



Yorkshire Gardens Trust AGM Saturday 21 March 2026 Lotherton Hall, Leeds followed by a talk by Jemima Hubbersty and a tour round the gardens



Terrace Garden and South Front of House

The AGM

A foggy March morning saw some 60-odd members assemble at Lotherton Hall for our annual general meeting. The largely Victorian and Edwardian Hall was given to Leeds City in 1968 by the last owner, Sir Alvary Gascoigne, and now forms a popular part of the Leeds Museums and Galleries offer. <https://museumsandgalleries.leeds.gov.uk/lotherton-mbrx>

The meeting was held in the elegant drawing room overlooking the garden but beforehand we had the chance to view an excellent exhibition by our member Jane Furse which included lots of information and photographs on the Edwardian garden created by Sir Alvary's father Frederick and mother Gwendolen and which we were to view later. Both the garden and house are listed Grade II denoting their national importance.

The AGM served to remind us of the hard efforts of our various Trustees and Officers; all focused on running the Trust as efficiently and effectively as possible. We were reminded that income relied heavily on memberships bolstered by occasional donations of varying types. Budgets are very well and tightly managed, a returned unspent bursary was noted this year along with the pressures of rising postage costs. To try to alleviate the latter, members are being asked to consider online only receipt of information including *Newsletters* wherever possible.

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Conservation Group

Our various groups continue their sterling efforts. The Conservation Group put much time, effort and energy into responding to planning applications affecting parks and gardens across the region. This is a fluctuating but heavy workload which has seen significant benefit on the ground through many revised and more sensitive planning proposals. All helping retain our significant historic assets whilst also supporting change and adaptation. Notable successes this year included gaining statutory protection for the fabulous Art and Crafts house and garden at Tudor Croft, Guisborough; comments were also provided on restoration proposals for the newly listed Archbishop's walled garden at Bishopthorpe, York.

A recent government consultation on streamlining the planning process caused much angst as, amongst other things, it included a suggestion that the Gardens Trusts be removed from the statutory consultees list for planning applications affecting historic parks and gardens. Both the national Gardens Trust and the Yorkshire Gardens Trust responded in detail, explaining the importance and value of our work and countering any views that such served to block planning systems. We await the Government's considered response to the comments. There is much to play for here as the proposals would significantly change the way that both the Gardens Trust and we interact with the planning system, and we hope that the detail supplied will indeed counter many of the suppositions inherent in the original consultation.

The steady number of consultations on forestry and woodland issues speak, amongst other things, of the need to be able to respond clearly to climate change issues whether these are linked to disease control, carbon capture, climate change and nature recovery. These are specialist areas challenging available knowledge. The value of training events such as this upcoming one in Herefordshire https://www.woolhopeclub.org.uk/sites/default/files/homepage_banner_file/Herefordshire%20Parkland%20Conference.pdf is critical. Let us know if anyone is attending and can provide feedback.

Research and Recording Group

The Research and Recording Group continue their focused efforts across the County. Some 90 detailed reports on individual sites are already available online with a further 10 or so in progress. This is an invaluable resource which frequently provides critical support for developers, planners and the Conservation Group. Here it is worth noting that there are some 500 known historic parks across Yorkshire of which only 131 currently have statutory protection so there is much continuing work to do, and the Group is always

looking for new members. Training sessions such as that provided this year at Baldersby Park provide important support for the Group and help maintain consistency of approach.

Membership and Engagement Group

The work of the Membership and Engagement Group continues apace as ever, with four informative *Newsletters* (two hardcopy; two online) produced a year and a varied range of site visits. Last year's programme was another triumph of organisational skill and included Hornby Castle, Bedale, Sheffield parks, Parcevall Hall Gardens, near Skipton, Skipwith Hall, Selby, Helmsley Walled Garden, South Cliff Gardens, Scarborough and the University of York Campus, together with a study trip to the Yorkshire Sculpture Park. The amount of time and effort taken to arrange these for members' benefit should never be underestimated. From this year the numbers of *Newsletters* will be reduced and more will be made available online (as noted above as a response to increasing postal costs).

Schools Group

The Schools Group has found its grants especially attractive this year with available funds all well-subscribed; some five grants have been made. The value of these was emphasised in a thought-provoking presentation by Ben Palmer, Assistant Head of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Keighley. He leads their outdoor learning programme, which is supported by YGT, and eloquently and passionately explained how this can be used to support well-being and child development, especially in areas with significant socio-economic issues as in his school catchment. This is manifested by high levels of special educational needs (SEN) and deprivation challenges and lots of mental health issues. Traditional classroom learning and curricula do not meet these needs well. In contrast outdoor learning is much loved and valued. It allows children to explore nature, collaborate, take risks and more, all helping build confidence and connection skills. Academic studies have confirmed these values, but sadly none of the excellent work done in outdoor classrooms and forest school programmes is currently statutory. Many schools simply do not have the resources or passion to pursue such learning.

At St Joseph's each child receives an hour of Forest School a week largely based in their own greenspace. Activity space includes a playground garden full of sensory plants which support well-being and each class has its own hanging basket of plants to nurture. His impassioned presentation ended with a 'Call for Action' to ensure more schools and children can benefit from these approaches. This was an inspiring

insight and demonstration of how a relatively small grant can make a big and real difference in the right hands. (It is hoped to print Ben's paper in a later issue of the *Newsletter* – Ed.)

Small Grants

On Small Grants only a couple have been awarded this year; one to Askham Bryan College, one to Yorkshire in Bloom. It would be good to get more quality applications. Sadly, a student bursary offered this year was returned prompting thought on how to better use this resource, especially if it could be used more to support trainee horticulturalists.

Chair's Report

Our Chair, Chris Webb, then gave an upbeat account of what has been another very active and productive year. As this is his last year in role his presentation was reflective. He flagged the many challenges the year had brought but commented on the positive efforts and enthusiasm which has been directed towards these, all providing strong and, hopefully, productive input. He reflected on continuing good relations locally with Historic England, English Heritage and the National Trust. He also reported on our relationship with the national Gardens Trust which remains strong, but not without issue around roles and responsibilities. This will be a continuing story not least as the Government clarifies any changes to planning procedures and supporting guidance.

Finally, Chris and other retiring Trustees Penelope Dawson-Brown and Vicky Price were thanked for their unstinting efforts in support of YGT over many years. Penelope is retiring from the Council, and before the AGM closed Chris was presented with a magnificent planting trough.

Overall, the key impression provided by the AGM was of a passionate, busy, determined and well managed charity with enthusiastic plans, and so much food for thought.



Chris Webb receiving his retirement present at the AGM

The Wrest Park Circle

The AGM was followed by a lecture by Dr Jemima Hubberstey on *Unearthing Gardens in the Archive*.

She examined how 18th century women engaged with garden designs and landscape, drawing primarily on the correspondence of four women of the 'Wrest Circle'. Dr Hubberstey undertook her Ph.D. research examining connections between literary coteries and garden design in the mid-eighteenth century. She now works in the research team for Historic Royal Palaces.

The Wrest Circle focused on Jemima Marchioness Grey (1722-1797) of Wrest Park in Bedfordshire and her female friends Catherine Talbot (1721-1770), Elizabeth Anson (1725-1760), Mary Gregory (1719-1761) and Mary Forbes (1722-1783). Each was well educated and had the social position to allow intellectual freedom. Together they created an intellectual circle which saw them undertaking tours together, co-writing accounts of these and exchanging many letters.

Existing accounts of the development of 18th century landscape and gardens are drawn from very male perspectives. These include the work *Pleasures of the Imagination* written by Joseph Addison and published in the *Spectator* in 1712. It included developing thoughts on aesthetics and how the pleasure of a connoisseur could improve refinement and taste. Women had limited ability to engage with gardens in the same way, but careful consideration of archive material can help give them voice and de-marginalise them. This is particularly the case for the Wrest Circle for which considerable correspondence is preserved in the Bedfordshire Archive Service.

Jemina had inherited Wrest Park from her grandfather. She spent much time in the garden, was interested in landscape and garden design, and chose Capability Brown to remodel the landscape there. Once he started, she kept a tight rein on the work. Elizabeth Anson also had a practical understanding of garden design and a sense of the *genius of places*. Mary Forbes was an accomplished and passionate painter of plants and flowers and developed a strong interest in their botany. Jemina and Catherine Talbot had critical discussions about design and developed strong views about that at Stowe. Guidebooks at the time suggested that Lord Cobham had done great public service in creating his garden at Stowe, not least making it accessible to the many visitors who found their way there. But the women's accounts develop a view that the landscape was primarily designed for those men who had been on Grand Tours. Jemina, particularly, suggested that the gardens reflected Cobham's poor taste. The group debated the design and elements of the landscape. Whilst developing slightly different views, there was a general dislike of the various built structures and a view that the landscape needed a more naturalistic approach.

Both at home and away Jemina invited friends and acquaintances to draw and paint gardens and landscapes but warned that they would be unlikely to be able to do full justice to nature there. Sadly, none of the artwork created by the group survives but it was reviewed and discussed in their correspondence. Interestingly their strong interest in more naturalistic landscapes presaged the Picturesque movement which was to follow.

Overall, the lecture was a firm reminder to us that 18th century women had an influence and often strong views on the developments in the landscape and garden design of their age. Thoughtful research, as shown here, can demonstrate the interest and power they had and how they used it to counterbalance the more usually presented masculine-led accounts and views of the time.

After a splendid lunch in the courtyard, we were well set for afternoon tours of the gardens. Thankfully the fog and mist had lifted to reveal blue sky and full sun, perfect conditions for the delights to follow.



Drive to House from Stable Court – Maria and Jane leading us off

The Gardens

Lotherton had a hall and medieval village from at least 1086. It passed through several ownerships and has limited surviving history until sold to the Gascoigne family of the neighbouring Parlington Estate in 1825. The formal gardens were created by Colonel Frederick and his wife Gwendolen in Edwardian style, drawing on influences and ideas from their other properties in Ireland and at Craignish in Scotland. Gardener contacts included Osgood Mackenzie (creator of Inverewe Garden in Scotland) and Ellen Willmott.

Outside the drawing room we had met in earlier is a magnificent terrace laid out in 1902-3 by William Goldring. It is enclosed by stone balustrading with stone piers which supported urns. Roses climb the Hall walls whilst shaped beds, today with heather edging, are set into the paving. Whilst the site has a limited number of gardening staff, a large volunteer force helps prepare the beds for glorious summer

planting. Here volunteers are drawn from the neighbouring 'Garforth in Bloom' group. <https://www.garforthinbloom.org.uk> In places the garden is ornamented with oriental sculpture, not original but drawn from the collections of Leeds City Museums and used to mark Sir Alvary Gascoigne's diplomatic career; particularly his role as British Political Representative in Japan between 1946 and 1951. Oriental plants have also been introduced.

From the Terrace steps lead down to a long formal garden with gravel paths and formal beds edged with clipped yew. These take the visitor to an 18th century Walled Garden used as part of the Edwardian design.



Walled Garden

The family did not need a productive garden as they had access to the one at nearby Parlington, so they could turn this into another of their garden rooms. A heated conservatory shown on early maps was replaced by Mrs. Gascoigne with a summer house which itself is now lost. The walled garden is currently under restoration but we were allowed a privileged view. Large beds run around the walls and had a variety of plants training against the walls with herbaceous borders in front. A central lawn is now dominated by later specimen trees.

A Metasequoia (Dawn Redwood); Ginkgo Biloba and Davidia Involucrata (handkerchief tree) now dominate this space and take much light but are retained as important specimens. Crown lifting keeps them healthy but also allows more light through the canopy. Sadly, the former box edgings here were diseased and had to be removed. In place the use of Ionicera as edging is being trialed.

The current work in the Walled Garden again highlights the effort of the site volunteers. The gardens have a site restoration Masterplan, recently completed by renowned consultants Southern Green, but a proposed bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for support did not work out and instead the gardens team are taking a smaller step-by-step approach to projects.



William and Mary Garden

Next was the William and Mary Garden, an intimate and elegant space focused on a central rectangular sunken pond. This is flanked by edged beds and spiral topiary. Originally alpinists tumbled down the partially enclosing wall. This garden leads to the Parlington Garden, named after the neighbouring family seat. A small lime avenue leads to a stone garden temple, originally said to be a portico from Parlington Hall. Adjacent conifers are a later planting and again have outgrown available space.



Pool in William and Mary Garden



*Meadow to S. of Formal Garden.
White Summer House in distance. Ha-ha to right separating
Meadow from Parkland*

To the south an area of grassland planted with bulbs runs down to a ha-ha. Here the ha-ha takes in an area of meadow, extended by Lady Gwendolen. Long developed over magnesium the undisturbed grassland here is species rich and retains significant wildflowers including various orchids. There is also a shrubbery and rock garden known as the Dell.



The Dell

This had a designed water system and water features and originally included a fernery and Japanese garden. Today the rockwork is considered a likely Backhouse of York creation. Again, carefully targeted clearance and planting is happening. A recent welcome addition has been species snowdrops kindly donated by Mike Heagney and other members.

A walk through the grassland took us through specimen trees and national plant collections including that of hollies and back to the main house access drive and the end of our tour.

Conclusion

Overall, the garden provides an elegant insight into the early 20th century. The series of linked 'rooms' each bring their own intimate delight and provoke thought. Their careful maintenance is a testament to the skill and determination of the Museum and Gardens Teams, including their volunteers. Unusually they still complement the entertaining wing of the adjacent hall well. So many originally similar gardens have been swept away by later redesign. This is an atypical, registered garden and a good contrast to the more usual open 18th century designs. It should be better known and respected by the conservation community.

During our visit it was extremely good to see the high numbers of visitors present, including many large family groups. These were probably drawn not just by the glorious weather but also by other elements of the site we did not have time to reach. This includes a large orchard planted in partnership with the Northern Fruit Group in 2006, the deer park (which retains medieval ridge and furrow earthworks), play areas and the Wildlife Zoo not to mention the museum collections in the Hall itself. A good location for a follow-up family and friends visit.

Many thanks to the team at Lotherton who made the day so special and to Jane Furse for sharing her intimate knowledge of these gardens.

Dr Margaret Nieke

Images © Philip Ingham

Whirlow Brook Park & Whinfell Quarry Gardens, Sheffield

YGT Visit 20 May 2025

Part 2: Whinfell Quarry Garden

YGT's South Yorkshire day of garden visiting had started in the morning with an exploration of the history and current developments of the extensive Whirlow Brook Park landscape including its interesting tree collection, the restored rockery, the pond, the woodland and the formal gardens. (See *YGT Newsletter 57, Autumn 2025 p.1*)

For our afternoon session, it was time for something completely different: Whinfell Quarry Garden "the garden next door" to, but separate from, Whirlow Brook Park. Both sites are public parks owned and managed by Sheffield City Council in partnership with their individual Friends groups.

Key information about Whinfell Quarry Garden

- It is a Grade II listed garden (listed in 1999)
- It has a well-documented garden history because of its listing, as well as family and Friends' group research
- It has a well substantiated link to the Backhouse Nurseries in York, an image appearing in the 1906 Backhouse catalogue *Concerning Artificial Rock gardens and What Should Grow in Them* (Borthwick Institute for Archive, Daphne Hamilton Archive)
- It has a recognised alpine garden designer and plantsman associated with the garden: Clarence Elliot
- Whinfell pre-dates the neighbouring designed landscape of Whirlow Brook Park
- Whinfell remained in private ownership for longer than Whirlow Brook Park and was gifted to the city in 1968
- The original Whinfell House has not survived as it was destroyed by fire in 1971. A modern residential complex was built on the original site of the house in the 1980s
- Whinfell Quarry Garden is compact in size 2.5 acres (1 hectare) and has a very different atmosphere to Whirlow Brook Park

A brief history of the site

David Fletcher, Chair of the Friends of Whinfell Quarry Garden, gave an interesting introduction to the history of the site and development of the garden. Gillian Parker (YGT) provided excellent detailed research notes plus the Friends of Whinfell's leaflets helped us navigate and understand the complexities of this labyrinthine garden.

Between 1795 – 1880 what later became Whinfell Quarry Garden had been the Whirlow Flagstone Quarry (Fig 1). Sheffield Quaker steel maker Samuel Doncaster (1853-1934) leased the land with its old sandstone quarries from the Fitzwilliam Estate c.1897. Samuel named his estate 'Whinfell' in recognition of an area in Cumbria called 'Whinfell' a favourite holiday destination for the Doncaster family, as it still is today in the form of a popular Center Parcs location.

A keen traveller, mountaineer and alpine plant collector, Samuel Doncaster immediately commissioned the Backhouse Nurseries of York between 1897-8 to transform the landscape into a large dramatic ornamental garden, to include eye-catching flower borders and the rock garden within the redundant quarries. Unusually the creation of the gardens preceded the construction of the Arts and Craft house which was finally completed in 1902.

Paddocks above the Large Quarry became bluebell and daffodil woods nearest the house forming the woodland garden which Samuel Doncaster wanted. Nearest the house a semi-formal Top Garden followed planted in the more naturalistic style of the day. (Fig 2)



Fig. 1: Yorkshire CCXCVIII.2 Surveyed 1875-1890 pub. 1893 (National Library of Scotland)



Fig. 2: The Arts and Crafts Whinfell House with flower-filled borders.

Sewell, J. *Whinfell Quarry Garden Conservation Management Plan*

Later, c.1912, Clarence Elliott (1881-1969) laid out an alpine garden with a cascade in the Little Quarry on the west side of the garden towards the top of the Whinfell site. Elliott had trained with the Backhouse York Nurseries and was listed in the 1901 census as a

horticultural student living in York. A decade later, in the 1911 census, his occupation is recorded as a landscape nursery gardener. By this time, Clarence had established himself as an alpine plant specialist. Samuel Doncaster had been a director of the Backhouse Nurseries between 1898 and 1910, and so his choice of Clarence Elliott to create this second rock garden at Whinfell in the Little Quarry was an obvious one (Credit: Gillian Parker's PhD research on the Backhouse nurseries for this additional information.)

In 1933 Whinfell's ownership passed to Frederick Neill (1891-1967), who was another prominent member of Sheffield's steel industry. It remained in the ownership of the Neill family until 1968.

Sir Frederick Neill undertook an extensive replanting scheme during the 1960s and created a second entrance point, linking access to Whirlow Brook Park.

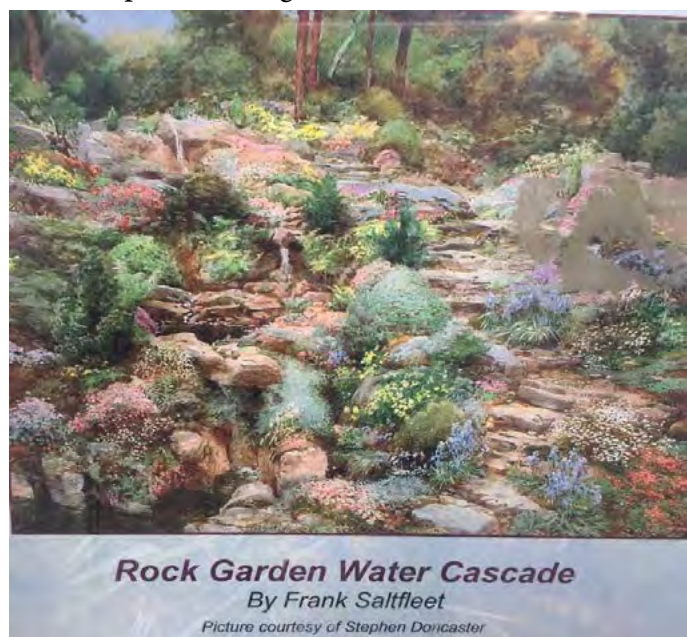


Fig 3: Clarence Elliott's alpine garden and cascade c.1912 by Frank Saltfleet

(Friends of Whinfell Quarry Garden Interpretation Board)

In 1968 the Quarry Garden (not the house and adjacent paddock) was given to the City of Sheffield by James Neill Holdings Ltd, as a memorial to Sir Frederick Neill. Since then, the site has been a public park, owned and managed by Sheffield City Council. In 1971 Whinfell House was destroyed by fire and subsequently demolished in 1979. In the 1980s flats and houses were built on the paddock and the site of Whinfell House at the very top of the garden. The development was renamed Whirlow Court Estate.

During the 1980s and 1990s the Whinfell Quarry Gardens continued to decline. In 2001 the Friends of Whinfell Quarry Gardens was set up, driven by the residents of the Whinfell Court Estate. Since then, the gardens have been maintained and restored jointly by a part time Sheffield City Council gardener (Three days a week) funded by the Friends group as well as the latter's industrious volunteer task force. The

Friends Group also helps to raise funds to continue ongoing work at Whinfell.

Garden Tour Highlights (Fig. 4 map)

Due to the narrow winding paths and steep inclines of the site, our group divided in two and enjoyed the enthusiasm and knowledge of Richard and Paul as our tour guides. Their shared knowledge and unique practical insights into the joys of maintaining and meeting the challenges that Whinfell Quarry Garden presents was much appreciated.

Coincidentally, we were following in the historic footsteps of a distinguished group of visitors who attended a garden party at Whinfell 115 years ago. A report in the *Sheffield Independent* (7 September 1910) described an event held by Mr & Mrs Samuel Doncaster for the British Association attended by more than 300 scientists (including the granddaughter of Charles Darwin). The article described the garden and its impact on the visitors as follows:

"Flowerbeds and borders everywhere showed signs of the most careful attention. Many exclamations of wonder and delight fell from the lips of the distinguished scientists All the guests were charmed with the rock garden in the old quarry..." Our tour began by proceeding along Frog Walk, to discover if the charms of the rock garden in the Large Quarry had indeed survived over a century later.....

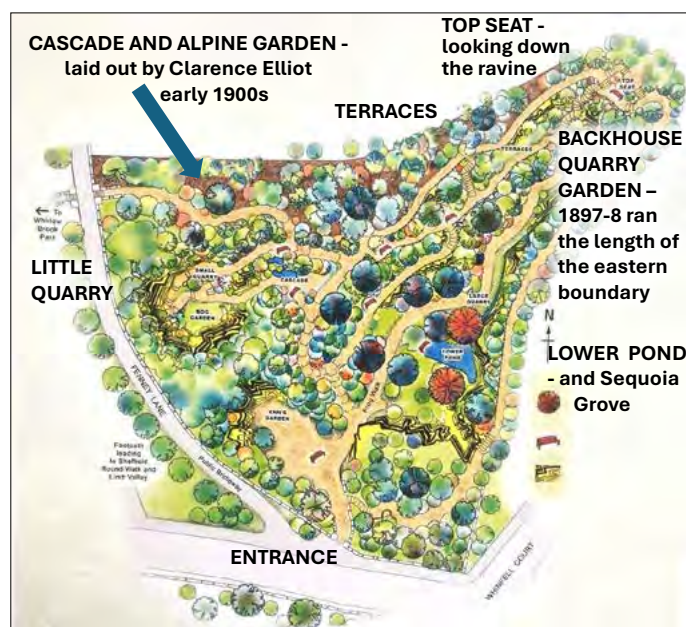


Fig 4: Garden tour route and highlights. Map Copyright Friends of Whinfell Quarry Garden based on a plan by Stephen Pounder

Frog Walk and the Sequoia Grove

By the pool known as Lower Pond, we arrived at the Sequoia Grove containing towering Giant Redwood trees. In 1897 Samuel Doncaster travelled to America and collected Sequoia seed cones in Yosemite. These were incorporated into the Backhouse rockery design to be the specimen trees in the Large Old Quarry. The Friends group leaflet sums up the unique atmosphere

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of the Sequoia Grove, describing it as “a cathedral like space with a sunken pond flanked by sequoia, pines, cedar, and exotic plants giving it a primeval atmosphere”



Figs.5 and 6: Giant Redwood in the Sequoia Grove and the immense presence of the quarry face forming Whinfell's eastern boundary

Two more Redwoods have been planted in this area in recent years. The circumference of the redwoods grows approximately 10cm a year and they have quickly established themselves.

Despite climate change, the Lower Pond has never dried up. It is planted with *Gunnera* and *Symplocarpus foetidus* (skunk cabbage) which were once widely planted as ornamental plants around landscape water features, but which are both now banned from sale in the UK.

The Old Quarry Garden and Arboretum in the Large Quarry

Continuing northwards and upwards along Frog Walk we paused to examine more closely the rock work and features associated with Backhouse rockery design principles with further explanations from Gillian Parker.



Fig.7: A striking stonework feature – looking very much like a large nose

A key Backhouse design principle was the sensitivity applied to their rock work in terms of being appropriate to the site, and aesthetically in this case, complementing the natural sandstone strata of the old flagstone quarry. The protruding rock (bottom left of image) which looks almost like a large nose (Fig.7) was the trademark of Richard Potter, Backhouses' Alpine Foreman at the end of the 1890s. However, an unattributed note in the Whinfell Quarry Garden Archives states that it was Potter's successor, William Angus Clark who built Whinfell's Quarry Garden. He also taught Clarence Elliott to grow and propagate alpine plants during his Backhouse training.

The planting in the Quarry Garden includes low growing bamboo used as ground cover and architectural ferns. This area contains many rare trees and species including Japanese acers, Tibetan cherries, rhododendrons and a variety of conifers. An elegant 60-year-old weeping Beech is a real showstopper. (Fig.8)



Fig.8: An elegant weeping beech

From the upper most northern corner of the site (just below Top Seat) an artificial waterfall (laid out between 1898 and 1902), runs down the quarry face

along the eastern boundary of the site, into a series of four small pools. The water subsequently runs into the Lower Pond in the Sequoia Grove.

Opposite the quarry face on the other side of the winding path - Frog Walk - the steeply sloping banks are planted with rhododendrons of varying shapes and sizes, Pieris etc. There has been a continuous programme of digging out unwanted *Rhododendron Ponticum* and replacing it with new and more manageable varieties. *Camellia Sansanqua* is an interesting alternative to the *Camellia Japonicas* genus, flowering in December at Whinfell. Several species of epimedium have been successfully used throughout the garden as ground cover. Cardamine, Ostrich fern, Himalayan poppies, and a 40-year-old *Rodgersia* added interest to the steep banking planting.

The lower part of the garden uses the large old sandstone quarry to create a rocky terrain and steep slopes with a mountainous feel. Currently the Old Quarry Garden is only a small remaining part of the larger estate gardens which Samuel Doncaster and the Backhouse Nurseries developed between 1897-1902.

The topography of the Old Quarry section of the garden most certainly presents physical maintenance and restoration challenges and an enthusiasm for vertiginous gardening certainly seems to be an essential criterion.

Top Seat and Ravine Views

Completing our meandering along Frog Walk, it suddenly changed in height and a flight of steep stone steps climbed up to Top Seat - Whinfell's highest point, at the north-eastern corner of the garden.

Designed as a viewing platform with a seat commemorating Samuel Doncaster (1853-1934), with fine views of the ravine and the Old Quarry Garden below which no photograph can really do justice to. (Figs.9 and 10). This is a perfect place for visitors to pause to enjoy sights, sounds and scents of what could be a lost Himalayan ravine.



Figs. 9 & 10: Top Seat and viewing platform.

The Terraces

Returning to lower levels, we explored the central part of the garden, a wide-open, spacious series of terraces accessed by gently winding paths and steps. With such an expanse of ground to cover, shrubs and perennials have been planted in themed sections of e.g. roses, heathers, and perennials to create interest and colour throughout the seasons e.g. saxifrage, epimediums, hellebores, daffodils, self-seeded-hypericums, *Exochorda 'The Bride'* to name just a few. A superb low growing yellow rhododendron has been specially selected to be planted alongside an upper path in order not to spoil the view below.



Fig. 11: Low growing yellow rhododendron

The Heather Garden

(Fig.12) is a reminder of Whinfell's historic links to the Doncaster family and the York Backhouse Nurseries.

Erica Carnea 'Mrs Samuel Doncaster' was collected in Switzerland by Richard Potter and introduced by the Backhouse Nurseries in 1911. It was named after Samuel Doncaster's wife Emma Gertrude (1853-1937). This cultivar is now named and conserved as 'Mrs Sam Doncaster'.

