

Amersham Gardening Association

www.amersham-gardening.org.uk

August 2024 Newsletter

From the Chairman

Since my report issued at the time of the AGM, the number of members attending our meetings remains high and, in fact, we had to search for extra chairs at our July meeting.

Judging has recently taken place for Britain in Bloom so let's hope the judges were impressed and that we do as well or better than we did before our break from competing. I know that I speak for all our members when I thank the Amersham in Bloom team for their efforts – hopefully these efforts will be rewarded by the judges, though whatever conclusion the judges come to, Amersham has certainly become a much brighter place due to the team's efforts.

The plant sale in May was again very successful and our thanks go to Janet Philpott for organising the event and to all those members and partners / friends who assisted in their various ways. The plant sale was followed by the Chesham Bois fete in June when we had a stall and made a significant amount of money for the Association's funds despite the rain in the morning – thanks to Susan Jeffrey and all the members who helped before and on the day.

The AGA trip to Cheshire in June was enjoyed by many of our members - thanks to Stuart and all involved for organising the trip. A report on the holiday is included in this Newsletter.

Colin Ross

A letter from Betty and Jim Campbell

Dear Amersham Gardening Association members,
Thank you for your kind wishes and support. As you know, Betty and I have moved to the Wirral where we will be establishing a new life.
Looking back on our time with the AGA, it is pleasing to see the club going from strength to strength. When Betty and I joined, it was a small group of fewer than

twenty and I remember cajoling friends and neighbours into joining the Association. As I said previously, it is pleasing to see it thriving.
We want to thank you for the voucher and again for your kind thoughts and good wishes.

Betty & Jim Campbell

A note from the editor – membership is now more than 180, and our Thursday evening meetings now attract almost as many people as there are chairs available.

Plant sales at meetings

The exchange of plants is a traditional part of the activities of a gardening association. You are very welcome to sell your plants on the Association's plant table at our Thursday evening meetings (but, obviously, not on the speaker's table if s/he brings along plants for sale). Just bring your plants in clean pots with two labels – one with the name of the plant and one with your name and the price.

10% of the selling price goes to the association (but you can also put "for association funds" on the label if you do not want the money yourself). Last year this

commission on plant sales raised some £100 for the Association's funds.

Please bring your plants early, not when Colin is just about to introduce the speaker. It would be helpful if you can bring some carrier bags for people to take plants away with them. If your plants don't sell you will need to take them home again.

Plants are not sold until the interval, to give everyone a fair chance, but if you are helping with coffee, raffle, etc you have first choice and can buy before the talk.

Forthcoming meetings in the Drake Hall

September 26th James Bolton. The relationship between Sir Edwin Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll

The last two decades of the nineteenth century reverberated with the row between William Robinson and Reginald Blomfield as to the pre-eminence, in the garden, of the architect or the gardener. At a stroke, the problem was solved by the partnership between Gertrude Jekyll and Edwin Lutyens, so that a house by Lutyens, with a garden by Jekyll, became an Edwardian ideal. Their partnership thrived in the brash, new-moneyed Edwardian era, but the First World War ended that golden afternoon and as Lutyens became distracted by the creation of New Delhi and Miss Jekyll, almost blind, became more and more reluctant to leave

Munstead Wood, so the gardens they designed together were fewer and further between.

James Bolton set up his [garden design business](#) in 1992, following two years as head gardener at a private garden near Wantage. He had previously trained with the Direction des Parcs et Jardins in Paris. He was Faculty Director in Design History at the Inchbald School of Design and a Lecturer at Middlesex University. He now lectures extensively on garden history and runs Border Lines, the leading tour company organising visits to private English gardens and to the finest gardens in Europe and South Africa.

October 24th John Armand. Jacques Armand tulips

For over 90 years, Jacques Amand has offered flowering bulbs of many varieties to discerning gardeners. The company began as a flower shop in the Strand when Jean Jacques Amand arrived from the Netherlands in 1927. Since then the company has grown to become a major supplier of bulbs from well-established favourites to the rare and unusual, and is renowned for the diversity and quality of bulbs offered to customers in many countries.

Still a family business, based in Clamp Hill in Stanmore, Jacques Amand participates in many world famous flower shows annually, including award winning displays at the Chelsea Flower Show, the Philadelphia International Flower Show (March, USA), and the Hampton Court Palace International Flower Show as well as many regional shows and events in the UK.



