

# Avon Gardens Trust

# Newsletter



*The Lower Garden at Clifton Hill House*

## ***Avon Gardens Trust***

Registered Charity No. 900377  
Company No. 2357099  
CREATE Centre, Smeaton Road,  
Bristol BS1 6XN  
[www.avongardenstrust.org.uk](http://www.avongardenstrust.org.uk)

Chairman: Ros Delany  
[chairman@avongardenstrust.org.uk](mailto:chairman@avongardenstrust.org.uk)

Membership: June Shannon  
[membership@avongardenstrust.org.uk](mailto:membership@avongardenstrust.org.uk)

Editor: Ros Delany  
[editor@avongardenstrust.org.uk](mailto:editor@avongardenstrust.org.uk)

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Photographs: Ros Delany: Anne Hills: Alan  
Kempton: © Eastleach House: © Tyntesfield

## *Message From The Chairman*

As this is penned on Midsummer's Day, at least it is beginning to feel as though summer may have arrived. It always feels such a shame when inclement weather means we cannot get out and enjoy our gardens as well as visiting the many gardens that are open to the public at this time of the year.

It was in our 2017 Autumn Bulletin that mention was made of a FW Meyer rockery being 'discovered' at Backwell Down. The Trust took on the task of ensuring the garden became registering to protect it from future planning applications. Earlier this month and after much research, the application for local listing was submitted to the Heritage Team at North Somerset Council. I am delighted to say the submission was approved and Backwell Down can now be added to the Gazetteer as a garden of local importance. An article about Backwell Down will be in our forthcoming edition of the Journal.

A major part of the committee's focus this year has been on updating the records we have for the parks and gardens listed in the Trust's Gazetteer. There is an article in this newsletter giving further information about this ambitious and exciting project. Of course, all projects require help and we really hope members will get involved. Enthusiasm is more important than experience as, besides researching sites, assistance is always welcomed with tasks ranging from photographing sites through to any anecdotal information any of you may have about any of the locations.

I trust you will all enjoy reading about the Trust's activities over the last few months and hopefully you will be able to come along to the two future events planned of visits to Eastleach House and concluding with our Annual General Meeting at Tyntesfield.

*Ros Delany*

### *Should the Trust become a Charity Incorporated Organisation?*

When the Avon Gardens Trust was originally formed, it was constituted as both a Company and a Charity. This means that we need to submit financial information each year to both organisations and to keep them both informed of other changes. It would save on administration if we only had to deal with one organisation.

A few years ago, the Government set up a new structure named a Charity Incorporated Organisation (CIO). This has the benefits of being solely under the remit of the Charity Commission, but includes the legal benefits of being a company. We would retain our name of the Avon Gardens Trust and our existing charity number 900377 if we changed to being a CIO. The Charity Commission have a model constitution on their website, which we would use as a base and add an updated list of our objectives.

The Committee has agreed to recommend to Members with the principle of becoming a CIO, and it will be put to Members to vote on at the Annual General Meeting in October.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have. Alan Kempton [alank@john-lewis.com](mailto:alank@john-lewis.com)

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## *The Elms*



*The House and former Winding Engine House, 1978. Courtesy of Dave Sowdon*

Last year, Avon Gardens Trust was invited by the Conservation and Heritage Officer with North Somerset Council, to attend a meeting to discuss the future of The Elms (Middle Engine Pit) Colliery site in Nailsea. Prior to this meeting, we studied documents dating back to 1984 that recorded earlier attempts to excavate, record, and protect the industrial heritage site, all the time wondering where the Edwardian Garden was, that AGT might contribute research towards restoring.

As a result of excavations of the site in 1984 by Nailsea and District Local History Society, the remains of the colliery buildings were listed grade II and Middle Engine Pit became a Scheduled Monument. The site was further excavated by Avon Industrial Buildings Trust (AIBT) and, in 1995, the site was sold to the AIBT for a nominal sum, to ensure protection of the heritage assets. The Edwardian garden mentioned in some of these reports related to the ruined and disused pit buildings being incorporated into the garden of a large house called The Elms.

The site is on Historic England's Heritage At Risk register and North Somerset Council are currently responsible for obtaining a future for The Elms Colliery site by securing funding and handing the site plus funding to a Trust, who would have the long term aim of opening a safe, protected and remarkable heritage asset in Nailsea, for local people to have access to. Avon Gardens Trust wrote a letter of support to the Heritage Lottery Fund's Resilient Heritage Fund regarding this site. North Somerset Council has been successful in being awarded funding from Historic England's Heritage at Risk fund to carry out important survey and repair work at the site which is currently taking place.

