

The University of Oxford

116

# Botanic Garden & Arboretum

Friends'  
newsletter

Spring /  
Summer 2024



# From the Editor

By Chris Thorogood

The living collections at OBG hold intrinsic conservation, education and research value, as well as the power to engage people with the importance of plants. Plant Records Officer, Dr Sarah Edwards recorded 10,509 living plant records (i.e. plants recorded as being alive in the collections) at the Botanic and Arboretum, during an audit at the end of 2023. This number is made up of 5,743 taxa (4,680 species) from 271 families (an increase of seven families since 2023). Some of these taxa are unique to OBG - in other words, they exist nowhere else in living collections internationally.

OBGA's collections also support a range of biodiversity besides plants, including fungi and insects: 84 invertebrate species were recorded at the Arboretum in 2023 including *Zygina nivea*, a rarely-recorded leafhopper that arrived in the UK from the continent in 2010 (our thanks to volunteer John Bloomfield for this record) - see page 7 for more information.



An autumnal display at the Botanic Garden in November

We enjoyed beautiful displays of late autumn colour at the Botanic Garden and the Arboretum back in November. Visitors met with a miscellany of pumpkins, squashes and other colourful autumn fruits upon entering the Garden. On the first of that month, Secretary-General of ASEAN Dr Kao Kim Hourn visited the University and delivered a lecture on 'The Future of ASEAN: Challenges and Opportunities Beyond 2025' at the Divinity School. After the lecture, I had the pleasure of joining Dr Kao and his team to discuss OBG's collaborative research in Southeast Asia, which focuses on the biology and conservation of *Rafflesia* (the genus with the world's largest flowers).

Later in November, it was a privilege to be shown the accounts and lease register for Oxford Botanic Garden, by the Rev'd Dr Andrew Bowyer in Magdalen College's library. We discovered that the Botanic Garden's first keeper, Jacob Bobart the Elder, was paid a handsome £2.15 for taking some plant cuttings (equating to over £250 in today's money). One hopes his cuttings took root!

More recent propagation successes are reported in this issue of the Friends' Newsletter - from ginkgo seeds (p. 4) and rare carnivorous plants (p. 5) - to species of global

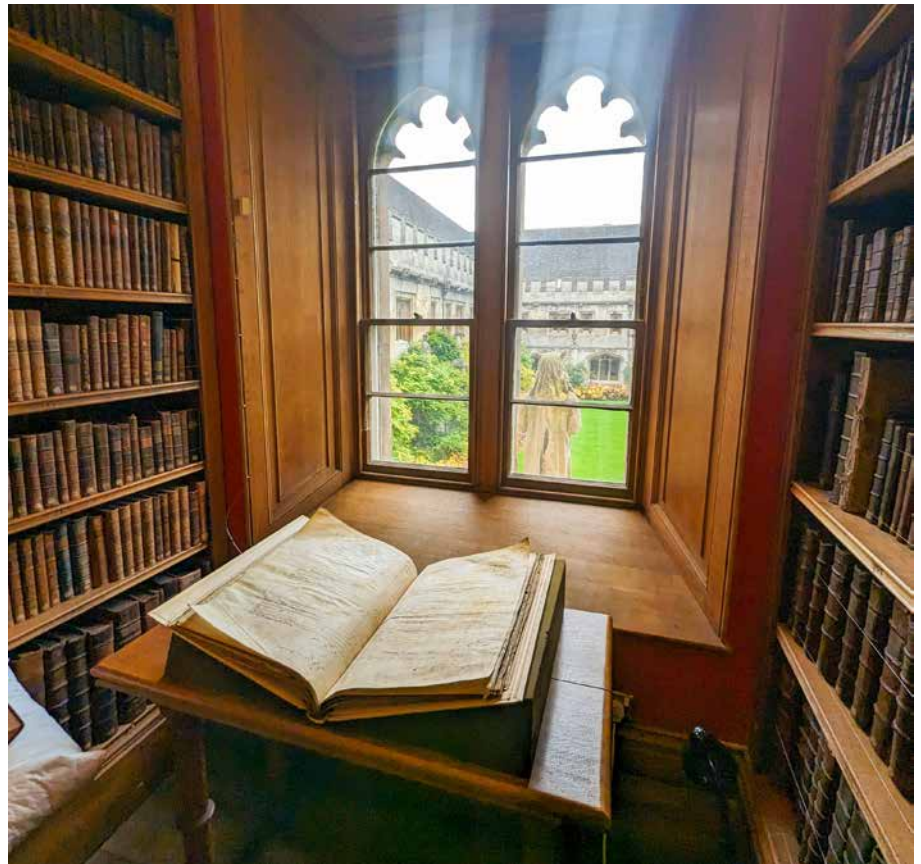


Secretary-General of ASEAN Dr Kao Kim Hourn and Chris Thorogood in the Divinity School

conservation concern. Indeed, we work with partners around the world to propagate and conserve rare flora, for example the Wollemi pine (the sole living representative of an evolutionary line thought to be long-extinct until its discovery in Australia in the 1990s) (see p. 7) and closer to home, the black poplar (as described by Mark Brent on p. 4). At a time when 30% of the world's tree species are at risk of extinction - trees we all depend upon - this work couldn't be more important.

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The accounts and lease register for Oxford Botanic Garden at Magdalen College Library

# From the Director

By Simon Hiscock



Looking back at my message at the start of 2023 I note my great optimism for development at the Arboretum in its 60th year linked to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF)-funded 'Gateway to Nature' project to create a Visitor & Learning Centre (VLC) and deliver a new public programme engaging people with nature. At that time the first phase (Development Phase) of the project was in full swing and its public programme was already delivering extensive engagement with diverse new communities and by the summer went on to deliver far beyond all expectations - winning great praise from the NLHF assessors. Sadly, this was not the case for the capital strand of the project taking concept designs for the VLC through to a planning application. This was because of cost escalation, complex planning considerations, and the absence

of a major donation towards matching the NLHF funding. Regrettably, we therefore agreed with the NLHF to pause the project until such time as funding could allow resumption. Notwithstanding this, work on other capital projects at the Arboretum did proceed and work to build a new propagation facility (the 'Conservation Hub') began with the removal of the fir plantation behind the tractor shed. With planning permission secured we anticipate this crucial (donor-funded) new facility being completed by summer 2024. Work on restoring and creating new paths has also begun utilizing funds raised by the Friends' Paths Appeal.

