

Welcome to the Gatton Park spring newsletter. After a long winter, spring is finally with us and the park and gardens are bursting into life! Our staff and volunteers have been busy working on projects in the park and gardens all winter and we hope you'll pay us a visit to see what we've been up to. We have a full events and activities schedule for the coming months so do check out our events listings. We look forward to welcoming you to Gatton over the coming months.

What's new for 2011



We have had a very busy winter with lots of projects in the park and gardens starting to come together. The parterre is nearly completed with the finishing touches being done to the paths and urns. The composite bench in the parterre has also had some much needed restoration and is back to its former 'quirky' glory. The central beds of Japanese garden have been replanted with a mixture of shrubs and herbaceous perennials to freshen up this wonderful garden. Over the next few years these plantings will mature to provide a lush exotic feel, which was so characteristic of that era. The Sunday volunteers have also been busy constructing a fernery/stumpery on the northern side of the dry arch. This shady spot is now home to over 50 different types of ferns which have been acquired by Alan Wolsoncroft from all corners of the country. Great progress has also been made in the former pleasure gardens, clearing ground and sowing meadows. This project received a big boost with a grant from the Big Lottery Fund. Later this year we will be installing a path which will provide all year round access to this area. The park has also had many improvements on the lake fringes and meadows and over 40 trees have also been planted to re-establish park and garden features.

The Gatton Trust

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The Orchid Asylum by Lorraine Spindler

I have often marvelled at the riot of colour and intoxicating beauty of the orchid displays at Kew Gardens. As I sit glancing through Gatton Park's archives on a dreary January afternoon it is difficult to imagine that in the early 1900s Gatton rivalled Kew's orchid paradise. At first Sir Jeremiah Colman's book *Hybridization of Orchids* (1932) does nothing to alter my vision of Gatton but then I recall Joe Kunisch, a New York orchid expert, who commented - 'You can get off alcohol, drugs, women, food and cars, but once you're hooked on orchids you're finished' and I begin to understand.

Sir Jeremiah called orchid breeding his 'fascinating hobby' in which Gatton's twelve orchid glasshouses became an 'asylum' for the 'historic has beens' that no other orchid breeder was particularly interested. He described his plants as 'helpless and delicate children' where Gatton Park was 'Wonderland' and the orchids 'Alices who may prove curiouiser and curiouiser'. Fortunately Sir Jeremiah had the will and spending power to support his passion; in the 1930's Sir Jeremiah spent £1375 on *Miltonia* stock alone, the equivalent today of over £78,000.

Sir Jeremiah's expert knowledge and fame grew to the extent that he was elected Chairman of the Royal Horticultural Society's Orchid Committee between 1917 and 1932 and Gatton hosted visits by Queen Mary and Edward VII. The hybrid genus *Colmanara* was named in his honour and combines *Miltonia*, *Oncidium* and *Odontoglossum*. The archive at Gatton throws up a sea of documents expressing contemporary appreciation for Sir Jeremiah's orchids including Oakes Ames, Professor of Botany at Harvard University, on his visit to Gatton in 1915.

Sir Jeremiah was thrilled to share his expertise and knowledge. In 1933 a van packed full of 80 hybrids and 82 different species of orchids left Gatton Park destined for Cambridge, these plants were a generous and welcomed gift from Sir Jeremiah to the University's Botanical Gardens. Furthermore, a week later Sir Jeremiah funded a visit to the Botanical Gardens by his own gardener Mr Perfect to help settle the orchids in their new home.

But what happened to Gatton Park's vast collection of orchids? In 1942, after Sir Jeremiah's death, more vans left Gatton destined for Kew Gardens, filled with orchids donated by Sir Jeremiah's son. Sadly much of the collection had to be destroyed or sold in lots to anonymous buyers as this was wartime and much of Gatton Park was given over to the billeting of Canadian troops. So orchid breeding ceased at Gatton in the 1940s a situation that has not changed, apart from the delightful Orchid Society of Great Britain's Winter Shows at Gatton Hall (8th January 2011).

Spurred on by the news that Gatton Park is currently seeking funding to restore the only remaining glasshouse and that Bob Greenhalgh (working on the land course for the Royal Alexandra and Albert School) is hoping to start growing some of the Colman hybrids soon. I am inspired to contact Cambridge University Botanical Gardens and Kew Gardens to find out if Sir Jeremiah's kind acts could be returned in some way in order to restore Gatton Park as the 'orchid asylum' it once was?



Forthcoming Adult Events

Sat 19th March Quiz Night

A highlight of the year! Bring your favourite tippie and join in the fun! 7.30pm. Cost: £7 per head including supper.

Sun 3rd April Gardens and Grounds Open Park and Gardens open all afternoon, bird hide open, free guided tours and free activities for children.

1-5pm Cost: Adults £4.00 children free

Sat 16th April Art in the Park

Bring your materials and your chair and enjoy a day's drawing or painting in the park. There is a classroom available throughout the day for you to use as required. 10am-4pm Cost: £5 per person (bring a packed lunch).

