

Abbey Gardens Friends

Newsletter, Autumn 2024



The aviary wolf is looking magnificent again thanks to Abbey Gardens Friends member Brian Jenkyn and his varnishing skills. Bryan has also done a fine job on John Williams' oxlip carving near the Rose Garden.

For a second year, the AGF volunteer gardeners have worked with staff to sell ex-Gardens plants to the public every Wednesday in October (and one in November). We expect to make over £2,000 for our funds, which is wonderful. Meanwhile, some of the banana plants from the central beds were retained to be dried on site (pictured) and stored over the winter for re-use in the Gardens next year.



The guided walk round the Gardens for AGF members in September was very popular (see report below). Another one is planned for **Weds 29th January 2025** at 10.30am, themed on the Gardens and historical events related to winter. Email abbeygardens.bse@outlook.com if you wish to come.

Please put **6.30pm Wednesday 12th February 2025** in your diaries for our AGM - details to follow in due course.

Libby Ranzetta, Chairman

Abbey Gardens “Walk and Talk”, 11th September

Report by Paul Marsh

About 20 people joined Simon Hobson and Paul Marsh for a walk about the garden on a bright and blustery day. It was a very convivial hour, with Simon pointing out interesting trees, shrubs and plants and Paul pitching in with some stories about the gardens past. This article covers a little of what we talked about at some of our stopping points. If it whets your appetite why not join us when we have our next “Walk and Talk” around the garden?

Cornelian Cherry Trees by the café (Cornus Mas – Variegata)

These two trees were planted sometime between 1830 – 1861 when Nathaniel Hodson was the proprietor of the Botanic Garden. These trees are not only old (the twisted wide base of each trunk gives some indication of their age) but in a variegated form are also rare.

The café

Sometime in the period 1830 -1861 the building served as the stove house (or if you like, the boiler room) for the Botanic Gardens hothouses. Look closely at the roof line, on the front and side walls, to imagine how it might have looked in the 19th century. In the 1840s Robert Bobby installed cast iron pipes to carry hot water through the hot house(s) to maintain a warm climate for the exotic plants which were frost-tender. In 1843 he was an ironmonger and leadsmith with premises on the Meat Market .



Figure 1 The former stove house now garden café

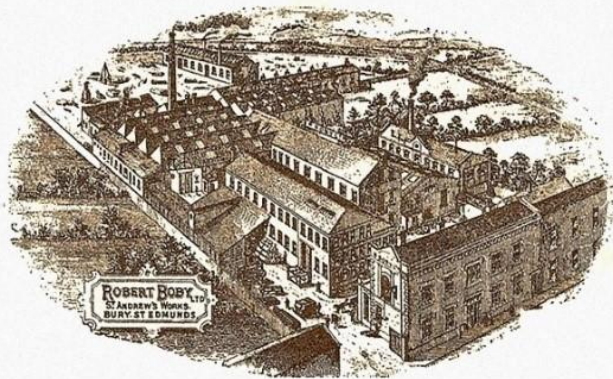


Figure 2 Bobys St Andrews Works

Boby went on to become rich (and well known across the globe) for his patent “Boby Malt Milling Machines”. The St Andrews Works in Bury St Edmunds produced a variety of agricultural machinery for sale worldwide until the early 1900s. The company went through various owners until its eventual demise in the 1970s.

Robert Boby Way leading to Waitrose in Bury is all that remains of this once famous works, to read about a Boby machine still in use click <https://waterfordwhisky.com>

The Centre Beds

The centre beds in the Abbey Garden were created by Nathaniel Hodson in the early 1830s. The pattern of

planting was a series of concentric circles radiating out from a central bed. It was thought to have been loosely based on the then newly created Royal Botanic Gardens in Brussels. In 1935/36 the original arrangement was altered to celebrate the coronation of George VI. The new



pattern consisted of 64 flower beds arranged symmetrically around a circle crossed by 4 paths. That 1930s pattern of flower beds exists to this day.

A tree overlooking the River Lark

One of the trees overlooking the river in the Abbey Gardens is a tree thought to be about 200 years old. It is a rare female Black or Lombardy Poplar tree. In 1821 Jacob George Strutt painted, then engraved an image of this tree. Strutt is well known for publishing two books of engravings *Sylva Britannica* (1826) and *Bury St Edmunds Illustrated in Twelve Etchings* (1821), in which this engraving featured.



Nathaniel Hodson was sent cuttings from Christian Fischer of the University of Gottingen in Lower Saxony in the 1820s with a view to growing them on and thus increasing the English stock of these rare trees. If the newspaper cuttings of the time are to be believed – the cuttings failed to take.

Figure 4 Black/Lombardy Poplar Abbey Grounds, by JG Strutt 1821

Model of the old Abbey

We stopped for a few minutes to examine the model of the Abbey as it may have looked before its dissolution by Henry VIII in the 1530s. The scale of the Abbey dwarfs the current St Edmundsbury cathedral and it is hard to imagine how impressive the Abbey would have been, and that in the early 16th century it was home to around 2500 people.