Autumn 2023 saw the delivery of another highly successful Autumn Fair at the Arboretum. On a beautiful sunny day in October, over 1,600 people enjoyed the

autumn colour of our trees, engaging with woodland crafts, sampling artisan produce, and being entertained by the Horns of Plenty. Congratulations to the Friends' volunteers whose cake stall raised a record-breaking £1,400 towards the paths appeal.

October also brought the opening of a unique exhibition, 'Fungi', in the Herbarium Room at the Botanic Garden. The exhibition, designed by Pia Östlund, celebrated the diversity of fungi as seen through the eyes of amateur painter and naturalist Lady Katharine Nicholson (1912-1972), who observed the fungi in and around homes she shared with her husband Sir Godfrey Nicholson BT (1901-1991) and family in Berkshire. Most of the paintings on display were illustrated between 1936 and 1950 and had never before been displayed in public. The exhibition was sponsored by her daughter Emma, Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne who has become an active supporter of fundraising for new glasshouses at the Botanic Garden. Opened by Professor Baroness Kathy Willis on October 5th the exhibition ran until November 18th (extended into November by popular demand), during which time it was visited by over 3,500 people. The opening event provided an opportunity to introduce many of Baroness Nicholson's family and friends to the Botanic Garden and our ambitions for new glasshouses.

Continuing with the fungi theme, the annual Fungus Foray at the Arboretum took place on National Fungus Day (October 7th). Led by Professor Richard Fortey (President of the Fungus Survey of Oxfordshire) this hugely popular event attracted over 100 people who learned about the incredible variety of fungi native to our woodlands and the crucial role they play in ecology through their mycorrhizal associations with plants.

2023 ended with the long-awaited return of the Christmas Fair in early December. The fair had not been held since 2019 because of the pandemic and its aftermath and came back stronger than ever, with more stalls, food and drink offerings, and family-friendly activities than ever before. Word of its return certainly spread (especially through our social media channels) and record numbers of people visited the Garden - more than 5,500 over the two days - to enjoy a unique Christmas shopping experience. This was a joyous way to celebrate the end of another successful year, toasted with mulled wine or, better still, a dram of Black Pine Whisky, which I am delighted to say is on sale at the Lamb & Flag on St Giles, a favourite haunt of Tolkien and his fellow Inklings.

# News from the Garden

By Mark Brent

'The rain it raineth every day', sang Feste in Twelfth Night; so it seemed this winter: the Botanic Garden suffered from one of the wettest winters in recent memory, and in early January the River Cherwell breached its banks and flooded the Lower Garden. The Environment Agency has a monitoring station close to the Garden's glasshouses, and the peak river levels recorded there in January were just shy of 6.18 metres, last recorded in 2012. Despite the inclement weather the horticultural team has continued with the essential winter maintenance and the Garden has looked presentable throughout the winter months.



Horticultural Apprentices George Wickson and George Harwood-Edwards

OBGAs two Horticultural Apprentices have played a key role in supporting the maintenance of the Garden since their arrival at the end of September. George Harwood-Edwards and George Wickson have settled in

well and have seized the opportunity to learn and acquire new skills. Their placements are dependent on the generosity of donors, to whom we are very grateful. Over many decades Oxford Botanic Garden has launched the careers of many horticulturists. From the most recent cohort to graduate from OBGAs, Jack Willerton is now studying at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. Graduating with Distinction, Jack recently won a Highly Commended Award for his category and an Intermediate and Advanced Apprentice Award from the University Apprenticeship Department for his achievements during his time here at OBGAs.

During the autumn it was a pleasure to host Ken Burras, whom readers may recall was the Superintendent of the Botanic Garden from the mid-1950s until 1986. Ken retains an incredible enthusiasm for plants and a deep love of the Botanic Garden. The opportunity to pick Ken's brain proved invaluable during his visit, and I gained many insights into the development of the Garden, which included the construction of the present glasshouses and the acquisition of the Arboretum during his time here.



Ken Burras and Mark Brent in the Arid House

John Letts, a specialist in heritage grain crops, produces the organically grown grain used in the production of Oxford Physic Gin. Working with John we have established four trial beds in the Lower Garden adjacent to the 'Plants that Changed the World' display, that demonstrate elements of grain evolution and genetic diversity. Over 90 species and



Heritage grain being sown with John Letts

varieties of grain have been planted, ranging from Neolithic bere barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) to Ethiopian black barley, as well as modern 21st Century wheat varieties such as 'Skyfall' (*Triticum aestivum*).

This spring will see the installation of interpretation boards for the Literary Garden: a collaboration between Fiona Stafford, Professor of English Language and Literature, and the Director, Professor Simon Hiscock.

This newly interpreted area will highlight the work of literary authors in connection with the Botanic Garden along with some of the plants they feature.

Finally, the Botanic Garden has been involved with propagating seeds from 'Hibakujumoku' ginkgo trees, which survived the atomic blast

in Hiroshima. These seeds were distributed globally by the Mayors for Peace organisation. The first seedlings have germinated, under the care of Lewis Barrett our Senior Botanical Propagator. Saplings will later be planted across Oxford as living symbols of hope and peace.



Ginkgo biloba seedling

## Native Species Conservation: the black poplar

By Mark Brent

Planting Black Poplar in Emberton Park, Olney

In January 2023 I received an email from Greg Fairley who is a founder of the conservation group, Community Trees MK in North Buckinghamshire, seeking advice on how to plant black poplar (*Populus nigra*). Thirty years ago, my father was a Countryside Officer for Buckinghamshire County Council. He was an ardent conservationist who undertook much work to reintroduce black poplars to the countryside. Together with Roger Jefcoate, Deputy Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire (also known as 'the phantom tree planter') he pioneered guerrilla tree planting long before it became fashionable! Several of the trees they planted can be seen around Thame.

Nationally, black poplars have declined in recent years. Surveys estimate that there are only 7000 black poplars in England, Wales and Ireland, of which 600 are female. Their decline can be attributed to their exacting requirements: male and female specimens in close proximity, and the need for damp ground to germinate, which is impacted by drainage for agriculture.

In January 2024 OBGAs supported Community Trees MK in planting 115 black poplars, carefully selected for their genetic diversity, at Emberton Park in Olney.



# News from the Glasshouses

By Mark Brent

The Glasshouses provided welcome sanctuary from the inclement weather this winter. Highlights in the Cloud Forest House included orchids such as *Dendrochilum glumaceum*, with its delicate, long feathery pendulous highly scented racemes, and the trailing inflorescences of *Coelogyne ovalis* tumbling between the ferns. Away from public view, *Begonia breviflora* put on a beautiful private display in the Nursery Houses - its leaves rival the colour of any flower.