November 28th Amber Hine. Naturalistic planting

Amber Hine is a professionally trained Garden Designer based in Bedfordshire, working on gardens from smaller courtyard size projects to larger landscapes. Previously of the technical theatre industry, Amber brings drama and innovation to her designs, incorporating her theatrical lighting flare to gardens. Whether you are looking for retreat, expression or a social space Amber combines horticultural knowledge with ergonomics and aesthetics giving you a space to live in.

Amber [writes](#) "I am a Garden and Landscape Designer based in Bedfordshire. I work on projects large and compact across the UK. I also embrace the importance of communication and education, providing public speaking on the subject of horticulture, as well as writing for local publications on the subject.



Having worked in theatre and events on, amongst other things, lighting, I bring a strong sense of artistic space creation, with an emphasis on lighting the space for character, atmosphere and extending the useful time of your outdoor space.

December 19th Social evening

Note that this is the third Thursday, not our usual fourth Thursday. We will provide food (sandwich platters, desserts, etc as well as wine and soft drinks) from Association funds. To allow us to know how many people to cater for, we will ask members to sign up and pay a token £1 per person at the November meeting.

Chelsea flower show

It is some years since we braved the Chelsea flower show, and looking at the massed crowds in the background of the TV reports of the 2024 show, we were reminded why. Last time there was a very lengthy queue on the members only opening day, and by 11:00 the crowds were so bad that we made our way out, despite not having seen all we wanted to see – and add to this the fact that while at one time there were cameras and reporters from just the BBC, the multiplication of TV channels and streaming services restricted our movement even more – a far cry for my visits on the final day (then Thursday), in the 1970s and 80s, when the show ground was easy to walk around – not to mention the sight of people making their way back to Sloane Square station carrying large plants that were sold off from stands after 4pm – how they managed to get some on the Tube was a mystery.

Even in the days when we were regular attenders, it was obvious that there were areas where plants were taking second place to sculptures, outdoor dining sets that cost more than our indoor dining room suite, and barbecues larger than the oven and hob in our kitchen (and doubtless costing more than our new oven!). *The Guardian* had a somewhat tongue-in-cheek article about Chelsea 2024 on May 14th by Oliver Wainwright, entitled "[Romans in togas, shepherds in saunas and the Bridgerton garden in bloom ... my wild day at Chelsea flower show](#)".

It begins "A gigantic Chinese dragon made of gnarled chunks of driftwood towers over a display of bog plants, puffing steam from its nostrils and clutching a ceramic pearl that gushes with water. Nearby, men dressed in togas patrol the courtyard of a pretend Roman villa, where simulated rain pours into the garden from a pantiled roof. Around the corner, a waterfall cascades down an artificial rock face, creating an arresting backdrop to a display of luxury outdoor sofa cushions.

"Welcome to the RHS Chelsea flower show, a surreal phenomenon that has gone from an annual fair of prized blooms to a multimillion-pound Disneyfied spectacular, where the flowers now struggle to hold their own against ever more elaborate pieces of set design.

"It is a place where elfin treehouses compete for attention with pixie grottos, and sculpted clay stupas loom above moss-encrusted ruins. It feels like wandering around a themed food court, with Moroccan tiled courtyards jostling with Japanese bridges, thatched Burmese stilt houses vying with Welsh dry-stone walls. The cuisine on offer might not be as international, but you can wash down the global garden safari with a £15 Pimm's.

"For the first-timer, the fixture is a bewildering spectacle, like a trade show crossed with a wedding. Gaggles of visitors in floral dresses and straw boaters peruse avenues lined with stands selling secateurs, lawnmowers and ladders, along with hand-woven sun-loungers and sculptures of rabbits in comical poses. There are purveyors of thatched gazebos for outdoor entertaining, and makers of luxury shepherd's huts, kitted out with saunas and roll-top baths, yours for £160,000. There is bad art aplenty for gardens of all sizes, from animal figurines made of bundles of wire, to big copper trees that spout water from their leaves. Meanwhile, outdoor tables erupt with decorative gas flames – mains connection optional – so you can enjoy the spectacle of global heating all night long, all year round."

Actually, Wainwright does go on to say that there were indeed plenty of plants on show, and the link to [Chelsea flower show](#), in his article does lead to more conventional reporting of the show in *The Guardian*.

