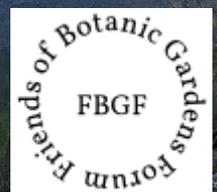




**FRIENDS OF BOTANIC GARDENS FORUM  
NEWSLETTER  
EDITION 18**



March 2026

Dear Friends,

This FBGF newsletter marks the final issue I have edited as Chair of the FBGF. I embarked on the setting up of the FBGF almost ten years ago, and with all of your support and wise counsel over the ensuing years, the FBGF has gradually increased its membership and proved to be of use to its members, sharing information and providing advice on issues as they arise. I knew a year ago that it was time to hand over the leadership to others, and therefore, at the AGM in April, Lloyd Snellgrove from Sheffield Botanical Garden will be taking over - a safe pair of hands with many contacts in the horticultural world. I can reflect on the past 9.5 years as being a fulfilling and joyous period post-retirement! I have met so many people who share my botanical and horticultural interests and a commitment to supporting botanic gardens. For the time being, I will continue to edit the newsletter until we have found a replacement ( please look at the advertisement in the newsletter!)



Since our last newsletter, FBGF participated in a series of three webinars in collaboration with Plant Network. They generated considerable interest and we hope to run more webinars in the future. **Let us know any further topics we can include in future webinars.**

The AGM of the FBGF will take place at Ness Botanic Garden on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> April. Ness is a garden I have visited many times – a gem set on land looking over the Dee estuary to North Wales. We are very grateful to Ness BG for hosting us and to Michael Roberts, their Plant and Labels Officer who will be giving attendees a talk on the garden and a guided walk in the afternoon. On Sunday morning, we will be having a guided tree walk at Calderstones Park in Liverpool. And I would like to congratulate Ness Botanic Garden for acquiring BGCI accreditation—all credit to the Curator and his team for achieving this recognition.

Once again you will find so much of interest in this newsletter – Stephen Lyus – Liverpool Botanic Trust is running another one-day seminar at Croxteth Hall, Liverpool – topic this year is Bromeliads. Pat Davie from Friends of the University of Bristol Botanic Garden tells us about her visit to an extraordinary garden in California. And we have articles on the plant propagation/planting initiatives at Sheffield Botanical Garden and the digitisation of the Herbarium material at National Botanic Garden of Wales.



Thank you all for your friendship – I look forward to seeing some of you in person (and others on-line) at our AGM in April. And I still have to visit a number of botanic gardens in the UK – I am not going to disappear completely!!

Best wishes

Shiona

**Photos: Palmhouse. RBGE Shiona Mackie**

**Front and Back Pages: Christine Rose. Sheffield Botanical Garden**

# Friends of Durham Botanic Garden

2025 was a busy and successful year in the garden. One of those successes was the Botanic Garden being awarded a Gold at the Northumbria in Bloom Awards.

The garden achieved the highest score possible with Gold (in all 3 measured categories). In addition to achieving a Gold the Botanic Garden also won the category of 'Best Tourist Attraction and Country Estates'. This was up against strong competition. It was a real reward for the hard work of the Gardening Team and the volunteers (including the Friends) who support their work.

The Garden Manager (Peter Thomson) is very keen to enhance Biodiversity in the garden as a contribution to delivering the Durham University Biodiversity Strategy (DUBS) and his team have been using the good weather to plant a row of Crab apples (*Malus sylvestris*). These whips have been grown from seed taken from the two remaining Crab Apple trees in a hedge line located nearby at Low Burn Hall. The whips have been nurtured by the BG team over the last four years and planted this October. The attached photo shows the team beginning the work. As part of this work the plan includes the creation of a Low-Weardale native hedge along the boundary at Hollingside lane.



The Weardale native hedge is as follows....

- 60% - Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*).
- 20% Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*).
- 5% Hazel (*Corylus avellana*).
- 5% Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*).
- 5% Crab Apple (*Malus sylvestris*) or 5% Dogrose (*Rosa canina*).
- 5% Guelder Rose (*Viburnum opulus*) or 5% Wild Privet (*Ligustrum vulgare*).

The plan next year is to create another low Weardale hedge (this time 100m in length) at the alternative entrance to the Botanic Garden. This is all contributing to the 10-year DUBS and targets, using local provenance plants and seed where possible in the BG and wider University estate.



During the Autumn/Winter, the Friends Volunteers whilst still working in the garden shift to working inside on the seed packaging programme as can be seen from the attached photo. We have had a really positive response from Friends with contributions of seeds which augurs well for raising funds next year.

**David Spence**

**Photos: Peter Thomson, Garden Manager**

## Liverpool Botanical Trust.

Our terrible news is that the 3-day cold snap in late November has probably killed off a significant proportion of our tender plants. The council never repaired the boiler even though they were alerted to the issue back in April. When the Trust heard about the disaster, they issued a Go Fund Me alert which raised £960 in a day and allowed us to get an account with the local butane gas supplier. So far we have donated 20 cylinders. The council employees eventually provided temporary big powerful air heaters, with which they manually blast each house for 10 minutes every hour! The council did eventually agree to pay to have the boiler mended, which has now happened. Unfortunately, they now find that the hotwater pipes are leaking!



