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A new year and I am greeting you as the new Chair of the Norfolk Gardens Trust. I have taken over from Matthew Martin who, after 10 years, is stepping back from chairing but will remain on the committee, thus continuing to provide us with the benefit of his sage advice and knowledge. Matthew presided over a period of considerable achievement for the Trust; we are the largest of the county garden trusts and hope to welcome our 1,000th member during the coming year.

My love of Norfolk started in the 1970s when I was a student at the University of East Anglia. I then moved to Norfolk in 1999 to be Director of the Norfolk Museums Service. My retirement from the NMS in 2013 gave me more time for voluntary work, including chairing the Norwich Society and helping set up the Friends of Kett's Heights.

I am looking forward to helping the NGT develop its activities and raise awareness of the benefits of parks and gardens amongst the general public. Last year saw our first photography competition, Norfolk Parks Photographer of the Year 2024, to celebrate and promote the county's rich heritage of public parks. We plan to do more to promote our educational work in 2025 – one of our key charitable objectives. In the past we have offered bursaries to support students studying landscape history at the University of East Anglia, and we continue to offer grants to schools to encourage a love of gardens amongst pupils. This year we are delighted to be partnering with the Royal Norfolk Show in their schools' wheelbarrow or small show garden competition. So much to look forward to.

Vanessa Trevelyan



The Man Who Invented Spring

Hugh Aldersey-Williams Award-winning author of *The Adventures of Sir Thomas Browne in the 21st Century*. He lives in Aylsham.

Last spring, you probably noticed when snowdrops came into flower, when individual trees came into leaf, and when you heard the first cuckoo. If so, you were following in the footsteps of Robert Marsham, the 18th century Norfolk landowner who launched a new science of the observation of the signs of spring. Starting in 1736, Marsham systematically noted twenty-seven such events – from the singing of the song thrush to the first brimstone butterfly – over a period of sixty years until his death in 1797.

His descendants continued to record the same information methodically until 1958, amassing the longest British record in a single location. Without knowing it, they were building a dataset that would prove invaluable to scientists now seeking to learn more about how the seasons are changing as a consequence of global climate change.



Robert Marsham, born into an old-established Norfolk family in 1708, inherited the large estate of Stratton Strawless on his father's death in 1751. The land was too poor for crops, however. Indeed, William Cobbett was sufficiently struck to note the conspicuous poverty of the soil at Stratton in his *Rural Rides* in 1830. His youthful travels through Britain and Ireland were often driven by a wish to see remarkable trees, and on his return from his peregrinations he embarked on a long-term project of tree-planting. Over more than a thousand acres, he is thought to have planted hundreds of thousands, if not a million and more, mixed, mostly deciduous trees, chosen because he wanted to leave a permanent legacy, not to harvest their timber. 'I plant whenever I have leisure,' he said. That rate of planting over a working lifetime comes to something like fifty trees a day!



The woodland at Stratton Strawless now is mostly pine grown to make fencing – a sad decline. Very few of Marsham's trees remain. One is a thirty-metre-tall cedar that he planted in 1747, which can be seen from far off standing head and shoulders above its neighbours. There is also a vast sweet chestnut, much decayed with many fallen boughs, marked with a plaque when a preservation order was placed on it in 1995.



Despite the replacement of most of his trees and the loss of most of his papers, both of these lifelong activities of Marsham's have left a lasting impression. After fifty years of data-gathering, he communicated his results to the Royal Society in London, and the 'Indications of Spring' were published in its *Philosophical Transactions*.

Marsham's observations of nature eventually earned its own name: phenology, defined as 'the field of science concerned with cyclic and seasonal natural phenomena, esp. in relation to climate and plant and animal life'. Today, there are networks of



phenologists collecting and correlating these data around the world. It is a perfect subject for 'citizen science', too, and organizations such the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew and the Woodland Trust have run schemes in which schoolchildren and amateur recorders are asked to log their observations of the budding, flowering and leafing of different plants.

The data reveals some things you would expect and some you perhaps wouldn't. It shows up one-off anomalies very clearly. Marsham's own record for 1784, for example, shows that almost all his 'indications' came very late in the season. This was due to the previous eruption of an Icelandic volcano. Otherwise, the figures show a surprising variability in dates – ranging over up to three months for some 'indications' – greater than you might think just working from memory. Not everything shifts by a similar amount in a given year either, giving a clue to the likely climate resilience of different species. Over the long term of nearly three hundred years, thanks to the start made by Marsham, it also now gives evidence of an overriding trend of a warming climate.

Marsham's tree-planting practices attracted the admiration of Humphry Repton, who thought that he had discovered a 'far better method of planting waste land, where enclosures are not permitted', and promptly adopted the same. The two men met when Marsham was in his old age and Repton had belatedly taken the career turn that would lead to his success as a landscape gardener. Repton was especially struck by Marsham's choice of deciduous species and his technique of mounding earth around the base of the trees. After Marsham's death, Repton hoped to publish his notes on tree planting as a book, but the idea was not pursued. Nevertheless, it might be said that Marsham's influence is to be seen today in some of the great gardens laid out by Repton.

If you did not happen to mark the arrival of the snowdrops and the cuckoo last year, then you can do so this year and become part of Marsham's long-running experiment. In 2024, I noted the date of many of Marsham's 'Indications'. My birch came into leaf on 17 March, the hornbeam on 3 April, and mountain ash on 5 April. I only heard my first swallow on 1 May, weeks later than usual, and even a few days later than the latest of all Marsham's recordings, 27 April, in 1763. I was glad they had not been tempted by the warm southerly winds at the beginning of the month since the rest of the month was colder than usual – a reminder that weather as well as climate affects nature. I wonder what will happen this year.





The Pleasure Grounds of Sennowe Park -
A Grade 2 registered garden

Kate Lyons NGT Events



Sennowe Hall from the south

If any house and designed landscape in this corner of England expresses the optimism of the Edwardian age it is Sennowe Park. The estate was acquired in 1898 by Thomas Cook, grandson of the original founder of the famous travel company. Both the house and grounds at Sennowe were then extensively reworked from about 1906 to the vision of George Skipper, the highly talented Norwich-based architect. It was designed in a flamboyant Italianate style, which was very much in vogue after the publication of Edith Wharton's Italian Villas and their Gardens in 1904.

The park itself is gently undulating and mainly wooded with the exception of the surround to the house and the picturesque landscaped views down to the sizeable lake, created in 1910 by diverting and damming the River Wensum. Panoramic views are enjoyed from the raised garden terrace over the park to the lake. These are focused on the charming rustic boathouse (Grade 2 listed), also designed by Skipper, from which point there are views back across the park to the Hall.

Skipper laid out the series of balustraded terraces *(Grade 2 listed)* across the



Sculpted stone lion. Credit Dougal Waters



Inside the Winter Garden cum ballroom. Credit Dougal Waters



Italianate Campanile clock tower and water tower

south front, linked by steps, all of which are intact to this day. He employed a series of skilled craftsmen, including teams of stonemasons from Italy, to carve many fine features. The structural stonework was by Potter of Norwich, with other stone carving by Brindley of Westminster and Fehr of Fulham, who created sculptured animals such as lions and eagles. Skipper himself designed the handsome decorative urns on the terraces.