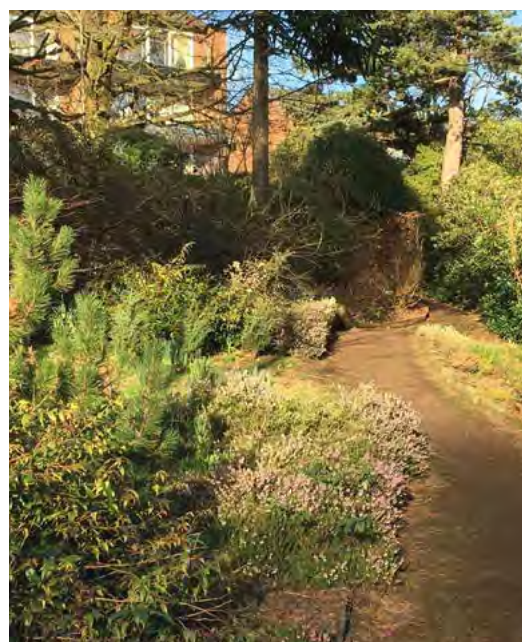


Fig.12: The Heather Garden (February 2026)

Behind the Heather Garden is the northern boundary of the Whinell garden, close to the 1980s residential housing which can be clearly seen.

In a nearby border there is also a memorial stone to Stephen Doncaster (1919- 2018), Samuel Doncaster's grandson, a noted theatre and set designer who seems to have maintained the strong Doncaster family links to the garden.

Easier accessibility and space across the Terraces offer the opportunity for slightly more formal planting and features, such as the island bed seen in Fig.13 with a stone ball on a plinth. However, the presence of trees is never very far away, with the trunks of Scots pines standing like sentries as the paths gradually slopes upwards.

The management and maintenance responsibilities for Whinell are shared. Sheffield City Council is responsible for the upkeep of the hard landscaping including paths and steps, boundaries and the overall health and safety of the site. Work in the garden also requires council approval e.g. design.

The Friends group of volunteers look after the garden. There are 20 volunteers who work 5 hours on the first Saturday of every month. An additional 8 volunteers work during the week for 2-3 hours.

Most of the planting is purchased rather than propagated, funded by donations and grants raised by the Friends Group.



Fig. 13: Island bed with stone ball on

The Little Quarry

Crossing the Terraces brings the visitor to the highest point of Whinell's northwestern corner and boundary and a return to its quarry features, but on a different scale to that of the Old Quarry garden.

The Little Quarry has been sub-divided into five areas, each having distinct qualities but all of which contribute to a coherent whole. They are acer dell (with an 80-year-old specimen tree), wooded heights, the cascade rock garden, and upper rock garden, alpine lawn and the bog garden.

The remains of the cascade rock garden seen in Fig.14 created by the renowned plant collector and nurseryman Clarence Elliott c.1912, was constructed using both Yorkshire limestone and sandstone from the Whinell quarry itself. Elliott's cascade rockery was restored in 2015 funded by a National Lottery grant.

Elliott's design included a series of small pools and cascades. However, from the beginning a significant challenge to the design was the absence of a natural stream on the site. The cascade is fed by a tap not natural running water. The rising temperatures resulting from climate change are a continuing challenge for this section of the garden with features such as the cascade and bog gardens suffering from limited water supply.

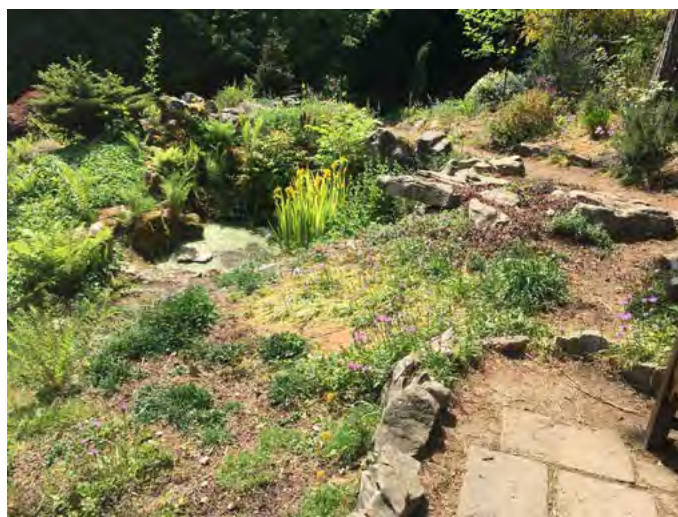


Fig.14: The remains of Clarence Elliott's cascade rock garden

The Little Quarry section of the garden is labour intensive in terms of maintenance and restoration. Our guide Richard highlighted the two problems facing the Alpine Lawn: an invasion of horsetail and the lack of sunshine it receives due to the height of the surrounding trees but there is still the excitement of newly discovered paths from Clarence Elliott's original design being revealed as overgrown areas continue to be cleared.

As our tour drew to a close, we descended from the

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cascade rock garden down to ground level and the Bog Garden in the Little Quarry.

We followed the line of grinding wheel stepping stones through what should have been the Bog Garden, back towards our starting point, the main garden entrance. (Fig.15)

During our tour we had passed an adult family group who seemed particularly interested in and the garden. On talking to the group, what a coincidence was revealed! Its leader, Menneer, was a member of the Neill family. Whinfell had been the family home of his grandparents. He had happy childhood memories of playing on the lawn at Whinfell House and of looking for tadpoles in the Lower Pond. Meneer's parents were married at Whinfell.

What a wonderful story to round off YGT's visit to Whinfell. A reminder of the close and personal connections associated with gardens and garden-making through the vision, skills and expertise, tenacity, and enthusiasm of so many individuals past and present.



Fig 15: Grinding Wheel stepping stones through the Bog garden

Conclusion

The significance and impact of Whinfell Quarry Garden (which had been more than 30 years in the making) is captured in the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* report of a public charity opening at

Whinfell in July 1931:

“Mr Samuel Doncaster has made this garden very beautiful and of course the great marvel about it is the rock garden in the old quarry, which he has turned from an ugly scar on the earth to one of the most beautiful spots in Sheffield. ... The whole garden is a series of surprises ... a labyrinth of lovely scenes ... One can imagine visiting the gardens many times and discovering something new each time” (July 22, 1931)

After a fact-checking return visit to Whinfell in February 2026, I can certainly confirm that. Two hours exploring the garden in early spring revealed even more about not only its structure and history but also its unique and therapeutic value of peace and tranquillity on the edge of a busy urban setting.

Many thanks to Gillian Parker and Maddy Hughes (YGT) for organising the visit. Thank you to the Friends groups of Whinfell Quarry Gardens and Whirlow Brook Park, and to Sheffield City Council for welcoming us and providing a fascinating day, but above all for their constant commitment and hard work in looking after these special but quite contrasting public green spaces for others to enjoy.

Chris Beevers

Images © Chris Beevers

New Trustees elected at 2026 AGM

Congratulations to **Sue Lang** and **Sue Lindley** on being elected as Trustees. Sue Lang works with the Research and Recording Group and Sue Lindley with the Schools Group. Further information about them both will be published in our next *Newsletter*.

Snowdrop Visit to Burton Agnes

Friday 13 February 2026



Introduction

I am sure that we have all seen flocks of birds lift off a field, or perhaps peel out of a hedge, where it has appeared as though upon a leader's command the entire cohort of starlings, or linnets, etc has lifted off to suddenly fill the local sky with a cloud or murmuration of equally-spaced, equally coloured, equally flapping birds, sometimes twisting into the sunlight and forming exquisite abstract shoals in the sky (if you will allow the clumsy mixed metaphor).

Well, I have wondered whether snowdrops enjoy a similar command from their local leader. One day you will see perhaps one or two investigating the early sun under a group of trees, and then the next time you look at the same patch the whole area has bloomed into a local white carpet. Yet, at the same time, other patches of woodland might appear to remain relatively bald, exhibiting only their early vanguards, until they catch you out again when you take a second look and another white carpet has appeared.

Of course, the variation in timing between the flowering of different group of snowdrops is much less romantic, probably not because one of them shouted "Eh up! It's spring, let's all burst into flower next Wednesday". The timing of their flowering is the consequence of various physical features some controlled "internally" (endogenous) and some controlled "externally" (exogenous), such as plant variety, exposure to local sunlight, local temperature, length of daylight, etc. The joy for the visitor is to see the whole woodland, if you are lucky, in an unbroken white carpet, as the different groups coalesce their efforts and provide a backdrop to the simplicity of the winter trees.

Such was the hope when YGT visited Burton Agnes on 13 February 2026 which started as an extremely cold, windy and damp day, but did later improve. The site contains not only the Elizabethan/Jacobean manor house but also the shell of its predecessor, the Norman first-floor hall house. The manor house had

been designed by Robert Smythson (1601). The estate is currently owned by the Cunliffe-Lister family. The estate comprises eight acres of walled gardens, four acres of lawned areas and 100 acres of woodland.

Snowdrop tour

There were about twenty of us and we gathered in a marquee which had been erected for visitors in a courtyard and enjoyed warming coffees to start the day. The Burton Agnes Head Gardener, Jeremy Palmer, provided us with an excellent overview of the relevant garden history and their current gardening practices. The gardening staff for the estate consists of three full-time and one part-time gardeners. He explained that the snowdrops had colonised estate woodland where they had been regularly dug and potted during the mid-20th century for sale at Bridlington market. The plants which were not sold had been returned and scattered in the woods, resulting in the remarkably unbroken carpets which visitors can now enjoy. At Covid Easter Egg hunts through the woodland had been stopped, and the snowdrop population had evidently thrived, so the egg hunt has not been reinstated!

Jeremy then led us through the gardens to the wooded areas which display the snowdrops. My goodness, the snowdrop carpet was impressive stretching more or less as far as we could see, with a meandering path inviting us to wander further between the winter trees. The tree belts upon which the snowdrops are growing are raised perhaps half a metre above the adjacent arable farmland and Jeremy conjectured that these woodland strips might have historically had origins as access roadways leading to the Hall. The tree species were mixed, typical English hardwoods with under-storey bushes planted at random intervals.



Burton Agnes has been promoting snowdrop visits since 1999, and their visitor numbers have risen from virtually single digits to almost 10,000! Jeremy believes that the snowdrops are coming into flower on average one week earlier each year. Certainly, we timed our visit to perfection!



Jeremy pointed to early, emerging leaves of native English bluebells which are now invading the woodland, and he predicts that they will overwhelm the snowdrops in due course. Primroses are also invading the woodland. Nature can be such a brute!

Walled/Kitchen Garden

At the end of our tour, Jeremy showed us around this area which is currently being extensively renovated. The walls have been repaired and a pergola erected. It is planned for there to be vegetables and a potager. There are new plans for the contents of each bed be they vegetables or flowers. The team are currently chitting potatoes and getting ready to plant the future cutting flower garden. Alpines are being planted in gaps in the brick walls and there are large areas of gravel which are being replaced by lawns. The estate boasts an anaerobic waste plant and the hard digestate that it produces is being spread on the borders and

beds. The team have devised a plan for the next two to three years and it would be good to revisit then and see just how much progress has been made. Certainly, we got the impression that the team were extremely positive and enthusiastic.



The Kitchen Garden

Conclusion

We were very grateful to Jeremy for accompanying us on our tour and providing such a lucid explanation of the history of the snowdrops at Burton Agnes. Thanks also to Vicky Price, Tricia Sharp and Joanna Pavey for organising the visit.

Roger Lambert

Images © Roger Lambert

Notes from the Editor

Much has changed in the life of the YGT since the last *Newsletter* was published in August 2025. Our excellent Chair, Chris Webb, retired at the AGM as did one of our long-standing trustees, Penelope Dawson-Brown. Our very grateful thanks were extended to them both: to Penelope for her outstanding contribution to the YGT over many years. As editor I will particularly miss Penelope's erudite articles, contributed entirely voluntarily, on such diverse issues as *The Gibraltar Botanic Gardens* and *The Yellow Gentian – Giant of the Alps*.

Chris will be a very hard act to follow as Chair. He brought so many talents to the task including his academic rigour, his extremely hard work and his dogged pursuit of issues which he and the YGT felt strongly about. We do not have a replacement for Chris so members of the Trustee Board will take it in turns to Chair our Council meetings for the rest of this year. Gillian Parker stepped nobly up to the plate at our April meeting, but she has not been expected to write a column for this issue!

Margaret Nieke bravely took on the huge task of writing up not only the March AGM proceedings but also the lecture by Jemima Hubberstey on *The Wrest Park Circle* and the subsequent tour round the grounds of Lotherton Hall. See p.3

Our Events programme began with the customary snowdrop visit, this year to Burton Agnes in East Yorkshire. It took place on an extremely unpromising day with strong winds, sleet and almost snow and lots of rain. Roger Lambert has written a short report at p.12

Our second report in this issue is by Christine Beevers and is Part 2 of the visit in May 2025 to South Yorkshire public parks and gardens, namely Whinfell Quarry Garden, which sounded like an extremely interesting day. I am very grateful to Chris for producing both reports.

In her report of the AGM, Margaret mentions the work done by our Committees and highlights their considerable achievements. I have not therefore included *Reports from the Committees* in this *e-Bulletin*.

A full list of our new Council and Trustees appears on p.16.

Finally, 2026 marks the new pattern of publication for our *Newsletters* and *e-Bulletins*. This first *e-Bulletin* covers the AGM and our early visits. There will be a second *e-Bulletin* in the Autumn after most of our visits have taken place. The year will end with a printed annual *Newsletter* which will continue to be our document of record and contain all the material for 2026, suitably edited. There will be an option to receive the *Newsletter* in electronic format only. We hope that this pattern will cut the costs of production of the *Newsletters* and *e-Bulletins* but still keep members fully informed of our activities.

Christine Miskin
Editor

Obituary: Malcolm Hand 1937-2025



Malcolm Hand enjoyed a very successful and varied career. He was originally in the Army, worked for ICI then moved to the Diplomatic Corps and worked as a commercial attaché in India. He obtained an MSc at York University in computer science. He also had degrees

in geography and business administration, and he was the MD of several software companies. He had a keen interest in gardens and gardening and was heavily involved in the early days of the Yorkshire Gardens Trust becoming a Council member from 1999 – 2005.

He agreed to take over the Editorship of the *Newsletter* from Val Hepworth with effect from Issue 7 in Autumn/Winter 2000. His first issue contained a request for ideas for additional material including a

correspondence column, as did my first issue 20 years later! Malcolm continued as Editor until 2005 and the Chair at the time, Penelope Dawson-Brown found him “an extremely good editor, quite academic and interesting”.

Malcolm was also very involved in setting up Parks and Gardens Data Services Ltd in association with the Architectural Landscape Dept at Kings Manor in York between 2007-2012 and was one of the project directors. This was a joint project between the Association of Garden Trusts and the University of York's Department of Archaeology.

Late in 2007, Malcolm was invited by the owners of Markenfield Hall to chair a steering group set up to create a Friends Organisation to help promote, conserve and protect this early 13th century moated manor house near Ripon and he was subsequently its Chair.

Support Yorkshire Schools: Make a Difference Today



As a valued member of the YGT, your involvement helps us inspire a love of gardening and growing and supports young people across Yorkshire.

We are proud of what we have achieved with our member schools – and with your continued support, we can provide even greater support.

Donations, however big or small, make a real difference. Every pound goes directly towards funding schools with grounds development awards, plants, books and resources to support their work in their gardens and outdoor learning spaces. This approach enables us to nurture the next generation of gardeners and broaden opportunities for the pupils in our member schools.

If you are able, please consider making a donation this year. Some examples of how your donation could be used to support gardening in schools include –

- £10 would allow us to send a perennial plant to a grateful school.
- £25 could fund a book on gardening, to inspire young minds.
- £50 a fruit tree to stand in school grounds for years to come.
- £100 a wormery with all the learning, horticultural and ecological benefits that provides.
- £300 would fund a Grounds Development Award to allow a school to make an inspirational change to their grounds.

You can donate *online* via our website, set up a regular contribution, or contact us directly for more ways to give. Every donation, however large or small, is appreciated and truly valued by children and schools across our huge and diverse county.

Thank you for your support. Together, we can continue to make a positive impact in Yorkshire schools.

***With gratitude,
The YGT Schools Committee***



Yorkshire Gardens Trust

President	The Countess of Harewood
Vice Presidents	Caroline Legard, Peter Goodchild, Nick Lane Fox
Chair	Vacant
Treasurer	Maddy Hughes
Company Secretary	Gillian Parker
Trustees	Val Hepworth, Maddy Hughes, Roger Lambert, Brendan Mowforth, Vicky Price, Gillian Parker, Camilla Allen, Trevor Nicholson Sue Lindley, Sue Lang.

Committees and Groups

Conservation	Vacant
Events	Vicky Price, Maddy Hughes and the Team
Membership/Engagement	Vicky Price
Newsletter/e-Bulletin	Christine Miskin
Research and Recording	Louise Wickham and the Team
Schools	Sue Lindley
Small Grants	Brendan Mowforth
Webmaster	Louise Wickham

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Forthcoming YGT Publications

We expect to publish the next e-Bulletin this Autumn.

If you wish to have material included, please do not hesitate to contact me below: .

Please send items for inclusion to Christine Miskin: cemiskin22@gmail.com

YGT Contact Details

For general and membership queries: email secretary@yorkshiregardenstrust.org.uk.

Or, if you are already a member, use the 'phone numbers on your membership card to give us a call.

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