**Before and after  
National Coleus  
Collection**



## Plant Family Seminar



*Aechmea fasciata*

**Our good news is that we will be holding our 3rd annual Plant Family Seminar on Saturday, 28th of March at Croxteth Hall, this year focused on Bromeliads.**

We have these speakers:

- **DR. SVEN BATKE 'GROWING ON TOP OF THE WORLD: BROMELIADS - THEIR DIVERSITY, ECOLOGY, AND PHYSIOLOGY'**
- **DONNA YOUNG 'BROMELIAD BOTANICAL ILLUSTRATIONS'**
- **JOHN HENSHAW 'BROMELIADS IN HABITAT AND GARDENS'**
- **DON BILLINGTON 'BROMELIADS FOR THE HOME'**

As last year, we are ticketing either through Members re-joining through our website, or Eventbrite, from February.

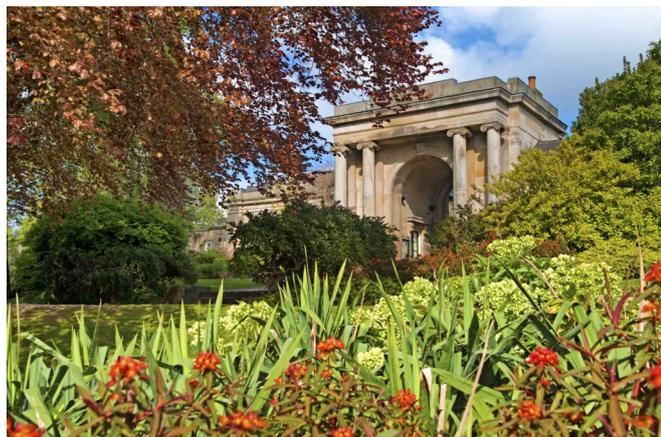
**Stephen Lyus**

**Photos: Stephen Lyus**

## NEW PLANTING IN SHEFFIELD BOTANICAL GARDENS

Over the past few years we have been redeveloping and managing several areas of the Garden. This extra activity arose mainly from the unstoppable urge, which Peter and I brought with us from Kerrachar, to propagate far more plants from seed than were necessary for selling to raise funds for the gardens. With the blessing of the Curator and Head Gardener we have been allowed to make use of this obsession

So that it didn't get completely out of control, we decided to concentrate on geographical areas which were not well represented in the Gardens. However, the first actual bed was for Peter's special favourites, *Meconopsis* and *Primula*. The coolest and dampest corner was identified and successfully planted in around 2015.



The first proper geographical area was that for South African plants. This was created on a southwest facing slope against a high stone wall, one of the warmest parts of the gardens. Preparation of the soil was laborious, mainly due to a large amount of pure clay just below the surface. After this had been removed, 15 bulk bags of gravel and sharp sand were dug in and the slope reduced by a retaining wall. Planting started in 2019 and followed our usual approach of trying as wide a range of plants as possible. This inevitably resulted in many failures but after six winters the bed has settled down to a collection of plants mainly from the high-altitude summer rainfall areas, but also several interesting species from the mountains of the Western Cape. Some of these, for example the very striking *Watsonia marlothii*, were collected by Professor James Hitchmough with the late Rod and Rachel Saunders of Silverhills Seeds to whose memory the bed is dedicated. (see back page)



Our next project was to replant an area where James Hitchmough had experimented with prairie plants grown from seed mixes sown directly into the soil. Originally planted in 2003, the areas were due for redevelopment. We started with an area mainly in the shade of a huge European Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*). Having studied Rick Darke's 'The American Woodland Garden' we decided to plant perennials from the Northeastern American deciduous woodlands. Inevitably the dry shade specialists such as *Eurybia* (formerly *Aster*) *divaricata* have thrived and seeded around, coming to dominate the late summer and autumn, but many spring flowers are also doing well including the lovely *Mertensia virginica*.

In the summer of 2022, we were asked to tackle a steep bed near the main entrance to the gardens which contained old 'leggy' shrubs and needed redevelopment. Its sunny location suggested Mediterranean Climate planting and we decided to restrict this area to plants from the Mediterranean Basin. We began sowing immediately and by Spring 2024 had a large number of species ready to plant when the area was stripped out by the gardeners. Like the South African Bed many tones of clay were removed and replaced by sharp sand and gravel. The bed was extended in late winter 2025 and planted out in the spring. Survival during the winter 2025-26 was reassuringly good, and in some cases quite surprising. My favourite plant is the Cretan Cabbage (*Brassica cretica*) which, as I write in February, is still flowering!

Currently we are focussed on replanting further parts of James Hitchmough's original prairie where new prairie plants and plants from the Pacific Northwest of America are being introduced

**Peter and Trish Kohn**

**Photos: Rod Egglestone**

# Thwaite Gardens News Spring 2026

## Herb Garden Revamp

In the winter of 2023/24, the volunteers decided that the Herb Garden, which was created 25 years ago, was ready for a revamp in 2025.

As the beds and the gravel paths round them were already in place the easiest course was to turn it into a gravel garden incorporating more plants for pollinators. Most of the existing, well performing herbs, were left but they have been supplemented with many more plants providing different textures, height and colour. The existing beds have been enlarged with block pavers, with a pleasing result of less gravel and more plants.



**Kath Mitchel & Jean Major**

## Friends of Thwaite Gardens 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

In addition to our usual open day in May, we held Thwaite [Fête](#) to celebrate our silver anniversary in July. We invited all the members, our immediate neighbours and members of the All for One choir (who always entertain us at our annual open day in May). We had a brass band and a barber shop group. It was a chilly day, but it was dry, and it was fun. Thwaite Fête was also the official launch of our little book, celebrating 25 years of the Friends of Thwaite Gardens. The book gives a short history, as well as describing the current gardens and outlining some plans for the future.

Other events have included our main fundraiser, the May Open Day, Open Gardens in support of a local hospice and Heritage Open Days. In August we also opened on two Sundays to give access when it wasn't a weekday. As a result, lots of younger people came along, people who are usually at work when the volunteers are in. We had various comments about not knowing the gardens existed and everyone seemed to enjoy themselves, even if there were only biscuits, no cake!

**Annie Bourton Card**

## Meetings

A great turnout of almost 50 people attended our AGM and Autumn Meeting in October held at the gardens. Bob Hall entertained us with a tour through the flora and fauna of Thwaite through the year. Bob highlighted many of our specimen plants but also looked at some of our native residents and visitors. Along the way Bob gave us tips to identify the different species.

Our next event will be the Spring Meeting in March when Dr Peter Williams, a retired plant scientist and life-long gardener, will give us a talk 'Welcome to the root zone – the original dark web' looking at the nature and properties of soils and the complex interactions that occur in the root zones of our gardens

**Lindsay Atkinson**

**Photo: Kath Mitchel**

**Pat Davie – Friends of the University of Bristol Botanic Garden writes about her recent visit to**

## **The Huntington Botanical Gardens**

At the end of last year, I visited my daughter and family who live in Pasadena, a district on the north-east of Los Angeles. During our stay we made a return visit to 'The Huntington' which the website quotes as being '**a world-renowned cultural and educational institution, providing transformative experiences for a community of the curious.**'

In 1903 railroad and real estate businessman Henry Edwards Huntington purchased San Marino Ranch, a working ranch with citrus groves, nut and fruit orchards, alfalfa crops, a small herd of cows, and poultry. His superintendent, William Hertrich (1878–1966), was instrumental in developing the various plant collections that make up the foundation of The Huntington's Botanical Gardens. The property - originally nearly 600 acres - today covers 207 acres, 130 of which are open to visitors.



With his wife Arabella, Henry amassed extensive library, art, and botanical collections. In August 1919, they formed a trust to make their private estate a public institution, making their collections available "to promote the public welfare". After their deaths The Huntington opened publicly to visitors in 1928 and is now a non-profit institution that supports and promotes the humanities, the arts, and botanical science. It is very well-supported by many of the wealthy local residents and organisations and benefits from some major donations the like of which we could only dream about!



The Gardens benefit from the Mediterranean climate of southern California and so they can grow many species outdoors which we have to maintain under glass in the UK. They also have the benefit of space, which certainly we in Bristol do not have, and so are able to have large areas available for events with open grass and woodland in between the various collections, which include some 84,000 accessioned living plant species.

There are many highlights: the **Garden of Flowing Fragrance** – 15 acres of classical-style Chinese gardens including a 1.5 acre lake with pavilions, a teahouse, stone bridges and a waterfall. From here you can walk along the side of the canyon to the **Japanese Gardens** with a moon bridge, a teahouse, a walled Zen garden with ginkgo trees and beautifully raked gravel, and many very old bonsai.



The recently expanded **Desert Garden** has a collection of many large, mature cacti and succulents which set against the deep blue sky are quite stunning. There are formal native plantings divided by hedges, a **Childrens' Garden** with interactive exhibits – when a toddler my grandson used to love running in amongst the mist which would suddenly erupt into mini fountains – we always had to have a change of clothes available! The extensive **Rose Garden** with over 1,000 cultivars was still very much in flower in November and next to this is a traditionally laid out **Herb Garden**. This is overlooked by a restaurant serving English tea on delicate china, with sandwiches without crusts and petits fours on

tiered cakestands– this is always fully booked months in advance. There are tropical plants including many orchids in the **Rose Hills Foundation Conservatory**, which is used as a teaching area, and laboratories for research used by visiting botanists. A large collection of Australian flora includes many enormous Eucalyptus trees; a jungle garden, sub-tropical plants, lily ponds and many palm trees including the ubiquitous, towering, native California fan palm *Washingtonia filifera*.