The main approach to Sennowe is the Norwich Drive which enters the park from the A1067 in the east. It enters through a pair of identical lodges *(Grade 2 listed)*, known as the Italian Gates, connected by ornate iron railings and stone piers all designed by Skipper. The long, straight drive runs south-west, flanked by wide grass verges and by mixed woodland of sweet chestnut, horse chestnut, and sycamore, underplanted with laurel and rhododendrons. The drive passes over a Baroque style bridge *(Grade 2 listed)* of brick with stone dressings, designed in 1910 by Skipper. The drive continues through woodland and eventually swings south to enter the carriage court on the east front, also flanked by fine entrance gates *(Grade 2 listed)*. There is also a west drive from an earlier date for which Skipper built two further lodges to match those on the Norwich Drive.

One notable feature added to the redesign of Sennowe by Skipper was the large 70ft long glasshouse known as the Winter Garden. It has survived remarkably intact from the Edwardian

Garden History



Original topiary planting circa 1912

era. From the outside, it is a pleasing architectural construction, of wrought iron and with a domed glass ceiling set on stone Ionic columns. Inside there is a sculpted centrepiece of art-nouveau influence set in a black and white chequered marble floor. Originally, it was used as a ballroom when space for dancing was needed. Today the Winter Garden is filled with a beautiful display of geraniums, pelargoniums and other flowering plants.

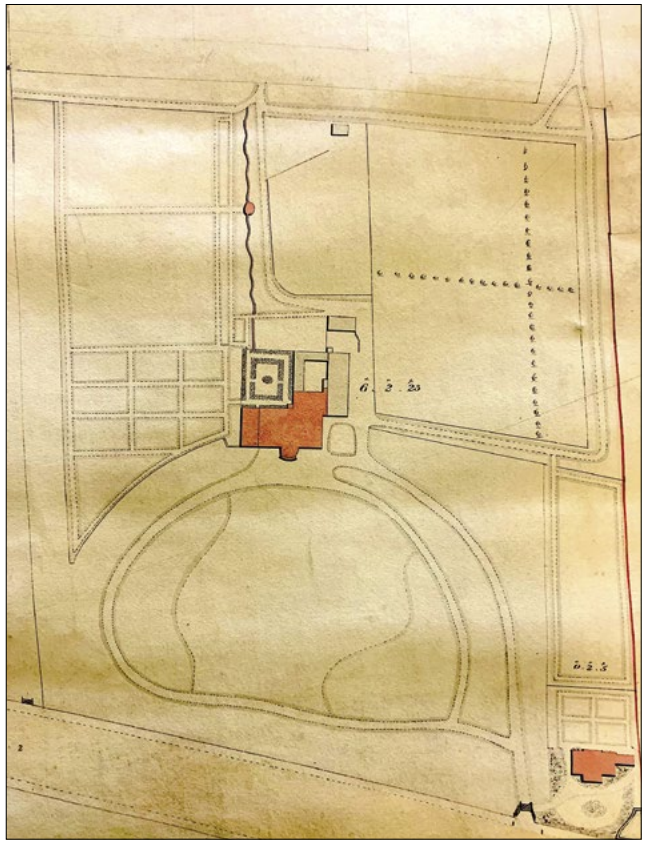
Although the garden landscaping and fine stonework remains intact and in good condition, inevitably, some features of the original planting scheme have disappeared. To the east of the Hall is the main gravelled entrance court which is divided from the park by a balustraded retaining wall and, records state, used to also feature a castellated yew hedge. An old photograph shows the original yew planting of this area in 1912. Another image circa 1912 shows what looks like a Victorian style parterre which today is laid to lawn. However, over one century after it was created, this remarkable designed landscape remains much as intended and is a tribute to the exceptional vision of George Skipper.

The Survival of Eaton Grove Gardens

Thomas Greenwood, Head Gardener

Eaton Grove, the home of the Norwich High School for Girls (NHSG), is situated on Newmarket Road, Norwich. The house and gardens were constructed c1820 for the entrepreneur John Harrison Yallop. Knighted in 1831, Yallop had previously been Sheriff and twice Mayor of Norwich. Built in the Regency style with a rendered exterior, hipped slate roof and a central bow-fronted bay flanked by Ionic columns; it is a charming, balanced building, grand in design and modest in scale.

Eaton Grove is set in gardens contemporary with its initial design and construction. The effect of the original design as shown in the 1827 estate map can still be discerned today with many remaining or echoed features.



The sweeping drive up from Newmarket Road is, in many respects, the most significant feature of the landscape. It appears that in order to create the rise on which Eaton Grove sits, a considerable amount of earth was removed from the land in front of the house and mounded into two approximately crescent mounds delineating the curve of the drive. The scale of this hard landscaping only becomes noticeable when one walks the full extent of the paths in front of Eaton Grove. Now covered in mature trees it takes one by surprise to find banks and levels differing by



metres to one another. The intention appears to have been to raise Eaton Grove and gardens more prominently in an otherwise empty landscape, whilst affording views to, and from, Newmarket Road.

The crinkle-crankle wall is over two chains (40 metres) long and was, for a time, something of a mystery to me. I could not quite envisage it outside its current situation, enclosed by trees on one side and school buildings on the other. However, the 1827 map suggests dual purposes for the wall. First, and most obviously, it is south-facing, ideal for growing fruit against.

Second, it defines the gardens, with the more formal leisure gardens on the south-east shielded from views of the ancillary domestic buildings and grounds on the northern side.

Many other features remain; one of especial interest is the grid to the south of Eaton Grove. This is likely a formal pleasure garden of the sort that saw a resurgence in popularity in the 1810s. In the summer of 2024 marks appeared in the lawn corresponding to the 1827 plan, suggesting the tantalising possibility that the original garden is still, to a limited extent, present.

The 1827 estate plan revealed much about Eaton Grove. However, it was also rather puzzling to me. The estate was not just the six-acre block reproduced above, rather it extended to forty-six acres, in six approximately rectangular



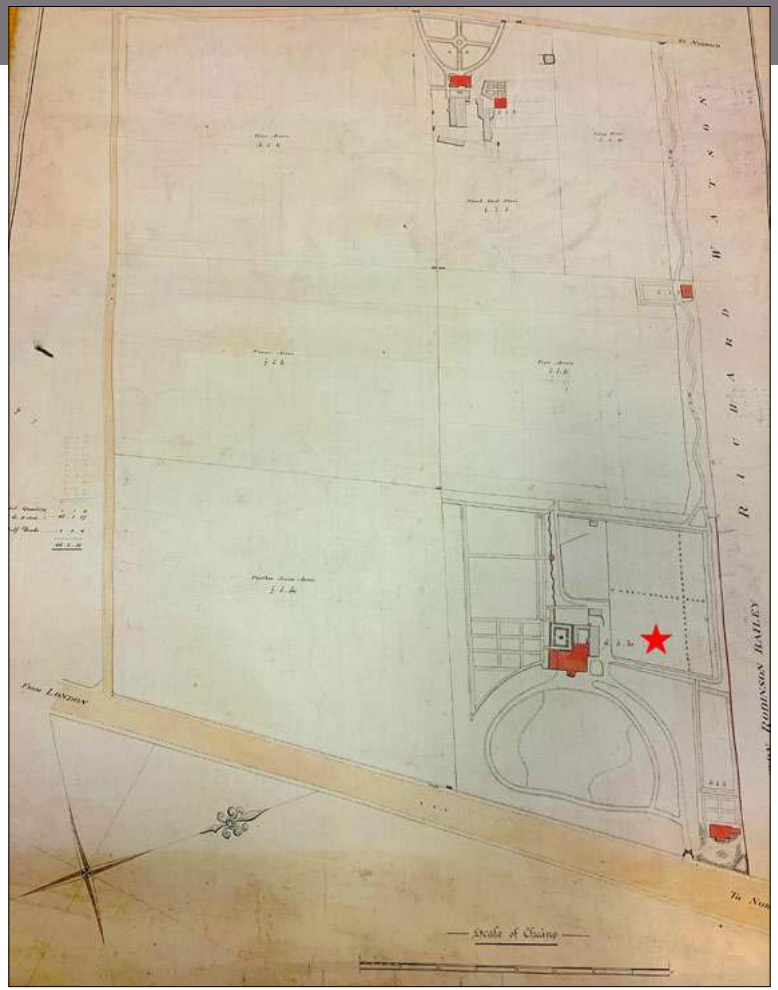




plots. Four of the plots were empty whilst another showed a large house (now gone) next to what is now Unthank Road. My first hypothesis was that Eaton Grove and its gardens were designed along the lines of a fashionable country estate and soon, with limited evidence, I had filled in the blanks beyond the 'pleasure gardens,' with rolling grassland and bucolic cows – a slice of Capability Brown on the edge of Norwich.



