

Birkbeck Garden History Group Newsletter



Summer 2025 No 69

Twenty-third Annual General Meeting

The BGHG Annual General Meeting was held on 25 February 2025 at the Lumen Community, Bloomsbury, London with 32 members attending. The annual report, financial report and annual accounts were circulated by email in advance of the meeting.

Joan Pateman, chair of the meeting, introduced the annual report. One item for discussion concerned a proposal for a new BGHG donation. This arose following the article by Susan Jellis in the Winter 2025 Newsletter No 68 on the refurbishment of Fairchild's Garden in Hackney. It was proposed that the BGHG should make a contribution to enable Hackney Council to improve the state of Fairchild's headstone in the garden, which was currently illegible. After a useful discussion at the AGM, members agreed that the Committee should pursue the proposal and determine the costs. It was noted that it might be necessary to raise more funds, either through approaching another organisation for support or by asking BGHG members for an additional donation and this was agreed.

The programme of activities for 2025 was circulated; because of the fewer number of committee members it had been decided to curtail the programme and not plan a visit for the month of August. All activities in 2025 would be booked using the online ticketing system BookWhen, which was easier to use and cheaper than Eventbrite. Payments could still be made offline, if necessary, even if a place was booked online in BookWhen. The annual subscription would remain at £10 for 2026.

The Committee for 2025 was elected, namely Barbara Deason, Maeve Heneke, Joan Pateman, Helena Poldervaart, Sandra Pullen, Margaret Scholes and Linda Wade. Patricia Maitland and Susan Pettit had resigned this year and were warmly thanked for all they had done. We were pleased to welcome one new member, Maeve Heneke, to the Committee.

The AGM Lecture

Mary Somerset, first Duchess of Beaufort (1630–1715) by India Cole

In 1730, 15 years after her death, Philip Miller, writing in the Society of Gardeners publication *Catalogus Plantarum*, noted the horticultural skills of Mary Somerset, first Duchess of Beaufort, indicating the great esteem in which she was still held. Her achievements are less well known nowadays, but India Cole is seeking to reverse that with her fascinating research into this pioneering botanist, one of the few women working at such a serious scientific level at the time.

Mary was born at Hadham Hall in Hertfordshire into the Capell family in 1630. The family were keen gardeners and her brother Henry was responsible for starting the exotic garden at Kew, later to become the Royal Botanic Gardens. She married at 18 and had two children. Her husband and father were Royalists and were sent to the Tower of London during the Civil War. Her father was executed in 1649. Her husband survived but became ill and died in 1654. She married Henry Somerset in 1657 and had a further six children. Sadly several of Mary's children died young and her husband, in some political trouble, was imprisoned for a short period. Mary turned to plant-based tinctures for relief and came up with a recipe for "melancholy water" designed "to comfort the heart, to quicken the spirits, to provoke sleepe". In 1682 Henry became the first Duke of Beaufort as a reward for services to the Royalist cause and the family moved into Badminton which he had inherited from a relative. Their London residence, Beaufort House, was located on the north bank of the Thames near the Chelsea Physic Garden and the home of Sir Hans Sloane.



Mary Somerset and her sister
by Sir Peter Lely, 1670s

The Beauforts entertained the great and the good, and elaborate gardens were laid out at both houses. Mary became increasingly involved in supervising their development and became an accomplished gardener familiar with detailed horticultural practices. She also delighted in growing the exotic plants that were beginning to reach our shores, such as zonal pelargoniums from South Africa, the passion flower from South America and the guava from Central America, which she recorded as having fruited in the 1690s. There were stove houses and other buildings in both gardens, including an orangery at Badminton which still survives. The gardens were changed through the seasons – there were summer displays and imported pots containing topiary specimens, and exotics were brought outside to add interest and show off the family's wealth and status.

After Henry's death in 1700, Mary's reputation continued to grow and she succeeded in developing a



Beaufort House, Chelsea, 1707-9 by Johannes Kip after Leendert Knijff
Cleveland Museum of Art

network of contacts for discussing her work with botanists including Sir Hans Sloane and Richard Bradley, and for obtaining newly imported plants and seeds, for example from nurseryman George London. At that time many specimens failed to survive their long journeys by sea but Mary always grew her new seeds with care and recorded and reported her successes and failures. With the help of Dutch botanical artist Everard Kik and later other artists, she started a Florilegium, a collection of botanical paintings of the plants she grew, which is still at Badminton today. Her botanical achievements also included a carefully catalogued herbarium in 14 volumes, which she bequeathed to Sir Hans Sloane and which is now in London's Natural History Museum. Mary died in Chelsea in January 1715 at the age of 84.