The garden no longer exists. The house called The Elms was demolished in 1985 and the area around the Scheduled Monument fenced off. New housing surrounding the site was built in the mid-1980s. However, there is much to conserve here. As far as Avon Gardens Trust is concerned, the remains of the industrial buildings would sit well within a designed landscape that reflects the 200 years of industrial and social history.

The maps of the area around the time of the 1881 census record, make no differentiation between mine related buildings and individual houses occupied by the mining community for The Elms colliery. Certainly, The Elms house had not been built by this date, but in an area then called 'Nowhere' the 1881 census records that 'Nowhere' was occupied by Samuel Morgan, aged 40, a Mining Engineer, born in Nailsea. As coal mining had ceased by this time, cottages were being vacated or . . .

## *...The Elms*

combined to accommodate families with occupations other than connected to mining.

There is a wealth of social history to research further, but suffice to say at this stage, the most celebrated owner of The Elms was Conrad K. Cowlin and his wife, Faith. He represented the fifth generation of the Bristol firm of contractors, Messrs. William Cowlin and Son Ltd. The company's buildings included the Bristol Town Hall, Bristol Records Office, Bristol Royal Infirmary, Portishead Power Station and Government Buildings in Jamaica. Cowlin's obituary in the Western Daily Press covered the whole of a broadsheet page in July 1940.

I think that further research of the The Elms will reveal a fascinating, developing social history of this once industrial area gradually becoming 'gentrified' over less than fifty years.

*Anne Hills*

## *Blaise Victorian Greenhouse Restoration Project*

Hiding behind brick walls close to Blaise House in Henbury, Bristol lies a 'secret' garden that most of the visitors to the Blaise estate are unaware of. The walled garden was established in the early nineteenth century for the Harford family and following the sale of the estate in 1926 to Bristol City Council, the walled garden has had a number of uses. In the 1950s it was used to grow bedding plants and many of the greenhouses on the site date from this period. Cannington College then took over the garden followed by a tree growing project before it fell into disuse for over ten years leading to the greenhouse frames becoming entirely overgrown with brambles, saplings and other plants.

Six years ago, the Friends of Blaise and Henbury Conservation Society were granted access to restore a part of the garden and create Henbury's first community kitchen garden. The project is entirely volunteer led, and is intended to provide a chance for members of the community to come together, learn about growing plants and share their time to grow some produce.

Hidden among the modern greenhouses is a Victorian greenhouse which had been virtually hidden from view by saplings and brambles. In April last year, the AGT awarded the sum of £1,200 towards the restoration of this structure and our award provided for forty roof glazing bars and a condensation channel for the Victorian greenhouse which helped to stabilise the structure and prevent further water ingress.



Earlier this year, I revisited the garden to see how our grant money had been spent. The greenhouse was secure and the next stage in the restoration process was focused on the sash windows of the greenhouse. All the Victorian ironwork is intact inside the greenhouse but the frames around many of the sash windows required attention. At a recent committee meeting, it was agreed to make a further award towards the restoration of this structure.

The garden is being transformed, vegetables and flowers are grown and many plants are for sale. It is well worth a visit and in the summer months the gardens are open to the public on Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays from 10am to 2pm. Visit <https://blaisecommunitygarden.org.uk/> for further information.

*Ros Delany*

## ***Research and Recording Update***

The idea of an online database recording the parks and gardens covered by the Avon Gardens Trust area was debated by the committee throughout last year. While the Parks and Gardens UK website is undergoing a huge revision, the committee considered it to be an important recording and research tool for all local and regional sites to have our own Database. We will be able to have direct access to ensure that entries are up to date and relevant and we have now taken the plunge and have made a start on this ambitious task.

James Cooper, who is the author of our current revised website, has now been commissioned to set up the database. Work is progressing, but slowly, with the trial site. First of all we have to find out if the 'bones' of the database are going to suit our purposes, and this work is underway with committee members Peter Shannon and Gill Clarke in contact with our database designer.

All the information is based on the Avon Gazetteer of Sites, published in 1991. Recognition of historic gardens has grown since then; for example in those days only 29 gardens of national importance were listed; today there are 39 sites on Historic England's Register of Parks and Gardens for the Avon area alone. The Gazetteer included gardens of local importance and there are a total of 289 listed. The Trust is fortunate indeed to have such a good start. However, there is a lot of up-dating, making additions, revision and checking which needs to take place before we can say we have an up-to-date and fully usable resource.