Sun 17th April Spring Walk around Gatton

A tour around the park and gardens as they spring back into life. Guided by the Landscape/Heritage Officer. 1pm Cost: £5 including tea and cake.

Mon 25th April Percy the Park Keeper Treasure Hunt

Follow the story of Percy and find the park keepers working in the gardens as Spring comes to Gatton. Bring a picnic to enjoy on the newly-restored parterre lawns. 12-4pm Cost: Adults Free Children £5 refreshments available.

Sun 1st May Gardens and Grounds Open (See April)

Sat 14th May Art in the Park (See April)

Sat 21st May Grow your own Wild Flower Meadow

A day of activities and practical sessions for families or adults on how to establish your own wildflower meadow. In the morning adults will learn about different types of meadows for different soils and children will enjoy activities with our education team. In the afternoon we will all create a

meadow by plug planting. Bring your own picnic lunch. 10am-3pm Cost: Children £5 Adults £10.

Sun 5th June Gardens and Grounds Open (see April)

Sat 18th June Art in the Park (See April)

Sat 25th-Sun 26th June Traditional basket making course

A two day basket making course with underwoodsman John Waller in the beautiful setting of Gatton Park. Materials and tools provided. 9.30am-4.30pm each day Cost: Adults £90 for both days.

Sun 3rd July 'Go Green at Gatton' Country Fair A great day out for all the family. Country crafts and demonstrations, children's activities, gardens and grounds open.

1-5pm Cost: Adults £4.50 children free.

Would you like to receive mailings about our events and activities? Please send your postal and email address to us and tell us whether you would like information on adult or children's courses, or both.



Orchids Return to Gatton

It was second time lucky for the Orchid Society of Great Britain's winter show at Gatton in January. Last year our plans were scuppered by snow but this year the orchids and the orchid enthusiasts came from around the country. Orchids were exhibited in our only existing glasshouse (Jeremiah Colman had twelve in the heyday of orchid growing at Gatton) and in Gatton Hall – including some of the hybrids which Jeremiah bred. Visitors could also enjoy talks about Colman and his orchids and a guided tour of the gardens.

Willow Structures

Just as the snowdrops were starting to show their heads, a group of people attending one of our adult courses braved the cold to create a new feature at Gatton. A "fedge" is the name that has been coined for a living willow fence (half fence, half hedge!) and the team built one to learn the basic techniques of building structures from living willow. Willow is a wonderfully flexible material which can be easily planted and woven in to domes, tunnels and fences to add structure to your garden or to create natural play areas for children. At Gatton we have several structures dotted around, including the Magic Button Trees, created by local school pupils and artist Karen Lucas, which children enjoy exploring as they walk around the park. The new fedge is close to the dry arch, forming a boundary along one side of the orchard.

Art Inspired by Gatton

Gatton is a very inspiring place to be, as I'm sure you agree, and for some local children a visit to the park with their school this winter has been the starting point to inspire an art project. Pupils from Yattendon School visit Gatton as part of their project on artist Henri Rousseau. They draw the trees and plants in the rock garden and use them to inspire Rousseau-like artwork. All of this is put together to create a "Shoe box theatre" with some of Rousseau's jungle animals.



Photo by Sarah Bonner

Nature's Calendar

The topic of phenology – observing the changing seasons – has become popular again in recent years, as the BBC Springwatch and Autumnwatch programmes have got the nation noting down the first time they see a daffodil or a bumblebee. Young children were introduced to this on a weekend activity at Gatton by creating a calendar for the year ahead, with ideas of what animals and plants might be doing each month. The children completed sections of their calendar and took the rest home to complete throughout the year. The photos show some of our visitors creating Spring gardens, with natural objects they found at Gatton and pictures of spring flowers.

Forthcoming Children's Events

Sun 3rd April Gardens and Grounds Open Enjoy a walk around the park, free activities for children. 1-5pm Cost: £4 children free.

Thurs 14th April Green Fingers (4 - 7 years)
Fun and games about growing plants. Plant your own "smelly welly" herb container to take home.
10am-12.30am Cost £5 per child.

Fri 15th April Toddler Trails and Tales (2 - 4 years)
Look out for the big bad fish! Follow the story of a tadpole who can't go Boing!
Activities and art for tiny tots.
10am-11.30am Cost £5 per child.

Fri 15th April Camp Building (8 - 12 years)
Come and build a camp in the woods with your friends.
1-30-4pm Cost £5 per child.

Wed 20th April Stormy Weather (4 - 7 years)
Make some equipment to measure the weather. Games and art inspired by our climate.
10am-12 noon Cost £5 per child.

Thurs 21st April Toddler Trails and Tales (2 - 4 years)
Jasper's Beanstalk. Enjoy the story and then enjoy some activities about growing seeds.
10am-1130am Cost £5 per child.