Sheila Poole

Study Day: Public Parks in Britain over Time

29 March

The BGHG Study Day this year explored changing attitudes to public urban spaces and their evolution from the seventeenth to the twenty-first centuries. The periods were covered in four lectures by well-known speakers and the Day was chaired by Annabel Down, landscape architect and garden designer.

Privatising Public Space in Early Modern London by David Marsh

David Marsh, Course Director for the MA in Garden History and honorary Senior Research Fellow at the University of Buckingham, began by noting that in contemporary London recently opened public spaces, such as at Canary Wharf and Paternoster Square, are under the social control of private companies. In this talk he would analyse how a similar situation came about in the capital during the early modern period.

Moor Fields

Portrayed on the Copperplate Map of the 1550s, Moor Fields, common fields just north of the City wall, though privately owned, were in public use for a variety of activities such as walking and laying out washing to dry, because gardens of City houses were too small. In 1606 the Corporation acquired the Fields and laid out walks, much praised in a booklet of 1609 by Richard Johnson entitled 'The pleasant walkes of Moore-fields'. In 1608 two keepers were appointed to operate 24-hour supervision, preventing nuisances and removing rubbish.

Lincoln's Inn Fields

In the early 17th century these Fields adjoining the Inn were Crown land, used for pasture. Lawyers from the Inn successfully petitioned the Crown to enclose them; houses were only allowed round the edge on condition that the centre remained open for public use. The Fields were conveyed to the Society of Lincoln's Inn, which became responsible for removing annoyances and laying out walks. Local inhabitants, however, complained about the loss of freedom to graze animals, dry washing and use the Fields for general recreation.

St Martin's-in-the-Fields and Leicester Fields

Similarly in St Martin's extensive churchyard and nearby Leicester Fields, local inhabitants complained that they were no longer allowed to dry clothes as they had been 'wont to do'. In 1630 the Earl of Leicester applied to build a fine house and garden in the Fields and lease the rest for building. When local parishioners complained to the Privy Council, they were told that the Earl could build his house but must leave the rest open. Nevertheless houses were built round the edges of the square.

City Churchyards

Within the City walls, prior to the Great Fire, the 100 churchyards were almost the only areas open to local people. Most were small and were controlled by parish vestries, run by local elites. The minutes of their meetings record complaints about washing, rubbish dumping, keeping of chickens, etc. Many churches were lost in the Fire, and public access to those remaining became closely controlled. The churchyard at St Mary Magdalen, Milk Street, was opened only for burials, and the vestry at St Botolph's, Bishopsgate, in 1681–1682 considered excluding 'all persons whatsoever'.

These restrictions were in part a result of financial pressures on vestries; they had additional responsibilities for matters such as street cleaning and helping the destitute. At St Bennet Fink, Threadneedle Street, and All Hallows Staining land was sold for shops. The vestry of St Antholin, Budge Row, burnt down in the Fire, denied that anything had changed at the site, although they had taken the opportunity to build without the archbishop's permission. At St Katherine Coleman, on the other hand, an extension built by a neighbour on church land without payment was knocked down.

Livery Companies and the City Corporation

The gardens of livery companies also became increasingly restricted. Entry into Drapers' Gardens, for example, was open to the 'respectable'; but when that rule was breached it was locked, and keys given only to company members. This also happened at Moor Fields under the City Corporation. A new enlarged Bethlehem (Bedlam) hospital for the insane there, designed by Robert Hooke in 1676, was built just outside the City wall, on the narrow

site of the old town ditch. A print shows the hospital giving on to the Moor Field walks as if they were part of its garden, thus appearing grander than it was. The City Corporation, moreover, claimed ownership of 'Little Moorfields', a narrow strip of land adjoining the Fields, where they wanted to grow fodder for horses and build houses. The neighbouring Merchant Taylors' Company objected, but 20 years later Little Moorfields was built over.