If you would like to take part in this important work then please do contact Chairman, Ros Delany on [chairman@avongardenstrust.org.uk](mailto:chairman@avongardenstrust.org.uk), or me, Gill Clarke on [research@avongardenstrust.org.uk](mailto:research@avongardenstrust.org.uk). We will shortly need to start on the review of sites in Bristol, so if you would like to help, even on a small part, then please do get in touch.

*Gill Clarke*

## ***Historic Landscape Research Project***

Volunteers from County Gardens Trusts play a vital role in the research, recording, history and conservation of our heritage. As Avon Gardens Trust has discovered, CGTs are becoming an increasingly important and respected voice offering authoritative advice on historic designed landscapes as well as providing an active social group for people interested in parks and gardens.

The Historic Landscape Project (HLP) is an initiative from the Gardens Trust, part-funded by Historic England, which offers support to CGTs in all their endeavours and helps their volunteers to play a greater role in the conservation of our historic designed landscapes.

To this end, we run a varied programme of training opportunities for CGT volunteers, on topics including:

- responding to planning applications
- research and recording
- understanding significance
- the public parks funding crisis . . . and more.

We also hold regular networking days including regional Members' Meet-Ups (this season in Essex, Cheshire, Bristol and the West Midlands) and our national, annual, Historic Landscapes Assembly, where all those interested in conservation and historic designed landscapes can come together to discuss key issues. Most of these events are free to attend and are friendly and informal and suitable for those with no prior knowledge.

The HLP can provide one-to-one support with planning work, ways to take your CGT forward into the future, and help to build links with other CGTs or relevant organisations. . .

## **...Historic Landscape Project**

Please do get in touch to find out more. We welcome *all* CGT volunteers to our events, whatever your experience or area of interest.

***Please may I urge you to join our emailing group, to receive occasional updates and news of upcoming events. Simply email me at [tamsinmcmillan@thegardenstrust.org](mailto:tamsinmcmillan@thegardenstrust.org) to sign up.***

Visit <http://thegardenstrust.org/conservation/historic-landscapes-project/> to read more about the HLP, and to access our Research Hub of downloadable support. Our events are also listed on the GT website at <http://thegardenstrust.org/events-archive/> and you can join the online discussion forum for CGTs at: <http://thegardenstrust.org/learning/forum/>

*Tamsin McMillan, Historic Landscape Project Officer, the Gardens Trust*

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## **The Bristol and Bath Parks Foundation: an introduction**

This is a new charity focused on improving parks and green spaces across Bristol and Bath, in partnership with Bristol City Council and Bath and North East Somerset. The Foundation aims to raise additional income for parks and support people who give their time in activities such as running an event or helping with nature and conservation projects. The Foundation will not take ownership or maintenance of parks away from the local authorities

The idea of forming a Foundation was raised over 18 months ago and last July, a set up grant of £193,000 was awarded to them as part of the Rethinking Parks programme, funded by National Lottery Community Fund, National Lottery Heritage Fund and Nesta. Since then, the charity has been registered as a Charity Incorporated Organisation.

The Bristol & Bath Parks Foundation will not replace the role of the Councils in managing and maintaining the public parks and green spaces, but will identify projects that enhance and add value to these spaces. The Foundation will work alongside those organisations working to sustain wildlife in urban areas, promote health and well-being as well as developing opportunities for volunteering and community involvement.

Together, Bristol and Bath have nearly fifty parks and open spaces, including some well-known Victorian landmarks, plus smaller urban parks and green space that all provide important benefits for their communities.

In addition, Bristol City Council has secured additional funding of almost £1 million to help secure the future of its parks and green spaces. Bristol is one of only eight places across the UK selected by the National Trust and The National Lottery Heritage Fund to take part in its ground-breaking Future Parks programme.

Bristol City Council submitted a plan to put together a 'Bristol Parks Prospectus' which will outline Bristol's parks and green spaces. It will explore their potential to accommodate business activity, including pay-to-use services considered to be compatible with the character, role and use of a particular site. In the first project of its kind in the UK, Future Parks is designed to help councils find sustainable ways to manage and fund parks and open spaces across entire towns and cities.