Senior Botanical Propagator, Lewis Barrett, has propagated many new species in support of OBG's research and conservation work. Interesting new additions to the carnivorous plant collections include *Nepenthes burbidgeae* and the 'bat pitcher plant' (*N. hemsleyana*) - both Bornean endemics. The latter has evolved an intriguing symbiosis with bats in nature: the bats roost inside the pitchers, and their droppings release nutrients that benefit the plant.

Regular visitors to the Arid House cannot have failed to notice the specimen of *Agave salmiana* var. *ferox*. For years we have been patiently waiting for it to show signs of blooming; should it do so, we will need to remove panes of glass to make way for the tree-like proportions of its blossom.



*Aristolochia* in bloom in the Nursery Houses; *Victoria cruziana*; *Agave salmiana* var. *ferox*; *Justicia carnea*; *Coelogyne ovalis*; *Dendrochilum glumaceum*; *Sarracenia* hybrids in the Carnivorous Plant House in December; Magdalen tower behind the carnivorous house; The leaves of *Begonia breviflora* in the Nursery Houses - they rival the colour of any flower.

# News from the Arboretum

By Ben Jones

The year began with the welcome colours and fragrances that mark the short days of winter at the Arboretum in the form of witch hazel, mahonia, and daphne. Winter sweet (*Chimonanthus praecox*) is another fragrant plant that can brighten up a cold, crisp day in winter. It is at this time that the Arboretum's hazardous tree survey work is undertaken. Trees do need to be removed occasionally due to their age and decline, although where possible, we leave specimens to grow

old gracefully. Fencing these trees off or relocating pathways, both reduce the risk they might otherwise pose to visitors. Only when all such options have been exhausted, do we make the decision to remove 'high risk' trees. If and when this happens, the trees are still put to good use: branch wood, for example, is put through the chipper, and the resulting woodchip is then used for pathways or placed around new plantings. The wildflower meadows are grazed during the winter. This year, nearly 200 Castlemilk Moorit store lambs grazed the sward around Pylon Meadow and Palmer's Leys. These sheep play a vital role in maintaining the meadows: they graze the excess grass and their split hooves press seeds through the thatch and into the soil, encouraging yellow rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) which parasitises grasses, enabling other wild flowers to flourish.

Castlemilk Moorit sheep are a rare breed from the early 20th century. Sir John Buchanan-Jardine initiated a breeding programme on his Castlemilk Estate in Dumfriesshire. By selectively breeding Manx Loghtan, Moorit Shetland, and Wild Mouflon, he aimed to create a breed that would not only enhance the beauty of his parklands but also produce a unique, fine, and kemp-free Moorit coloured wool.



Left and below: © Fisher Studios

Late winter colour at the Arboretum



Witch hazel at the Arboretum



Fungi at the Arboretum



Gorse in flower at the Arboretum



A black pine at the Arboretum

© Fisher Studios

© Fisher Studios

Do remember the monthly 'Insight Tour', held on the first Wednesday of each month. Check the 'What's On' page for further information.

## Invertebrates at the Arboretum

The Arboretum hosts a wealth of invertebrate species. Over the years, twenty four species of butterfly and 437 species of moth have been recorded at the site. In 2023, volunteer John Bloomfield recorded many interesting new insect species at the Arboretum, including batman hoverfly (*Myathropa florea*) - an insect identified by its distinctive yellow and black colouring and the 'Batman' symbol-like markings on its thorax, and common copperback (*Ferdinandea cuprea*), which is distinguished by its grey-striped thorax, copper-coloured abdomen, and conspicuously-marked wings. From spring to early autumn, these hoverflies can be found on ox-eye daisies (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) in the meadows alongside red squash bug (*Corizus hyoscyami*) - a species gradually extending its range northwards due to climate change. This insect can be found on common ragwort (*Jacobaea vulgaris*). Rhododendron leafhopper (*Graphocephala fennahi*) is a summer resident of the Arboretum. This leafhopper arrived in Europe in the early 20th century, and is often found on *Rhododendron ponticum*. Another leafhopper species, *Zygina nivea*, shows a preference for bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*); since 2010 the species has become frequent in South Oxfordshire. Look out for all these invertebrates as the days become longer and warmer.



Photographed by John Bloomfield

*Corizus hyoscyami*



Photographed by John Bloomfield

Rhododendron Leafhopper  
(*Graphocephala fennahi*)



Photographed by John Bloomfield

*Ferdinandea cuprea*

## The Wollemi pine

By Ben Jones

In 1994, the discovery of a grove of unusual conifers in a remote canyon in the Wollemi wilderness of Southeast Australia gained international attention. The remarkable find occurred during a canyoning expedition led by David Noble, an off-duty officer of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The trees he discovered were surviving relics of a lineage previously known only from the fossil record.

The Wollemi pine (*Wollemia nobilis*) is listed as critically endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. All known wild individuals - which amount to fewer than 100 - are confined to just four sites, located within a single warm-temperate rainforest canyon system. The trees' restricted distribution makes them particularly vulnerable, and so good candidates for international conservation.

A new initiative to protect the Wollemi pine was launched by the Botanic Gardens of Sydney in October 2023. The initiative aimed to distribute genetically diverse specimens around the globe as part of a 'meta collection programme'. So-called 'six packs' - groups of six saplings representing the full spectrum of known genetic diversity - were distributed to six sites across the

UK, including Harcourt Arboretum. The project seeks to promote the health, longevity, and adaptive resilience of the species while contributing to global biodiversity conservation. Our specimens will be planted in late spring.



Dr Cathy Offord at Harcourt Arboretum

# Research News

By Chris Thorogood

*Cistanche* is a genus of parasitic plants (sometimes known as 'desert hyacinths') which have been used in traditional herbal medicine since antiquity, and are still traded widely today. Our recent work, published in *Phytotaxa*, examines the confusion surrounding the taxonomy of the most widespread species, *Cistanche tubulosa*. Our work shows that this species name has been applied incorrectly to plants that comprise a polyphyletic group, meaning they are not all derived from a common ancestor. Moreover the so-called type specimen for *C. tubulosa* is missing. A type is a plant specimen to which the scientific name of that plant is formally associated; it serves to anchor the defining features of a particular taxonomic group. When a type specimen is lost or destroyed, botanists designate a new specimen, or neotype, to serve in its place to maintain nomenclatural stability. To resolve the taxonomic confusion surrounding *C. tubulosa*, we assigned a neotype for the species, using a herbarium specimen housed at Kew, collected from South Sinai in 1945. We hope that this act (known as a neotypification) will help stabilise the taxonomy of *C. tubulosa*, resolve confusion, and in turn, direct conservation efforts.