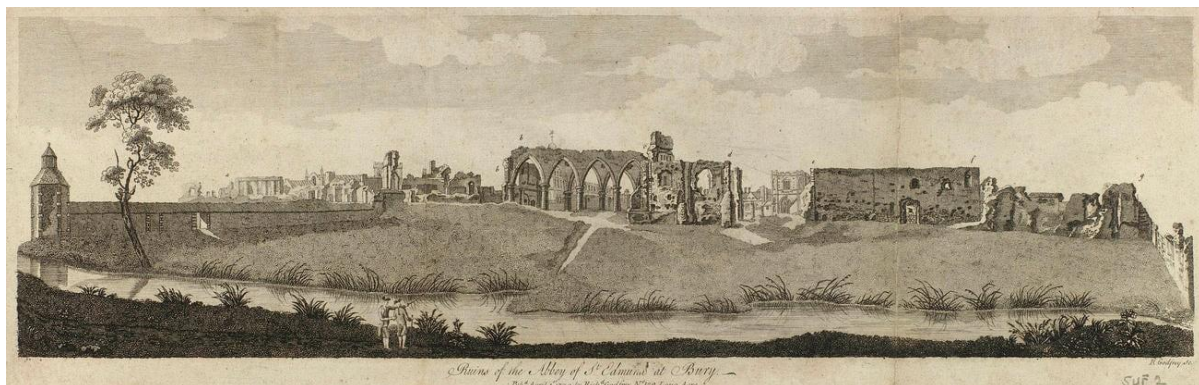


Figure 5/ Ruins of the Abbey. Bury St Edmunds. Engraving By R B Godfrey 1799. Courtesy of Charles III /Royal Collection Trust.

The Rose Garden



Figure 6 Rose Garden in 2023

The Old English Rose Garden we see today is situated on the site of the Botanic Garden plant nursery, which was probably created in the early 1830s. The Rose Garden was created by money donated by an American airman John Tate Appleby who was stationed in Suffolk. The garden serves to remind us all of the 2000 Americans who lost their lives whilst flying bombers from airbases around Bury against Nazi Germany.

As a reminder of those you can sit on the bench made from aluminium panels off a B17 bomber (in the background of the photo centre right). John Tate Appleby's book *Suffolk Summer*¹ (still widely available) describes his time in Suffolk cycling around Bury and neighbouring villages. Proceeds of the book help maintain the Rose Garden.

Figure 7 Plaque at entrance to Rose Garden explaining its American connection.



¹ Book details: *Suffolk Summer* by John Tate Appleby. Reprinted 1997 by Alastair Press ISBN-10: 1870567579

The Suffolk Oxlip Carving by John Williams

The final stop on our walk was the Oxlip carving, which John had finished a week or so previously. John was recently featured in Suffolk News talking about the project and the challenges of carving the dense wood of a cherry tree. The Oxlip is the county flower of Suffolk, and rarely found outside Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Essex. It is a relative of primula. In spring the real thing can be seen (amongst other places) at [Bulls Wood Nature Reserve](#) which is run by Suffolk Wildlife Trust.



Figure 8. RIGHT. John taking a break from carving and chatting to passers-by

Figure 9 LEFT. Detail, from the cherry tree carving of the oxlip

The Oxlip, or True Oxlip (*Primula elatior*), is a rare perennial woodland wildflower that apparently loves to grow on cow dung. It has a pale-yellow flower with five petals which tend to face in the same direction, it is often confused with wild cowslip (*Primula veris*). The difference is that cowslips have deeper yellow flowers

whose flowers often face multiple directions. Just to confuse the amateur plant spotter, oxlip and cowslips sometimes hybridise to produce False Oxlip (*Primula veris* x *vulgaris*). These grow to about the same size as an Oxlip but its flowers also do not all face the same way. Look at this wonderful addition to the garden when next enjoying a stroll.

NEWSLETTER QUIZ – COUNTY FLOWERS OF EAST ANGLIA

A devilishly hard 3-way puzzle: match each flower with its county then match it with the correct picture. And yes, two counties share the same flower. Answers at the end of the newsletter.



i

ii

iii

iv

v

A.Suffolk

B.Norfolk

C.Essex

D.Lincolnshire

E.Cambridgeshire

1. pasque flower

2. common poppy

3. common dog violet

4. common poppy

5. Oxlip

Suffolk Gardens Trust - WINTER LECTURE SERIES

Paul Marsh (Abbey Garden Friend volunteer gardener and committee member) will be delivering one of the Suffolk Gardens Trust winter series lectures, on Saturday 30th November 2024, 2.00pm. He will talk on the history and changing nature of the Bury Botanic Garden, from its founding in 1820 by Nathaniel Shirley Harness Hodson until Hodson's death in 1861. He will give insights into the life and times of Hodson, the sole proprietor and superintendent of the garden, and his connections with the world of botany, horticulture and gardening, using some examples of his (and his employees') contributions to journals, newspapers and local life.

Earl Stonham House, Church Lane, Earl Stonham, IP14 5ED

Tickets are £9 each via the chairman of the Trust: Edward Martin, 10 The Walled Garden, Sudbourne Park, Sudbourne, Woodbridge IP12 2AQ Tel: 01394 459903, edward.martin8@btinternet.com

HISTORICAL NOTE No 4: A nearly dead Cactus from South America is revived!

