

Abbey Gardens Friends Newsletter, Spring 2026

"Helping to keep the Abbey Gardens a joy to visit".

(9-page edition!)



Margaret Wilkin Winter Garden Officially Opened!



The Winter Garden on a frosty morning

It might seem strange to start the Spring newsletter with the new Wilkins Winter Garden in the central beds, but I hope Abbey Garden Friends had many opportunities to enjoy it over the past few months. All made possible because Dr Margaret Wilkin left us a legacy of £5000 in her will. Thanks are due to Simon Hobson who designed the winter garden and all the gardeners, volunteers, and professionals, who planted it out. It promises to be even better next winter. The event was covered by Bury Free Press and pictures can be viewed on line .

Photographs above, left courtesy of Bury Free Press

The Annual General Meeting : Long-time Abbey Gardens Friend Richard Summers writes:

I was pleased to see at the recent AGM how the Abbey Gardens Friends have been developing from strength to strength since I was a committee member back in 2015. The “buzz” in the room amongst members and guests showed that the Abbey Gardens Friends are indeed a friendly and dedicated community group.

The AGM was very well attended by enthusiastic and committed members. It was good that the Leader of West Suffolk Council, Cliff Waterman, and senior managers including Mark Walsh, Damien Parker and Gary Quilter were there along with Simon Hobson, the widely admired Park



Image Courtesy of Abbey of St Edmund Reborn Project

Manager. The AGM business was speedily conducted, and the Chairman and Committee were duly re-elected –sure signs that the Abbey Gardens Friends are in good hands. The key features that I remember from my time as a committee member, not least the work of the volunteer gardeners and the ever-better newsletter, are all there but they have grown in strength and breadth.

An important part of the AGM was an excellent presentation of the Abbey of St Edmund Reborn project by James Mellish, the Project Manager, showing how the heritage of the Abbey will be conserved and presented to visitors alongside the well-established glories of the Abbey Gardens. James confirmed that the project proposals are already developing local community engagement across the town. So, all in all, well done Abbey Gardens Friends for continuing to strengthen support for improving this well-loved attraction in the heart of our town!



James Mellish, Project Manager- Abbey of St Edmund Reborn

The chair of AGF addsThe early part of the evening was accompanied by solo violinist Josh Foreman playing a selection of mid-19th century music, for those of you who were humming along the pieces played are below .It was one of Josh’s first solo gigs -so well done to him. And finally, to add to Richards comments about the “buzz” at the AGM, it was due to the bumper membership turnout, keen to hear about the endeavours of our dedicated members, both in the garden and engaged on various projects for the garden (completed and ongoing). The strong support from our colleagues at West Suffolk Council was also greatly appreciated. Thanks to everyone who has contributed to AGF in the year. Meditation *from Thais by Massenet, Sonata in C major by Clementi, Salut D'Amour by Elgar, Czardas by Monti, Romance by Mazas.*

Paul Marsh

The 2027 AGM will be on Thursday March 4th, 2027 @ the Unitarian Meeting House.

Volunteer Gardeners Update / March 2026 / by Pam Adams

Our volunteer gardening team has been busy over the early months of 2026, preparing the grounds for spring and supporting key events across the gardens. Here's a look at what's been happening:

Holocaust Garden Preparation. Ahead of the Holocaust Service on 27 January, volunteers carried out a full tidy and refresh of the Holocaust Garden. Pathways were cleared, beds were restored, and the area was carefully prepared to ensure it provided an appropriate setting for this important occasion.

Rose Garden Rejuvenation in mid-January. The Rose Garden received a major boost with the planting of 290 new roses. These additions are part of a wider, multi-year plan to revitalise the space and enhance its long-term health and appearance.



Nearly time to peel this banana !

Seasonal Maintenance Across the Grounds.

As winter gives way to spring, the volunteers have been working across the Centre Beds, the Sensory Garden, Cloister area, Angel Hill planters and Cathedral churchyard. Tasks have included cutting back old growth, removing epicormic shoots from the Lime trees, tidying beds, and applying mulch to support healthy development as the growing season begins.

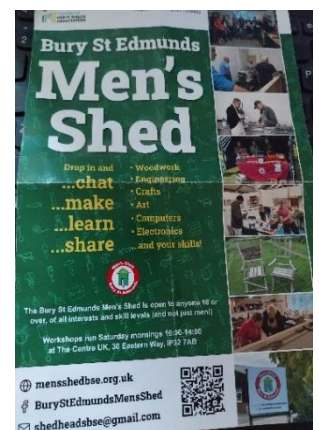
Banana Plants Uncovered for Spring. With longer days and rising temperatures, the first of the Banana plants around the Fountain have had their winter covers peeled off! This marks the start of our seasonal displays and highlights the team's ongoing attention to changing weather conditions.