The collections are set in between a number of beautiful traditional buildings with galleries which hold many valuable international art works acquired by the Huntingtons and since with the help of many wealthy benefactors, including the **Virginia Steele Scott Foundation** (1979) of American Art and some 50,000 objects of decorative arts, folk art, paintings, prints, drawings, photography and sculpture. Of interest to us in the Art Museum is the famous Blue Boy by Thomas Gainsborough which after restoration was briefly lent in 2022 to the National Gallery in London.

The horrific Eaton fire which ravaged nearby Altadena in January 2025 destroying some 11,000 homes, fortunately did not reach the Huntington but they did lose some trees and plants in the 90mph winds. It provided a place of safety for some valuable artifacts such as the Torah scrolls from the Pasadena Jewish Temple and Center, as well as some Koi carp from residents' ponds! It has since made available from their archives much information on the buildings in the neighbourhood which have been lost. They also supported their own staff and volunteers as well as many locals who had lost their homes.

I could spend many hours at the Huntington at any time of the year, and if I was living nearby, I would almost certainly have joined as a Docent as their volunteers are known – approximately 1,000 throughout the organisation! At this last visit it was around 25°C with a clear blue sky and so all the plants looked beautiful. It is very difficult not to take 100's of photographs (as I have over the 20 years I have been visiting) but it is also necessary to just enjoy the many different vistas, with the San Andreas mountains in the far distance, as well as, with my horticultural hat on, appreciate the species which are growing in such profusion. It was hard to tear myself away and return to a wet cold English December – but I do have a wonderful picture as my computer screen saver to remind me of my visit!

If you ever find yourself in the Los Angeles area there is so much to see but if you can spare half a day then do try and visit the Huntington (website: [huntington.org](http://huntington.org)).

**Pat Davie**

**Photos: Pat Davie**

## TREBORTH BOTANIC GARDEN

Our woodland saw another interesting management technique last autumn - the introduction of three Highland cattle for a few weeks. Their trampling and browsing helped to control some of the unwanted tree saplings and create varied habitats. They were mainly controlled by virtual fencing, whereby they wore collars that emit a mild pulse when they approached a pre-defined (on GPS) virtual boundary. However some actual fencing was erected when one of the cattle decided that, despite the collar, she rather enjoyed lying down in the middle of the public footpath!

Treborth Botanic Garden has been awarded National Plant Collection status by Plant Heritage for our collection of native Welsh ferns. Our damp western climate is ideal for these plants, and at Treborth we can grow species that are normally found in remote areas. This means that they will be accessible to students, researchers, conservationists, and the wider public. The collection will be managed by horticultural team members Richard Storey and Ruth Yap (shown pictured with Head of Botanic Garden Natalie Chivers-Cross).



**Sarah Edgar**

**Photo: Alex Burnett**

## BGCI Accreditation for Ness Botanic Gardens



We are delighted to announce that Ness Botanic Gardens is now a Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) Accredited Botanic Garden.

Nick Lightfoot, Curator at Ness received the news in December 2025 and recognises that over the last year or more, staff have worked hard to put the detailed submission together and the accreditation reflects that Ness is excelling in the areas that make a botanic garden a botanic garden, such as:

- An underlying scientific basis for the collections
- Proper documentation of the collections, including wild origin
- Monitoring and long-term maintenance of plants in the collections
- Labelling of plants
- Conserving rare and threatened plants

We are now one of the fourteen institutions in the UK to have received accreditation. This marks a significant recognition of our wonderful and scientifically important living collection, as well as the professionalism of our staff and volunteers – we hope other members of FBGF will visit soon!

**Andrea Harman**

**Photo: University of Liverpool**

## TREES OF THWAITE – Variegated Sweet Chestnut (*Castanea sativa* 'Albomarginata')

This tree was originally one of several planted in November 1998 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the founding of Thwaite Botanic Garden – back in 1948. The event was instigated by Vice Chancellor of the University of Hull at the time – David Dilks – as a first step in his plans to restore the garden. This was in the days before The Friends were founded. However, he left the University about a year later and it was the Friends, started the following year, who were mainly instrumental in the restoration of the garden as we see it today.

Our variegated Sweet Chestnut has grown well and now forms quite a centrepiece, more or less in the middle of the area beyond the greenhouses, not far from the classroom. It is a very uncommon variety of a fairly common species and as far as I am aware is unique in East Yorkshire, though bigger older ones exist elsewhere, for example at Thorp Perrow arboretum, near Bedale. It is far scarcer than some other variegated trees like *Acer platanoides* 'Drummondii' (variegated Norway Maple), or the various variegated Sycamores. Unfortunately, rather like the *Acer* 'Drummondii', variegated chestnut tends to revert to pure green and if you look carefully, you can see one or two green branches among the variegated on ours. This is a common problem with many variegated plants, and the remedy is normally to prune out the reverted shoots as they appear. Clearly, with a potentially large tree as they grow bigger, this task becomes increasingly difficult, and it is common to see old variegated 'Drummondii' maples almost completely green as the green shoots being more vigorous, gradually overwhelm the variegated. Our chestnut is still just about within the height when such pruning can be done from the ground with an extending saw. After that, I'm not sure what we will do.



Sweet Chestnut itself is a magnificent species widely planted but seen at its best in open parkland. Locally, South Dalton Hall has several fine examples though there are even bigger ones at Studley Royal and Castle Howard among other places further afield. Some of these are massive in girth and might be mistaken for ancient oaks at a distance. Like the oak, this tree can live to a great age too, several centuries being typical. Unlike our common oak, it is not a true native however and was introduced from southern Europe by the Romans who used the nuts as a portable food source. The nuts are the well-known Christmas "chestnuts roasting on an open fire". Most of the fine nuts sold commercially are of special varieties imported from Italy and elsewhere. However, British trees will produce decent crops even as far north as here, particularly after a good summer, though ours are usually smaller and crowded several to a husk – the commercial ones being single to a husk, therefore bigger. In many parts of southern Britain, the tree has become thoroughly naturalised particularly in sandy parts of southeast England but although strong wild populations can be seen at least as near to here as Clumber Park, Nottinghamshire, they seem rarely to

regenerate locally. With climate change, Sweet Chestnut may become even better suited and is a good choice for tree planting with this in mind. It likes hot dry summers and grows well on most well drained soils, though not chalk – so no good for the Wolds. As well as the fruits and fine foliage the flowers are quite attractive in late June/July – masses of creamy catkins with a distinctive smell. Bees love them and where the flowers are abundant produce a distinctive and sought after 'chestnut honey'.

Sweet Chestnut fruits are a bulbous prickly husk, which splits to reveal the rich brown nuts. From this it is easy to see why they share the same name 'chestnut' with the Horse Chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*). The two are totally unrelated however, Sweet Chestnut being in the same family as Beech and Oak (Fagaceae), while Horse Chestnut is nearer to Maple. Sweet Chestnut was really the original chestnut, too – Latin *Castanea*. With Horse Chestnut the second name *hippocastanum* means literally horse (*hippo*) chestnut (*castanum*), suggesting inferiority at least as a food – which it certainly is, though perhaps less so in some other ways. Timber is one of the other ways in which Sweet Chestnut is superior, too. Traditionally grown in the south in extensive coppice plantations, the wood was split to make the well-known chestnut paling fencing. This seems less popular now and many coppices have been abandoned and have grown up into trees.

## Friends of the University of Leicester Botanic Garden

It is almost a year since our new director was appointed, but because there was 'so much to do' in relation to the organisational structure, garden design and rebuilding bridges with the University and the community, it still feels like 'early days'.

The Friends, who have continued to carry out fund-raising activities since the retirement of our previous director, are delighted to have more evidence of our usefulness, and enjoy the replanted long borders that now line the path beside our Edwardian Fish Pond.

Our anticipated 'great' show of 80,000 crocuses on one of the lawns has not yet become the stunning display that we had hoped for, but there are some signs that we will be admiring them within the next ten days. Meanwhile the Friends served home-made cake and hot drinks to the brave members of the public who supported us by coming out in the rain on the first Crocus Sunday. On the second Sunday we combined the Crocus viewing with a plant sale in the Dining Hall. We had six plant sellers, mostly with early flowering perennials or shrubs. The visitors to the garden were pleased to have an additional attraction to make their visit worthwhile and the plant sellers went away happy to have had an early event on the sales' calendars to help focus their minds on business.

Our AGM comes up in March when we plan to introduce both changes to the constitution and an application to (at last) become a registered charity. Fortunately for us, our new Secretary, is a recently retired Solicitor, seemingly unphased by the application process and has led us through the process, without too many hiccoughs. We are also grateful for the help we had from Durham Friends, and our application has now been 'accepted'. We wait to see how long it will be before we can call ourselves a 'Registered Charity.'

Our morning talks (always accompanied by home-made cake and tea or coffee) continue to be well-supported. Evening talks which have only been restarted in the past two years are now attracting a regular audience (but fewer than morning talks) but it is becoming increasingly difficult to find affordable speakers.

Our last big event of the year is the Plant Sale and Family Day—always on the Sunday before the beginning of 'Wimbledon'. We usually admit 2000 adults to the garden, and at the moment it is the only day in the year when a charge is made. We have yet to work out what will happen when there is a charge to the garden every day, so lots of negotiating lies ahead.

While it is exciting to have a new Director in place, it undoubtedly implies that 'things will change', and not all changes will be necessarily to the advantage of Friends. However, I'm sure many other Friends associations have been through garden management change and I look forward to seeing you at Ness, and learning how to survive!

**Mary Campbell**



# AGM

## Ness Botanic Garden

### 18.04.2026

#### Programme

**10.00 Welcome Tea and Coffee**

**10.30 AGM**

**11.30 Talk from Michael Richards, Plant and Labels Officer, Ness Botanic Garden**

**12.30 Lunch**

**14.00 Guided walk around Ness Botanic Garden with Michael Richards**

**16.00 Finish**

**19.30 Dinner - Woodcote Hotel, Hooton**

# St David's Day Greetings from Clyne Gardens, Swansea

St David's day on March 1<sup>st</sup> is always a pivotal day in the year of Clyne Gardens. It kicks off spring and the park is coming alive with spring flowers, shrubs and trees are well into bud.

We, in Friends of Clyne Gardens, are coming out of hibernation and getting ready for our annual Clyne in Bloom - which is held during the month of May and each Sunday the park comes alive with children's activities, displays, stalls, talks and in the afternoon we have a different band - covering jazz, folk, pop, choirs and rock. It's all free, and the locals are increasingly coming out in force to support the event - it is an old-fashioned family day in the park to get away from all the troubles in the world.



Of course nothing comes free to put it on, so we are indebted to people like the National Lottery, local councils and private donations.

Whilst this money supports the May event, it also provides tools and equipment for the park gardeners as increasingly the council is under financial pressure.

We also usually have projects to fund - and this year we have been lucky to add to the infrastructure in a sympathetic way.



For a number of years we have been hoping to build a more sustainable, green, rustic shelter - to give some

of our visitors some cover in the Welsh rain!! We've just got to get a more sensible pathway to it - but it is open and all are pleased.

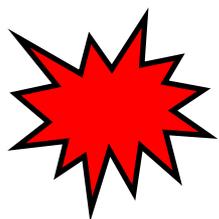
Also we are conscious that children are an important part of the park going forward and we commissioned a new story tree with carving depicting 'The Mabinogion' a book of old Welsh folklore stories.



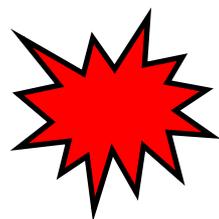
May is when Clyne is at it's best with world class Rhododendrons, azaleas and trees from all corners of the world. Come and see us and enjoy a Welsh Cake or two!!!!

**Richard Owen**

**Photos: Richard Owen and Anthony Dyke**



## FRIENDS OF BOTANIC GARDENS FORUM VOLUNTEER EDITOR - NEWSLETTER



The Friends of Botanic Gardens Forum (FBGF) is looking for a volunteer editor of their newsletter. Currently the Chair of the Forum has been editing the newsletter and shortly to be standing down from that role after nine years. The newsletter is published electronically three times a year. It provides a means of sharing news about events and other initiatives that supporters of botanic gardens undertake. Articles are submitted by members of the Forum which are then collated and edited as appropriate. External contributors might also be requested. The newsletter is then sent out to members and placed on the Forum website.

An inevitable question that arises when volunteer positions are advertised is how much time does it take to create the newsletter. The current Editor suggests that on average, time allocated might be approximately 12-15 hours - that is a summation of time over a two-week period, three times a year.

The role provides an opportunity to engage with supporters of Botanic Gardens across the UK - through Friends groups and membership/events managers.

**For more information, please contact the Chair of the FBGF - Shiona Mackie**

[email@shionamackie.com](mailto:email@shionamackie.com)

## **Meadow Maker – A day in the life of an artist in residence at the Garden of Wales**

It's been almost three years since the National Botanic Garden of Wales received funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to digitise our historic Herbarium, and what a joyful time it's been getting to know this fascinating pressed plant collection!

The Science Team took some time at the start for research, with trips to Royal Botanic Garden Kew and the Natural History Museum, where we were welcomed with kindness and endless amounts of advice to begin our digitisation journey. With the daunting task of conserving, imaging and transcribing thousands of specimens, we knew we wouldn't be able to achieve this alone, so we began the process of recruiting volunteers to help. In April 2024, 10 volunteers joined the project and started to learn all the skills involved with Herbarium curation and digitisation. They do everything from curating the specimens, using high-standard archival techniques and materials, taking high-quality photos and transcribing the challenging Victorian handwritten labels.

Fast forward to the present day, and we have achieved so much! 26,000 specimens have been individually curated and prepared for digitisation, with over 13,000 photographed and almost 7,000 transcribed. This project will continue until June, when we will have at least 5,000 specimens available online for public viewing. Keep your eyes peeled!