*Cistanche tubulosa*, wild in the Middle Eastern desert

See our 'News' page on the website for further information on OBG's research into these plants.

Another study we published recently in the journal of British and Irish Botany, examines the ecology of a broomrape called *Orobanche picridis* - thought to be one of Britain's rarest plants. Broomrapes (genus *Orobanche*), are related to *Cistanche*. Most are very rare in the UK and have been neglected from conservation because of perceived cultivation difficulties; OBG has a research and conservation focus

on these plants. *Orobanche picridis* has been widely recorded across southern England, but most records have proven to be erroneous due to confusion with the similar, often co-occurring, common broomrape (*O. minor*). Together with Dr Fred Rumsey of London's Natural History Museum, we reviewed the past recording and confusion surrounding the plant and its shifting changing ecology. Data from our

20-year survey revealed a fifteenfold fluctuation in annual abundance. This observation, together with our recent discovery of a thriving meta-population of *O. picridis* in brownfield sites in South Wales, suggests that whilst populations may be declining in some locations, they are increasing in others.



*Orobanche picridis* growing in a brownfield site in South Wales. Right: Chris Thorogood's illustration of *Orobanche picridis* and related plants





# News from the Education Team

The Autumn Science Lecture 2023 line up

By Lauren Baker, Tegan Bennett and Catherine Vivian

Autumn was a busy time for the Education team. In addition to our usual school and community visits, an A-Level Plant Science Conference ran on the 28th September, called 'Botanical Breakthroughs'. This event brought together 100 Year 12 students from schools in Oxfordshire to learn about plant sciences and 'green careers'. Dr Chris Thorogood gave a talk on his research on parasitic plants and biomimicry. Six DPhil students from the Department of Biology also presented their research in flash presentations, and ran student workshops, sharing their experience of studying at University of Oxford.

The public engagement programme has continued to prove popular and well-attended. In October, the horticultural team ran a seed saving workshop at the Botanic Garden in which attendees learned how to collect, dry and store seeds and discussed growing techniques to get seeds started in the best possible way; pruning and ornamental tree planting courses then ran at the Arboretum through the winter.



A selection of mushroom species found growing at Harcourt Arboretum. Right: Professor Baroness Kathy Willis and Professor Yadvinder Malhi



Dr Chris Thorogood giving the keynote lecture at Botanical Breakthroughs



The ever-popular Fungus Foray ran in October, in which 648 people attended an engaging talk by Professor Richard Fortey, President of the Fungus Survey of Oxfordshire, followed by a walk around the Arboretum. Families had the opportunity to learn about the variety of fungi native to our countryside and gardens, and the crucial role they play in the ecosystem.



In October, we welcomed four trainees from the Primary Education Degree course at Oxford Brookes University. The trainees were third-year primary teacher training students taking part in cultural placements; those who joined us had the opportunity to learn about schools programming at OBG.

The Autumn Science Lectures ran from October to November in which five expert speakers gave lectures online. Dr Roberto Salguero-Gomez, Professor Baroness Kathy Willis, Professor Ilina Singh, Professor Lars Ostergaard and Professor Yadvinder Malhi spoke on a range of topics, including senescence, the role of nature on mental health and wellbeing, floral development, and tropical ecosystems. Over 1,600 attendees registered for the talks and the recordings of the lectures have been viewed over 450 times.

The Museum of Climate Hope trail concluded in December. This trail took participants across all six of the Gardens, Libraries and Museums (GLAM) institutions and was launched in July 2023. Each venue featured two or three items with associated interpretation explaining how they represent transformation, resilience or inspiration, in the broader context of climate change. The trail explored positive stories that have helped tackle climate anxiety among teenagers. Over the six months, 1,702 visitors took part in the trail at Oxford Botanic Garden, and accessed information about our living specimens using QR codes displayed alongside them.



The Fungus Foray in full swing

# Friends' Section

## News

I am writing this section of the Newsletter as a trustee of the Friends of Oxford Botanic Garden & Arboretum (FOBGA). As you will all be aware, following the decision taken at the AGM on July 6th 2023 the Friends of OBGA charity is merging with OBGA/the University. This gives us the opportunity to streamline the operations and finances of the Friends with those of OBGA to simplify the overall administration of the charity. In taking this path we are following other Gardens, Libraries, and Museums (GLAM) institutions, including the Ashmolean and Bodleian, whose Friends membership and operations are now managed in-house.

At the AGM Sarah Taylor (Chairman of the Friends) and other trustees stood down and two new trustees, Professor John Geddes (Professor of Psychiatry in the Department of Psychiatry and Chairman of the Board of Visitors of OBGA) and Marius Apetrei (Divisional Finance Controller for GLAM), were elected to support me as the only remaining trustee. As this is the minimum number of trustees required for a charity, we are in the process of approaching other potential trustees who we will propose to the membership at this year's AGM (date to be determined). The merger, which is a complex process, is moving ahead gradually and we are grateful to Sarah Taylor and the other former trustees, especially Hemlata Bountra (former Treasurer) and Anna Nasmyth (former Secretary), for their help during this interim period of transition. We are also extremely lucky to have Christopher Shakespeare acting as Friends Administrator at this time. Christopher who is employed through the University's Temporary Staffing Service (TSS) has many years of experience working in Development, Membership and

Alumni relations within the University, notably at St Hilda's College and St Peter's College. This section of the Newsletter was formerly written by the Chairman of the Friends, Sarah Taylor, so as we enter a new era I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to Sarah on behalf of the Friends, OBGA and the University for her tireless (voluntary) work in support of the Friends' charity. Sarah was a trustee for 26 years and Chairman for the last seven years and has given me tremendous support since I was appointed as Director in 2015. As well as steering the Friends past a landmark two million pounds raised in support of OBGA since its foundation in 1994, she steered the charity through the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic and led the 400th anniversary Paths Appeal, which has now raised over £500,000 towards its target of £750,000 to deliver new paths and greater access for all to the Arboretum. Please do continue to support this campaign, which Sarah remains committed to lead to its completion and thus delivering the greatest single fundraising campaign in the Friends history. This will be a massive achievement and a fitting legacy of Sarah's leadership.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank other former trustees for their ongoing support as essential volunteers: Helen Potts, who will continue to manage the Bobarts patrons group through 2024, Diana Nauman, who leads the garden visits team, Seonaid Danziger, who oversees Friends events, and Rebecca Mather who oversees membership and also assists with Bobarts events. You will see that there is an exciting schedule of garden visits and events lined up for this year thanks entirely to the efforts of the dedicated Friends volunteers who support Diana and Seonaid.