However, when viewing the original documents up close a new possibility suggested itself. What I had not appreciated on my copy of the 1827 plan (which I had relied upon for a couple of years) were the fine pencil lines within five of the plots, these pencil lines delineate a grid of over fifty plots and roads. The new evidence seems to indicate that this was not a plan of the estate, rather it was a plan to develop an estate into housing admittedly grander than the congested terraces that would soon be developed by the Unthank family to the north east. This suggestion fits better with the historical context: Enclosure Acts had brought more land



to market; the end of the Napoleonic Wars had stimulated an agrarian recession bringing down the price of land; and the growth of a mercantile middle class increased demand for suburban villas within easy reach of the city's commercial centre.

There is much more to tell about the history of Eaton Grove the house, landscape and gardens. Why is there so much industrial waste edging all the paths? What was the purpose of the sunken serpentine road (a section of which survives) which once linked Newmarket Road to Unthank Road? What happened to the two other houses on the 1827 map which are no longer there? However, history aside, what matters most is that a house and garden designed and laid out over two hundred years ago is still loved, enjoyed and cared for, much as it has been for over ninety years, by hundreds of children able to enjoy all that it has to offer.

The Winter Gardens – a restoration and redevelopment project

Rachel Daniel, Partnership & Engagement Coordinator

On Great Yarmouth's seafront stands the last remaining Victorian seaside Winter Gardens. The beautiful glass and iron structure has a rich history as a hub of seaside entertainment stretching from its arrival on the coast in 1903 to its closure in 2008. Recently it has received funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to restore and redevelop the structure.

WINTER GARDENS HISTORY

This iconic landmark of the seafront did not always live in Great Yarmouth. As with many cast iron and glass houses the building was cleverly engineered to be dismantled and reassembled elsewhere. The Winter Gardens was initially erected in Torquay, Devon, designed by Architects John Watson and William Harvey in 1881 at a cost of just under £13,000. However, it was not a commercial success. Numerous attempts were made to sell the Winter Gardens to Torquay Council as well as seaside towns up and down the coast.

The Winter Gardens was eventually bought by Great Yarmouth Borough Council at the encouragement of J.W. Cockrill, Borough Architect and Surveyor. Cockrill felt that if brought to Great Yarmouth the building could 'lengthen the season with better class visitors, and on wet days provide for 2,000 persons under cover.' They were sold in 1903 for the price of £1300 and transported along the coast via barge and re-erected on the Golden Mile.





The Winter Gardens officially opened in June 1904, with capacity for 3,000 visitors. Not only was the building full of electric arc lighting, making it shine like a beacon on the seafront, it also contained planting. It is important to note that the Winter Gardens was never intended to be the kind of glass house you might find in Kew's botanical gardens. Instead it was a versatile entertainment space with its own interior decorative planting. One commentator in 1913 described the planting as 'a bower of refreshing green with vines trained along wires high in the air and from aloft drop tendrils in every direction, while in the corners are eucalyptus trees of substantial growth towering to the roof and pressing against the glass seeking to gain light'.

Over the hundred plus years that the Winter Gardens has been in use it has had many different purposes for locals and tourists, reflecting the changing nature of seaside entertainment. It has been a space for music and dancing, and has played host to many famous performers. Locals to Great Yarmouth will remember it as the roller-skating rink in which they learned artistic roller-skating, played roller hockey or joined one of the infamous skating chains. In 1966, the interior was converted into a Tyrolean Biergarten with Josef Hofer and his Tyrolean Band complete with painted scenery and colourful umbrellas.

Over the years the Winter Gardens has needed a lot of maintenance, in part due to the experimental nature of the Victorian ironwork and glass structure that meant the building is often too hot in summer and too cold in winter. By 2008 it closed and has been in a state of managed disrepair ever since.

WINTER GARDENS REDEVELOPMENT

However, it has remained a much-loved building. In 2021 Great Yarmouth Borough Council were one of five projects to be awarded a Heritage Horizons grant from the National Lottery to begin developing plans for a sensitive, sustainable restoration of the building.

The project will fully restore the cast iron structure and incorporate a range of new additions that will transform the Winter Gardens into a flexible entertainment space, with an event space with stage and seating, a food and beverage area, and an activity area for local groups and schools. Importantly it will open onto the beach itself, making the building once again feel connected to the sea.

One of the most important design elements of the design is the planting.

Historically all the planting in the Winter Gardens was pushed to the perimeter of the building, with decorative borders that ran along the low plinth walls with a variety of different plant species. In the restored building, planting will take much more of a centre stage, with displays throughout. There will be islands of larger, tropical plants located in the eating area and displays alongside the 'Hellerup' seating area allowing visitors to feel surrounded by greenery.

Species will relate to Victorian planting, using ferns, orchids, and palm trees. The proposed planting scheme is sensitive to the need to balance a comfortable environment for people with a suitable environment for plants. This has required the design team to create features such as movable planters in the centre of







the tower that can be pushed against the walls during events. On an upper mezzanine level a sensory planting area will sit alongside an Activity Area, allowing groups to interact with this specially selected planting.

For the first time the Winter Gardens will also have a small team of dedicated horticulturalists who will be tasked with caring for and developing the planting displays, working with volunteers to share their skills and knowledge with visitors. Planting will also form a key part of the events programme at the Winter Gardens, with talks, tours and workshops focused on exploring the displays and linking in with the flora and fauna of the Norfolk Coast.

Made possible with Heritage Fund

Construction is due to start later this year, with an opening date of 2027.

Kett's Heights Gardens

John and Vanessa Trevelyan

Our previous article in the magazine about Kett's Heights (autumn 2022 issue) described the creation of herb and sensory gardens on the site of former greenhouses. Since then, the most significant development has been the creation of a new step-free access into the site from Ladbrooke Place, funded by Norwich City Council with an official opening by the Lord Mayor in December 2024. This greatly improves access into the site for both anyone with mobility problems and the local community: there have also been improvements to paths and signposting.



Cllrs Vivien Thomas & Mike Stonard, Matt Davies

The new access and the existing access from Kett's Hill meet by the former piggeries; there the Friends have created new seating, decoration and planted areas.

Our involvement with Norwich City Council's Outdoor Projects Network led to a training event at Beth Chatto's garden on developing a dry garden; we then created a small gravel garden on the terrace between the lower and upper greens. Although this has been reasonably successful we decided not to extend it but to use instead an adjoining area for a grass garden, not least as grasses appear pretty resistant to the attentions of the resident muntjac deer.