Squares

The residents of St James's Square, laid out in the 1660s, complained about it being used as a rubbish dump, but it was not until the early years of the next century that it was redesigned by Bridgeman and the public excluded. This reflected a general trend as noted by the poet John Clare: 'Proud distinction makes a wider space | Between the genteel and the vulgar race'. The last square to be enclosed was Lincoln's Inn Fields, shut in 1735. Thus the freedoms portrayed on the Copperplate Map nearly two centuries earlier finally came to an end.



Lincoln Inn's Fields, 1810 (Note fence enclosing garden in centre)

Katherine Myers

People's Parks: The Proliferation of Urban Parks in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries by Paul Rabbitts

Paul Rabbitts, currently Environmental Services Manager for Norwich City Council, pointed out that, although we take them for granted, parks bring important benefits in the fields of education, health and social activity.

Early Parks and Paxton

The first city parks were royal, starting with Greenwich Park, established in 1433. Others followed in London in the 16th and 17th centuries. After a gap John Nash, an influential figure in the early 19th century, created Regent's Park in Marylebone, which at the time was rural farmland, and redesigned St James's Park. Admittance to royal parks was limited by social class, with more access for the lower classes over time. Hyde Park, Queen Victoria's favourite, was the most open; 'the Ring' was a fashionable area where carriages of the wealthy paraded. The 'Route du Roi' (known as 'Rotten Row') was built through the park by William III to connect his palaces at Kensington and St James's Park. After the Napoleonic Wars a nude statue of Achilles erected at Hyde Park Corner as a monument to the Duke of Wellington caused a stir, and in the late 1800s 'Speaker's Corner' was established in that area.

In the 18th century people from a wide spread of social classes frequented commercial pleasure gardens, pre-eminently at Vauxhall, where there were concerts, spectacles and fireworks. On national occasions similar entertainments took place in the royal parks. For example in 1749, Handel's *Music for the Royal Fireworks* was performed in Green Park at the celebrations for the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle.

In general public parks came about in the 19th century because of economic pressures. With the coming of the Industrial Revolution Britain's population rose rapidly and towns became overcrowded, dirty and disease-ridden. Increasing concern about the health of the working classes led in 1833 to the establishment of the Select Committee on Public Walks, which looked into the provision of new urban spaces where workers and their families could spend their Sundays in 'rational recreation', a healthy alternative to the pub, thereby leading to 'the redemption of the working class'.

In 1839 a further report highlighted a rise in mortality due to unhealthy conditions in East London slums, and the residents of Tower Hamlets petitioned the Crown for a 'royal park'. As a result in 1841 Sir James Pennethorne was asked to design Victoria Park. This large open area, becoming known as the 'lungs of London', was a landmark in the history of park provision.

In 1851 the Great Exhibition was held in Hyde Park in the 'Crystal Palace', designed by Joseph Paxton, four years after his important work, Birkenhead Park, had opened. The latter's highly original design has stood the test of time and has been widely influential, as in Central Park, New York for instance. Birkenhead included a wide variety of buildings designed by others, including an impressive entrance gateway, a Swiss bridge and two boathouses. Following the Great Exhibition, Crystal Palace was relocated to Sydenham, where it dominated a dramatic sloping site, laid out by Paxton with fountains, terraces and statuary, and a lake inhabited by dinosaurs. It never recovered, however, from the disastrous fire of 1936.

Later Victorian Parks

Paxton was closely associated with three important garden designers of the later 19th century. Edward Milner was his assistant before designing Pavilion Gardens, Buxton (1860s). John Gibson, also apprenticed to Paxton, is best known for the sub-tropical garden at Battersea Park, London (1863), and Edward Kemp, Paxton's assistant at Birkenhead Park, designed Saltwell Park, Gateshead (1876). Albert Park, Middlesbrough, donated to the town by its mayor Henry Bolckow in 1868, had many features typical of its time: a clock, boating lakes and refreshments. It has recently been given lottery money for a major restoration.

The 20th Century and Beyond

J. J. Sexby, Chief Officer for Parks in the newly formed London County Council from 1892 to his retirement in 1910, had an important influence on parks, setting standards and inculcating principles of design. He also designed numerous parks, including Wandsworth, Springfield and Ruskin. In 1925 the National Playing Fields Association was founded because of anxiety over the fitness of men in particular; children's playgrounds were also considered important. Both concerns encouraged the provision of sports facilities in municipal parks designed by park superintendents, borough engineers and surveyors or landscape architects. One designer, Captain Arnold Sandys-Winch, previously articled to the influential landscape architect Thomas Mawson, became Parks Superintendent for Norwich, and greatly increased the provision of open space in the city.



Memorial Clock, Albert Park Photo: habiloid

Decline and Renewal

Cost-cutting in the 1970s and 1980s encouraged vandalism and neglect. Establishment of the Heritage Lottery Fund in 1996 with its special programme for park restoration changed the situation radically. More recently, during the COVID lockdown parks were appreciated to the full, and 'park runs' are again demonstrating their importance for public health.

Katherine Myers

Public Parks in the Twenty-first Century by David Lambert

David Lambert, currently Director of the Parks Agency, a consultancy focused on the conservation of public parks, gave an illuminating and at times disturbing report on the history, chronology of funding and maintenance of public parks in the 21st century. His theme was the possibility of an alternative way of maintaining public parks and he welcomed the opportunity of examining what this might be. Whilst he recognised that for many a public park may still be an urban oasis, parks are far from immune to the changes wrought by the financial crash, neoliberal attacks on the public sector, biodiversity collapse, climate change and COVID-19. Indeed in many ways parks are particularly vulnerable. The 21st century has seen parks struggling to adapt to organisational disruption and huge reductions in budgets.

Closely involved in setting up the National Lottery's urban parks grants programme, David was able to comment on the huge sums generated by Lord Rothschild and the evolution of the Heritage Lottery Fund in the late 1990s when Grade I historic parks came into the fold. He noted the HLF-funded three-pronged approach to the regeneration of parks, namely restoration, management and programmes of event.

A 1999 Select Committee evaluated government initiatives, adding many parks to the Heritage List. A Public Parks assessment covering 1980–2000 noted a significant loss (56%) of amenities and architecture in public parks which had become unfit for purpose. With the HLF grant of £50 million over three years, local authority budgets were empowered to regenerate, resulting in a brief renaissance of parks in the early 2000s. However, the advent of the coalition government in 2010 with its introduction of austerity and siren call of low taxation, led to a scale of cuts of 10–20% year on year, which meant that swathes of expertise were lost in redundancies; the focus was on statutory duties at the expense of non-statutory items such as the maintenance of public parks.

In 2013 the National Endowment of Science Technology and the Arts (NESTA) encouraged the resurfacing of ideas that had, in the past, been rejected as unworkable. Commercialisation was rife and in 2020 HLF reported that the parks are in a worse state than in 2016. Sadly a raft of senior managers and Councillors could not bring themselves to object that depleted budgets made their task impossible. Bristol, for example, received zero funds over several years. David took the view that funds raised through both rates and events, supposedly for public parks' regeneration and maintenance, were used elsewhere.

Nevertheless, thousands discovered and celebrated the importance of parks during COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. Many have come to terms with the fact that governments of the main political parties are not prepared to protect parks and communities through local authority budgets; funds are often mismanaged and one in four local authorities are facing bankruptcy. Management plans are now structured around how to deal with issues along the way. The acceptance of messy outcomes and an awareness of the possibility of new opportunities under the notion of 'creative recalibration' include the importance of networking at a local level, supporting community initiatives and volunteers.



Meanwhile Gardens, Paddington, 2023, created by the local community on derelict land owned by the Council

Carmela Bromhead Jones

***Wembley Way to Park Life – it's been a bit of a Blur* by Julian Tollast**

Uniquely qualified to address his subject, the last speaker of the day was Julian Tollast, architect and Head of Masterplanning and Design for Quintain Limited who, with other private sector investors in partnership with Brent Council, have been working on the Wembley Park development project since 2005. He indicated that, in his view, the Wembley Park project offered a practical application of some of the issues identified by previous speakers. Environmental benefits had been made possible by some bold foresight about the long term in the early years, as described in the 2019 report of the project on the web at [Wembley_Park_PASS_IT_ON.pdf](#)

Julian gave a brief outline of the long history of place. In Anglo-Saxon times it was known as Wemba's Lea. The Page family subsequently became major landowners in the area and in the late 18th century, with the help of Humphry Repton, they landscaped informal and formal designs at their Wellers country house and park. Eventually the railways cut through the country park and Betjeman metro-land homes developed around the area. By the 1920s the park had all the 'parkitecture' seen earlier. Post WWI, the site became synonymous with the stadium and exhibition halls many still remember. It rapidly outgrew its capacity and with Brent Council's efforts to have the site redeveloped in a more environmentally friendly way, a scheme called the *Three stations strategy* was set in hand.