**Professor Simon Hiscock, Director of OBGA**

Their continuing support in these important Friends fundraising activities is greatly appreciated by all at OBGA.

Finally, I need to inform you that the price of membership will rise from March 11th in line with the two-year cycle of increases to reflect inflation. I also encourage you to complete the membership survey (see below) which aims to better understand the membership and ways we can improve and enhance your membership experience. The survey takes just a few minutes and can be completed online ([https://go.glam.ox.ac.uk/\\_UHptRNsv](https://go.glam.ox.ac.uk/_UHptRNsv)) or using the paper questionnaire and reply paid envelope, included with this newsletter. We truly value your support as members and we want you all to feel part of the Botanic Garden and Arboretum as we continue our journey of transformation.

### Don't forget your membership card

when you come to visit the Garden or Arboretum. Our ticket office staff do not have access to the membership database (for data protection reasons) and can't let you in free of charge if you don't have your membership card!

### Message to all email users

If you are not receiving regular e-bulletins with news of Friends' events by email, it will be because you have not signed up to receive them. If you wish to sign up, please send an email with your name, to the Friends' Administrator at [friends.administrator@obg.ox.ac.uk](mailto:friends.administrator@obg.ox.ac.uk).

### Dates for the Newsletter

The newsletter is published and sent out three times a year, in mid-March, early July, and early November



# Friends' Events

This year, you, the Friends, will have the treat of two opportunities to have exclusive access to the Oxford Botanic Garden, first as the sun rises, and again, as it sets. As you know, these are the best times to enjoy the beauty of any garden. Mark Brent, the Curator of the Garden, gives here a brief description of what may be new to you (more information elsewhere): 'We will be delivering the new Literary Trail in the Garden this spring with new interpretations which will engage visitors by highlighting literary connections between OBG and authors but also connections between some of the plants and notable works. We are also planning quite a few subtle improvements around the garden such as our trial display of heritage grain which is a joint project between John Letts of The Oxford Distillery and ourselves.'

Here are the two events for which Friends can book tickets for themselves and their own friends and family. We look forward to seeing as many of you as possible.

## Wednesday 1st May, from 5.00am

### May Morning

Song on May Morning  
John Milton. 1608 - 1674

*Hail bounteous May that dost inspire  
Mirth and youth, and warm desire,  
Woods and Groves, are of thy dressing,  
Hill and Dale, doth boast thy blessing.  
Thus we salute thee with our early Song,  
And welcom thee, and wish thee long.*

## Thursday 13th June, 5.30 to 7.30pm

### The Friends' Garden Party

Oxford Botanic Garden

Last year the party was held on a warm September evening at the Arboretum. This year, by contrast, it will be close to the summer solstice at the Botanic Garden in the freshness of early June. The format will be the same - we will serve drinks and canapés (freshly made by the team) and entertain you with speeches from our leaders which will bring us all up-to-date with developments and research at both sites, the Garden and the Arboretum. You will also be informed on the progress being made by the Friends' Paths Appeal. We charge a minimal ticket price to cover costs. Any excess will go towards the Friends' Paths Appeal.

May Morning is one of the special benefits of being a Friend of the Oxford Botanic Garden and Arboretum. If you are not already a Friend, this is a good moment to join. Friends, this is a unique opportunity to invite your own friends and family to witness this ancient Oxford celebration of spring. After the bells have rung at 6.00am, silence falls, and the Magdalen College Choristers sing the *Hymnus Eucharisticus* followed by prayers and further singing, from the top of Magdalen College tower. You will have the privilege of a perfect view from the peace and beauty of the Botanic Garden, with a hot drink in your hand. While waiting for the choristers you will be entertained by traditional Morris dancers, Cry Havoc, and be able to appreciate the beauty of the early morning light in the Garden. As the sun rises, freshly baked croissants, with homemade jam will be served. The profits from this event will go towards the Friends' Paths Appeal.

#### SCHEDULE:

The event will run from 5.00-7.00am

Entry is only via the Rose Lane gate of the Botanic Garden between 5.00-5.30am

Morris dancers, Cry Havoc,  
perform 5.15-5.45am

- Friends £20 Guests £25, children aged 2-15, £5
- Ticket includes: hot drinks (coffee, hot chocolate, tea) and a freshly baked, and still warm, croissant
- Booking is open to all Friends, who may buy tickets for their guests. Please note that the closing date for booking is Thursday 25th April.

All booking is online at  
<https://www.obga.ox.ac.uk/book>

If you have any difficulties with booking, please contact the **Friends' Administrator**.



Booking and further details will be available **online** but anyone who has difficulty with this process should contact the **Friends' Administrator**.

- Friends £10, Guests £15, children under 16 free

## Coffee mornings

Coffee mornings are held on the first Friday of each month, except January, from 10.30am to midday. No booking is needed but do remember to bring your membership card with you. Dates for the next few months are as follow:

2024

5th April - Botanic Garden

3rd May - Harcourt Arboretum

7th June - Botanic Garden

5th July - Botanic Garden

Please check the Friends' website for up-to-date information <https://www.botanic-garden.ox.ac.uk/>

## A Friends' Garden open for Friends

Tracy and David Russell will open their Long Crendon garden at 2.00pm on Sunday 2nd June.

Tracy writes that this is "A wildlife friendly, biodiverse and ever evolving space with garden structures built from natural materials, bat boxes, hedgehog hideaways and more.

A roundhouse structure and natural swimming pond have been added in recent years and a mature grapevine provides grapes to a local wine initiative".

- Tea and cakes will be available for a small charge.

Please let me know if you would like to visit Tracy and David's garden and I will send directions. ([rebecca.mather28@gmail.com](mailto:rebecca.mather28@gmail.com))



## Helping with events

If anyone reading this would like to join the groups working on any or all of these events, do please get in touch with me. It is fun and interesting. All of these Friends' events are organised by Friends Volunteers.

Seonaid Danziger  
[seonaidscd@gmail.com](mailto:seonaidscd@gmail.com)  
com

New Chamber Opera on Wednesday  
3rd July at New College, Oxford

**La Vera Costanza**

By Joseph Haydn

You are cordially invited to join us for the performance, which is being held in aid of The Friends' Paths Appeal.