We have also recently sown wildflower seeds provided by the Outdoor Projects Network in several areas. We asked for





a seed mix that would go into grass, and then found it is best when sown into soil that is 50% bare. Cue much cutting and scarifying: we look forward to seeing the results in 2025 and thereafter.

The herb garden receives occasional new plants and has matured nicely, with the seating provided there making for a very sunny resting place for visitors. The sensory garden is still a work in progress, although we have added planting on the north side (the old chapel wall) of donated fruit trees. We have also built two compost bins and utilised builders' bags for additional compost storage.

All the improvements made over the years helped Norwich City Council make a successful bid for a Green Flag Award in 2024. Part of the application process was the revision of the Management Plan produced jointly by the Friends and the Council. The new Plan contains a commitment to work towards the reopening of a southern entrance onto Gas Hill.

Kett's Heights is open at all times: free guided tours are offered each month between April and October. More information is at kettsheights.co.uk.

Vanessa Trevelyan chairs the Norfolk Gardens Trust and the Friends of Kett's Heights Publicity and Events Committee.

John Trevelyan is a member of the Norfolk Gardens Trust Research Group and former Chair of the Friends of Kett's Heights.



The Heigham The Priscilla Bacon Lodge revisited Centenary

Jack Mackenzie, Head Gardener

I find that an essential part of being a gardener is the ability to think about the past, present, and future simultaneously. Alongside all the planning in the winter, I take the opportunity to write, reflect and admire what the garden has given back to us.

In a previous article about the Priscilla Bacon Lodge in this magazine (Autumn 2023) there was really little planting to show for we had just taken in our first patients. Since then much has happened in our first year of gardening: from autumn 2023 to spring 2024 we planted hundreds of perennials, grasses, shrubs, trees, and annuals. The following winter we planted thousands of bulbs, all the while keeping pace with this new and ever-changing garden.

The eight acres of gardens have been expertly designed and curated by James Alexander-Sinclair—an esteemed designer, RHS Vice President, and all-round horticultural whizz. James has structured the garden in layers that gradually drift outwards to blend seamlessly into the native wildflower meadows and the surrounding Norfolk countryside.

The beds that wrap the main brick building are filled with colour, texture, and seasonal interest. At the main, west-facing entrance—where shade dominates—daffodils emerge between



Aerial shot of Priscilla Bacon Lodge in June



Our first art workshop in May 2024

hellebores in late winter and early spring. From June, *Rosa* 'Madame Alfred Carrière' flowers are complemented by the dusty pink of *Digitalis parviflora* and the vivid feathery greens of hakonechloa. As the garden opens out, the planting reflects the drier, south-facing conditions typical of Norfolk, where the majority of the ornamental planting is found. Here, familiar favourites like *Verbena bonariensis*, euphorbia and nepeta mingle with the structural forms of cardoon, molinia, and asters.

Among these layers, the garden volunteers and I have been diligently planting a variety of tulips, *Allium* 'Purple Sensation' and 'Red Mohican', *Eremurus* 'Romance', and muscari. As we transition towards the patients' gardens, the bulbs shift towards more naturalising species such as *Tulipa turkestanica, Tulipa sylvestris*, snake's head fritillaries, snowdrops and crocuses.

The garden reached its peak between May and July in the first year. Irises, heleniums, crocosmia, valerian, hydrangeas, and eremurus dazzled in the summer sun. However, the exceptionally hot and dry summer meant the season faded more quickly than expected. By August, the plants were already winding down, feeling more like late-September. While verbena provide continuity and



Tulip sylvestris glowing with the first of the fritillaries and Tulip 'Purple Prince' in late March 2024



Geranium 'Rozanne', dianthus and Thalictrum 'Black Stockings' mingle together in late May

asters extend the season, we are excited to introduce more late-flowering annuals and dahlias this year to sustain interest further into autumn.

Our initial focus has been on high-impact planting to achieve immediate colour, height, and density. This has primarily involved verbena, thalictrum, cardoon, salvias, and ornamental grasses. As we move into our second year, we will gradually thin out these elements to create space for slower-growing structural plants such as shrub roses, lilac, daphne, and hydrangeas, along with lower-growing perennials like geums and geraniums. Over time, these will provide the backbone of the planting, interwoven with grasses and annual bulb planting.

James and I are keen for the garden to develop naturally, so self-seeders such as *Valeriana officinalis*, verbena, lychnis, and fennel are liberally encouraged. While managing these may not be our volunteers' favourite task, their presence will add a welcome informality and vibrancy to the design. This, alongside other key features, will help ensure the garden remains engaging and adaptable to the changing climate.

Things haven't always been as controlled as they may sound. Starting a garden from scratch is challenging—perhaps 'all-consuming' is a more fitting description. There are always obstacles, some anticipated and others only revealed in the moment. I predicted that exposure to both the summer sun and westerly winds would pose challenges until we gain more shelter from hedges and trees, but in reality their impact was keener. Our flowering season was noticeably shorter and, by late summer, many plants were already fading into the familiar browns of autumn.

Establishing four and a half acres of native wildflower meadow is no easy feat either. Thankfully, this was prepped and drill-seeded before I arrived. My goal in 2024 was to assess its first year, monitor which plants are thriving, identify areas struggling to establish, and develop a maintenance plan.

It is easy to become absorbed in managing the health and appearance of the garden, as may be evident from all I have written so far. However, this is only part of what happens in the gardens at PBL. I am constantly reminded of the profound impact this space has on the well-being of patients and staff. It is a privilege to share meaningful conversations with patients and families in this setting, connecting over a shared love of gardening.

Looking ahead, we hope to integrate patients even more into the garden's life. Thanks to a generous donation, we now have a beautiful Rhino greenhouse where patients can assist with seed sowing. Alongside my gardening duties, I also run a monthly art workshop in the garden, encouraging participants to engage with nature through drawing and visual art. The message is simple: nature belongs to everyone, at every stage of life, and the cycles of a garden can be a profoundly healing metaphor for our own.

For further information visit: enquiries@priscillabaconhospice.org.uk



Heleniums, Verbena bonariensis, and Kniphofia 'Tawny King' in the cafe garden.



Wildflower meadow in July

Hay Hill: a new urban oasis for Norwich

Gabriella Mogyorosi. Landscape Architect, Norwich City Council.

Hay Hill re-opened to the public in October 2024 with a refreshing new layout, creating a welcoming public garden and event space. This significant revamp has transformed the outdated square into a vibrant, accessible area.

Hay Hill now provides an intimate setting for events and cultural activities, and offers improved links between Norwich Market, Millennium Plain, Gentleman's Walk and Chantry Place.

Using £3.2m from the Central Government Towns Fund, this redevelopment was seen as part of Norwich City Council's broader vision for rejuvenating the city centre.

Formerly known as 'Haymarket', the area operated as a local marketplace for Norfolk farmers until around 1900 when some buildings were demolished to create the open square.

In 1905, a statue celebrating local physician and seventeenth century author Sir Thomas Browne was installed. The statue, surrounded by flowering beds, set in a lawned area with a backdrop of pleached trees, captured the formal garden style of the era and served as a visual attraction rather than a functional public space.

During the 1960s and 70s the pedestrianisation of the city centre sought to improve the flow of foot traffic and reduce vehicle congestion. As a result, these green areas were replaced with tree and shrub planting, paving, a cascade water feature, and an area for market stalls. The cascade water feature and shrub planting were later removed as part of a regeneration scheme in the 1990s that adopted a harder landscape approach.