In 2007 a publicly accessible space of some 1.3 ha included the new Wembley stadium with three times the capacity and a new diagonal access route. The Wembley Park now consisted of around 34 ha of living/working space and green space proportionately allocated. Arborealists and phytogeographers were consulted and feedback from a walkabout with local residents was positive.

The tree planting project lasted for three years in all during which 1,300 were planted of which 99% have survived. Most impressive was the change to Olympic Way, the main road to the stadium. Here, with advice from Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, they planted a long avenue of mature champion trees of the world arranged from the eastern to western longitudes. These were planted with a wide root base and a sophisticated tree pit design to manage the roots under the pavement. See also the website *Explore the Trees of Wembley Park* (2025) <https://wembleypark.greentalk.io/>.

Biodiversity is taken seriously with wild flower meadows, a sunken road to lose the traffic in a ha-ha effect, reed-bed planting to capture runoff water, a bee park, blue space in the form of a lake and sites conducive to the red kite. Tree totems made from fallen trees and a celebratory mural as well as traditional park architecture have been included.

Finally, with two new councillors for Wembley Park ward, the aim is to be able to use space safely, particularly at night, to minimise possibilities for anti-social behaviour and to increase opportunities for health and wellbeing, such as the availability of community football pitches specifically for young people and children.

Carmela Bromhead Jones

Three hundred years since the founding of the Rivers Nursery

The year 1725 saw the establishment of the Rivers Nursery in Sawbridgeworth, Hertfordshire, by John Rivers, who moved there from Berkshire. When the nursery ceased operation in 1987 it was the oldest garden nursery in the UK. A volunteer group was formed to protect, preserve and maintain the remains of the nursery site and in 2025 the Rivers Heritage Site and Orchard group are celebrating the 300th anniversary of the historic site through a series of events, activities and articles shown on their website 300 years of Rivers Nursery.

Thomas Rivers (1798–1877) took over the thriving family business in 1837. He became one of the most respected pomologists of all time. He worked closely with Robert Hogg, whose status in the fruit world is second to none. He also corresponded with Charles Darwin on botanical matters. Rivers and Darwin eventually exchanged around 30 letters, mostly in 1863, when Darwin was hard at work on the manuscript of *Variation of plants and animals under domestication*, the sequel to *Origin of species*. Rivers, an experienced plant breeder and hybridist, supplied Darwin with detailed information about bud variation in fruit trees, strawberries, roses and laburnum, and the effects of grafts upon root stock. When Darwin eventually finished *Variation* in 1868, he acknowledged Rivers' many contributions and powers of observation.

Thomas Rivers developed a plethora of horticultural techniques, was an early pioneer of fruit cultivation under glass, developed many fruit and rose varieties and helped restock the Californian orange industry. He authored many books on fruit and rose cultivation that still sell today. His son, Thomas Francis Rivers (1830–1899), continued the introduction of new fruit varieties including the Rivers Early Peach (apple), the Thomas Rivers Apple, the Late Transparent Gage, the Czar plum and the renowned Conference Pear (introduced at the National Pear Conference in 1885). The Thomas Rivers and Son Nursery declined through the 20th century and was sold at the end of the 1980s as it was no longer commercially viable due to the rise of supermarkets.

The development of the famous Rivers Orchard House was the result of Thomas Rivers' powers of observation and meticulous note-keeping. He wanted to be able to grow figs in pots in the vineries but the trees proved to be too vigorous and grew too large. Having noticed that the roots of figs grown in relatively small pots grew out into the soil beneath and still produced a reasonable crop, he devised a method of leaving a larger hole to allow even more root growth. After harvest, the roots were cut back to the pot, keeping the plants manageable, and then top-dressed in spring. He went on to try the method with other fruit trees.

In his book *The Orchard House* Rivers gives detailed descriptions of how to construct, manage and stock orchard houses. He lists the lean-to orchard house, the small and large span orchard houses including examples

of materials and costs. In particular, in the 8th edition (1860), he mentions the house at Audley End: ‘One recently built at Audley End is, I think worthy of a short description... This is really a noble orchard house and forms a healthy and most agreeable promenade.’