*Ros Delany*

## *Programme*

**Wednesday 17 July at 2pm**  
**Visit to Eastleach House, Eastleach Martin**  
**Cirencester, Gloucestershire GL7 3NW**

This extensive, stunning garden is not usually open to the public, and we will be introduced to the garden by the owners before we have a self-guided tour of the grounds.



Covering fourteen acres, the garden is made up of many 'rooms' and has been designed to follow the natural contours of the land. As a result, the garden presents different and contrasting aspects, from the formal South Lawn, the ten acre park with its long vista and stunning avenue of lime trees, the Walled Garden with its soft colours through to the Rill Garden with its curving paths edged with box and where the water falls over thirteen carved stone steps, each producing a different sound effect, down to a circular pond.

Members £17, Guests £19, including refreshments.

NB: The garden includes four ponds and some steep steps and slopes.

Further details may be found on our website <https://www.avongardenstrust.org.uk/events/a-visit-to->

**Saturday 19 October at 1pm**  
**The Annual General Meeting of Avon Gardens Trust and visit to Tyntesfield**  
**Wraxall, BS48 1NX**

After the AGM and refreshments in the historic Sawmill on the Tyntesfield estate, we will be taken on a tour of the gardens by Paul Evans, the Head Gardener, who will outline the development and restoration of the gardens and parkland. Paul will lead us on a walk through a collection of specimen trees brought from all over the world, some of which are now Champion Trees due to their height, age, girth or another remarkable quality and they should be in their full autumn glory of colour for our visit.

Free for members and £5 for guests.

Full details of our visit may be found at <https://www.avongardenstrust.org.uk/events/agm-and-garden-tour-of-Tyntesfield>



Please contact Peter Hills at [events@avongardenstrust.org.uk](mailto:events@avongardenstrust.org.uk) or telephone 01275 858809 further information or if you have suggestions for any AGT events in 2020.

## *Programme*

### ***VISIT TO GOLDNEY AND CLIFTON HILL HOUSE***

The garden at Goldney House has long been associated with Avon Gardens Trust ranging from the first AGM of the newly created Trust being held there in 1987 through to our 25<sup>th</sup> celebration in 2012. The main purpose of the recent visit was to see how Heritage Lottery Funding money had been spent at both Goldney and Clifton Hill House on restoration and conservation projects which had been supported AGT.

On a sunny spring afternoon in April, we were shown around the grounds at both properties by Alan Stealey, Head of External Estates at Bristol University and Louise Hopkins, former Gardener at Clifton Hill House who had been instrumental in implementing the new planting scheme at Clifton Hill House.



In Goldney, the focus of attention was the newly restored rotunda (see left) which had been built by Thomas Goldney in the 1730s. It is referred to briefly in Goldney's garden book from September 1738, but there is no evidence of its appearance until Goldney notes its completion with a colonnade in 1747. This colonnade was dismantled sometime in the C19. The rotunda had windows on all sides, and overlooked the river below, where Goldney's ships could be seen sailing in and out of the port of Bristol.

Alan Stealey explained how a conservation attempt in the 1960s had led to a cement render on the structure, then thought to be the correct conservation material, but this caused much greater damp problems. Prior to the recent conservation work, the timber windows and ceiling were rotting, there were structural cracks and a leaking roof. Initially, there had been plans to re-instate the colonnade but for financial reasons it was not included in the restoration work.

Our visit to Goldney concluded with seeing the grotto which continues to give pleasure to all who are fortunate enough to see it. From Goldney we went across to the dining area at Clifton Hill House where we had refreshments which fortified us all for the second part of our visit.

The gardens at Clifton Hill House have been created in the last couple of years and draw on the de Wilstar map of 1746 but adapted to be less labour intensive and to reflect it being a student hall of residence. The initial outline plan was drawn up by Nicola Greaves (winner of the coveted Society of Garden Designers Award 2013) and the garden now reflects elements of the de Wilstar garden with distinctive *patte d'oie* or 'sextant' pathways supplemented by soft landscaping to achieve the Landscape Movement's philosophy of nature and wilderness. This has been achieved by the creation of a pond, a wildflower meadow and a wooded section at the bottom of the garden that forms a wilderness walk. The abundance of spring flowers, especially the blue anemones in the upper lawns and the green and blue planting in the wilderness area added to a sense of calmness and tranquillity.

However, the star attraction in the lower part of the garden proved not to be the planting scheme but the resident fox who was taking advantage of the mild spring sunshine.