THANKYOU MENS SHED

Mens Shed have designed and manufactured a new, lockable notice board for the garden. Thanks are due to Giles Washbourn and the chaps who were involved. Much appreciated. (Left: the new noticeboard awaiting collection if you want to know more about mens shed in Bury St Edmunds use the link:

<https://mensshedbse.org.uk>



HISTORICAL NOTE No 8: This note about the garden comes from early in Nathaniel Hodson's life in Bury when he was creating his first botanic garden of about 3 acres (existing between 1820 -1830), now lying under the Premier Inn car park at the end of the Great Churchyard. Hodson writes about a recent acquisition for the botanic garden bought at the clearance of Troston Hall, former home of Capel Lofft well known lawyer, poet, and radical political thinker.

"TO THE EDITOR OF THE BURY POST –Bury St Edmunds October 29th, 1824.

Sir, as many of your readers are acquainted with some of the poetical effusions of the late Capel Lofft Esq. I beg to subjoin some original lines that were found within the lid of a seed box which was purchased at Troston Hall , and is now in use at the Botanic Gardens in this town

Yours &c N S Hodson"



Troston Hall, taken from "70 views of Norfolk, Suffolk and Northamptonshire" by Robert Bloomfield ,1806. The hall is still inhabited. See insert of the hall today. Photo courtesy of Discover Suffolk



Capel Lofft was a lawyer passionate about astronomy, an ardent anti slaver, defender of civil rights and anti-hunting. In 1800 he was struck off "the roll", the list of practicing Lawyers, for defending Sarah Lloyd, a 22-year-old servant accused of the theft of 40/- from her master, apparently encouraged by her suitor. Lloyd was found guilty and sentenced to death. Following the sentence Lofft tried strenuously to get Lloyd's sentence commuted, but to no avail. He accompanied her in the open cart taking her to the gallows, holding an umbrella over her to shield her from rain. Her memorial is in Bury old churchyard.

Lofft supported the idea of revolution in France and Britain and campaigned to stop Napoleon being imprisoned on St Helena which alienated him from most of Britain's politicians and social hierarchy. Perhaps it's not surprising as his views, some of which chime with today's thinking, would have been disturbing to many influential people at the time. In 1811 his father died and left him a large inheritance. In 1815 Lofft was so vehemently opposed to the Government's decision to send Napoleon to exile in St Helena he attempted to serve a writ of *habeas corpus*, the legal instrument against wrongful imprisonment, while Napoleon was being held aboard HMS Bellerophon in Plymouth harbour. He was unsuccessful. In 1816 he went to live in self-imposed exile at Montcalieri, near Turin, in Piedmont and remained there until his death in

*Photo of Llyods memorial.
Courtesy Mark Woods @"Find a
Grave"*

May 1824. St Marys church Troston has a memorial to him. Lofft numbered, amongst his less contentious activities astronomy, gardening and poetry. This is the poem Hodson found in the lid of the seed box. If anyone knows the whereabouts of the seed box let me know

"SEMINARIUM" – 20TH MAY MDCCLXXXIII

*Hopes of my garden rest: until your day
Wake you to life and beauty. Some to shed
New fragrance on the Zephyrs infant wing:
Others to glow on Summers varied robe
Or swell rich Autumn's pomp: and some to smooth
The chill and vacant darkness of the year,
When Winters sternest frowns, let none despise
Your seeming nothingness: in which are veiled
Unnumber'd miracles of form and hue,
And vegetative soul; but own the more
Him who pervades the UNIVERSE, whose breath
From every atom calls forth latent worlds.*

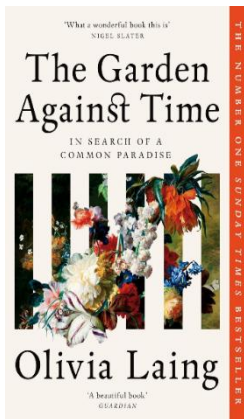


Capel Lofft by William Ridley, 1802.

