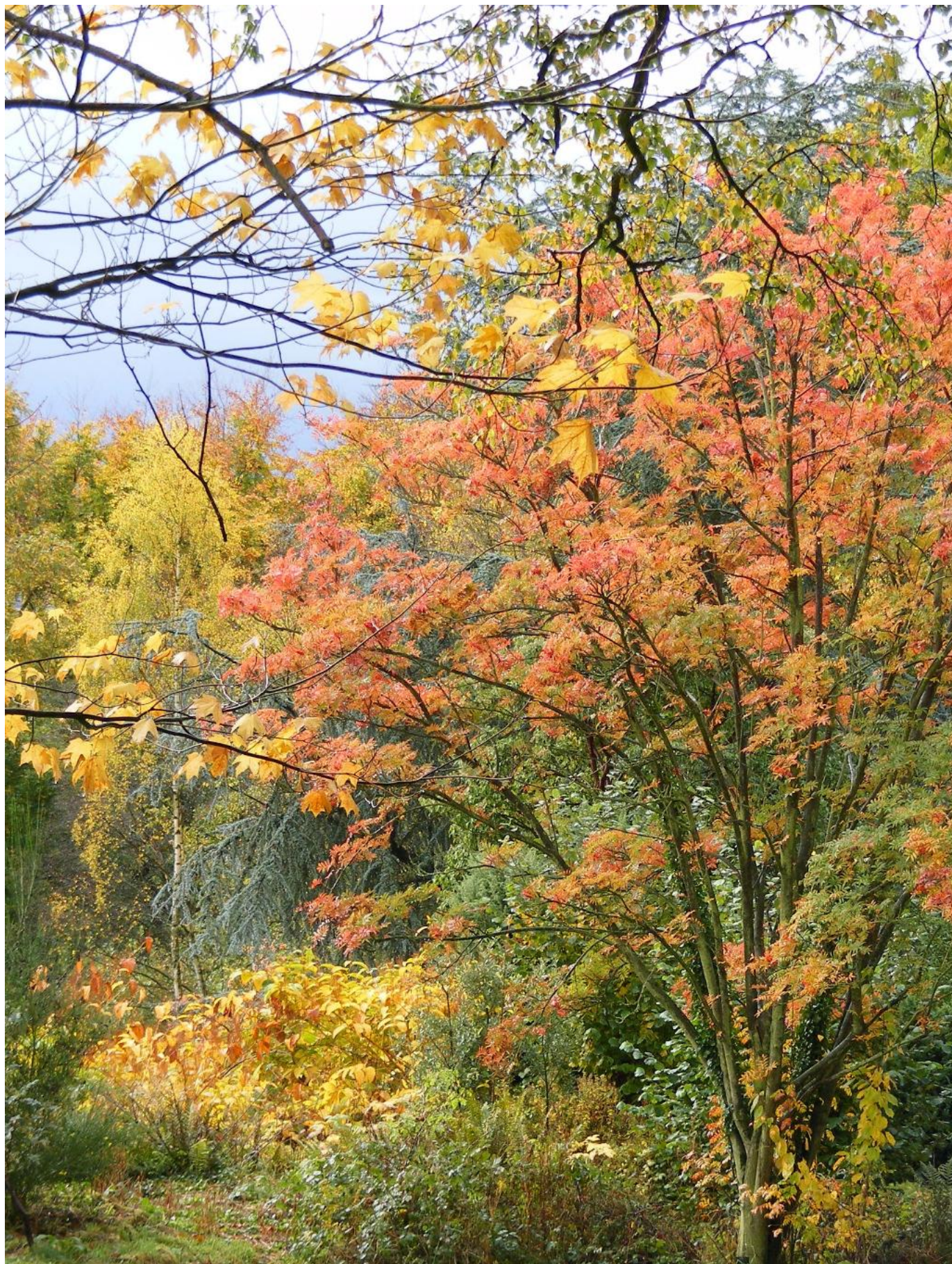




FRIENDS OF BOTANIC GARDENS FORUM

NEWLETTER

EDITION 20



October 2026

Dear Friends,

Our autumn newsletter as well as heralding the start of a new season also marks the end of an editorship era as Shiona Mackie retires from her long-standing role as editor. I am therefore taking this opportunity to pass on our deep appreciation and heartfelt thanks to Shiona for regularly producing, over many years, such an engaging and informative newsletter.

At the same time, we warmly welcome our new editor Peta Sams who comes with a great deal of experience in communications and media from which we will all benefit.

I also wanted to warmly welcome our two new Forum members - Shuttleworth Botanic Garden; Castlewellan Arboretum and Annesley Walled Garden.

Lloyd Snellgrove - Chair Friends of Botanic Gardens Forum

Citizen science: a growing role for volunteers.