Chesham Bois fete, June 15th

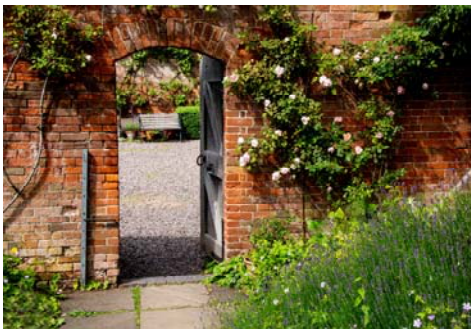
Despite a very slow and wet start (we were most grateful for the use of Colin's gazebo), the day must be counted as a success, with a profit of £346, a welcome addition to the Association's funds.



Cheshire holiday, June 9th – 13th

Sunday: Castle Bromwich

This was somewhat of a disappointment, although I may have been influenced by the (eminently sensible) suggestion that we should not all go immediately for coffee and cake at the same time. I waited until most of our members had gone into the gardens, then found that there was a very long queue of people with large dogs waiting for coffee and cakes – it looked as if the whole of the kennel club of the West Midlands had arrived for an outing. There were certainly areas where there was some interesting planting (including a splendid *Drancunculus* in flower), but the many areas that were apparently meant to be wild-flower meadows somehow showed the difference between rewilding and simple neglect and scruffiness.



Sunday: Little Morton Hall

Reputedly the wonkiest building in England, and certainly a well-preserved Tudor manor house. The wonkiness is apparently due to the use of green (ie freshly felled) timber that became warped as it dried. As a one-time DIYer who was used to buying machine-made wooden dowels and using a drill bit that made a circular hole precisely the right size for the dowel to fit and make a tight joint, I was interested to learn that the Elizabethans used kiln-dried timber to make the rough-cut dowels and inserted them loosely into holes that were larger; as the green timber dried and shrank, so the dowels became tightly held in place – without the use of the adhesive that modern dowels require. We were promised a knot garden and borders within the moated area. There was certainly the outline of a knot garden, but with little planting – indeed, one member suggested that it was more of “a not garden” than a knot garden. There was certainly ample seating space for those of us indulging in tea and coffee – and some amusement as wild fowl from the moat came scavenging for crumbs.



Monday: Tatton Park



Tatton Park is under joint management by the National Trust and East Cheshire Council – this gave Jane immense problems when she was negotiating our group entry and tours of the Japanese garden – everything seemed to be some-one else's responsibility. In the end, a few people had to be disappointed and miss out on tour of the Japanese garden (and you are not allowed in except on a guided tour), although many of the most interesting areas are visible from outside anyway. Quite apart from the Japanese garden, Tatton is well worth a visit, with an impressive rockery, some massive topiary and a fine Italian garden that can be overlooked from a terrace, and with splendid views across the open landscape.



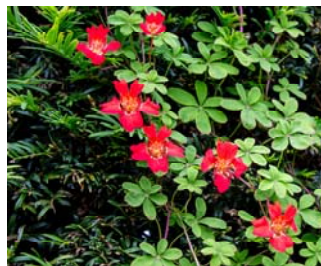
Monday: Lyme Park

Lyme Park is unusual, in that the 18th century house is half-way up a hill, with a terrace overlooking a formal Italian garden (and also the car park, although our coach was allowed up to the gates of the house), then a series of terraces rising above the house with ornamental beds, a rose garden and an orangery. Fortunately, the house was open, and well worth visiting, not only for the views from the windows, but also the furniture, including a splendid Victorian dining table set for 14 people.

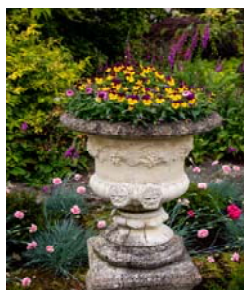


Tuesday: Arley Hall

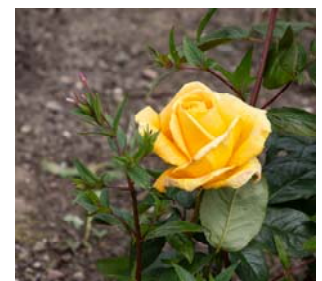
On arrival, the coach took us straight to the courtyard – perhaps this was a good thing, since on leaving we had to go to the carpark – and this meant passing the splendid plant sales area. Some people may have been so entranced by the variety of plants on sale that they would have missed out on the experience of the gardens, which were some of the finest we have seen. They have been developed by successive generations of the same family over the last 270 years, with some 8 acres of formal gardens. The outstanding feature is the double herbaceous border, thought to be the first planted in England, and bordered by yew hedges, with yew buttresses to break up the long borders without spoiling the view. Add to this two walled gardens, the fish garden with an ornamental pond, a rock garden and the avenue of pleached lime trees from the entrance to the courtyard (with potholes to match some of those in Amersham), and a family chapel, and you have a place well worth revisiting. Something we had not seen before; scarlet flowered *Tropaeolum speciosum* growing through some of the yew hedges.



