in communities, grows people's mental wellbeing was the message well told. With a lovely surprise at the end."



During the performance, interleaved with the other elements, they designed, drafted and brought to life a unique and beautiful garden, and shared fascinating plant stories and gardening tips along the way.

After the performance one audience member said "I was imagining it would be some sort of comedy about what people get up to in their gardens. It was a heartwarming and personal story of how the simple act of growing and creating something can be so good for our mental health and a road back from depression. The happy surprise at the end of the show was a moment that brought a tear to my eye."

Everyone there was in no doubt that we could agree with our Patron Alan Titchmarsh's quote on the publicity poster for the show that Jake and Warren provided "Living proof that gardening is good for you"

Val Pitts

Photos: Ros Whistance

Friends of University of Durham Botanic Garden

2023 was quite a successful year for the garden not only winning a gold medal in the Northumbria in Bloom Competition but also capping this by winning the category "Tourist & Visitor Attraction and Country Estate"

It was also a successful year for the Friends with membership numbers holding up well. We had a number of we attended talks and the Friends participated in the Garden's very successful first Fun Day, funding a number of the performers.

Our main priority for the early part of this year is to see the enhancement of the Japanese Garden in memory of our late Head Gardener Mike Hughes completed. Progress has been inhibited by the difficult weather conditions but we can now see a light at the end of the tunnel as this photo shows.

The bareness will disappear in the Spring and Summer when the wild flower seeds germinate. Also enhanced planting including acers and azaleas is planned. The Friends have agreed to fund extending the granite setts onto and along the gravel path which should make it a really attractive element in the garden.



Just to show what winter used to look like here is a photo taken earlier this year in the garden.



David Spence
Photos: Fred Smith

Jill Sinclair from Sheffield Botanical Garden would like to draw members' attention to this forthcoming conference

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON BOTANICAL GARDENS

An exploration of the important and sometimes discomforting roles played by botanical gardens over the centuries. A study weekend in Oxford in partnership between the Gardens Trust and Oxford University Department of Continuing Education. Friday 31 May - Sunday 2 June. For this and other events run by the Gardens Trust, see http://thegardenstrust.org/events/

Friends of Sheffield Botanical Garden (FOBS)

Our Ruby Anniversary

The Friends of the Botanical Gardens, Sheffield, affectionately known as FOBS, was inaugurated in April 1984. The aims were to encourage horticultural education and to raise funds for the Gardens. Lectures, workshops and visits to other gardens were organised and sales of plants and crafts held. With severe cuts to the Sheffield Council budget in the late 80s, the number of gardeners was severely reduced and the Gardens began to decline. FOBS role began to change and in the autumn of 1993 volunteers were allowed to help with maintenance.

The announcement of the Heritage Lottery Fund's Urban Parks programme in January 1996 stimulated action by the Friends; we recognised that a charitable organisation was necessary and formed the Sheffield Botanical Gardens Trust (SBGT which has its own website).



Working as a team, the Friends and SBGT joined forces with Sheffield Town Trust, the City Council and the Landscape Dept at the University of Sheffield to submit a proposal to the Heritage Lottery Fund. The bid was successful and the Restoration Project got underway. The Friends have made a significant contribution over the last forty years and with in excess of 500 members we continue to grow. A series of events including a picnic in our beautiful gardens this summer will be held to celebrate our anniversary.

Alison Hunter. FOBS Historian

FOBS Garden Tours

FOBS has a volunteer group of tour guides and stewards who offer a variety of public tours. People just turn up and join in. These take place on the fourth Tuesday of each month from February until November. They commence at 1pm and last about an hour. Following an experiment last summer we have decided to again



offer early evening tours, for those who can't join us in the daytime, these tours commence at 6pm and run from June to August coinciding with other events in the Gardens. For example, last June we ran our very successful Shakespeare Botanical tour on the evening that Pantaloons Theatre Company presented The Comedy of Errors. Great fun! All of these public tours are themed and as well as Shakespeare include, Natural Dyes; Perfumes and Potions; Painting With Flowers and a Halloween themed tour. We don't charge for the tours but do ask for a suggested donation of £3, all monies collected go straight into Garden funds. In addition we run a very successful Private Garden Tours programme. These can be themed or if no theme is preferred we take our tours through the gardens concentrating on what's

looking its best. Our pavilions are well admired.