Image courtesy of Wikipedia

Capel Lofft , 28TH May 1783

Suffolk Gardens Trust: AGF friends' corporate membership will be renewed on 1st April. The SGT latest newsletter is out now and can be viewed online. It features a flyer for their visit to Abbey Gardens in August for a "Walk & Talk" led by Paul Marsh and Simon Hobson (West Suffolk Council Manager for Abbey Gardens, Green Spaces and Heritage). Please use our membership to visit historic Suffolk gardens not open to the public -all for a reasonable ticket price which usually includes cake! www.suffolkgardenstrust.org

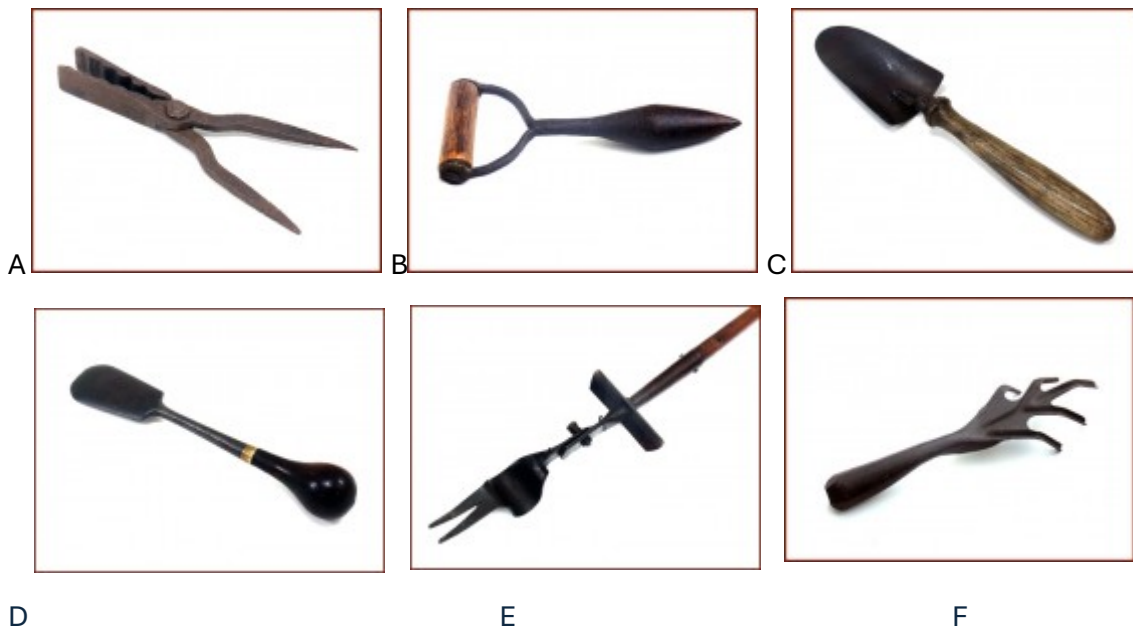


BOOK REVIEW: If you love gardens and you love Suffolk there is a pretty strong chance you will love this book. It's the story of how Olivia Laing and her partner set about reviving a long lost walled garden near Leiston which had been created by garden designer Mark Rummery of Norcott's Nursery in the 1970s. It's not a straight narrative but a meandering patchwork of stories exploring the nature of a garden and the tranquillity it provides, all interwoven with descriptions of how the garden once was and how it will be when it comes back to life. Milton's poetry, hunger in wartime Italy and artist/gardeners Cedric Morris and Arthur Lett-Haines of Benton End, Hadleigh are some of the evocative divergences. Beautifully written, a thought-provoking look at what your own Garden of Eden might look and feel like.

Published by Picador @ £10.99 . ISBN : 978 - 1529066708

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THE QUIZ : The mysteries of a garden shed are sometimes revealed when you have a clearout. Here are 6 old tools I found which need sorting out. Good luck.



CULTIVATOR	DAISY GRUBBER	TROWEL
WEED SPUD	THISTLE PULLER	DIBBER

We have received a donation of £100 which has been spent on shrubs for the garden. Many thanks from AGF.





A SUMMER VISIT BOOKED FOR THURSDAY 25TH JUNE

WOLFE HALL, BARROW, BURY ST EDMUNDS. As a result of an interesting conversation Paul Marsh had at one of the October plant sales we are off to visit Jo and Mark Howard's 5 acre garden which is part of the National Garden Scheme (see NGS website or the online pages of Suffolk Magazine). All takings from the visit will be donated by Jo and Mark to St Nicolas Hospice in Bury. 15 places are available, at £10 per head, the money to be collected on the day. If you would like to be put on the list for this outing please contact our Secretary, Ian Hobley, email abbeygardens.bse@outlook.com. Places will be allocated on a first-come-first-served

basis. Please also tell Ian if you are willing to drive and take passengers. We shall meet at 10.00am by the War Memorial on Angel Hill. The event will include a guided tour of the gardens and refreshments. The event will finish at approximately 12.30pm.