In 1863, the *Journal of Horticulture: cottage gardener and country gentleman* described how ‘The late (but one) Lord Braybrooke [Richard Griffin, 3rd Baron Braybrooke, 1783–1858] was the only nobleman in my experience who felt much interest in orchard-house culture. He has a large house built at Audley End somewhere



Orchard House at Audley End Photo: Gemma Sturges

about the year 1852–3 [actually 1855], and I remember hearing from his own lips the great pleasure he had derived from it in his old age and declining health, for he seldom passed a day without a promenade in his orchard-house.’ The house is 90 feet long and 20 feet wide, with two paths, one each side of a central plinth, so quite a good stroll for an invalid.

Nevertheless, it was a productive and not just a leisure space. In 1885 a letter by James Vert, Head Gardener of Audley End, was published in *The Gardening World Illustrated* (page 334) which mentions the house contained ‘sixty fruit-trees in 9-in. pots, composed of Peaches, Nectarines, Plums and Figs.’ In the diary of a Victorian undergardener at Audley End, William

Cresswell, there are many references to work in the Orchard House, including thinning, disbudding, shortening growths, mulching with dung and guano, and dusting or smoking for pests. The House was also a temporary home for pricked out vegetable seedlings and potted up geraniums.

The house at Audley End was eventually demolished but was reconstructed on the same site in the millennium revitalisation of the kitchen garden.

Susan Jellis

Acknowledgement: information from the Rivers Heritage Site and Orchard website, Rivers Heritage Site, and the English Heritage Audley End website, Rivers Nursery | English Heritage

Ninfa – ‘The most romantic garden in the world’

It was with a huge sense of expectation at seeing the ‘most romantic garden in the world’¹ that we found ourselves, thanks to a Roman-based garden historian, near the small town of Norma in Italy for the annual Open Day of the Garden of Ninfa organised by the International Friends of Ninfa.

A cluster of ruins is all that remains of the once thriving mediaeval town of Ninfa. The princely owners, the Caetani family, can be traced to 1298 and Pope Bonifacio VIII’s encouragement to his nephew Pietro speaks volumes. Pietro Caetani was able to buy 1852 ha comprising the villages of Ninfa, Sermoneta, Bassiano and Cisterna, thereby securing for the Pope a solid base of power and influence for his Caetani descendants. A prescient move, the influential and cultured Caetani lineage has survived until now. The 17th-century Francesco Caetani, eighth Duke of Sermoneta, established a prestigious exotic bulb collection setting the scene for botanical expertise for later gardeners. The 8-ha garden, including a *hortus conclusus*, have evolved from 1920 when Gelasio Caetani (1877–1934), son of the 14th Duke Onorato Caetani and his British wife Ada, initiated restoration. Gelasio’s brother Roffredo Caetani, composer and diplomat (1871–1961) provided 70 years of consistency with his American wife, professional singer Marguerite, whose discerning eye contributed to the collection of 200 roses supplied by Hillier and Sons from England. Continuity then devolved to their daughter Lelia Caetani Howard a painter (d. 1977), wife of Anglo-Italian Hubert Howard, son of Sir Esmé Howard; she set up the Roffredo Caetani Foundation in 1972 to preserve the garden.



Rocca di Norma from the Garden of Ninfa

Photo: Carmela Broadhead Jones

Manifestly, the aesthetics, botanical knowledge and passion of these women with their differing artistic and cultural sensibilities have influenced the development of a gardening style. The combination of the fast-flowing River Ninfa (a habitat for black trout), the clarity of light, shade and form of the disintegrating ancient walls and castellated turrets together with inspired planting is considered both English and painterly. Crimson roses reflected in the stream, a double-flowered *Rosa roxburghii*, orangey-yellow abundant *Rosa crêpuscule* climbing over a half-ruined arch and *Rosa rêve d’or* twining through a black-shaped cypress, framing a view to the sunlit hills, all contribute to the romantic notion of place.

The micro-climate encourages *Musa acuminata* (banana plant), citrus trees and *Melia azedarach* (Indian lilac), an Indian species with violet poisonous racemes and soporific scent of vanilla, to flourish against the warmth of the walls. Spring bursts forth in the garden with the flowering of a multitude of *Prunus* species, many chosen in the early 1950s and 1960s by Marguerite Caetani. Other features include an allée of alders, a selection of *Quercus* and grasses.

In the spirit of retaining original plantings and with support from the national plan for recovery and resilience (*Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza, PNRR*), spectacular *Chionanthus virginicus* and Japanese *Lindera obtusiloba*, Lelia's favourites and lost to the garden, were re-established in 2024.