Mon 25th April Percy and the Park Keeper Treasure Hunt
Follow the story of Percy and find the park keepers working in the gardens as Spring comes to Gatton Park. Bring a picnic to enjoy on the newly restore parterre lawns.
12-4pm Cost: Adults free Children £5 Refreshments available.

Sun 1st May Gardens and Grounds Open (see April)

Sat 21st May Grow your own Wild Flower Meadow
A day of activities and practical sessions for families or adults on how to establish your own wild flower meadow. In the morning adults will learn about different types of meadows for different soils and children will enjoy activities with our education team. In the afternoon we will all create a meadow by plug planting. Bring your own picnic lunch.
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Volunteering at Gatton Park



Enthusiastic supporter of Surrey's amateur dramatics, Maggie Kippen is a key player in Gatton's own cast of volunteers. Maggie has been working with the Education Office in the critical area of fund-raising. And she has been promoting Gatton's contribution to the community by her involvement in a series of inspiring plays and events held in our beautiful park helping to spread the message to a wider audience.

Maggie says that one of the striking things about the Park is that, whatever the weather, it's such a place of serenity. And yet every time you come you see something different. Her involvement with Gatton goes back to 2000, when Gatton Community Theatre, which she now chairs, staged an open air play here for the first time. Confessing that the Park was entirely new to her, Maggie was instantly bowled over. Having got to know Louise and the Education volunteers, she started working closely with the Trust and has been involved in a number of important initiatives in recent years.

Meanwhile **Gatton Community Theatre** has some impressive productions to its credit. The curtain first went up in 1999, with plans for a celebration for the new millennium. Among the highlights since then have been *The Passion* in 2000 and 2009, *Nativity* in 2001 and 2004, and *The Twelve Days of Christmas* in 2007. Maggie is now busy walking the Park in preparation for this year's *Arabian Nights*, which will surely be one of the highlights of the summer.

In concert with the Education office the Theatre also organizes the Fairytale treasure hunts each spring. These are live interactive events where children (and parents!) can get together with the fairy tale characters that they have always wanted to meet. And just in case Maggie has any spare time left she helps with the massive amount of planning and preparation that goes into our Go Green country fair in July.

Clearly, it's going to be another busy, entertaining and memorable season for Gatton Park.



Gatton Friends Launch and Opening of the Parterre! 5th June

To celebrate the completion of our stunning Parterre (a special kind of formal garden fashionable in Victorian times) and to launch our new 'Gatton Friends' initiative the June Open Day will have – what else – a Victorian theme. With Live music, Cream teas and lawn games it's a day not to be missed... Gatton Friends is a way of supporting our charity if you don't have time or energy to volunteer. At a pound a month you are invited to special 'Friends' events including a picnic on the Parterre. Support our work and share your ideas about the continuing restoration of the park and its use by the local community. Please contact us to find out more – fernwarwickching@gatton-park.org.uk 01737 649 068

And of course a massive thank you to everyone for all your passion, enthusiasm and pride for Gatton Park!!

Current Volunteering opportunities

The volunteers at Gatton make it what it is, if you would like to get involved there are many different ways you can help out!

Garden restoration and maintenance:

Since 1996, the garden restoration volunteers have brought back to life the rock and water garden, the Japanese garden and areas of parkland. These areas need continuing development and maintenance. You don't have to be a gardener to help us but any experience would be useful.

Parkland Management Assistant:

Come and help the Park warden with the maintenance and development of the park. Work involves hands on woodland and grassland management, habitat creation and surveying.

Kitchen Garden Maintenance:

Upkeep of a large area of allotments. Please contact us for more information.

Estate Tour Guides:

Gatton Park has a rich heritage that we are keen to share with as many people as possible. This opportunity provides you with the chance to develop tours around the park and gardens by using the resources of our recently developed archive. If you have a passion for history and a natural flare for talking to groups, Gatton Park provides a wonderful setting for you to develop your interests. Basic training in how to use the archive and deliver park and garden tours will be given.

Animal Care Assistant:

Help us with the management of the animals that we keep in the park. You will be working with our staff to help with the management of our chickens, pigs & goats. If you have a preference to work with one particular type of animal this can also be facilitated. No experience is required as training will be given, but if you do have experience it would be very useful.

Can you help the Education Team?

We need help on a wide range of tasks. These include:

-Office Manager, look after the office when staff are out with school groups. Manning the phone, taking bookings, giving info on events, checking emails.

- Helping with or leading groups of children on indoor and outdoor studies and activities

- Administrative help, such as computer work and promotional mailings

- "Blue Peter" volunteers – cutting, sticking, colouring, laminating – to prepare for children's activities

- Helping out at special events or with weekend activities

- Marketing or assisting with fundraising

We are happy for volunteers to come anytime during the week that fits in with your schedule.

If you would like more information on our volunteering opportunities please call or email us. Our contact details are on the front page