Tuesday All Fours Farm

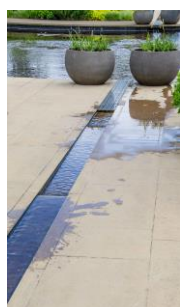
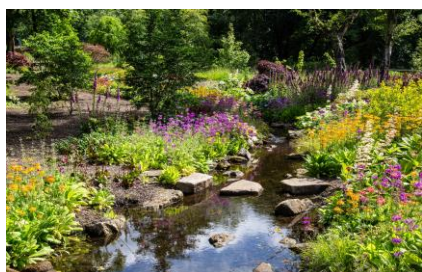


This was really a working rose farm, with a small cottage garden, some interesting antique garden implements and machines, then, on the other side of the road, a plant sales area for those of us who had not spent up at Arley Hall. Also, an excuse for tea or coffee and excellent home-made cakes included in our entry fee for the NGS. The garden, rose plantation and cakes are all the work of Mrs Evans; her husband tends the plant sales area.



Wednesday: RHS Bridgewater

The RHS's newest garden is very much a work in progress – as it should be, if only to remind us that unlike TV makeover programmes (and even dare I say, the Eden Project), you do not create a garden instantaneously. It has to develop, and allow visitors to see how new areas progress from plans to reality – then how different areas change over time. Outside the welcome building is a lake, then a series of plots leading to the streamside garden (a mass of candelabra primulas when we were there) and on to the Chinese garden, developed in conjunction with the relatively large Chinese population of Manchester. We then followed round through a woodland area that will remain as woodland, and on to the outside of the old walled garden, with the building that had housed the boilers to heat it, and an area now set aside for trial beds, housing a trial of hydrangeas (and already some of the varieties were showing that they were not going to thrive here). This led us into the walled garden, which must have provided food for a very large number of people in the heyday of the (now demolished) Worsley New Hall. There are the expected borders and glasshouses in the walled garden, and in the centre is a stunning modern square pond with rills set in paving – a striking contrast to the rest of the area.



Seen from the coach

Approaching Manchester airport: three separate signs:

For Terminal 1 follow T!, For Terminal 2 follow T", For Terminal 3 follow T3
Um – rather obvious perhaps!

In the outskirts of Birmingham, two petrol stations with launderettes in the forecourt!

Thursday: Wollerton Old Hall

Wollerton Old Hall dates from the 16th century, but the 4 acres of garden are modern and mainly formal, although there is an interesting wild garden hidden away at the back. The garden is arranged in a series of rooms, with separate east-west and north-south vistas, separated by hedges, and with a rectangular pond. In many areas the Hall itself provides a backdrop to the formal gardens.



Overall this was a most enjoyable few days away, with a great variety of interesting gardens. Unexpectedly for the Manchester area, it did not rain much, and indeed apart from a couple of showers, the rain was only after we had returned to the coach or hotel. Many thanks to Frances, Felicity, Jane, Joan, Val, Althea, Liz, Di (in order of the gardens visited) and Stuart for their hard work in organising everything.

Don't dig up your gunnera



But if you do, make sure you destroy it, and don't let it escape into the wild. It is now illegal to cultivate, sell, buy or transport it. According to *The Garden* in June 2024, this is the result of unforeseen consequences. Two species of Gunnera were introduced from south America in the 19th century: *G. tinctoria* from Chile in the 1830s and *G. manicata* from Brazil in the 1860s. *G. tinctoria* rapidly became established and self-seeded both in gardens and the wild – it is highly invasive, and was banned in 2017. What has been grown as *G. manicata* rarely, if ever produces seedlings, and indeed does not really resemble the wild species.