Romantic, Ninfa certainly is but it is also botanically and historically fascinating. Under the long-standing guardianship of Lauro Marchetti, gardener/curator now managing director of the Roffredo Caetani Foundation, and with the continued support of PNRR, the International Friends of Ninfa and others, the garden is set to thrive.

Carmela Bromhead Jones

¹ *Ninfa – the most romantic garden in the world* by Charles Quest-Ritson, Frances Lincoln (2009)

News

The Nesfield Archive at the Garden Museum

The 2025 BGHG Winter Newsletter No 68 included a news item about the acquisition by the Garden Museum of the William Nesfield archives. The Museum's press release happened to include an image of one of Nesfield's watercolours with the caption 'Unknown Landscape'. BGHG member Rebecca Tate on reading the press release recognised the location and contacted the Museum giving a website in the Yorkshire Dales containing a photo of the place, the Devil's Bridge over the river Lune at Kirkby Lonsdale in Yorkshire.



Unidentified watercolour by Nesfield



*Photo of the Devil's Bridge, Kirkby Lonsdale
Courtesy of Yorkshire Dales National Park
Authority*

Rebecca went on to add 'It would also make sense to me that the River Lune would be a subject Nesfield might have painted – his Victorian contemporaries waxed lyrical about a different viewpoint of the Lune a little further up the same river walk from the bridge – a nearby high-level view from the churchyard now known as Ruskin's View. Wordsworth said in his 1810 guide to the Lakes that it was a place not to be missed by any visitor to the area, JMW Turner painted it in 1822 and John Ruskin visited in 1875 and said the view from the churchyard was "one of the loveliest in England, therefore in the world".' (See website Ruskins View - Kirkby Lonsdale.)

Robert Hillman, archivist at the Garden Museum, agreed that the watercolour must be the same place as the photo of the Devil's Bridge and thanked Rebecca for getting in touch. He also noted that John Ruskin was well-known for admiring Nesfield's work and had praised particularly Nesfield's management of water in his designs – an interesting connection of them both to Kirkby Lonsdale and views of the river Lune.

Recognition of the Charles Darwin Archive UK

Charles Darwin, one of the UK's greatest scientists, continues to make headlines 166 years on from the publication in 1859 of his best-known work *On the origin of species*. Controversial at the time, this book explained his theory of how living organisms have developed over time through natural selection, and led to our understanding of the process we now know as evolution. Working in his garden and the landscape around his home Down House, Darwin continued his research until his death in 1882, leaving an important collection of materials now brought together in the Charles Darwin Archive.

UNESCO has recently placed this Archive in its International Memory of the World Register – the documentary heritage equivalent of UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The Archive is a collaboration between the main UK institutions involved: Cambridge University Library, the Natural History Museum, the Linnaean Society, Down House (English Heritage), the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and the National Library of Scotland. Comprising more than 20,000 items, it includes Darwin's books, scientific papers, manuscripts, experimental notes and letters. Many of these have been digitised and are freely accessible online.

This recognition of Darwin's legacy highlights its importance to global science and should ensure that his work, which continues to provide insights into biodiversity and ecology, will be preserved and made accessible to future generations.

Web: UNESCO Memory of the World Register | UNESCO

Web: Charles Darwin Archive recognised by United Nations Agency

Events

BGHG Programme 2025

June 18–21	Northumberland Study Trip
June 25	Cliveden, Buckinghamshire
July 22	Long Barn and Hever Castle, Kent
August	nothing scheduled
September 18	Charlton House & Gardens, London SE7 8RE
October	nothing scheduled
November	Winter Lecture

Linnean Society Lecture In-person

Thursday 3 July 6.00–8.15 pm *The World*

According to Citrus, David Mabberley. Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1J 0BF. Tel: 020 7434 4479, Email: info@linnean.org, Web: The Linnean Society - VeryConnect

City Lit Courses In-person and Online

Saturday 5 July 11.00 am–4.00 pm In-person

Archaeology of London Gardens, Jill Hummerstone.