As part of this project, we were delighted to take on an artist in residence for a short residency, using the collections here at the Garden as inspiration for their work. Artist Lily Tiger was our successful candidate, starting the residency back in July 2025 and ending with an installation in January 2026. Lily spent the summer here on site as time to research and form her ideas, spending time in our wildflower-rich hay meadows in the Waun Las National Nature Reserve. After learning some of the garden's history and having various conversations with staff members and volunteers, Lily's ideas quickly developed from focusing on Welsh plant names to exploring how humans can be part of nature by helping to improve biodiversity, such as through wildflower meadows. After the meadows had their annual cut in September, Lily had the idea of using the meadow cuttings to create paper, which would then ideally grow. The installation was a reflection and a final element of Lily's residency, sharing all that she'd researched. Lily suspended 1x1 metre paper sheets to form a 'floating meadow' with smaller pieces of paper surrounding the gallery walls, embossed with impressions of wildflowers from our historic Herbarium collection. Complementing the paper was a sound piece consisting of members of staff and volunteers discussing their thoughts and knowledge on meadow management, whilst a black and white film showcasing snippets of the meadows at Waun Las was projected onto one of the pieces of paper. We loved having Lily join the team for a few months and enjoyed seeing her ideas grow.



Please follow the link below to read more about Lily's time here at the garden.

<https://botanicgarden.wales/2025/12/making-a-meadow/>

If you'd like to get involved with our digitisation project, we have online volunteering opportunities to help us transcribe our collection, from the comfort of your own home! Please follow the link below to get started:

<https://botanicgarden.wales/2025/08/transcribing-the-past-join-our-digivol-volunteering-team/>

## Benmore Botanic Garden February 2026- an update

It is some time since I last submitted a report on Benmore and there have been many events and many changes over the period.

Our Curator, Peter Baxter, retired at the end of October 2024 after more than 25 years at the helm at Benmore. While we said goodbye to Peter with a heavy heart, after a suspenseful wait of many months we met our new Curator Luke Senior in June 2025. After nine months in post, from a Friend's point of view and a Volunteer's point of view – we are very happy. Of course, we know these decisions are nothing to do with us but it is good to see that the all-important Garden Team at Benmore seem to be a happy bunch too.

Luke trained at Kew and came to us from Kilchoan, a big garden further north on the west coast of Scotland. Kilchoan is in the early stages of rewilding and mass planting – quite a contrast to the historic collections at Benmore. At least the high rainfall hasn't come as too much of a shock to Luke.

Benmore closes over the winter months to visitors, though the work for the Garden staff if anything intensifies. Since Storm Eowyn early in 2025 much of the work has involved clear up operations. Shiona Mackie reported in an early 2025 newsletter that Benmore was the hardest hit of all the RBGE gardens, with over 700 trees either down or felled at varying heights or with badly damaged canopies. The lower part of the Garden was opened by March 2025 and gradually other paths were cleared. By the opening date this March it should be possible for visitors to access all parts of the Garden. It will take a little longer for some of the smaller paths to be cleared. Luke has paid recent tribute to 'The Benmore Team's resilience, hard work and skill' a year on from Storm Eowyn. As with another memorable storm in 1968, although the devastation is great, the planting opportunities offered are to be welcomed and a change of approach is necessary. It seems that the tall north American conifers planted in such huge numbers by James Duncan at Benmore in the 1870s (and other landowners elsewhere) show the major losses in these storms and future planting must be planned differently. A move should be away from mass planting of a single species. In a Botanic Garden such as Benmore, perhaps a sacrificial nurse crop of native trees should be planted to give protection to important conservation plants. Space should be given for tall specimens of the future to move freely in the wind and thus develop more resilience in the stem.



The Winter Walk is always one of the most popular events organized by the Friend's Committee in the year. By tradition it is led by the Curator who speaks to members about work in the Garden and looks at some of the plants of seasonal interest. Rain and snow never deter members who enjoy this special event during the closed season to the public. However, this year on 17<sup>th</sup> February, they were treated to a blue sky day ....even if the temperature was around 4 degrees! We counted over 40 following Luke over the bridge into the Garden. At last year's Winter Walk, led by David Gray in the interim between Curators, we were able to see the margins of the devastation caused by the storm. This year we saw areas that had been cleared and heard about planting opportunities. We saw the beginnings of the Rhododendron flowering season with, as usual, *Rhododendron reri* (subsection *Argyrophylla*) being the first species to flower at Benmore. This is one of many conservation status 'vulnerable' rhododendrons at Benmore, My favourite plant at this time of year is *Lonicera setifera*, one of the shrubby honeysuckles. It is on the outside of the walled garden and looked beautiful in the sun. It is an important source of nectar for bees venturing out on the occasional winter day. The committee provide welcome soup and sandwiches in the Gallery following the walk and this year Michel Dvorak, Collections Manager, gave us a talk about the restored polytunnels (all came down in the storm) and their importance for the supply of plants for the Garden. The day felt like a good omen for new beginnings at Benmore. Certainly the Members left very joyfully looking forward to the season ahead.