The foundation of the Forum is the work that volunteers carry out which increasingly is in a diversity of roles amongst which is citizen science. Many of us will be familiar with high profile nationwide events such as the Big Butterfly Count, the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch and Flower Insect -Timed Counts. Like many others I'm sure interest was also piqued recently by the high media profile given to the news of '2000 pairs of underpants buried across Switzerland.'¹

Citizen science is a collaboration allowing scientists to investigate areas that would otherwise take too long, be too expensive or be too difficult; whilst volunteers have the satisfaction of contributing to research and finding out more about a specific subject, developing their own skills and knowledge. Having said that scientists may rely on volunteer expert knowledge as with the case of the ex-situ trial cultivation of *Wollemia nobilis*²

The approach of citizen science is often thought of as being new but the practice of using citizen knowledge maybe much older. Pedanius Dioscorides a Greek physician, pharmacologist and botanist of the First century AD, 'surgeon general' to Nero's army, is said to have collected information on the many uses of plants from people themselves, rather than that of predecessors or contemporaries. His five-volume *De Materia Medica* was a key text for medical practice until the 1600s.

Many regions have natural history societies and here in Sheffield, the Sorby Natural History Society has been collecting data from its members and the general public since 1918. Many well noted individuals have done the same over the centuries but with the advent of the internet, mobile devices and apps, the potential of volunteers and non-professionals collaborating in scientific research has grown enormously.

Although citizen science is generally used as a part of large- scale meta collection data I was also interested in individual projects in gardens whether or not they were part of larger data set collection. There is the well known example of the 'James Hall Ginkgo' at the University of New Hampshire³ where annual leaf fall is now recorded as being 12 days later each year compared with the 1970s.

Naturally though I wanted to find out about the diversity of citizen science projects across member gardens and some of the different ways that volunteers are getting involved. This doesn't pretend to be a full list which would take longer to compile, not least to give members longer to reply especially over the summer period. Therefore, I've set out below just a few examples of the types of activities taking place.

The National Botanic Gardens of Wales has a strong base of citizen scientists from day-to-day visitors to long term volunteers who support biological recording and other scientific work. Visitors are encouraged to pause and observe both wildlife and the landscape more closely through schemes such as the annual Bioblitz, a fixed-point photography post trail and volunteering opportunities. Beyond the Botanic Gardens, citizen scientists assist conservation data collection by submitting plant records which inform seed collecting priorities, and support the Garden's research, by submitting honey samples for analysis to examine honeybee foraging, using DNA metabarcoding.

Treboth Botanic Gardens (Bangor University) hold a specific citizen science workshop to help observe and count birds by sound, enabling scientists and communities to use sound to better understand bird diversity and monitor nature. In addition, the Friends of Treboth hold an annual fungal foray with around 200 volunteers participating to produce a species list often exceeding 500, this is then reported to the local Biological Records Centre.

The **University of Bristol Botanic Garden** volunteers have for many years contributed to national butterfly and moth counts.

Cambridge University Botanic Garden has been running an unfunded phenology project since 2020. Currently 24 volunteers weekly record seasonal changes on 90 trees. This has created a database of some 18500 recordings of multiple spring and autumn measures and associated images. The aim is to make this an even longer-term project over 10-20 years. Moth trapping at Cambridge takes place every Friday and has since 2018.

Moreover, Cambridge have been working with the developers of the IRIS Garden Explorer database, used by several Forum members, in the development of a phenology add-on module so that Gardens will be able to share their data in the future.

At **RBG Edinburgh** two of the phenology teams meet once a week to survey their specific plants and record data. The Rhododendron Phenology Team has been recording for 19 years (data from 2007). They use a well-defined custom recording code to log the status of approximately 182 plants (flowering, leafing, dehiscence, and more). The Chilean Tree Phenology Team uses a different coding system based on the BBCH convention (a German derived international coding system) to track 20 trees with data going back 4 years. All are citizen science Volunteers – and several are also RBGE Garden Guides.

In conclusion citizen science has become a cornerstone for innovative research in many fields related to botanic and specialist gardens such as conservation, ecology, biodiversity, climatology and sociology. It enables visitors and community members to observe and contribute to the changes taking place in flora and associated fauna, critically enhancing data collection, reporting real-time monitoring changes and supporting community engagement.

It's on community engagement I wanted to finish as I think that is the essence of Friends, groups, volunteers and members. It was notable that academics working on the Cambridge phenology project made the point that the volunteers simply enjoyed being in the Garden and that there was a 'real community feel to the team', which I'm sure is the feeling that resonates across the Forums' members.

Lloyd Snellgrove

1 <https://www.sciencefocus.com/news/scientists-are-burying-2000-pairs-of-underpants-in-switzerland>

2 <https://www.botanicgardens.org.au/discover-and-learn/watch-listen-read/citizen-science-helps-ancient-wollemi-pine-endure>

3 <https://www.unh.edu/news/why-do-ginkgo-trees-drop-all-their-leaves-once-unh-expert-explains>

Friends of Castlewellan Arboretum

The Friends of Castlewellan Arboretum were established in March this year, with a mission to engage the public with the beauty and importance of Castlewellan Arboretum and Annesley Walled Garden, while raising funds to support the tree collection and heritage projects. We are delighted to join the Friends of Botanic Gardens Forum.