Web: Archaeology of London gardens | Culture, history & humanities course | London | City Lit

Saturday 5 July 1.00–5.00 pm In-person *Garden*

History: Italian Renaissance Gardens, Nathalie Puget. Both courses at Keeley Street, London WC2B 4BA. Web: Garden History: Italian Renaissance

Gardens | Business, marketing & technology course | London | City Lit

Wednesday 16 July 1.30–3.30 pm Online *The art of Chinese gardens: nature and philosophy*. Xinrui Zhang. Web: The art of Chinese gardens: nature and

philosophy | Online Course | Culture, history & humanities | City Lit, Tel: 020 4582 0414,

Email: humanities@citylit.ac.uk

Kent Gardens Trust Visit

Wednesday 23 July 10.30 am–3.30 pm *Visit to*

Lullingstone Castle. Eynsford, Kent DA4 0JA.

Tel: 01622 861313, Email:

pamela.hipkins@kentgardentrust.org.uk, Web: Kent Gardens Trust booking - Booking by Bookwhen

Fulham Palace Lecture In-person

Wednesday 23 July 12.00–1.00 pm *Black gardeners*

in West London: the life and times of Tobias Eccho & Marina Dellap, Nadege Forde-Vidal. Bishop's

Avenue, London SW6 6EA. Tel: 020 7736 3233,

Email: mail@fulhampalace.org, Web: Black gardeners in West London - Fulham Palace

Garden Museum Workshop In-person

Thursday 24 July 11.00 am–1.00 pm *Garden Plan*

Drawing. 5 Lambeth Palace Road, London SE1 7LB.

Tel: 020 7401 8865, Email:

info@gardenmuseum.org.uk, Web: Branch Out | Garden Plan Drawing Workshop - Garden Museum

Editor: Joan Pateman,

Email: joan.pateman@zen.co.uk

Assistant Editor: Sheila Poole

University of East Anglia Study Day In-person

Saturday 26 July 10.00 am–5.30 pm *Norfolk*

Landscape History Day, five talks. Thomas Paine

Study Centre, Norwich Research Park, Norwich NR4 7TJ. Tel: 01953 453915,

Email: enquiries@nahrg.org.uk,

Web: <https://www.nahrg.org.uk/events.php>

British Library Exhibition In-person

Until 10 August *Unearthed: The Power of*

Gardening. 96 Euston Road, London NW1 2DB. Tel:

01937 546654, Email: boxoffice@bl.uk, Web:

Unearthed: The Power of Gardening | British Library

Oxford Botanic Garden Tour In-person

Tuesday 12 August 11.00 am–12.30 pm *Tour of the*

Medicinal Plant Collection, Sue Burge. Rose Lane,

Oxford OX1 4AZ. Tel: 01865 610300,

Email: admin@obg.ox.ac.uk, Web: A tour of the

medicinal plant collection with Dr Sue Burge |

Oxford Botanic Garden and Arboretum

Garden Museum Exhibition In-person

8 October–25 January 2026 10.00 am–5.00 pm

Rory McEwen Botanical Art. 5 Lambeth Palace

Road, London SE1 7LB. Tel: 020 7401 8865,

Email: info@gardenmuseum.org.uk,

Web: Rory McEwen - Garden Museum

Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Lecture

Saturday 18 October 2.30–5.00 pm In-person *John*

Adams and Thomas Jefferson's Tour of English

Gardens 1786, Julian Hunt. Aylesbury Methodist

Church Centre, Buckingham Street, Aylesbury HP20

2NQ. Email: enquiries@bucksgardenstrust.org.uk,

Web: Talk: John Adams and Thomas Jefferson's

Tour of English Gardens 1786. Julian Hunt –

Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust

Oxford Gardens Trust Lecture Online

Thursday 13 November 6.00 pm *'One of the most*

Beautiful Landscapes in the World': Nuneham

Courtenay Gardens, House and Village, Malcolm

Airs. Email: events@ogt.org.uk, Web: *'One of the*

most Beautiful Landscapes in the World': Nuneham

Courtenay Gardens, House and Village - OGTevents

- Tickets

Cambridge University Botanic Garden Lecture

Wednesday 26 November 6.30–8.30 pm Online

Humphry Repton and the Regency Garden, Laura

Mayer. Email: education@botanic.cam.ac.uk, Web:

Humphry Repton and the Regency garden Courses -

Cambridge University Botanic Garden

Garden Masterclass Recorded Webinar Online

Anytime via Vimeo *William Robinson and the Wild*

Garden, Tom Coward.

Email: info@gardenmasterclass.org,

Web: William Robinson and the Wild Garden —

Garden Masterclass