



# GUARDIAN ANGEL

NEWS FROM BRADFORD ON AVON PRESERVATION TRUST

## Notes from the Chair

As usual I had left these notes rather late – but this time I can use Wiltshire Council as an excuse. They were to come up with a decision about the planning application for the restoration of the railway station footbridge canopy, but there was a delay in the process and we didn't hear until 1 April that permission had been granted. Excellent news – and it wasn't an April Fool!

Apart from that, I had a list of all sorts of things to include in a jolly, if somewhat random, manner but the news from Ukraine is so awful it makes the goings-on in a small town in Wiltshire seem trivial in comparison.

A van packed with donated items for refugees fleeing from the nightmare has been sent from Bradford on Avon, and arrived in Ukraine last month. What is needed now is cash: you can donate online via the Disasters Emergency Committee. We in the UK have already given more than £100 million – a huge sum, but one that will not last long in a country of 44 million, given the scale of the disaster.

In November I went to Glasgow with an old chum from the days of The Bath Arts Workshop, to make a film during the UN Climate Change Conference, COP26. We wanted to see what it was all about and to canvass people's reactions to the conference and the issue of climate change. You can watch the film on YouTube – it's called *Make It A Fair Cop*.

Before we went, we knew some of the basics of climate change but in Glasgow we found out a whole lot more: how your pension can be used in the fight, how nature has huge cash values as long as you leave it alone, how much a blue whale is worth... (A director from the IMF had a team working on the blue whale question and the answer is \$4 million – alive). We saw a train running on hydrogen and travelled on a large battery powered bus. We came across lots of fired-up people and heard about the urgency but, most importantly I think, we realised that there is hope for us all, things are changing, the terrible events in Ukraine are making us all look to different sources and methods of supplying energy, and we are all looking at non-polluting ways to keep the lights on.

I will give you one fact, which I picked up in a fringe meeting in a packed community church and have since verified on the World Economic Forum website:

To limit global temperature rise to below 1850-1900 levels we have to limit the output of carbon dioxide. The tipping point comes after an extra 460 billion tons of CO<sub>2</sub> is released into the atmosphere. In 2021 we released 36.3 billion tons.

On a personal note, I have a very positive climate story. I had to drive home, 40 miles after dark, during Storm Eunice. On the way down there had been one car in a ditch, a couple of fence panels and the odd dustbin rolling about. On the way back, the main road was

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closed, blue flashing lights everywhere, and we had to take the tiny lanes route after Pilton. There was lightning around Shepton Mallet and an enormous and deafening hailstorm which turned into a very quiet blizzard. By Cranmore it was all over apart from heavy rain. All road lighting was off and I very nearly came to grief at the large, busy roundabout at Nunney Catch.

I was an hour late at a dinner party but the good news from Alison was that the huge horse chestnut tree on the allotment had been blown over. It was old and not well, and we'd been thinking about taking it down for a while. I had to wear a cycling helmet there in autumn as the spiky coated conkers rained down, and much of April would be spent digging up small trees growing among the onions. I will miss its wonderful display of candles in early summer, though, and the Rambling Rector just setting off on its mad, upward journey has had to be rehoused.

Talk of allotments brings thoughts of the Flower and Produce Show, which will be held in St Margaret's Hall on Sunday 4 September, open from 2-4pm for everybody to come and have a look. An early hot favourite category is returning after lobbying from an ex-Mayor. Yes, the Cornish pasty will be back alongside the pork pie. I have just finished rebuilding a much larger greenhouse: I know Vernon's tomatoes are already up and growing well, but I am pretty confident in the largest tomato competition and quite hopeful in the tastiest. I have made the marmalade – unfortunately the first batch was too thick and the second too thin, so success in reclaiming the Town Council Jam Cup is resting on the strawberries.

A couple of positive items to end with: firstly, the completion – after some delays – of work on the pretty footpath which leads up from the end of Church Street to Barton Orchard. Wiltshire Council agreed to repair the path with pennant stone instead of asphalt, if we provided the stone.

With a generous donation from an individual member of the Trust, plus more funds from the Town Council and us, the stone was sourced and purchased, and a year later the small but perfectly formed project is finished. It looks absolutely brilliant – as you will see from the before and after pictures on page 9. Many thanks to everybody involved.

There is also movement to report on the local natural environment. Wiltshire Council adopted the Blue Green Infrastructure (BGI) Strategy on 1 February. This document lays out how they intend to protect the natural environment. It describes how the council, landowners and other agencies can help to address the climate and ecological emergencies. The Environment Act 2021 says that Wiltshire will have to produce a Nature Recovery Strategy and this will be key to Bradford on Avon and the wider environment. They will have to map a Nature Recovery Network, showing how there can be more, higher quality and better-connected habitats for nature. Let's hope this will provide evidence and planning protection for sites such as the disused golf course, an important green corridor alongside the blue river through town.

*John Potter, Chair*

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## Planning matters

### Rosie MacGregor, chair of the Trust's Planning Committee, reports on proposals affecting Woolley Grange, Mill Lane and Christ Church

#### Refurbishment and extension of Woolley Grange Hotel and Spa

The Preservation Trust Planning Committee made representations to Wiltshire Council after very careful and detailed consideration of the proposals. Woolley Grange is an important Grade II starred listed building within the Western Wiltshire Green Belt in close proximity to the Conservation Area at Woolley. The committee understood the desire of the owners to improve the current facilities and considered that some reconfiguration and updating might be required but the extent of the new development would be massive and entirely unacceptable.

The proposals would virtually double the original footprint and increase the number of bedrooms from 25 to 55 by extending the former country house and adding new buildings within the site. Irrespective of the intention to use natural materials and keep the new buildings of low profile with green roofs these would nevertheless be buildings and would be seen as such.

It was felt that the existing Grade II\* mansion would be dwarfed by these proposals which would overwhelm and dominate. The historic building, its open setting and green surroundings would be severely diminished by these harmful proposals.

New buildings and disproportionate extensions of existing buildings are inappropriate in the Green Belt except in exceptional circumstances and the need to generate more revenue and increase viability does not represent the very special circumstances needed to justify permission.

Furthermore, the proposals would require increased parking, signage, lighting and new access that would have an urbanising impact on the rural character of the area, would result in an increase in traffic and would inevitably harm the setting of the nearby Conservation Area at Woolley.

The increase in traffic would be a significant cause for concern as Woolley Street is of substandard width and inherently unsafe for pedestrians and all road users.

Bats are a significant feature of the area and the disturbance from increased lighting, traffic movements at night and general disturbance would harm these protected species.

The Trust is still awaiting a decision by Wiltshire Council at the time of going to press.

#### Planning appeal at Mill Lane

An appeal has been submitted to the Planning Inspectorate, a government agency that considers appeals against decisions of local planning authorities, for

refusal of permission to build a large two storey building incorporating ground floor parking and an apartment above at the corner of Mill Lane and Kingston Road.

We fully support the decision by Wiltshire Council and have made strong representations to the Inspectorate on the grounds of the substantial harm to the setting of buildings listed of historic importance, harm to the conservation area and harm to the street scene due to the location and proposed height, mass and design of the new building.

#### Christ Church refurbishment and repair of historic wall paintings and clock

Christ Church is an important Grade II\* Listed Building with fine architectural details within the building and a clock on the spire.

The wall paintings include the depiction of angels but are in need of restoration and the clock is no longer in working order.

We are keen to secure the restoration of the wall paintings and the clock. We have made a grant of £5,000 towards the cost of repairs and restoration of the historic wall paintings on the west wall and a grant of £2,500 towards the cost of repairing the clock.



A grant of £2,500 has been made towards the cost of repairing Christ Church clock

## ‘... the greater part of the truth being too bad to be told’

**Who told the truth? Was it the massed ranks of the great and good of Wiltshire, or the lone voice of Stephen Mizen, a Bradfordian and a master carpenter? Perhaps a lot of people thought it sensible to keep quiet. Geoff Andrews recounts a sorry tale of military misbehaviour**

If you bought a newspaper anywhere else in the country in June 1865 you would have had a chance to take sides after reading what happened when the Wiltshire Yeomanry camped and trained in Warminster.

The yeomanry, in the first half of the 19th century, were a mounted part-time army used extensively in support of the civil authority to quell riots and civil disturbances, including notoriously the Peterloo Massacre. Proud men of farming stock, but not necessarily popular – and politically Conservative.

In this area they had quelled a potential riot of several hundred people who had marched from Bradford on Avon and Trowbridge to Westbury a few years before, over the inflated flour prices being charged by millers and farmers. And in Frome, the Mells unit of the Somerset Yeomanry “with drawn swords” had crushed a riot that followed a crudely manipulated election. The Conservative candidate, who had lost with a show of hands, forced a poll which he won after three re-runs. The riot that followed was quelled quickly after the yeomen arrived.

By 1865, with the establishment of police forces, the yeomanry had been trimmed down. It was retained as a second line of support to the regular cavalry.

To belong to the yeomanry was obviously a sign of standing in the local community and an acknowledgement of your prowess in the saddle. Some yeomen boasted they had spent 1,000 guineas on their steed. So when the annual manoeuvres and training camp of the county regiment came to town it was a big deal, if only to have a look at the best horses: a bit like an equine *Top Gear*. Something to watch as they trained, and skirmished. And very good trade for the shops, anyone with rooms to rent – and the pubs.

Only two years earlier, the regiment was the first in the British Army to be awarded the title of ‘Prince of Wales’ Own’ (entitling it to wear the Prince of Wales’ feathers as a badge) after it provided an escort to the teenaged Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) through Savernake Forest, as protection against highwaymen.

Their full uniform was black with liberal frogging on the tunic and a white stripe on the breeches, boots and stirrups, with a black hat and big red plume. The horses had decorated harnesses and the prominent new guidon, or emblem, with the Prince of Wales’ feathers on it.

So a proud regiment travelled to Warminster on 6 May 1865 for its annual eight-day camp, 400 mounted men carrying out six hours of drill a day and lots of *esprit de corps* and banter. The high spirits spilled into town after

the day’s training, and the trouble started.

Ten days later, the *Salisbury Journal* lit the fuse with their account of what had gone on, as told to their reporter by an outraged Mr Mizen, probably at Trowbridge market. Did he imagine the consequences? Did he even know his words would be in print?

Stephen was then 55. He had married Mary, then 40, very soon after his first wife Rachel died, and she was pregnant with their only son, also Stephen. They were probably still living at 61 Whitehill, where his carpentry business was based. He retired shortly afterwards and moved to a cottage on Tory – not, at that time, a classier neighbourhood. With a new wife, a new son, why would he quit?

He had served the yeomanry since his teens, and a couple of years before the Warminster camp had been chosen to respond to a toast to the yeomen at a dinner in Bradford. He declared that for 35 years he “had never been absent at a roll call” and was “determined to serve his Queen as long as he had legs to walk or a horse to carry him”.

The story attributed to him printed in the *Salisbury Journal* described a night of drunken hooliganism and damage, and the cowardice of local police throughout Warminster on their last night at the camp. The allegations included:

- a woman had been stripped “almost naked and obscenely exposed” and tied to a pole
- she had been paraded around the town and dumped in the river;
- other ‘respectable’ women had been insulted in the street in daylight;
- shutters of a beer house which was closed were smashed by yeomen who forced the owner to give them drink while a policeman passed on the other side of the road;
- Mr Haley’s paint workshop had been broken into and trashed;
- a nonconformist preacher was kidnapped, bundled into a truck, taken away (and released after he insisted on preaching to them).

The response to the report was immediate. John Fussell, the Clerk of the Magistrates Court, issued a flat and unqualified contradiction of the story. The only incidents were a few bell pulls being damaged and four panes of glass broken, ‘when the wine was in and wit was out’ – with everyone recompensed except the person who had ‘foolishly’ fought back. Fussell lived some miles outside the town and had left his office at 4pm on the afternoon involved.

He was backed by Police Supt J Abbott, who conceded

that the worst was the damage to Mr Haley’s business and the beer house shutters, but the miscreants had compensated both parties. The *Journal* claimed that Abbott later visited Haley’s shop and removed and destroyed a notice he had posted in his window telling his story.

Next week, at the Wiltshire Society dinner in the Albion Hotel, City of London, Mr H A Merewether QC, Recorder of Devizes, proposed the toast of the Wiltshire Yeomanry and declared that the slurs were “entirely untrue” and that “the fact that the regiment had been so abused showed that there was actual good in it”.

Responding to the toast, Captain Fraser Grove, of the yeomanry (a baronet and destined to be the next Conservative MP for Wilton in a couple of months), was cheered when he asserted that the charges were unfounded and that “the regiment was never in a more efficient state”.

Stephen Mizen replied only once in print. He told the *Western Gazette* later that the report was “strictly correct, as far as it goes, the greater part of the truth being too bad to be told”.

The 1866 training camp at Devizes was noticeably subdued. The *Salisbury Journal* was intent on following up the Warminster story, which had rumbled on over the year in its letters columns. Most Wiltshire papers continued to look the other way or print letters saying nothing had happened. You could read more about the

Mizen side of it in dozens of local papers throughout Great Britain, however. The *London Evening Standard*, ran it prominently and even the *Dublin Weekly Nation* enjoyed a poke at the English establishment. Mizen’s local paper, the *Wiltshire Times*, had neither mentioned the story nor named him.

The *Salisbury Journal* reported from Devizes: “Throughout the week the men have, in the evenings, been unusually quiet and orderly.” The paper noted that all police officers from the surrounding area were on duty in the town and the chief constable was staying there. Stephen Mizen (“never absent at roll call”) was there too, and unwelcome. The report went on to say:

“On Thursday afternoon, the men being temporarily dismounted, several began to jeer him. It was taken up and hisses and jeers became loud and numerous... The harness was ‘playfully’ removed from Mizen’s horse, and though there was, of course, probably no desire to do anything serious there was evidently a strong determination to ‘roast’ him to the utmost.”

Mizen had to try to catch his horse without harness, which had been spooked by the derision aimed at her owner.

If that wasn’t enough, there were strong rumours that a coffin was being prepared for him if he showed up on the following day.

Sensibly, he apparently never attended roll call again.

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## 'We all joined in the age-old chants and made a most satisfactory and deafening Hullabaloo'

Nick Nicholls revels in the return of a bigger and better than ever Bradford on Avon Wassail, after a lockdown-enforced absence in 2021

When asked to report on the Wassail for the fifth time since its inception, my first thought was that readers have seen all previous reports and have a pretty good idea of how our Wassail works and don't need a report of what it's all about.

Then it occurred to me that all Wassails in the same place, in the same town, like any traditional festival such as Christmas or the New Year, though following old formulas, are never quite the same, as those stalwarts who attended our snow and ice Wassail in 2019 can surely testify. (You can still watch highlights of that event on YouTube!)

Well, after a two-year gap, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we certainly came back with renewed energy and a record crowd – reportedly around 300 – assembling at the Tithe Barn, where we had our fire basket glowing brightly in the fading light.

It was gratifying, for what is definitely an event for the whole community, to see so many families with young children among people of all ages. Word had certainly got around, partly due to the excellent social media coverage by both the Preservation Trust and the Town Council – one family had apparently come all the way from Portsmouth!

Once proceedings got under way, it was clear from the enthusiastic participation of all present that two years of restrictions engendered a pent-up feeling that was positively and noisily released in taking part in a real-life human event. A surprise 'first' was the appearance of a father and daughter half an hour before the start, to ask me, as MC, if 15-year-old Ruby could play her Scottish bagpipes. Without hesitation I agreed and Ruby joined us on stage, where she delighted us all with a couple of superbly played jigs and



"... our traditional ceremonies of wassailing the trees took place, pouring cider on their roots and hanging toast on the branches to attract robins – guardians of the trees"

Photos: Trevor Porter

with many amusing, topical references woven into the traditional elements of the play. Never a dull moment as their exuberance carried them away, even a little 'off-piste' to the mystified delight of all assembled. Again, this can be put down to the opportunity to perform once more after two frustrating years of restrictions. They also managed to involve Ren Osmond, our young Wassail Princess, who has been with us since our very first event in 2017. Another first!

Then followed our procession into Hens' Orchard where our traditional ceremonies of wassailing the trees took place, pouring cider on their roots and hanging toast on the branches to attract robins – guardians of the trees – involving the young children and their parents. We all joined in the age-old chants and made a most satisfactory and deafening Hullabaloo to awaken the trees ahead of springtime and to rid them of any malign bugs and diseases. Well, it seems to have worked so far!

Of course, all this takes a bit of organising and thanks are due to members of the Trust, the Town Council and many others who helped with preparation, publicity and stewarding on the day. Thank you all – and WASSAIL!! We'll see you again on Saturday 28 January 2023.

reels. The cheers that followed her performance were even louder than her pipes!

There followed the singing – led by Eagle Alley and Chris Samuel – of our 'traditional' Orchard song written especially for our Hens' Community Orchard by Anne Gregson and Keri Hendy.

We were then treated to an excellent display of dancing by the Holt Morris, joined this year by Bell's Angels, their sister side. Another first for us and wonderful to have a women's side giving us some colourful dancing.

Next up were the Widcombe Mummies, a larger group than usual, who were in exuberant form with a new script



## Stag beetles and snake's head fritillaries

Kate Nicholls reports on what the Trust's Landscape Group has been busy with – and offers advice on how you can help support increasingly rare wildlife

If you walk around the North Meadow at Barton Farm Country Park, you might have noticed some 'log pyramids' (pictured right). The Barton Farm volunteer group recently built these as a habitat for stag beetles, which are now nationally scarce. Here in Wiltshire we are on the western reaches of their range in the UK. Most of their lives are spent underground as larvae – possibly for up to seven years – and the mature beetle emerges for a few weeks in the summer to breed.



The wildflower meadow at the Tithe Barn is showing signs of new life: snowdrops and even some early snake's head fritillary emerged in March, and seeds were sown towards the end of the month.

In the Hens' Orchard the trees have been pruned – we had two successful pruning sessions under the guidance of Sally Heselton, professional gardener and former horticultural lecturer at Lackham College.

The orchard now has more than 40 trees and we feel this is the maximum number we can plant given the underlying stony ground and the shade of the surrounding poplars,

The larvae feed on decaying wood underground, hence the log pyramids. We used the wood from a tree that fell down a year or two ago, and buried the logs deep into the soil. Adult beetles can't feed on solid food – they rely on fat reserves built up in the larval stage.

If you want to know more about these fascinating creatures you'll find plenty of interesting facts at: <https://ptes.org/campaigns/stag-beetles-2/stag-beetle-facts/> and some top tips on attracting and protecting them at the bottom of this page.

copper beeches and willow trees. The very successful Wassail will, we hope, prove a good start to the growing season! Wiltshire Wildlife Trust will have an information stand in the orchard on several weekends over the coming months.

● If you would like to join the group, please contact Kate Nicholls on [kateboa38@gmail.com](mailto:kateboa38@gmail.com)



### Retain stumps

The single most important action for stag beetles is to keep stumps in place when trees or woody shrubs die or are cut down. This provides essential decaying wood underground for stag beetles.

### Escape route from ponds

This isn't just important for stag beetles – all animals need a way out of ponds. If you're planning a pond, ensure it has some shallow edges. If you already have a pond, a well-placed pile of stones or a log will help.

### Minimise use of weed matting

It can trap beetles underground. Use wood chip or bark instead to suppress weeds (and provide habitat for stag beetles).

### Build a log pyramid

If you don't already have stumps or mature trees and shrubs, you can provide a home for stag beetles by building a log pyramid. Bury logs from a broadleaved tree upright in the soil, with up to 50cm under the ground.

### Cover water butts

Stag beetles can drown in water butts. If you do find one in a water butt, take it out and let it dry. Once recovered, they often fly off.

### Leave a wild corner

Great for so many species, leaving a small patch of your garden to go wild provides an undisturbed space where invertebrates and small mammals can shelter, nest or feed.

### Don't use chemicals

Pesticides and insecticides can be toxic to non-target species – it's best not to use them.

### Be careful when digging

Stag beetles burrow in underground. If you do dig some up, please re-bury them straight away with as much of the surrounding dead wood and soil as possible.

### Tell us about stag beetles

Record your sightings at [www.ptes.org/ptes](http://www.ptes.org/ptes) or go one step further and carry out a garden stag beetle survey.

You can find out more about stag beetles, their life cycle, how to identify them and details for building a log pyramid by visiting [www.ptes.org/stagbeetles](http://www.ptes.org/stagbeetles)



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## Beating a path

Many thanks to everyone involved in transforming this:



to this:



About a year ago the Preservation Trust approached the Town Council to seek help in restoring the pennant surface of the lovely and well-used footpath between the top of Church Street and Barton Orchard had fallen into a parlous state over the past few years, with the asphalt surface badly damaged and unsightly. It was on Wiltshire Council's repairs list, but they were simply planning to re-asphalt the path.

So, just over a year ago, the Preservation Trust with support from the Town Council, offered to supply pennant stone slabs if Wiltshire's contractors would lay the stone paving instead of asphalt.

A generous donation from a Trust member, and funding from the Trust and the Town Council, paid for the stone, Wiltshire's contractors carried out the work, and the resurfaced path reopened in March. A small project, but one that has enhanced a rather neglected corner of the town.

Photos: Paige Balas

## Broadside balladeering makes for capital entertainment

Rosie MacGregor is inspired by a musical mystery tour of the City of London

A guided tour of historic buildings around Fleet Street and Clerkenwell in the City of London, accompanied by the singing of traditional broadside ballads, was the perfect diversion from the pandemic. It was something I could not resist as an amateur historian and town planner with a background in the historic environment, and equally as my *alter ego* Rosie Upton, semi-professional singer and former journalist.

It was a beautifully structured and well researched journey that proved the perfect showcase for a history tour that not only respected the buildings but the traditional elements of music.

Our London Blue Badge guide, Dafydd Wyn Phillips, spoke with considerable authority about the social history of each location and this was combined with well-chosen ballads relevant to each place sung by Vivien Ellis.

Broadside (or broadsheet) ballads were the forerunners of newspapers, printed on a single sheet of poor quality paper and often topped by a rudimentary woodcut to illustrate a current theme, a recent murder, licentious news item or scandalous event. Popular from the 16th century onwards, they were sold on street corners by ballad sellers who



would recite or sing the narrative in order to increase sales and circulation. Many of the words and tunes have been passed down through the oral tradition to the present day.

Given the location of the walk in an area associated with printing and the newspaper industry it could not have been more appropriate to link the walk to song. We set off to the accompaniment of *The Boar's Head Carol*, a processional carol, calling first at St Bride's Church, Fleet Street – also known as the journalists' church (pictured), and designed by Sir Christopher Wren in 1672.

A grimmer location next: the site of Bridewell in Clerkenwell. The original building before it became a House of Correction where prostitutes and petty thieves were imprisoned was Bridewell Place, built in 1553 as the residence of King Henry VIII. The chorus of 17th century work song *Whipping Cheare, or the wofull lamentations of the three sisters in the Spittle* was sung to the tune of *Hemp and Flax*.

We continued to the Black Friars pub and Playhouse Yard, on the site of a former Dominican friary refectory, where William Shakespeare's Kings Men performed in the winter months. Here we heard *Full Fathom Five* from *The Tempest* to its original melody, quite different from the tune more often sung in productions today. At Paternoster Square, originally part of St Paul's churchyard and once the heart of the printing industry, we heard a small part of an extremely long broadside: *A Doleful Ditty, Or Sorrowfull Sonet Of The Lord Darly, Sometime King Of Scots*.

Next, we heard vivid descriptions of the history of St Bartholomew's, Smithfield, site of the 14th century great Cloth Fair. It subsequently became a horse fair and was eventually banned when it became too raucous – as described in the broadside *Bartholomew Fair*.

Onwards to Charterhouse Square, originally home to a strict order of monks and then a plague pit. A soulful rendition of a song from *A Litany in a Time of Plague* by Thomas Nash seemed appropriate for these Covid times!

Moving on via The Viaduct Tavern to sample a *A Drop of Gin* or *Strip me Naked*, our final destination was the Public Library at Shoe Lane for a new composition, *Finding our Way*, written by the Dragon Café Singers.

Perhaps we might we consider something similar for Bradford on Avon? I'm thinking about it .... but maybe not for long.

● One of the best collections of broadside ballads is at Oxford's Bodleian Library and these can be accessed online at <http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk>

Photo: Chris Downer / City parish churches: St Bride Fleet Street / CC BY-SA 2.0

## Everything in the garden's lovely

After a two-year break, the organisers of Bradford's Secret Gardens events are planning a comeback in 2022. Here's how it all started

Back in the mid-1970s, Annette Seekings (then Viant), visiting Boston, US, for a nursing conference at Massachusetts General Hospital, enjoyed a walking tour around some of the glorious gardens in the city's Beacon Hill area. "It was lovely," she says, "wandering in and out of houses and gardens in a beautiful area of the city." It was an experience that stayed with her, and a few years later, back in Bradford on Avon, she decided to replicate the event in support of the Preservation Trust.

Annette said: "In 1982, when the Trust was about to embark on the restoration of what is now known as Pippett Buildings and in urgent need of money, Jenny Bird – who lived at Kingston Lodge in Woolley Street – and I borrowed the Beacon Hill idea of raising money by asking members of the Trust to open their gardens to the public for a small charge."

On Sunday 4 July that year – rather fittingly, American Independence Day – 18 gardeners opened their gates, and sometimes their front doors, for the modest admission charge of £1 for adults, 25p for children.

Several members served teas – Colin and Jill Johns, Mike and Christine Hiller, Trixie Turner and her neighbour, and Dorna Daw; soft drinks were served by John Teed at the Old Manor in Whiteheads Lane. Altogether, that first event raised £98 – and was so popular that a second was held just a month later, on 7 August. Secret Gardens, as it soon became known, had found a regular place on the Bradford on Avon social calendar, and continued to delight visitors two or three times a year for the next quarter century.

On the last Sundays of May, June and occasionally July, whatever the weather (and there were a few wet ones),

**Over the years, well over 200 gardens have opened to visitors – ranging from tiny courtyards to landscaped acres...**

not only local residents, but people from across Wiltshire, Bath and often even further afield, welcomed the chance to discover the Secret Gardens of Bradford on Avon.

By 2006, the event was contributing, after expenses, more than £4,000 a year to the Trust's coffers, for very little outlay (never more than about £300 for printing, publicity and minor expenses). Poster and programme designs were contributed by Gary James and Ann Seward. In addition to the funds raised for the Trust, many other charities and good causes – particularly Bradford's favourite, Save the

Children – have benefited from tea and cake (and, it is rumoured, illicit Pimms) served by garden owners.

Over the years, well over 200 gardens have opened to visitors – ranging from tiny courtyards to landscaped acres, specialist collections to eclectic ramblings, exquisitely planned plantings

to 'works in progress'.

In 2008, after a vote taken by the garden owners, the event benefit passed from the Trust to the Tourist Information Centre, but sadly this arrangement has not worked out. Fortunately Alison Miller stepped forward to join Annette – who would like to hand over responsibility to younger, willing hands, but is still happy to be involved in the planning of the event, and the recruitment of new garden owners.

If you are interested in taking part in this year's Secret Gardens or assisting with organisation, please contact Alison at [alisonandjohnmiller@gmail.com](mailto:alisonandjohnmiller@gmail.com) or Annette at [annette.seekings@gmail.com](mailto:annette.seekings@gmail.com). Interest has been expressed in showcasing the glories of the autumn garden by holding a Secret Gardens event on Saturday 3 September, the day before the enormously popular Flower and Produce Show.

*Guardian Angel* is published three times a year. It is distributed free to member households, to Wiltshire Council, Bradford on Avon Town Council and to local and national conservation bodies.

We welcome contributions from Trust members and from non-members. The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the policies of the Trust's Council of Management. **Please send typed, drawn or photographic contributions, in electronic form, to the editor, Joceline Bury, at [guardianangel@bradfordheritage.co.uk](mailto:guardianangel@bradfordheritage.co.uk), by Monday 18 July** for inclusion in the summer 2022 issue of *Guardian Angel*.

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