Castlewellan Forest Park is one of Northern Ireland's best-preserved historic demesnes and is listed Grade A on the Historic Environment Division's Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. The Annesley family lived here from 1741 until 1967, when the estate was sold to the State. The Forest Service opened it as a public park in 1969.

Within the 450-hectare Park lies a 40.5-hectare arboretum, renowned for its exceptional collection of trees and shrubs. At its heart is the 5.06-hectare, Grade II-listed Annesley Walled Garden, one of the largest walled gardens in Ireland.

Created in the 1750s as a kitchen garden and orchard, the Garden was transformed by the 4th Earl Annesley into a Victorian Pleasure Garden. During the 1850s, he began introducing exotic trees, for example, *Sequoiadendron giganteum* in 1856.

The Terrace and Gray's of Chelsea Glasshouses

In the 1860s, he added a terrace, granite steps and glasshouses by Gray's of Chelsea. Following his death in 1874, his brother, Hugh Annesley, continued extensive planting with his Head Gardener, Thomas Ryan. The Garden gained an international reputation. Hugh kept meticulous records and published *Beautiful and Rare Trees and Plants* (1903), documenting 70 specimens with his own photographs. Successive generations continued to add to the Collection.



Following the Estate's transfer to the Forest Service, the arboretum expanded to 40.5 hectares. However, after the millennium, a lack of funding and horticultural expertise saw the Walled Garden fall into decline. By 2012, it was in a desperate state. The local community responded, raising its profile, volunteering to tackle the brambles and developing a strategy to engage key stakeholders.

In 2018, the Arboretum was recognised by the International Dendrology Society for its contribution to dendrology. It was the first site in Ireland, and the 16th worldwide, to receive an IDS plaque.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council agreed a lease with the Forest Service, and we provided expertise to help secure funding. First came a £0.5m grant from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, which rebuilt the propagation house, restored the cold frames, brought in mains water and provided public toilets. A £3 million National Lottery Heritage Fund grant followed, restoring the Garden and adapting the 1750s farm buildings into modern visitor facilities.

The Garden reopened in March this year, securing this remarkable heritage for future generations. After 14 years of campaigning, we decided to create the Friends to build on this success and help shape the future of Castlewellan's extraordinary trees, garden and heritage.



The Mermaid Fountain

Dr Sally Montgomery

Photos - Dr Sally Montgomery

Liverpool Botanical Trust



The Peach House restoration has finally started!. HLF funding was granted in January 2024.

More good news was announced last week:

First project of the Queen Elizabeth Trust, the new UK-wide charity established following recommendations from The Queen Elizabeth Memorial Committee.

Liverpool City Council and the Queen Elizabeth Trust are joining forces on an ambitious new project at Croxteth Country Park, building on the Council's plans to unlock more of the much-loved park's potential for

local communities and future generations.

The partnership will see the Trust support an ambitious package of projects across the 500-acre park, helping Liverpool City Council go further with its plans to increase community participation, improve facilities and secure a sustainable long-term future for one of the city's most-loved shared places. Subject to final agreement, the initial phase is expected to include further restoration of the Walled Garden. We wait to see the detail but pray that this includes the glass-houses.

Our Seminar on Saturday 27th March 2027 will focus on the plant families for which we have National Collections:

- * Kristopher Harper-Allison of Harper & Debbage will talk on Hardy Fuchsias
- * Theo Damen of the National Bomenmuseum, NL will talk on Dracaenas
- * Paul Dibley of Dibley's Nursery will talk on Solenostemon (Coleus)

We are still looking for a Codiaeum (Croton) expert – any ideas?

Steve Lyus

Photo Steve Lyus

National Botanic Garden Wales – Our new chair – Gaynor Coley



When the National Botanic Garden of Wales was being developed as one of Wales' great Millennium Landmark projects, Gaynor Coley was just across the water in Cornwall, helping to build another one. As a Founding Director of the Eden Project, she was instrumental in securing the £140m needed to make it a reality, before going on to serve as Managing Director for 15 years.

Born in Usk in Wales Gaynor's career has taken her far. After Eden, she moved to the Royal Botanic Gardens of Kew as Director of Public Programmes, leading a major brand refresh, establishing the now iconic Winter Lights Festival, and overseeing the significant growth in visitor numbers. More recently she has chaired The Wave Group, the pioneering inland surf attraction.

Gaynor feels the Garden has a much bigger role to play in Wales, and further afield. There's a growing appreciation of what spending time in nature does for our physical and mental health. And the need for conservation and biodiversity protection has never been so widely understood. At the NBGW we can play a direct role and be an important advocate for Welsh species.

Julie James

Champions at Ness

In July we were visited by Owen Johnson of the Tree Register, which is a specialised database that records the many thousands of notable trees throughout the Britain and Ireland.



Owen travels the length and breadth of the country measuring trees and recording observations such as height and width of stems/trunks. When Owen last visited Ness in 2015, he recorded 17 Champion Trees on site.