DNA analysis has shown that what has been sold and grown as *G. manicata* is in fact a hybrid between *manicata* and *tinctoria*. It is likely that *G. manicata* was unable to cope with northern European winters, and died out, while the hybrid, now known as *Gunnera x cryptica*, was more hardy and survived, although like many interspecies hybrids, it is sterile, and therefore, it is not invasive, and certainly not a threat to native flora. The problem is that the relevant laws forbid the cultivation or sale of any hybrids of a banned invasive species. Therefore, as a cross between banned *G. tinctoria* and *G. manicata*, which is not banned, and is not really viable in UK, the law requires that it be banned.

Waterways Experiences Canal Trip on the Grand Union July 18th



One sunny day in July, Amersham Gardening Association ventured out on a very different event. 38 of us gathered at the beautifully landscaped boatyard near Hemel Hempstead run by Waterways Experience, an all-volunteer charity.

We had a very relaxing 4 hour round trip on their boat 'Sheldrake III' that took us from Nash Mills through Kings Langley to Hunton Bridge. We had plenty of time to talk to one another and especially to meet new members. Some of us helped with the locks and some took the opportunity to walk between them.

One of the highlights was the amazing array of delicious homemade cakes made by our members. Waterways Experiences supplied us with plenty of tea to wash them down.

We were especially grateful to the crew who were very friendly and helpful to those who had mobility problems. Needless to say, we all expressed our thanks to them for providing such a wonderful afternoon out. A special thanks should also be made to [Keith Hoffmeister for the wonderful photos](#) he took on the trip.



Joan Clark



[Click here](#) for more of Keith's photos as a video sequence

Visit to RHS Hyde Hall July 31st



This was the first day of the Hyde Hall flower show, and there were two avenues of nurseries displaying their wares, as well as a few stands of garden ornaments, etc, and a food court area (most welcome because when we went up to the restaurants in the Welcome Centre for lunch, the queues were out of the door). It was also one of the hottest days of the year to date. Whether buying or not, it was a pleasure to browse the stands; a surprise to discover how much is charged for *Crococsmia lucifer* (we were given a few plants some years ago by our neighbour who wanted to clear some space, and we now have a splendid display that in turn needs some thinning out). As ever, it is interesting to see how nursery people manage to have plants in flower both earlier and later than is natural.



Going up the hill, we came to the trial grounds where there is a sunflower trial in progress – a considerable variety to tempt us, but we have too many agile squirrels that would demolish the flower heads before the seeds are ripe.



Many thanks to Frances for organising a successful day out.

Overheard "Haven't you got any new ones, these are all rusty".



[Click here](#) to see more photos from the day

Some requests for help

We always need people to meet and greet members and visitors at our meetings.

If you can help, please contact Felicity Vickery Tel: 01494 726284, email felicityvickery@yahoo.co.uk

We need people to help with the tea and coffee at our meetings. There is a rota so you are not expected to help at every meeting. If you can help, please contact Liz Moulton Tel: 01494 784913, email libbym6740@gmail.com

As ever, it will be much appreciated if some members could arrive about 7 pm to help put out chairs and tables; they do not put themselves out!

Please remember the raffle at each meeting. The profit on the raffles makes a very useful contribution to our expenses; subscriptions alone do not cover the cost of meetings and speakers.

Publicity. If you know where you could put a publicity poster please contact david.bender@btinternet.com

At present we have posters in the following places:

White Hill Centre, Chesham; Blue Diamond (formerly Van Hage) garden centre; Little Chalfont Library; Amersham Library; Chesham Library; Coleshill Village Hall; Tesco Amersham

Committee and Contact Details

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Past newsletters

There is an archive of past newsletters from May 2014 to the current issue on our website at

<http://www.amersham-gardening.org.uk/newsletter.html>

Photos from outings

You can see links to lots of photos from our outings at <http://www.amersham-gardening.org.uk/outings.html>

See the photos in this issue full size

[Click here](#) to go to the photos from this newsletter in full size.

Click the button on the top right of the screen for a slide show; you can scroll through the pictures using the > and < arrows on the right and left of the screen



Half price entry to RHS gardens

We are affiliated to the RHS, and one of the benefits is a card allowing two AGA members at a time to visit one of the RHS gardens at half price. If you want to borrow the card, please contact Jean Bowling (secretary@amersham-gardening.org.uk)

We are not psychic

If you change your email address (or indeed your postal address) please email membership@amersham-gardening.org.uk and / or newsletter@amersham-gardening.org.uk, so that we can keep the records up to date and make sure you receive the newsletter and booking forms for outings.