Curved granite steps provide seating

In 2022 a consultation was held with the public and key stakeholders to inform the development of proposals for Hay Hill and gain insight into how the people would like to see and use Hay Hill in the future.

Many had fond memories of the fountain from the 70s and felt strongly about the water element as part of the proposal. While the presence of Thomas Browne and the celebration of his work was supported, suggestions were also made to relocate the 'Homage to Thomas Browne' artwork, by French sculptors Anne and Patrick Poirier, that was placed on Hay Hill in 2007.



Half-shaded planting mix



Thomas Browne overlooking Hay Hill.

The sculptures divided the audience due to their controversial modernist appearance surrounded by the historic architecture, and by their scattered arrangement that many perceived as tripping hazards. As part of the project, the artwork was relocated to Eaton Park, in a natural setting where people can engage with the pieces in a calming, more intimate environment.

There was a strong agreement among the participants of the consultation that the space lacked seating areas and planting; the current character was dominated by the outdated concrete pavers and steps that created a rather harsh and unwelcoming atmosphere. The space also lacked accessibility features such as level access, handrails and tactile surfacing that resulted in the space being avoided by those with mobility issues.

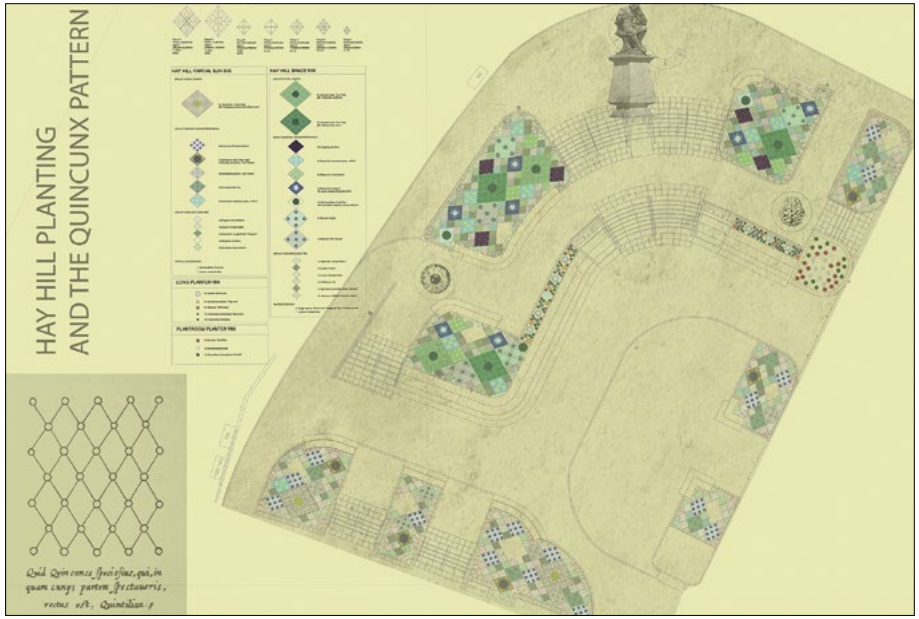
The design process started with a review of topography, with the aim to improve overall accessibility through the incorporation of ramps and steps with handrails that meet appropriate standards. Introducing planters not only supported the naturalistic appearance but also helped to address level differences, to increase accessibility and improve ground conditions for existing trees.

The scientific work of Thomas Browne and his interest in botany and biology inspired the planting scheme. In his book 'The Garden of Cyrus' he writes about the medicinal properties and the unique morphology of plants. He observed that the quincunx – a five-pointed diamond-shaped geometrical pattern – is reflected in flowers, fruit, and the leaf structure of several plant species. The quincunx is now extended to planting patterns and the philosophical exploration of the order of patterns in the chaotic abundance of nature.

The species used in the scheme are perennials and shrubs; while some have medicinal properties (*ie. Digitalis parviflora, Hamamelis x intermedia, Sambuca spp.*), others reflect on the 'order of five' arrangement in morphology such as the five petals of the anemone and hellebore species or the five-lobed leaves of the *Geranium macrorrhizum.*

These are planted in groups of five and four, reflecting the geometry of the quincunx at different scales. At eye level, the diamond grid is perceived less formally and gives a more naturalistic character to the site. The ground-covering mixes were created to accommodate the shady and half shady aspect of the site, with a high percentage of evergreen and semi-evergreen species to provide interest through the winter.

The colour palette of the shady planters is dominated by cooler whites and blues;



The quincunx pattern in the planting layout.



Accessibility improvements include upgraded steps and ramps.

this gradually turns to purples and pinks towards the northern and eastern edge-planters with the half-shady conditions. Plenty of seating is provided near the planting areas, with Corten steel planter edges creating a contemporary feel while complementing the surrounding historic and modern architecture.

The theatre-like event space has been designed to host pop-up activities and provide informal seating for gatherings. The contrasting colour variation between the grey limestone pavers, warm beige seating steps, black water features and white steps aim to provide clear navigation points for the visually impaired.

The blend of practical improvements with aesthetic touches helps position Hay Hill as a key part of the city's urban landscape.

Image credits:
Planting plan: Norwich City Council
All photographs: Credit Steve Adams Photography



Cascading water creates a calming environment.

Cooper's Field

by Jon Hawes Lifelong gardener, with a once in a lifetime chance to create a unique two and a half acre garden in South Norfolk

When I arrived four years ago the garden – and I say garden loosely – was an acre of ground around the bungalow of tired ornamental planting and two oppressive rows of 45-year-old Christmas trees. Beyond that were 1.5 acres of – again loosely – a field.



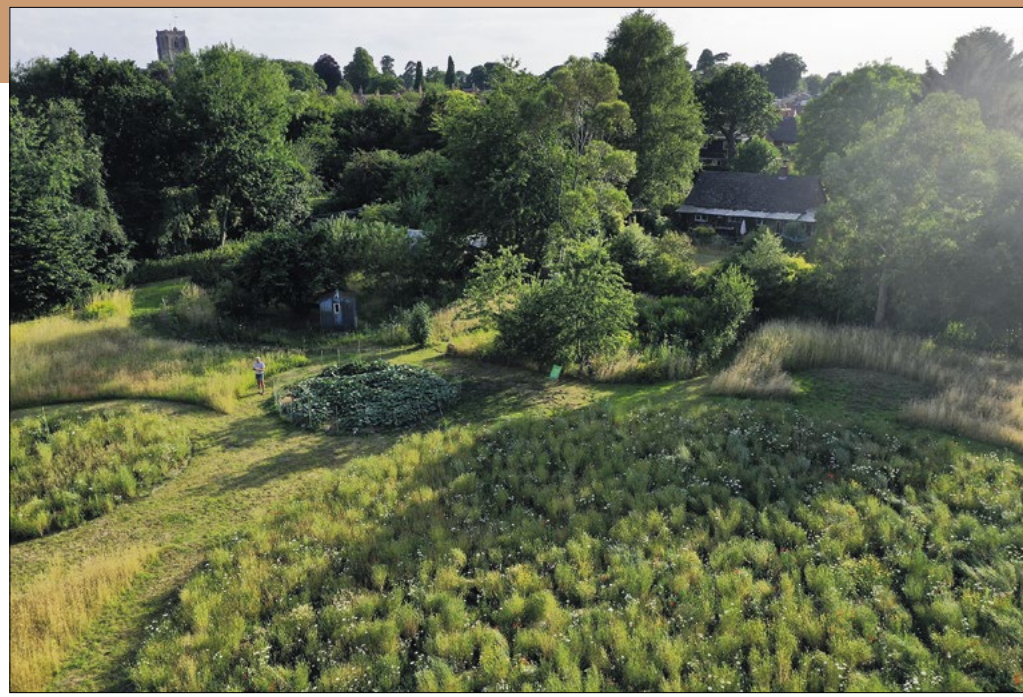
Coopers Field December 2020 Field Before Clearance.

Working with what I've got – mentally, physically, and materially – is an approach I have taken for much of my life and continues with this garden. There is no big budget or team of people working on it. Just me for much of the time. I have help from a friend for a few mornings a week and from my partner when required. I bring the skills and knowledge I've gained from being a self-employed gardener in my early twenties and from my 23 years as a qualified Landscape Architect.



Coopers Field March 2021 Field Post Clearance Marking Out of Circles.

My professional life as a Landscape Architect was not ultimately fulfilling but I am now in an incredibly lucky position to be doing something I've always wanted to do: create my own garden. The size of the garden and the challenges I faced didn't daunt me; as a Landscape Architect, I'd been used to master-planning large sites and I had worked in some unique gardens as a self-employed gardener.



Coopers Field July 2022 Drone Wildflower Circles.

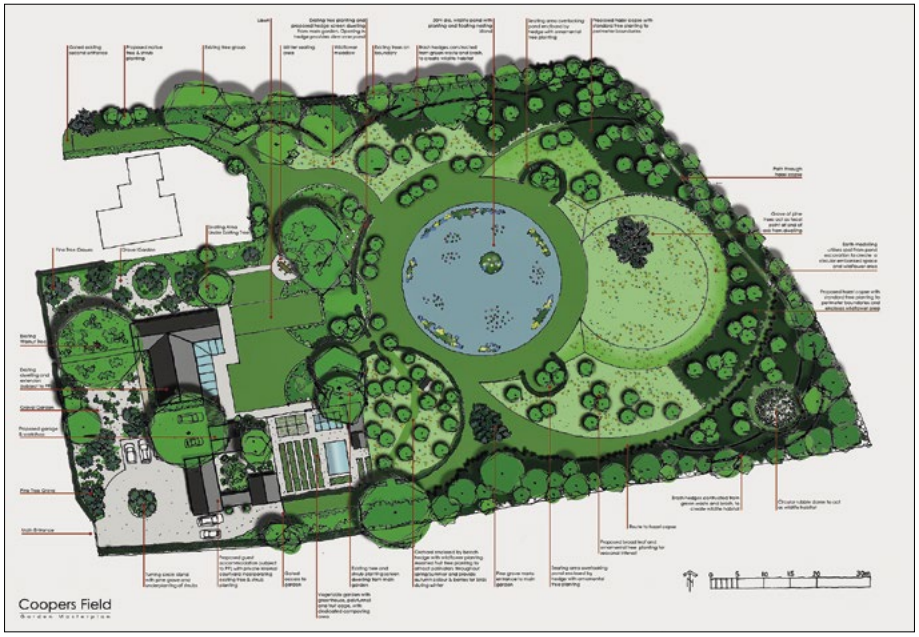
The initial priorities were quickly established: get the field cleared; get the brambles under control; rapidly increase its biodiversity; remove excess conifers and poor-quality trees throughout the garden. I had no intention of eradicating everything that I may have once considered naff or common since is important to me to find the extraordinary in the everyday. Ribes, for example, had been planted everywhere and were earmarked for removal until I discovered they were an important nectar resource for early pollinators. I also had to overcome my prejudice against variegated foliage – if I didn't there wouldn't be much planting left. I exaggerate, but again, I had to work with what I had.

Tree felling began in February 2021 and I have lost count of how many conifers were felled. These were the worst offenders, along with an excess of eucalyptus. The original intention was to fell them all, but, having overcome my prejudices, the most magnificent of the mature specimens still stand and I now feel slightly ashamed that I considered getting rid of them. They have become good friends.

The field was going to be a challenge. Half of it was scrub grassland with areas of bramble; the other half, solid brambles around 1.5m high. A chance knock on the door in January 2021 led to the field being cleared by a local chap Richard with his tractor and flail cutter. Within two hours the field's clearance was complete. What a transformation; I dread to think how long it would have taken to do myself.



Coopers Field July 2022 Drone Wildflower Circles & Tall Grass Areas.



Coopers Field 2022 Masterplan.

A 30m-diameter circle, along with two circles of 10m diameter, were marked out, encompassing as much bramble growth as possible. Richard returned in April to deal with them. The old bramble roots were huge but the resulting turned soil had a great tilth. I was fully aware that this would not totally eradicate the brambles and that thousands of dormant weed seeds would be brought to the surface and germinate. The summer was spent continuing preparation work on the circles that, by the autumn of 2021, were ready for sowing.

I bought a wildflower mix of annual and perennial seed but for budgetary reasons added seeds collected from elsewhere in the garden and field margins. This bulked up quantities and increased the variety of species. Regular hoeing of the circles during spring 2022 kept the unwanted weeds at bay and the resulting summer display of the annuals was stunning.

The 30m wildflower circle also allowed me to test the proportions of a proposed pond. This formed a significant element of the masterplan I drew up in 2022. Having got to know the garden I felt comfortable drawing up ideas that had evolved in my head since arriving. For now, though, the pond is a future consideration.

Whilst the brambles have not been totally eradicated (where they're not wanted), regular mowing of pathways has killed many more and the annual cut and clearance of the tall grass areas within the field has also kept them under control. In summer, the simple mown paths contrast beautifully with the tall grass areas and wildflower circles.

Obviously, all this clearance and ongoing maintenance produces considerable quantities of green waste. Along the north boundary there is now what I call a brash hedge; I am not a fan of the official term of dead hedge as it is far from dead, attracting a wide range of wildlife. All waste matter has been stacked and layered to create a brilliant boundary defence and wildlife habitat. It is continually settling and, as it decomposes, allows more material to be added, avoiding the need for bonfires.



Coopers Field June 2024 Wildflower Circle.

I have only touched on a few parts of the journey so far. There is much more to tell and still a long way to go, but I hope it's given you a flavour of my approach and what I'm trying to achieve.

Visit Jon on Instagram: @coopers_field

Some Norfolk apples

Richard Hobbs, Norfolk plantsman associated with Little Plumstead Walled Garden.

In the 13th century a Norfolk farmer paid his rent with 200 pearmains and four hogsheads of cider. The document recording this information is the first written mention of apples in England. Approximately 80 apples are known to have been raised in Norfolk and about half are still in cultivation. Those lost include the wonderful sounding 'Belle Grideline' and 'Sieley's Mignonne'. Many of the apples occurred on large estates, including Sandringham and Blickling, while others were raised by nurserymen such as George Lindley of Sprowston. Here I discuss some interesting Norfolk-raised apples and two that have made Norfolk their home.

'Sandringham' is a very good, sweet and crispy pearmain type that keeps well. (Pearmains are somewhat elongated and pear-shaped.) First exhibited at The National Apple Congress of October 1883 it is well worth growing today. The Royal Horticultural Society took advantage of an exceptional apple season and organised the event in Chiswick Gardens at short notice. Extended for a week it was a huge success with 236 exhibitors presenting 10,150 dishes of apples. Charles Penny, head gardener at Sandringham, raised the plant from 'Winter Pearmain'. Charles was a noted pomologist, having worked for several apple nurserymen and at many important gardens before spending the last 17 years of his working life at Sandringham.

'Caroline' is a long-keeping dual-purpose apple which is green flushed pink. It arose as a seedling at Blickling Hall gardens in 1822 – named after Lady Suffield, daughter of John Hobart 2nd Earl of Buckinghamshire and wife of William Harbord 2nd Baron Suffield. Believed lost in the early 1900s 'Caroline' was revived from a tree found in a garden near Oxburgh. It was Caroline who, in 1793, commissioned the building of the Blickling Mausoleum for her father and his two wives.



Sandringham © East of England Apples & Orchards Project



Caroline © East of England Apples & Orchards Project

'Norfolk Beefing' may well be Norfolk's most famous apple cultivar. Over centuries this apple has adopted a vast number of names including,'Catshead Beaufin', 'Reeds Baker', 'Norfolk Beaufin', and Norfolk Biffin'. The earliest record of this apple is in the Mannington Hall estate records for 1698. The origin of the apple is obscure; it may have come from the *Beaufin* district of France,



Norfolk Beefing © East of England Apples & Orchards Project



Norfolk Dumpling
© East of England Apples & Orchards Project

Holland or Hertfordshire. The big question is whether the name derives from Beaufin or is it because when cooked it resembles beef and was used in mincemeat? Robert Hogg in his Fruit Manual (1884) states that "it is extensively cultivated in Norfolk where, besides being applied to general culinary purposes, the apples are baked in ovens and form the dried fruits met among confectioners and fruiterers called Norfolk Biffins." It is reported that having finished baking their bread bakers would load the cooling ovens with apples to



Doctor Harvey *© East of England Apples & Orchards Project*

produce the sweetmeat, biffin. The skin of the apple is rather thick and green and, when ripe in October, is almost entirely covered with a shiny brownish red. When picked in October it can be stored and still usable in May though by then the flesh is a rather unappetising deep brown.

Norfolk Dumpling is a cooking apple with a very waxy greenish-yellow skin and prominent ribs. It has a delicate flavour and cooks down to a light golden puree. It is best during September and October. It first came to notice in 1820, was then thought lost but was rediscovered in the former rectory at North Creake.

'Dr Harvey' was not raised in this county but is very much associated with it. In *The Apples of England* (1948) H V Taylor refers to the fact that "Baskets of Dr Harvey can still be purchased in the Norwich Market. It is one of the oldest recorded apples, referred to by Parkinson as "a faire, greate goodley apple; and very well relished." The apple is a medium-sized cooker, yellow in colour often with a light orange flush and with light brown russeting around the base and the stalk cavity. It is best from October to February. Lindley in the Pomological Magazine (1828-30) says that "When baked in an oven which is not too hot, these apples are most excellent; they become sugary and will keep a week to ten days. Furnishing for dessert a highly flavoured sweetmeat." The first record is from Essex in 1629. The man himself was born in Saffron Walden where his father was a yeoman farmer and master rope-maker. Dr Gabriel Harvey was an influential writer and Latin scholar who became master of Trinity College Cambridge. He was a somewhat controversial figure and was described by a colleague as "an argumentative and malicious pedant". This apple is still around today and worth growing; it is reliably productive and fluffs up well when stewed.

'Golden Noble' was discovered by Patrick Finnegan, gardener to Sir Thomas Hare of Stow Bedon Hall. It was sent to the RHS in 1820 and soon became a widely grown apple. This cooker is best from October to December. It is described as limpid yellow and if exposed to strong sunlight has a slight orange flush. It is a relatively sweet apple and when cooked is a lovely golden colour. It is worth growing today and can still be seen along with many other interesting apples in the garden of Stow Bardolph Hall.



Golden Noble *© East of England Apples & Orchards Project*

Many of these Norfolk apples and more can be seen at the Little Plumstead Walled Garden, Blofield Community Orchard and Hillfield Nursery, Haddiscoe. Since 2003 the Norfolk-based charity East of England Apples & Orchards Project has been safeguarding the region's rich heritage of apple, plum, pear and cherry varieties. Visit: www.applesandorchards.org.uk



Espalier apples at Lt Plumstead

'Holmwood' – There's No Place Like It

Margaret And Henry Atkinson

We moved house within Elsing three years ago. Now, growing older, we bought a bungalow, leaving behind a quaint village cottage with its steps and narrow stairs. Paradoxically, we had inherited a 'three-dimensional' garden: the front half being level but the back half folded up like some massive origami triangle, forming a 45 degree hill.

Before Victorian times the site may have been a quarry before becoming the location of three cottages demolished in the 1950s. After that it became a school garden and play area for the next-door village school. That closed in the 1980s but the 3m high 'ball-proof' boundary school fence remained. 'Holmwood' was built in the '80s.

Thousands of years ago, following an ice age, the bluff at the back of the house was probably shaped by pre-Wensum melt waters. Beyond and above our garden is now a stand of protected deciduous trees, dominating the skyline, enhancing our backdrop and keeping east winds out.

These garden heights are now interspersed by zig-zag walkways and stairs, allowing access to most parts – even for old people.

We inherited a couple of small flat lawns, a mole, a resident hedgehog, up to six squirrels and two pheasants. The pheasants have a penchant for hosta leaves, which they peck frequently. Most people just have slugs eating their hostas ...

Margaret is the keen gardener; she has single-handedly spread massive builders' bags of topsoil and compost over and into the poor hillside ground and helped encourage the existing, mainly random, greenery to cling to the slopes. This labouring work belies her 79 years.



We have bought saplings from the 'Million Trees for the Jubilee'. Most took, though some on the higher land suffered from water shortages. Undaunted, we bought another 50 bare-roots when there was a second



issue of these trees early in 2024. Fortunately, these have been unaffected by any passing muntjac or Chinese water deer.

In spring/summer the shrub-laden, west-facing, hillside garden has first a sweep of bluebells. Next, there is a sequence of pink, then red and yellow with a mass of freeloading foxgloves aided by begonias, poppies, lavender, broom, followed by hypericum. All help our objective of securing the ground surface and minimising soil creep. We have also installed a sleeper retaining-wall and made good the 21 steps to the top of the escarpment, our backdrop.

The flatter front and side garden lawns have borders with burgeoning fruit trees, plus the occasional quince or ginkgo. We also have roses and, later in the summer, agapanthus flowers rise up and bloom in the bluest of blue.

After three years here, this is very much a work in progress.



AGM

AGM 2025

Saturday 12th April at 2pm.

All Saints Church, West Acre.

Our AGM will be held at All Saints Church, set on the classic Church Green at West Acre. The church is of medieval origin but was largely remodelled in the 17th century. Next to the church are the striking Grade 1 listed remains of the original gatehouse to West Acre Priory, built in the 14th century. Today, it serves as a historic entrance to the driveway for Abbey House.

After our AGM, refreshments will be served before we stroll to explore the Abbey House garden, which holds a natural landscape with remarkable features. One of these is the River Nar, arguably Norfolk's most important and unspoilt chalk stream, which traverses the garden from east to west and is crossed by charming wooden bridges. Along its shallow wet banks, reeds and grasses flourish, providing a rich habitat for insects, birds and mammals. In the spring, members can enjoy the blossoms on the trees as well as naturalised drifts of daffodils along the drive and by the riverbank. On a mound on the far side of the garden sits another feature; the dramatic ruins of the 12th century Augustinian medieval priory.

Please register online to attend. Registration will open in mid March.







Garden visits

Sunday 1st June 2 - 5pm

East Carleton Manor, East Carleton

A large garden of 10 acres designed by Hazel Chapman in the 1970s. This is a garden packed with many features and much horticultural interest. It includes many distinctive trees such as parrottia*, Cornus kousa,* catalpa and fastigiate copper beech. In the autumn there are wonderful colours from the many acers, gingkos and liquidambars. Spring and summer bring climbing roses, trumpet vines, geraniums and, in the walled garden, a border of beautiful hydrangeas. A classic wisteria winds over a moon gate. Other notable features are the impressive and immaculate lawn with views to a formal lake stocked with water lilies. For those wanting to explore further there are several small feeder ponds to be discovered. There is also a winter garden and a summerhouse from which one can sit and view the surrounding knot garden. Close to the house and its terrace, there is perhaps the garden's most distinctive feature – an elegant Italianate formal pond bordered along one side by a long pergola and on the other, with a row of stately columnar cypresses. *Teas.*

Booking required and will open on the website in early May.



Saturday 21st June 2 - 5pm

Old Manor Farmhouse, Swanton Abbott.

The Grade 2 listed building is a fine Dutch gabled 17th century wool merchants house. When the owners rescued the property in 1989 it was derelict and the gardens had been lost. It has been restored along with a historic thatched barn which won the 1991 Graham Allen Conservation Award. Both now sit within a carefully composed and beautifully planted sequence of garden rooms surrounding the buildings, interlinked with walks and lawns.
From the field with which they began, the concept was to recreate a garden in keeping with the period of the house. The first part of the garden to be planted was the distinctive geometric knot garden of box surrounded by pleached hornbeam, inspired by one seen at Moseley Old Hall in Staffordshire.

A further small knot garden is to be found at the front of the property. From the moment of entering the garden the eye is led to points of interest that repay exploration. The drive is lined with pollarded London planes and ingenious use is made of tiered rows of box, which form a contoured bank around garden steps. The garden continues into lawned herbaceous borders with tucked away garden rooms including a striking purple beech enclosure beautifully set with pink hydrangeas, a shade garden and a folly garden. A lavender walk leads around to a formal potager garden enclosed by pleached apple and pear trees and a clematis and rose arch takes one on to a paddock and tennis court. The garden was shortlisted in the Nations Favourite Gardens for the East of England in 2023.
Teas.



Photo credit Simon Smith

Tuesday 8th July. 2 - 5pm.

Sennowe Park, Guist

Sennowe in its present form was completed between 1906 and 1912 for its flamboyant Edwardian owner, T A Cook, grandson of Thomas Cook the travel agent. It was built, along with its wooded pleasure grounds, by a no less flamboyant Edwardian architect, George Skipper of Norwich. It very much expresses the self-confident optimism of the early twentieth century.
The main entrance to the park is through two gate houses with elaborately ornamental ironwork. The long drive rolls through a woodland setting; the park itself is gently undulating.

The Italianate terraced lawns are laid in symmetry on two large terraces, with sweeping views to the park, a 10 acre lake (created by Skipper from the River Wensum) and the very picturesque Grade 2 listed boat house. The terraces are delineated with fine stone balustrading and handsome ornamental urns, statues and staircases.
The Winter Garden, originally built to double as a ballroom, is a statuesque ironwork structure – a 70ft glasshouse containing a fountain and a chequered marble floor. It is home in summer, to a beautiful display of flowering plants.
Teas.



Saturday 19th July 2 - 5pm

Manor Farm, Coston

This beautiful five-acre garden, set in a larger estate, has evolved over the last 25 years, carefully developed by its owners and through the skilled dedication of long term head gardener Alan. It is formed by a series of garden rooms defined by wonderful old brick walls and use of formal beech, hornbeam and box hedges. Walls are adorned with old climbing roses and borders are filled with classic herbaceous shrubs underplanted with annuals. There is a kitchen garden, which is divided formally with old sleepers, a white-themed garden and a sensual grasses garden to enjoy. A notable feature of the garden is its collection of contemporary sculptures set in imaginative ways and also several individually designed gates and archways between some of the garden rooms. On the periphery of the garden, to the front and rear, wildflower meadows create a transition between formal planting and the informal woodland beyond, which includes a small arboretum. *Teas.*



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RHS Show Exhibitor 2025

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Wednesday 6th August. Afternoon.

The Topiary Garden, Sandringham.

An exclusive opportunity for a group of up to 40 members to enjoy a guided visit to the new Topiary Garden at Sandringham. We are delighted to be led by head gardener Jack Lindfield. Afterwards, the group will be free to enjoy the rest of the gardens at their leisure. Sandringham House, the Royal Family's country residence, enjoys 60 acres of glorious gardens, and is perhaps the finest of all the Royal gardens.
In early 2023, one acre of the West lawn of Sandringham House, was dug up and redeveloped to form a new formal topiary garden, combining a symmetrical design of winding paths with naturalistic planting. The formal planting comprises more than 5,000 *Taxus baccata*, commonly known as English Yew which was chosen for its resilience and timeless beauty. The young hedging plants are to be topiarized as they grow but the distinctive character of the garden is established by the inclusion of 34 mature pieces of outstanding specimen topiary, some already 80 years old. In a scheme intended to improve biodiversity, plants which encourage pollinators were also selected with the installation of more than 4,000 herbaceous perennial plants and bulbs. These included varieties of veronica, delphinium, phlox, echinacea, lavender and rose.

Booking required and will open on the website in late June.



Talks

Advolly Richmond: A Quick Introduction to the Social History of Gardens 1500 - 1914
Saturday 22nd March 2025 - 2pm
Tickets available mid-February 2025

2025 AUTUMN TALKS SERIES
Andrew Sankey: The Wonderful Norah Lindsay
Saturday 11 October 2025 - 2pm
Tickets available mid-September 2025

Catherine Horwood: Beth Chatto - A life with plants
Thursday 30 October 2025- 6.30pm
ONLINE TALK (Zoom)
Tickets available late-September 2025

David Marsh: Castles for Cows & Palaces for Poultry
Saturday 29 November 2025 - 2pm
Tickets available late-October 2025

Talks are held at Bawdeswell Village Hall, Reepham Road NR20 4RU
TICKETS:
In person talks
- £5 members / £10 guests
Online talks - free for members only
Order tickets online: **Norfolkgt.org.uk**

Committee

President
The Marquess of Cholmondeley KCVO DL

Chair Vanessa Trevelyan
chair@norfolkgt.org.uk

Vice Chair & Research Sally Bate
research@norfolkgt.org.uk

Secretary Roger Lloyd
secretary@norfolkgt.org.uk

Treasurer James Warren
quaestor@norfolkgt.org.uk

Membership Louise Rice
membership@norfolkgt.org.uk

NGT Magazine Sue Roe
magazine@norfolkgt.org.uk

Press & Publicity Hilary Talbot
press@norfolkgt.org.uk

Visits Kate Lyons
visits@norfolkgt.org.uk

Talks Penny Coombes
talks@norfolkgt.org.uk

Planning David Willis
planning@norfolkgt.org.uk

Grants Tina Douglas
education@norfolkgt.org.uk

Magazine Volunteers
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Readers' Gardens
If you would like your garden to be featured in the NGT Magazine please contact us. We welcome hearing about all gardens big or small, town or country and whether you are open to the public or not. Contact: sueroe8@icloud.com



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