The Appeal is raising money to help us complete a comprehensive accessible series of paths at the Harcourt Arboretum. These paths will benefit people with mobility difficulties, wheelchairs or baby buggies as well as the Curator and his staff as they extend and manage the Arboretum's unique collection: there are still parts of the site that are difficult for them to access with the plant and equipment.

The opera's plot is one of comic entanglement. Central to it is the five-year-old secret marriage between Count Errico and fisherwoman Rosina, Errico having abandoned Rosina and their young son. Needless to say, complications, romantic and otherwise, ensue which involve the rest of the dramatis personae, notably Errico's aunt. All does, however, end well with the entire cast singing in praise of constancy and virtue.

The opera will be performed in the Warden's delightful, secluded garden (or in the chapel if it is wet). The performance starts at 6.30pm and the garden will be open from 6.00pm.

At 5.00pm there will be a pre-performance talk by Professor Michael Burden, Director of the New Chamber Opera.

The New College cloisters will be open from 5.00pm where you will be offered a complimentary glass of fizzy.

There will be a 75-minute interval half-way through the performance for you to enjoy your picnic in the candle-lit cloisters. Please bring your own picnic, cutlery, glasses and plates.

Tickets for the performance are £44 and £3 for the pre-performance talk.

Please book your tickets by going to the Friends' page of the Oxford Botanic Garden and Arboretum's website [www.obga.ox.ac.uk/book](http://www.obga.ox.ac.uk/book). In case of difficulty, email the Friends' Administrator at [friends.administrator@obg.ox.ac.uk](mailto:friends.administrator@obg.ox.ac.uk)

**Saturday 27 April**

**Friends at the Spring Fair**

The next OBGA Fair will be the Spring Fair at the Arboretum. The Friends will once again be providing the extremely popular home-made cakes stall. If anyone reading this would like to bake a cake (or something else?) for this stall, your contribution would be most welcome.

Please contact Anne James ([riverbank26@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:riverbank26@yahoo.co.uk)) or Cathy Stewart ([cathystewart1@gmail.com](mailto:cathystewart1@gmail.com)) to discuss further.

# Friends' Garden Visits

By Pauline Coombes, Harriet Bretherton, Jane Annett, Diana Naumann, Jane Thrift and Megan Parry



Another summer full of visits which are full of variety. Two of the new visits have been organised by Megan Parry who has recently joined the Garden Visits Team. Some of you may already have met her at the Summer Party or the Christmas Fair last year.

**Booking Garden Visit Tickets: Online AND Postal Booking Form with cheques for those who have no access to the internet.**

**1) Online: To book and pay for garden visits online - please visit [www.obga.ox.ac.uk/book](http://www.obga.ox.ac.uk/book)**

**Any online problems? Please contact our Friends Administrator. [friends.administrator@obg.ox.ac.uk](mailto:friends.administrator@obg.ox.ac.uk) / 01865 610303**

**2) By Post with Cheque: A Postal Booking Form is enclosed for those who have no access to the internet.**

**Before booking a visit: Please be aware that some gardens may be a bit challenging, should anyone have mobility or health issues.**

**Dogs and Garden Visits: Following Botanic Gardens policy, dogs only permitted if they are registered assistance dogs.**

If you have any other queries about a garden visit, please contact our Friends Administrator because they support the work we volunteers undertake in creating your visits programme. And, if you've visited any gardens which you'd like us to organise visits to, please email details to: [harriet@brethertonfamily.com](mailto:harriet@brethertonfamily.com)

**Tuesday 14th May, 10.00am**

**Private visit to Wadham College Gardens**

Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3PN

By kind permission of the Warden and Fellows of Wadham College

'In the "merry month of May" a visit to the many varied gardens hidden behind the walls of Wadham College. Originally a series of orchards and market-gardens carved out from the property of the Augustinian priory, Wadham's gardens have been significantly modified and added to over the past 400 years. During a tour of the gardens, the Garden Adviser, Andrew Little, will share his extensive knowledge - some trees were grown from seeds which he planted three decades ago. Numbered amongst the tree collection are a holm oak, silver pendant lime, tulip tree, ginkgo, dawn redwood, Tree of Heaven, Incense Cedar, Corsican pine, Wollemi pine and a rare Chinese



Wadham College Garden

Gutta-percha. Among other curiosities are an 18th century 'cowshed' set into the remnants of the Royalist earthworks of 1642 and a sculpture of Sir Maurice Bowra (Warden, 1938-70) by John Doubleday. And, in the greenhouse, a 200- year-old dessert 'Black Hamburg' vine, still provides the college with grapes though none will be hanging in tempting bunches at the time of our visit! Refreshments on arrival in the college's ante-chapel.

- Friends £15, guests £22
- Maximum 30

**Thursday 23rd May,  
9.30 for 10.00am**

**A walking tour of FarmED  
at Honeydale Farm**

**FarmED, Honeydale Farm, Station Road,  
Shipton under Wychwood, Oxon OX7 6BJ**

By kind permission of Ian and Celene Wilkinson

Recommended by a Friend, this new visit is a guided walk led either by the Founder, Ian Wilkinson or members of the FarmED team. With beautiful views over the Evenlode valley, you'll hear about the varied work of FarmED at Honeydale Farm by visiting wildflower meadows, the heritage orchard, natural flood management and other experimental areas. With plenty of opportunity to ask questions about



FarmED Tour

everything from regenerative agriculture and sustainable food to micro dairies, bees and growing heritage wheat for artisan bread making you'll learn about all that's happening, and what will happen, at FarmED. The visit begins with refreshments and an introductory talk. This two-hour tour is a visit not to be missed. Walking style footwear recommended. Wheelchairs (unless motorised) unable to access full tour.

- Friends £30, guests £35
- Maximum 36

**Thursday 30th May, 10.30am**

**Private visit to  
Pusey House Gardens**

**Pusey, Nr Faringdon, SN7 8QB**

By kind permission of Mr and Mrs Richard Perlhagen

The extensive gardens of Pusey House include walled and kitchen gardens surrounded by c.18th landscaped parkland with an ornamental lake and a Chinese bridge and views of the Downs. South of the house is a terrace modified by Geoffrey Jellicoe after 1935 with statuary. The garden reopened for the first time after 40 years in 2023 and contains many delightful features including the Classical Church of All Saints, 1745, which will be open to visit. We are grateful for the generosity of Mr and Mrs Perlhagen for a rare opportunity to visit this beautiful landscape. Coffee, tea and cake on arrival.