## RBGE update

### The Palmhouse Restoration Continues

I was fortunate to have been given an early viewing of the restored Palmhouses immediately after they had been handed back by the contractors to the RBGE in September. (See Newsletter 17). As one of the many volunteers at the RBGE, we were invited to join a series of tours at the end of January/beginning of February to view the initial phase of replanting that had taken place over the first weeks of the year.

The first step in the preparatory process of repopulating the glasshouses was the taking up of the temporary floor which had been in place during the four-year restoration. The landscapers then set about creating new planting zones and paths. Meanwhile the Garden Horticulture Teams were preparing the 600 plus plants for eventual transfer to the newly restored Palmhouses. Just before Christmas, a *Dicksonia blumei* (Blume's tree fern) – the last plant to leave the Ferns and Fossil Glasshouse – became the first specimen to be planted in its new home. Following the Christmas break, the transfer of plants gathered pace and by the beginning of February, when my second visit to the Palmhouse took place, most of the tallest specimens had been transferred. This was a particular challenge – some of the plants stand several metres tall – they



have to be lowered to a horizontal position, manoeuvred through the doors at precisely the right angle, then brought back to the vertical for pinpoint precision planting.



Once again, there was a definite 'wow' factor on entry to the Palmhouse – the visual effect of the towering structure (pristine white metal work) above the newly replanted palms and ferns is really stunning! (See page 1 for photos)

The next step will be the planting of the middle and lower 'storey' plants before the Palmhouses are opened to the public later in the year. The glasshouse horticulture team responsible for the decanting, care and

subsequent replanting of the plant material must be commended for their astonishing commitment and skill in bringing this part of the Biome project to completion.

### A volunteering opportunity!

Finally, this newsletter will be shared with the RBGE volunteers via the Volunteer Co-Ordinators. Shiona Mackie has been volunteering at the RBGE for almost 15 years, initially with the the Edinburgh Friend Committee, and for the past nine years as one of the Edinburgh garden guides. Shiona has been leading the Friends of Botanic Gardens Forum since 2017. She currently also edits this newsletter. Shiona is now standing down as Chair of the Friends of Botanic Gardens Forum and is looking for a replacement editor of the newsletter – see the advertisement in this newsletter. The Forum is relatively young organisation – gradually evolving over the years. As Editor, it is a great opportunity to link with Friends/Members and Volunteers from other UK botanic gardens. **If you would like to know more please get in touch with Shiona Mackie – [email@shionamackie.com](mailto:email@shionamackie.com) or text 07808924842.**

## Orto Botanico Corsini

### Seeking volunteers to help in the restoration a historic Italian botanic gard

The Orto Botanico Corsini (<https://www.ortobotanicocorsini.com/home-en/>), situated on the Tuscany coast, seeks volunteers to assist in its garden restoration programme. In 2026 the priority is on reclaiming "lost terraces and walkways", opening these and other areas for planting in the autumn/winter. This is an opportunity to get in at the beginning of "lost garden reclamation", and see your ideas and energies make a tangible, long term difference. Volunteers are expected to dedicate 4 days a week in the garden, and encouraged to take one study day per week, and as part of the latter, expected to visit collaborators in the Botanic Gardens in Florence and Rome at least once during the volunteer period. Off site, nearby accommodation is provided. Minimum period 4 weeks, and for applicants who are non-EU residents, the normal maximum is 12 weeks. Applicants should have prior, relevant practical experience. An ability to understand and speak Italian is an advantage. Volunteering is normally restricted to the period from October to June, because of the summer heat. Applications (title should state "Volunteer Programme", include a motivation letter, CV/experience, preferred start date, and reference person who can be contacted) should be sent to [info@ortobotanicocorsini.org](mailto:info@ortobotanicocorsini.org) by March 31st 2026. Informal enquiries can be made by e-mail to Keith Sumption ([kifsum60@gmail.com](mailto:kifsum60@gmail.com))



The Orto Botanico Corsini (<https://www.ortobotanicocorsini.com/home-en/>) is a historic botanic garden located on the Tuscany coast, and in one of its most beautiful locations - Porto Ercole ("Port of Hercules") on the peninsula of Monte Argentario. The garden is spread over 16 acres, facing east, and with over 1,300 mature trees from about 150 species, is an oasis of greenery and cool, even in the hottest summer periods. At its peak in the 1890s, the garden housed over 1500 species, but many were lost in the following century (whose traumas included RAF bombing in WW2). The exuberant growth of trees and shrubs for over a century has made many parts of the garden in need of reclamation and restoration, and the Corsini Botanical Garden Association, which curates the garden, has since 2020 taken significant steps in the "Herculean task" of reclamation and safe-guarding the garden for future generations, including diversifying and adapting the plantings. The old terraces and diverse zones offer enormous potential for development and it is hoped that collaborations within and beyond Italy, including with botanic gardens in the UK, will help with ideas, enthusiasm and support. The main period for garden development is October to May/June, as conditions are often ideal, and the garden association is interested to host volunteers in these periods.

#### Keith Sumption

Advisor, Orto Botanico Corsini, Tuscany

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