Website: ngs.org.uk/gardens/wolfe-hall-ip29

The Town Meeting held on Wednesday 18th March.

Margaret Steavenson represented AGF at the town meeting, which was by all accounts well attended by community groups from across Bury. Donna Higgins, the Mayor, voiced public support for AGF which was lovely to hear. Thanks to Margaret for attending on our behalf



Talking of trees 1...you may have noticed that

a number of trees in the garden have been felled or had diseased/dead boughs removed for safety reasons. Pictured right is a Robinia tree in early March. It's being reduced in height by the tree surgeon from a "cherry picker" before the main trunk was cut down at the base and the timber removed. This tree had to be removed as it was dead and completely hollow and would pose a danger to the public had it been allowed to remain. Abbey Garden Friends are paying around £1700 for about a dozen new trees to be planted -both as replacements for trees being removed and trees in new places across the garden. Money well spent for future generations to enjoy.



Perhaps you are familiar with the question” When is the best time to plant a tree? “The answer to this old gardener’s pearl of wisdom can be found at the end of the newsletter.

Talking of trees 2...in preparation for a future carving, the conifer to one side of the Abbeygate in front of the tour guides office has been reduced by the tree surgeons to tallish twin stumps. More on what is planned for this rather interesting double stump in a future newsletter. See right.



Talking of Trees 3...Elaine Bean of Bury Water

Meadows Group and Abbey Garden Friends and several others have produced a tree trail for the Wildlife festival in the garden in May. It's run by Bury Water Meadows Group and will run over 3 days.

Talking of Shrubs...On 1st May the volunteer gardeners, WSC gardeners and other odds and bods gathered on the raised beds to the left of the café to say thank you to Ronnie who has donated over £550 to AGF in the past year. Ronnie likes to keep out of the limelight about his donations but he was thrilled to be asked to plant a shrub in the garden he clearly loves. Well-deserved recognition of his generosity. See Bury Free Press online and newspaper for the story.



SORRY TO BRING BAD NEWS.....but the beautiful donation



box in the Abbey Garden has been broken into and the contents stolen by a person(s) unknown. This probably happened between 12th March and 24th March as the box was emptied on the 11th. The loss to AGF for this period is probably between £20 -£60. The loss over the year if we do not have a donation box may be closer to £250-£300. The lock barrel had been removed cleanly, showing a level of professional skill better suited to a more productive vocation than robbing a community group of valuable funds. Apart from the obvious costs of repairs, we will have to take steps to try to reduce the risk of theftmore on this when we have a plan.

If anyone wants to call out this theft in the local press feel free to do so.

Walk and Talk: On a happier note, Simon Hobson (Manager Abbey Gardens, Heritage and Green Spaces) and Paul Marsh (Abbey Gardens Chair) hosted a group of Abbey Garden Friends for a walk around the garden on Wednesday 1st April. The weather was perfect and as far as Simon and Paul could tell a good time was had by all. Look out for future walks and talks as the year progresses. All part of membership benefits!

A date for your diary

FRIDAY 16TH OCTOBER 2026

“Heinous Crimes, Shenanigans and Misdemeanours and the Botanic Garden”

A talk by Paul Marsh, (Chair of AGF) and Nick Marsh MBE (a leading forensic expert) devoted to events involving the people in and around the Botanic Garden.

A talk which is bound to be full of surprising events highlighting poverty, greed, recklessness, brutality and jealousy in the 19th century.

A rare chance to find out more about the secret life of the garden and its people between 1828 and 1867!

More details on price and how to book your ticket coming soon.

QUIZ ANSWERS:

A: *Thistle puller*

B: *Dibber*

C: *Trowel*

D: *Weed Spud*

E: *Daisy grubber*

F: *Cultivator*

Talking of trees 1 : riposte” about 20 years ago!”

An invitation from the editor, who says he is always happy to receive articles or pictures about the garden, just use our e mail address to send them for consideration.

abbeygardens.bse@outlook

Unless otherwise stated all pictures are by Paul Marsh

END OF NEWSLETTER