- Friends £25, guests £32
- Maximum 40

**Saturday 8th June, 2.00pm**

**Private visit to Faringdon  
House Gardens**

**Church Street, Faringdon, SN7 8AE**

By kind permission of Mrs Crossley Cooke

Courtesy of Mrs Crossley Cooke, we are privileged to have a private visit to Faringdon House gardens which are never open to the public and the owner, or the Head Gardener, will welcome the group. The house c. 1780 (not open) sits within a formal garden, rolling out to parkland and a lake. There is a walled garden, an orangery and a bog garden. Outside the north terrace a new formal garden was planted in 2021. The garden



© Wadham College



Pusey House Garden

is notable for a variety of quirky statues introduced by Lord Berners and Robert Heber-Percy. An elevated swimming pool with a castellated turret for a changing room overlooks the kitchen garden. The visit will end with coffee, tea and cake in The Orangery.

- Friends £25, guests £32
- Maximum 30



Faringdon House - an illustration

**Thursday 13th June,  
2.00 for 2.30pm start**

**Upton Grey Manor House  
A private visit to a Gertrude  
Jekyll restored garden**

**The Manor House, Upton Grey,  
Hants RG25 2RD**

By kind permission of Mr and Mrs Wallinger

Gertrude Jekyll designed this important historic garden in 1908. When John and Rosamund Wallinger bought the almost derelict property in 1984, they did not realise that what lay underneath the jungle were the foundations of a very special garden. The work on this garden's restoration has been an exciting and rewarding adventure of discovery. What they have recreated is now believed to be the most complete and authentic Jekyll garden in existence - a living museum of Jekyll design. Rosamund Wallinger BEM will give an introduction to the garden and its history. Refreshments are included.

- Friends £25, guests £32
- Maximum 30



Upton Grey Garden

**Wednesday  
19th June, 2.00pm**

**Private visit to  
Colebrook House  
Garden**

**Colebrook House,  
Lower Street, Blockley,  
Nr Moreton-in-Marsh,  
GL56 9DS**

By kind permission of  
George and Melissa Apsion

Another first for our Friends. During the 18th and 19th centuries, Blockley had a thriving silk industry. The Cole and Blockley Brooks flowing through Colebrook House garden drove the mills. Remains of one such building lie at the heart of the garden. Hidden behind a wall, this full of contrasts garden was redrawn between 2016-2019 to the designs of Todd Longstaffe-Gowan, a landscape architect with a passion for the historical and cultural, in close collaboration with the owners. The owner will give a welcome introduction. The c.17th Cotswold mill-house home (not open) sits on an eminence adjoining a Great Lawn from where views overlook a newly-formed sloping walled garden. Pass through the lower wall gate to discover distinctive areas laid out on an east-facing slope overlooking more running water, with hanging natural gardens covering the opposite bank. The broad north-south terrace traverses the garden, linking the walled garden to the pool terrace and croquet lawn, all set in this imaginative two-acre garden. Included at the end of the visit is cream tea at nearby Village Café. Garden not fully wheelchair accessible.

- Friends £20, guests £27
- Maximum 38



Colebrook House Garden



West Woodhay Garden

**Tuesday 25th June, 2.00pm**

**Private visit to West Woodhay  
House Garden**

**West Woodhay, Newbury, Berks RG20 OBS**

By kind permission of Mr Harry Henderson

Midsummer at West Woodhay is accompanied by the blooming of the many rambling and shrub roses within the walled garden. The herbaceous borders will be fresh and verdant, showing colour from campanula, astrantia and allium to name a few. The later blooming rhododendrons could still be in full swing and there are many, many interesting trees to view which have various qualities at any time of year. The wilder fringes, such as the substantial wildflower meadow, will be building towards their full high summer best and the more formal area that surrounds the house will have transitioned to its summer guise, with many containers planted with interesting and harmonized combinations. Tea and cake will be served.

- Friends £22, guests £27
- Maximum 40

**Tuesday 2nd July, 2.00pm**

**A new visit to Waltham Place,  
the Biodynamic Garden**

**Waltham Place, Church Hill,  
White Waltham, Berks SL6 3JH**

By kind permission of Nicky and Strilli Oppenheimer

This new visit to the gardens at Waltham Place offers the visitor a unique vision of a garden steeped in history yet redesigned by Strilli Oppenheimer with the future in mind. Guided tours will explore the series of walled gardens, the oldest dating from the 17th century, an English landscape garden with splendid specimen trees planted in the early 19th century, and a huge double border enclosed by yew hedges. Within this framework many intimate areas invite you to pause and contemplate.



© Waltham Place

**Waltham Place Garden**

Larger trees and shrubs, some of great age, coexist with a natural planting system implemented in 2000 when the gardens were redesigned by the Dutch garden designer, Henk Gerritsen. The visit ends with refreshments.

- Friends £25, guests £32
- Maximum 30

**Wednesday 10th July,  
2.00 for 2.30pm start**

**A private tour of St Hilda's  
College Garden**

**St Hilda's College, Cowley Place,  
Oxford OX4 1DY**

By kind permission of St Hilda's College

The gardens at St Hilda's are full of horticultural interest and surprise. A small college compared to many - the main site is just four acres - St Hilda's benefits from its glorious location along the east bank of the river Cherwell which is a perfect backdrop for some lovely and varied plantings. Since 2017 the gardens have been undergoing a complete redevelopment under the guidance of Walter Sawyer, ex Superintendent of the University Parks. Above it all sits the Roof Terrace of the recently completed Anniversary Building. With its panoramic views across to Christ



© St Hilda's College

**St Hilda's South Riverside**

Church meadow, the spires of central Oxford and the countryside beyond, this area also hosts a rooftop garden which provides an opportunity to grow plants in what is a fascinating yet challenging environment. At the end of the visit Friends will have tea and cake overlooking the Cherwell.

- Friends £20, guests £27
- Maximum 40

**Wednesday 17th July, 2.00pm**

**Stockcross House, a romantic  
two-acre garden near Newbury**

**Church Road, Stockcross, Newbury,  
Berks RG20 8LP**

By kind permission of Susan Vandyk

A private visit to this romantic two-acre garden near Newbury that is set around a former Rectory (not open). From the garden are different views of St John's Church tower. There are deep mixed borders with the emphasis on strong, complementary colour combinations. Other areas of interest are a large orangery, a wisteria and clematis clad pergola, a croquet lawn with a rose-clad wall and pavilion, a small stumpery/fernery and a kitchen garden. Featured in Gardeners' World September 2023. Homemade tea included.