Champion Trees are individual plants that are remarkable in that they are the specific record-holders for being the tallest or having the widest trunk of their kind.

We are delighted to announce that the results of July's visit are in, and that Ness now has:

- * 27 Champion Trees (Britain and Ireland)
- * 7 English Champions and...
- * 168 Cheshire County Champions

Around the garden, Champion Trees and English Champions carry special blue labels. Labelling Cheshire County Champions is a work in progress, but we hope you will begin to start noticing more of them with each visit.



If you wish to visit these remarkable plants, please see the list of our 27 National Champions and a map of where to find them in the garden. These include as-yet-undescribed new species of crab apple (*Malus* sp. nov KR 1819, not too far from the western henge), the namesake of our founder AK Bulley (*Sorbus bulleyana*), as well as plants that are, to the best of our knowledge, the only ones of their kind in cultivation in the country (rare holly *Ilex linii*) – the latter being therefore being a Champion as it was the only one in the race!

So look out for the blue labels on your next week visit to Ness, perhaps they will highlight a plant or two you hadn't stopped to admire before!

1	<i>Sorbus</i> R 13479
2	<i>Sorbus</i> rushforthii
3	<i>Sorbus</i> bulleyana
4	<i>Betula utilis</i> subsp. <i>utilis</i> 'Polar Bear'
5	<i>Sorbus</i> carmesina
6	<i>Sorbus</i> parvifructa
7	<i>Sorbus</i> fansipanensis
8	<i>Sorbus</i> ovalis
9	<i>Betula</i> x <i>koehnei</i>
10	<i>Fraxinus</i> dipetala
11	<i>Picea</i> chihuahuana
12	<i>Betula</i> raddeana 'Hugh McAllister'
13	<i>Betula</i> ermanii var. <i>lanata</i>
14	<i>Alnus</i> fauriei
15	<i>Pinus sylvestris</i> var. <i>mongholica</i>
16	<i>Malus</i> vernalis
17	<i>Malus</i> sp. nov KR 1819
18	<i>Betula utilis</i> 'Edinburgh'
19	<i>Betula davurica</i> var. <i>parvifolia</i>
20	<i>Malus</i> spontanea
21	<i>Betula utilis</i> subsp. <i>utilis</i> 'Buddha'
22	<i>Cupressus</i> rushforthii
23	<i>Ilex</i> linii
24	<i>Pinus</i> longaeva
25	<i>Malus domestica</i> 'Niedzwetzkyana'
26	<i>Hedlundia hajastana</i>
27	<i>Sorbus</i> 'Pink-Ness'



Mike Roberts

Photos Mike Roberts

Cambridge University Botanic Gardens Irrigation Project

Protecting our living collection in a changing climate

This article is adapted from a letter to supporters from our Direct Professor Beverley Glover, FRS

Botanic gardens across the UK and beyond are increasingly facing the challenges of a changing climate. At Cambridge University Botanic Garden, recent summers have underlined just how vulnerable living collections can be to prolonged periods of hot, dry weather.

Many Botanic Garden colleagues will recognise the symptoms. During this summer's drought, lawns browned, soils dried, and even mature trees and shrubs showed signs of stress. What were once considered exceptional conditions are becoming increasingly frequent, placing growing pressure on collections, particularly those containing species cultivated outside their natural climatic range.

The drought of 2022 had a significant impact on Cambridge University Botanic Garden's collection, resulting in the loss of 165 accessions, including plants within UK National Collections, UK Champion Trees, and species of considerable conservation importance. Many had been cultivated and cared for over many years and, in some cases, cannot easily be replaced.

Like many historic botanic gardens, our infrastructure has struggled to keep pace with the challenges of a changing environment. Much of our irrigation network dates back around a century and serves only the original western section of the Garden. Across much of the site, horticultural teams continue to rely on long hose runs and labour-intensive manual watering to provide plants with the support they need during periods of drought.

To help safeguard the collection for future generations, we are preparing a major irrigation project. The first phase will establish a modern ring-main network, ensuring reliable access to water across the entire Garden. The project is not about increasing water use, but about using water more efficiently and effectively. Soil moisture monitoring, rain sensors and programmable controls will allow us to target irrigation precisely where and when it is needed, reducing waste while improving resilience.

This ring-main will also provide the foundation for future sustainable water management initiatives, including expanded rainwater harvesting and storage.

At its heart, this project is about protecting a living collection of international scientific, educational and conservation value, while ensuring that our horticultural teams have the tools they need to respond to increasingly unpredictable weather conditions.

Why now?

There is also a limited window in which the work can be undertaken. The existing system must be taken out of service and connected to the new infrastructure during the winter months, when water demand is at its lowest and risks to the collection can be most effectively managed. If funding is not secured in time, the project will need to be postponed until the following year, leaving the collection exposed to another growing season with ageing infrastructure and increasing climate pressures.

Every year of delay increases the risk of losses within a collection that has taken decades, and in some cases centuries, to establish.

How you can help

We already committed substantial funding towards the £2 million cost of the project, but we need to raise a further £400,000 before work can begin.

We know that many botanic gardens and horticultural organisations are facing similar challenges, and we are keen to share our experience as we work towards a more resilient future for our collection.

If you feel this project may be of interest to your supporters, members, visitors or professional networks,

we would be extremely grateful if you could help raise awareness by sharing our campaign. Every shared communication helps us reach potential supporters who are passionate about the future of plant conservation and living collections. To learn more about the project, or to share details of the campaign, please visit our website or contact development@botanic.cam.ac.uk. Thank you for helping us spread the word and for the vital work you do to care for living collections in your own organisations.

Helen Llewelyn, Friends Administrator, Cambridge University Botanic Garden

Below are a few photographs to show the effect of another dry summer.



Fairway meadow before



Fairway meadow August 26



Rose Garden before



Rose Garden August 26



Brookside lawn before



Brookside lawn_August 2026

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.

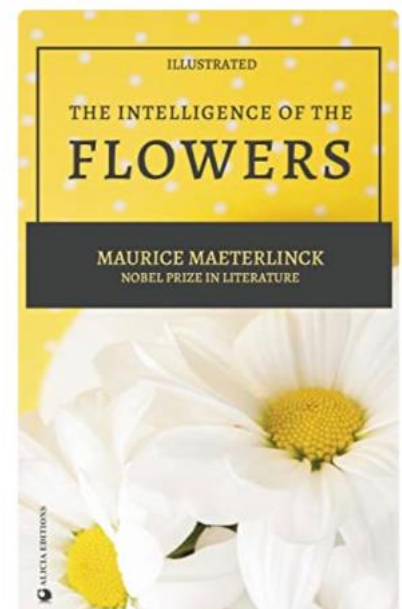
John Killingbeck



Book Review - The Intelligence of the Flowers -Maurice Maeterlinck -1907

In the preface to this translated essay Maeterlinck makes the modest claim that he is making 'a few elementary observations' on the basic facts of the plant lifecycle. After listening to a spellbinding dramatized reading by the actor Rory Kinnear at Thorington outdoor theatre I must disagree with this author. It does so much more. It convincingly explores the idea that plants demonstrate an intelligence which, while not human in appearance, has echoes of the inventions and characteristic of the human and animal world.

Maurice Materlink was a polymath. He wrote symbolist dramas and allegorical fairy tales of sufficient quality to win him the Nobel prize for literature at the beginning of the twentieth century but also demonstrated a restless and inquiring mind in terms of the natural world. At a time when we are questioning our relationship with the natural world with increased urgency, the essay "The Intelligence of the Flowers" seems suddenly less of a historical oddity and more of a visionary call for understanding and research. Part meticulous botanical observation, part philosophical treatise, this slim volume in 30 chapters reveals to us as if for the first time the deeply creative and vibrant will to live in the plant world.



Maeterlinck's central proposition is as radical today as it was over a century ago: flowers possess what he famously describes as "**thought without knowledge**"—a brilliant, adaptable form of organic intelligence. Rather than viewing the plant world as a passive, silent backdrop to animal life, Maeterlinck frames it as an arena of fierce and stubborn rebellion against destiny. Bound to the earth by their roots, plants are facing a cosmic injustice—immobility - and they fight back with breathtakingly sophisticated survival strategies. His background in drama and literature helps him animate all the aspects of life and death, as if we are inside this world. Aspects such as the complexity of

pollination and the chemistry of plant attraction becomes an arresting drama before our eyes. By describing all these processes Maeterlinck elevates plants from mere passive spectators to active participants, inventors who are testing out scientific survival strategies. With apologies for the pun - we begin to root for these plants.

Read today, as we face a warming planet, this essay feels more relevant than it has ever done. As societies face the challenges of engaging their citizens in the scientific discoveries necessary for plant survival, diversity and sustainability, this essay is a rare pleasure that combines science, philosophy and literature. For gardeners, scientists and philosophers, this is a beautiful argument for understanding the plant world through close observation and with humility. It demands that the reader slows down, looks closely and tries to understand nature without preconception. I thoroughly recommend it.

Lucy Davies

RBGE

Unfurl Unfold Unwind

Thus the RBGE is announcing the reopening to the public of the much-loved Victorian Palmhouses on Friday, 2nd October. Supporters and community groups associated with the RBGE have already been able to visit the glasshouses throughout September.



With all the cast iron sand blasted and painted (9100 litres), 5,700 + panes of glass replaced, stonework cleaned and restored, the interior paving replaced and the finally the plants (600) moved back into the new beds, the Palmhouses was ready to receive visitors.

I have been fortunate to be one of many supporters who had early access. It was a particularly sunny day - everything looked pristine - and the plants - palms and tree ferns and understory plants seemed to be welcoming us back.

View of the interior of the palmhouse

We had an opportunity to speak to the Glasshouse staff who had been responsible for decanting the Palmhouses, nurturing the plants in temporary accommodation and then re-instating them - this work commenced in September last year when the contractors had handed back the two glasshouses to the RBGE. It was such a joyous occasion. In the future, visitors will be able to participate in yoga and music sessions, forest bathing and aromatherapy in the Palmhouses - all part the new wellbeing programme being introduced at the RBGE.

To visit the Palmhouses, bookings have to be made on-line. Members of the RBGE will have free access (but must be pre-booked). Non members will be charged £5.50.

The RBGE will now embark on the second phase of the biomes project - a new Plant Health Hub, replacement of the research glasshouses and the new Energy Centre which will reduce reliance on fossil fuels to heat all the glasshouses in the future.



Sadie Barber - glasshouse curator - with *Sabal mexicana*.

Shiona Mackie

Photos - Shiona Mackie

Durham University Botanic Garden

For this Newsletter I am grateful to Alex Taylor our Friend's Volunteer coordinator for giving an insight into 2 of the major tasks for the Volunteers over the early Spring and Summer.

There are many routine jobs that occupy our volunteers over the year including deadheading the planters on the Terrace, weeding borders and tidying the glasshouses when the weather is less than friendly, to name a few.

Over the past few months, the volunteers embarked on a new project, and who doesn't enjoy a new project? Ours has been to improve the bamboos in the Japanese Garden. The clumps of species bamboos have grown and developed over the years but in doing so had become impenetrable thickets with a thick layer of leaf litter at their base. The Volunteers have been removing dead canes and cutting back the side shoots from the living to a height of 2m (six foot). This has thinned the clumps and, with the side shoots removed, provides new views through this part of the Garden.



Our Terracotta Warrior can once more be found looking down from his vantage point above the path to the Himalayan Dell. There is still more to do but I am sure that visitors to this part of the Garden will agree it is much improved.



Early May saw the volunteers begin the annual process of removing Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) from parts of the Garden.

Balsam bashing

Himalayan balsam was introduced into the UK in 1839 by John Forbes Royale, a professor of medicine at Kings College, London, as an ornamental plant. Within 10 years it had spread from gardens where it had been cultivated and is now classed as a non-native invasive plant within the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Over a period of years, we have almost eradicated it from the main areas of the Garden. However, it is still to be found along the banks of the stream that runs through the Himalayan Dell and on past Fungate into the woodland beyond. Working alongside members of the gardening team and volunteers from both the University and Wear Rivers Trust large thickets of balsam were uprooted. Removing them before they are in flower ensures that further seed dispersal is minimised. The wet weather we had had prior to the 'Balsam Bashing' meant that the plants came out easily. The warm and wet conditions had also encouraged the growth of stinging nettles making the job a little more difficult! As everyone knows. You can't turn your back on Himalayan Balsam so eradication will continue to form part of the volunteers' tasks for years to come.

David Spence

Friends of Treborth Botanic Garden

Our guided walks programme has really taken off this year. We started in 2024, when a few members of the Friends of Treborth responded to an appeal for volunteers to come forward, to be trained to lead visiting groups around the Garden. We asked staff and glasshouse experts to help us put together notes on each bed and section of the Garden, and give some training to the guides. Since then, some more volunteers have joined the team, and we have done tours for a range of visiting groups, from local gardening societies to coach parties from Cumbria.

This summer we introduced a programme of themed public guided walks, including: Myth and Medicine, which took visitors to the Welsh Herbal Garden; and Woodland Wonders, a tour of our woodland and its natural and historic features. Whilst most of these walks are conducted in English, we now doing some in Welsh, delivered by our Welsh speaking guides.

Our garden guide team were also busy at our Historical Open Day in September, when we were showing people the history of the Garden, both through the walks, but also in a new History of Treborth exhibition that was put together by members of the Friends. They combed through the internet and dusty box files to piece together some fascinating facts and photographs about the site, going back to Victorian times.

Another new event, also in September, was our first Harvest Festival. It was organised as a Flower and Craft show, with 14 different classes, including indoor and outdoor plants, photography, textiles and cakes. All visitors, whether they had entered something or not, could judge classes 1 to 11 and their votes were added up to give the overall results. The edibles - cakes, preserves and drinks - were judged just by a small team because of the impossibility of dividing up cakes or jams into 70, for everyone to have a taste; I felt very lucky to be part of that team! It was a most enjoyable event and we were very impressed by the talent, ingenuity and creativity of the entrants. Plans are already underway for the Festival next year.

Treborth Botanic Garden is supporting the Natur am Byth! (Nature Forever!) project. This has been set up to improve the prospects of Wales' most threatened species and reconnect people to nature, and is funded by a partnership of organisations, including the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales. Juniper, *Juniperus communis*, is one of Wales' three native conifers and has deep roots in history and folklore, but populations have declined dramatically over recent years and the population at RSPB's South Stack reserve near Holyhead on Anglesey stood at just three plants in 1979. Conservation efforts began in the early 2000s bringing numbers up to 29 and since 2023 Treborth has grown 190 Juniper cuttings which have been planted out at South Stack over the past year to reinforce the population and provide further genetic input to increase its adaptability and resilience in the changing climate. This is one of several *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation projects being undertaken by the Botanic Garden.

Sarah Edgar

Timeline of the garden



National Botanic Garden of Wales

A pictorial report of a long, hot Summer!



Shade netting put up for the Broadwalk team's plant stock to harden off outdoors and not dry out too quickly.



Ben from the Horticultural team was filmed by Channel 4 news to talk about how the recent hot weather and drought affected the gardens and our trees



Kniphofias were enjoying the dry and hot weather, throwing out some vibrant flower spikes.



The apple orchard feeling the heat.

Report submitted by Julie James

Reflections on the Sheffield Botanical Gardens Trust (SBGT)

As I come closer to stepping down as a Trustee of the SBGT – after 14 years as a trustee and five as Chair - Lloyd kindly asked me to share some thoughts with the Botanic Gardens Forum, in the hope that they might be of interest.



The Sheffield Botanical Gardens were established in 1836 by Sheffield citizens who could see that the industrial city was expanding and wanted to create a beautiful space.

It was a private initiative with subscribers – and only they could gain access to the gardens, although they did hold four fundraising 'gala' days each year when others could visit.

The main gateway

But the finances of the gardens were always difficult and in 1898, the Sheffield Town Trust (established way back in 1297) bought the 19 acres of garden to save it from being sold to a housing property developer. Yes speculative 'land grabs' are nothing new.

For the next 50 years, all was well and but in 1951 finances were again a problem and the Town Trust leased the gardens to the Sheffield Corporation (now Sheffield City Council) for a peppercorn rent to help manage maintenance. But the 1980s were difficult for South Yorkshire with the decline in steel and coal and Council income was decimated. Sweeping cuts had to be made – and the gardens declined dramatically and rapidly. Readers will no doubt be picking up that the financing of botanical gardens is a key recurring issue. Gardens consume money – and they are an easy target when cuts have to be made.

In 1984, the fight back started and the Friends of the Botanical Gardens Sheffield (FOBS) was formed as an unincorporated Friends organisation to try to reverse the decline and to start volunteering work in the garden. FOBS had great ambitions – a complete restoration of the gardens. To do that, they realised that an application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NHLF) would have to be undertaken. And this required an application from a charity – hence the creation in 1996 of a registered charity the Sheffield Botanical Gardens Trust. To everyone's delight the bid to the Lottery was successful and NHLF awarded £5.06 million for the project.

However, there was a catch. Matched funding was required to release the money!

Eight years of committed fundraising – and countless hours of work by trustees and FOBS members - produced £1.22 million and £0.41 million of work in kind - all through the generosity of local and national charitable trusts, large and small businesses, individual donors and regular fundraising events. At that time Sheffield Botanical Gardens was the only public space in the country where the voluntary sector had raised over £1 million in matched funding. On 1 September 2003, H.R.H. Prince Charles opened the iconic (now fully restored) Grade II * pavilions.

The fountain



So all was well? Yes ... but as I have said, gardens 'consume money'. Sheffield City Council had agreed to provide staff and resources to maintain the gardens – and they still do. And their work is superb with six professional gardeners. In addition, FOBS - which has 500 paid up members - provides a huge number (over 150) of volunteers to support the gardeners. And the third member of the partnership, SBGT – provides crucially additional financial support. Indeed since 1996 it has funded a further £2+ million of grants. Our success is due to these three groups working closely together.

The Trust has seven trustees – all of whom are volunteers. We have no staff. I think a range of expertise is required amongst trustees. You need people who have legal experience (a solicitor ideally), a fundraiser, a marketing/comms/publicity person, someone with experience of finance/investments, a botanical/education expert (we are, after all, botanical gardens!) someone who is good with governance/agendas/minutes, and finally a 'diplomat' to ensure that all the different groups that love the gardens are united in their key, mutual aim: to create beautiful gardens for the enjoyment of everyone.

When I became a trustee, I could detect that the existing trustees were exhausted by the exertions of raising the £1+ million for the lottery bid. Never underestimate just how much work a lottery application requires. But I could see that without further income, we would have a problem. If you have money, people will listen to you (especially cash-strapped Councils) and if you need to apply for charitable grants, you need to be able to put some cash on the table to show that you are serious. Having your own funds enables you to lever new funds in. We continue to work with the Council to provide matched funding – and to work with local charities, trusts and foundations to assemble a group of funders for particular capital renovation projects (they are never interested in funding recurrent income).

Without robust finance and sustainable income streams in place, it is very difficult to do anything of significance in a garden. So, generating cash was King. We already had a small reserve – prudently held with our bank and, to be honest, generating minimal interest. So the first step was to increase income by investing it. Fortunately, we had a trustee with a lot of experience in this area – and we set up a Finance Sub Group to drive this forward which would report back to all the trustees for decision making. Naturally, to spread risk we had a broad range of investments and, prudently, we always kept back a healthy 25% in cash.

We decided to encourage donations on-site by creating first one, and then two, contactless giving devices. You will have seen these in churches and museums. It just needed a simple 'pop up banner' to make a clear ask 'If you love the gardens, please donate'. In the five years we have had these devices, they have generated nearly £20,000 in thousands of small donations. It does help that the gardens are free to enter – so this is purely voluntary ... but people will help if asked.

My background was in fundraising for the University sector and one area that had been particularly successful was 'legacy fundraising' where alumni would remember their Alma Mater in their will. Of course, this does not happen quickly. It requires an excellent brochure, time and patience. But overtime it can generate a very significant income source. I could see that SBGT had already received quite a few legacies – without much publicity at all. So I decided to prepare a legacy brochure which you can view on our website - www.sbg.org.uk/ - and promote this form of giving more widely.

The gardens are beautiful, life-affirming and deeply loved by Sheffielders. Since we promoted legacy giving 14 years ago we have received over 20 legacies ranging from a few thousand pounds to £500,000. Our Trust policy is to invest these legacies and to use the income generated to support grants in the gardens. In effect, we have created a sort of income generating endowment (a 'gift which keeps on giving') although we reserve the right to access the capital if we had an emergency project. We acknowledge the names of legacy donors on an electronic information board in the garden and it is very

important to do this. People want to be remembered and it encourages others to think about legacy giving.

Over the years I have been chair, the Trust has created -

- * a new £750K Education Centre
- * funded an Education Officer
- * refurbished the Pavilions (over £60K)
- * created a new Volunteer Centre building
- * funded four huge composting bays
- * restored all the gates and railings surrounding the garden
- * undertaking an ongoing programme of renovating 16 benches each year
- * created a new website
- * provided grants for a New Zealand, South African, Mediterranean and Steppe Garden
- * funded bursaries to enable school visits to the Gardens
- * grants for a Riddle Trail, Volunteer Centre signage, an Evolution Trail and a wonderful Illustrated History of the Gardens

With money, you can make things happen. Through the hard work of our trustees – and the generosity of supporters – the Trust is now in a strong financial position. My aim was to have £1 million in reserves. We now have £1.5 million and we can allocate c. £70,000 p.a. to support the gardens. Our next target is to reach £2 million – ensuring that the Trust can start to allocate £100,000 p.a. in grants.

To conclude ... you must focus on generating income – and this can come from a variety of sources. You need to have a range of projects to fund from small (and unsexy) to bold and ambitious. Try to tick off a few small projects first to demonstrate impact and to create good news stories. In an increasingly troubled world, the media are often looking for happy stories. Work to create a community of interested parties - from the Council to volunteers to local businesses – with clear shared objectives. When you have a success – celebrate it.

Mighty oaks from little acorns grow. In the mid 1980s, the Sheffield Gardens were on their knees. But through the voluntary work of people who cared deeply, the Gardens have risen again like a phoenix. When I walk around them, I feel stunned by how beautiful they look. Covid demonstrated that gardens, parks and public spaces are not a luxury. They are vital for health and wellbeing and to create communities.

Miles Stevenson - Chair - Sheffield Botanical Gardens Trust, a CIO



The crocus pavilion

Windblown

Multi-award-winning musician, writer, and storyteller **Karine Polwart** has released her new album *Windblown* (Hudson Records), co-written with sound designer and composer **Pippa Murphy**, and featuring **Dave Milligan** on piano.

It is a farewell to a beloved old *Sabal* palm, on the eve of its felling at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE), and a hymn to the gardeners who looked after it across the arc of two hundred years. It's also, Karine writes, "about how we might take better care of endings in our own lives, and in this almighty broken and beautiful world".

Conceived originally during a joint Artist in Residence commission at RBGE, Polwart gives voice to the palm itself in ***Windblown***, imagining its extraordinary Victorian glasshouse experience of containment and longing, tenderness and dislocation, constraint and release.

Through a "rich blend of chamber folk stylings" (*The Herald*), accompanied by renowned pianist Dave Milligan, and Murphy's evocative sound design, the palm's story becomes a conduit for reflections on love and grief, knowledge and identity, and tender acts of human care for our beyond-human neighbours.

The studio album accompanies a richly illustrated book, featuring Karine's script for her luminous theatre show ***Windblown (Raw Material Arts)*** as well as stunning artwork from the archives of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. The book and CD are available from Hudson Records: <https://hudsonrecords.co.uk/>

Shiona Mackie

Photo - Shiona Mackie



Final Word

This has been my first edition as the Forum's new editor - a hard role to take on after seeing all the previous newsletters edited by Shiona. Thank you everyone for your contributions - it has been very interesting reading all your articles and also seeing a couple of themes emerge - 1) the absolutely wonderful trees that many, if not all, of the gardens have and 2) how to cope with increasngly hot and dry summers.

Any mistakes are mine - and I am sure thre are a few that have slipped in as I get to grips with using new software (Scribus).

I look forward to hearing from you all again for the Spring 2027 newsletter.

Peta Sams



Cover photos Sara Bishop Ness Botanic Gardens
Front cover - Autumn Trees
Back cover - Trees on the Brow