FOBS Tour Guides would be delighted to offer a private tour to another FBGF Friend group who may be visiting the City. We charge £7pp for a 90 minute tour but would offer this at a reduced price of £5pp for FBGF Friends. Please email fobstalksandtours@gmail.com

Christine Rose and Jude Haslam

Anniversary Logo and Photo: Jill Sinclair

Liverpool Botanical Trust—Part 2

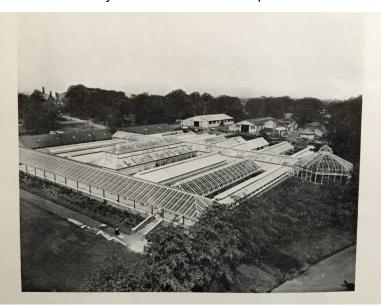
This is the second half of the story of the Liverpool Botanic Gardens, the first half took us from 1802 to 1910.



Not much of note happened until 20 November 1940 when a stray nazi parachute bomb hit the Wavertree glasshouses. The plants inside were shredded and as it was winter, the surviving plants were hurriedly moved into nearby private glasshouses. The orchids went into the Sudley House greenhouses. Air raid wardens were billeted in the Curator's lodge and unfortunately, they burnt all the garden's records to keep themselves warm!

This would have been the end of this story if Percy Conn had not become Superintendent of Liverpool Parks in 1947. He was aware of the heritage and aimed to create his new garden to be one worthy of being a successor to the one built by Roscoe and the Shepherds.

In 1951 he started in the newly acquired Harthill estate, a part of Calderstones Park. He asked the Council for £32,000 to build the glasshouses, but times were hard, and he only received £1,350, which built one cheap glasshouse! For the next 13 years he received enough to build a new glasshouse each year. Unfortunately, these small sums meant that Conn could only afford low grade spruce, not teak as was normal in those days.



Harthill Complex



Harthill opened in 1964 with an amazing complex of 16 interconnected glasshouses. There followed 15 years of good times with many skilled horticulturists trained and Liverpool representing Britain at international shows including Paris, Cologne, Vienna, and the Floriade in Amsterdam, as well as Chelsea and Harrogate.

Harthill Vestibule Entrance 1970's

Liverpool Botanical Trust—the story continues!

The bad times returned in 1979 when the decaying wood was not repaired. In 1981 a new glasshouse cost £10,000! Again, the local economy was in a dire state, with Tate & Lyle and Cammell Laird closing; unemployment at 25%; and the Toxteth riots. By now a complete rebuild of the glasshouses would cost £200,000!

The Councillors voted a retirement gift to Harry Buckley (Director Recreation & Open Spaces) in which that £200k would be provided in the 1983/84 financial year.

Michael Heseltine came to Liverpool's rescue with his Merseyside Task Force. Out of this came the 1984 International Garden Festival, using the heritage of the Botanic Garden as the major selling point.

Unfortunately, Militant Tendency took power in the Council and cancelled those funds. Even though the Friends of Harthill & Calderstones campaigned vigorously for other grants, the Department of the Environment was not interested.

The Council then decided that all the glasshouses had to be closed for Health & Safety reasons. All the plants were moved to glasshouses and polytunnels at the Council owned Greenhills Nursery at Garston and demolished the whole complex. For the next 23 years five horticulturists tended 10,000 plants, invisible to the world, apart from an occasional attendance at Southport Flower Shows.

The next lucky break happened in early 2006. As Liverpool was due to become the 2008 European City of Culture, Jill Bradley was commissioned to write a book to celebrate some aspect of Liverpool's cultural history. We are extremely lucky that she happened to speak to several people who remembered the Botanic Gardens. She wrote "Mr Roscoe's Garden" as a result of her research. The publication of this book reminded the Council of the existence of the remaining plants and in 2008 a third of the plants were



Croxteth Hall Glasshouses

re-housed in 5 redundant glasshouses within Croxteth Hall's walled gardens.

Only 3 horticulturists were left now, and they soldiered on with minimal support or funds other than to pay their wages and the heating bills. In 2014 they received redundancy notices, but these were rescinded when I got the Liverpool Echo newspaper to make a fuss. In 2016 the horticulturists were seconded to Myerscough College to help with training their apprentice gardeners.

The Council decided, again, they would no longer fund the Botanic Collection from 1st April 2023. I managed to get the new digital Liverpool Post to publish this story and there was another about turn on the 27 March 2023. So, the Collection and the workers were safe for a year, although the gardens were not opened at all to the public in 2023.

Several of us have now formed the Liverpool Botanical Trust, to try to ensure that this attempt at closure does not happen again and that there is an obvious future for this amazing collection. We are looking forward to receiving a lot of wise advice and help from the members of FBGF to assist with this aim.

Stephen Lyus

Photos: sourced via Stephen Lyus