- Friends £20, guests £27
- Maximum 38



**The Danby  
Patrons'  
Group**

**By Sarah Taylor**

On a rather chilly but dry October evening, members of the Danby group, along with a generous donor to our Paths Appeal, met at the Arboretum to hear about the work which the National Lottery Heritage Fund had facilitated, which links in with the crucial improvement to access to the site which our appeal aims to enable.

We heard from Lesley Best, project manager, about the effort to attract new audiences to the Arboretum. This has encompassed Help the Aged and organising visits to the Arboretum for lonely elderly people, links with a local school for disadvantaged children and various community groups. The feedback in terms of the benefits of visits to the Arboretum had been extremely positive and moreover the NLHF was delighted with the progress the team had made with outreach.

We also heard from Dr Rodger Caseby about developments in 'green social prescribing' (the practice of supporting people to engage in nature-based activities to improve their mental and physical health) with NHS Link Workers, and interdisciplinary research carried out in partnership with Oxford University's Department of Psychiatry, led by Professor John Geddes. Questions were encouraged, and we were assured that it is possible to measure 'wellbeing', within a scientifically determined and accepted definition.

The complex structure for the new paths as they go over tree roots was illustrated and we altogether came away with a strong understanding of the rigorous approach that is being taken for the whole development. As usual, food and drink contributed to a happy event.

A further exciting programme is taking shape for 2024, offering insights into the University's plant science research and treasures in the collections. The Danby group exists to support both the Friends of Oxford Botanic Garden & Arboretum and the Herbarium in the University of Oxford's Department of Plant Sciences, so partially bringing back together two closely linked collections.



© Susan Vandyk

**Stockcross House Garden**

# The Bobarts Patrons' Group

By Helen Potts

Bobarts patrons enjoyed some excellent visits in 2023, ending with a warm welcome and a fascinating tour thanks to the garden team at Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons, and the generosity of Chef-Patron, Raymond Blanc. 2024 looks set to be another good year with a mixture of new gardens and repeat visits. The programme has been put together by the new team of Claire McGlashan, Bebe Speed, and Rebecca Mather supported by long term organiser Helen Potts.

Our year begins with a visit to the Oxford University Herbaria, where Druce Curator Stephen Harris will reveal intriguing stories about plants using just a handful of the one million plus dried plant specimens for which he is responsible. Access is necessarily restricted to this collection of worldwide importance, with great relevance to all things botanical, so this opportunity is hugely welcomed.

As spring progresses we can move back outside to the extensive bulb plantings and the fritillary meadow at Magdalen College, before we head into the Cotswolds to visit the garden of Sarsden Glebe on the estate first laid out by Humphrey Repton and his son in the late 1700s.

This year there will be no multi-day trip to more distant counties though we hope to arrange one for next year, however in June we will travel to the south-west Cotswolds for two contrasting gardens: one long-established with an abundant rose collection and one only begun in 2011 but influenced by the Arts and Crafts gardens of Gertrude Jekyll and Christopher Lloyd.

In early July we will return to the fabulous London roof top garden of Cannon Bridge House with extensive views over the Thames, coupled with two small intriguing and historic gardens over the river in Southwark.

2024 marks the twentieth anniversary of this patrons' group founded by Dr

Jennie Turner. To mark the occasion and to remember Jennie we are planning a special celebratory dinner, to be held in the Botanic Garden on 27th June 2024. This midsummer evening at OBG will be a lovely opportunity to enjoy the calm and beauty of the gardens we usually see only by day. We hope both old and new patrons will want to celebrate with us.



View from Cannon Bridge House

Do consider joining this group and sharing these visits. Our loyal patrons provide extra financial backing to support the valuable work of the Botanic Garden and Arboretum. Members, and the Danby patrons' group, enjoy all the benefits of the Friends plus our programme of small group visits to a range of gardens and to special collections in Oxford.

## Calendar

Please check on the website: [www.obga.ox.ac.uk](http://www.obga.ox.ac.uk) for the latest news regarding forthcoming events.

For booking your ticket, please go to [www.obga.ox.ac.uk/book](http://www.obga.ox.ac.uk/book)

A full programme of short courses, talks and tours at OBG can be found at [www.obga.ox.ac.uk/whats-on](http://www.obga.ox.ac.uk/whats-on)

### 2024

#### April

Friday 5th April

**Coffee morning, Oxford Botanic Garden**

Saturday 27th April

**Spring Fair, Arboretum**

#### May

Wednesday 1st May, 6.00am

**May Morning**

Friday 3rd May

**Coffee morning, Harcourt Arboretum**

Tuesday 14th May, 10.00am

**Visit to Wadham College**

Thursday 23rd May, 9.30 for 10.00am

**Visit to FarmED at Honeydale Farm**

Thursday 30th May, 10.30am

**Visit to Pusey House Gardens**

#### June

Sunday 2nd June, 2.00pm

**Long Crendon Garden**

Friday 7th June

**Coffee morning, Oxford Botanic Garden**

Saturday 8th June, 2.00pm

**Visit to Faringdon House**

Thursday 13th June,

2.00 for 2.30pm start

**Visit to Upton Grey Manor House**

Thursday 13th June, 5.30 to 7.30pm

**Friends' Garden Party,**

**Oxford Botanic Garden**

Wednesday 19th June, 2.00pm

**Visit to Colebrook House Garden**

Tuesday 25th June, 2.00pm

**Visit to West Woodhay House Garden**

#### July

Tuesday 2nd July, 2.00pm

**Visit to Waltham Place**

Wednesday 3rd July, 6.30pm

**New Chamber Opera, New College**

Friday 5th July

**Coffee morning, Oxford Botanic Garden**

Wednesday 10th July,

2.00 for 2.30pm start

**Visit to St Hilda's College**

Wednesday 17th July, 2.00pm

**Visit to Stockcross House**

**The Friends of Oxford  
Botanic Garden and Arboretum,**  
Rose Lane, Oxford OX1 4AZ.



All Friends' enquiries, including those about Friends' events, should be made to the Friends' Administrator. The Friends' Office is staffed Monday-Friday, 9.00am to 5.00pm.

Tel: **01865 610303**

E-mail: [friends.administrator@obg.ox.ac.uk](mailto:friends.administrator@obg.ox.ac.uk)

Web: [www.obga.ox.ac.uk](http://www.obga.ox.ac.uk)

This Newsletter was edited by Chris Thorogood and Carol Maxwell. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the policies of the Board of the Friends or the Visitors of Oxford Botanic Garden.