The subject of this note is all to do with cactus. I have to say the world of these generally prickly little plants is new to me, but here goes!

All cactus, with one or two exceptions, originate from the Americas including the Caribbean. There is no cactus which is indigenous to the British Isles. To grow cactus you need bright light, low humidity and for the growing season, warmth.

There are many hundreds of species of

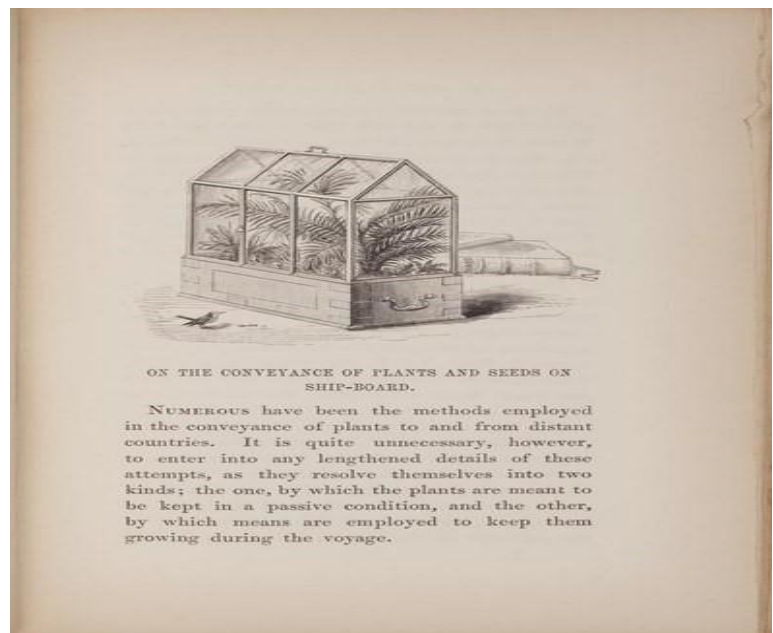


Figure 11 A Wardian Case: Invented by accident by Dr Nathaniel Bagshot Ward in 1829. Courtesy of RHS Lindley Library.

cactus which makes identifying some of the cactus which were grown in the Bury Botanic Garden quite difficult to identify. In the early to mid-19th century to successfully transport a plant, including cactus, from thousands of miles away required a degree of knowledge and a large dose of luck. Plants tended to be generally regarded as non-essential cargo and this attitude together with poor packing, wide changes of temperature and humidity, wind, sea water, salt and lack of light all played their part in killing plants from warmer climes whilst they were slowly sailing towards Britain.



Figure 12/a species of *Echinocactus*. from Curtiss
Botanical Magazine, vol 70, 1844.

Courtesy of Haithi Trust.

The letter below from the garden dates from 1845 when a cactus was still quite unusual (perhaps novelty is a better word) and in many cases rare plants. They needed to be cultivated in either in a Wardian case or in a cactus house (a type of heated stove or greenhouse). Nathaniel Hodson tells us in the letter about the determination and skill of his Curator, Henry Turner and the esteem with which he was held by his employer.

"Plant – *Echinocacti Mamillaria* from South America Shape

Echinocacti and Mammillaria:- I cannot omit noticing, for the information of your readers, an ingenious method of propagating such interesting plants:- Mr Turner, curator of the

Botanic Garden in Bury St Edmunds received from south America a rare specimen of Echinocactus, which was decayed at its base and would not emit fresh roots; he therefore, severed it at the top, and cut off the diseased part, which being healed in a

dry stove, produced several small plants on the summit, a second species which was deemed incurable, was cut transversely and placed on a shelf in the succulent- house, and being fixed on a pot of soil, soon made a strong plant. He has also increased, to a considerable extent, some of the species of Mammillaria by cutting off the protuberances on Mammillaria which, after being dried on sand, produced perfect plants under a bell jar with bottom heat.

N.S.Hodson "

Extract taken from: *The Floriculturist and Florist Magazine*, vol XIV, 1845, P214-215.

Paul Marsh

Anglia in Bloom winner



The Abbey Gardens won a very well-deserved Gold Award in the public parks category of the 2024 Anglia in Bloom competition. Congratulations to everyone who played a part in this, including Park Manager Simon Hobson, Head Gardener Tom Hagger and their team; to the Abbey Gardens Friends volunteer gardeners and

to Bury in Bloom coordinator Chris Wiley. (Photo (L to R): Lynda Seldis, Simon Hobson, Tom Hagger, Libby Ranzetta, Chris Wiley)

Thank you to all members for your continued support of the Abbey Gardens. AGF now has some 90 members and with readers' help we hope to reach the 100 mark in 2025.

Abbey Gardens Friends committee

A. Suffolk, oxlip – 5, !!!
B. Norfolk, common poppy – 2 or 4, i or v
C. Essex, common poppy – 2 or 4, i or v
D. Lincolnshire, common dog violet – 3, iv
E. Cambridgeshire, pasque flower – 1, ii

Answers to Newsletter quiz: