

THE SPADE

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THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF GARDENERS

UPCOMING DAIRY DATES

DATE	EVENT	VENUE AND INFORMATION
Saturday 3rd October 2026	Visit to Epping Forest	Epping Forest : Walks and talks in Epping Forest and a chance to view the Elizabethan Hunting Lodge.
Sunday 18th October 2026	Harvest Festival Service	We join the congregation of St Giles Cripplegate for their annual Harvest Festival Service followed by lunch nearby.
Wednesday 4th November 2026	Autumn Dinner	Our annual black-tie dinner celebrating our award winners.
Tuesday 24th November 2026	New Members' Lunch	An small informal lunch in a City restaurant allowing new members of the Company to meet each other. New members by invitation.
Friday 11th December 2026	Carol Service	A beautiful service of readings and music to mark the festive season, taking place at St Giles' Cripplegate and followed by a reception. Business attire.
Friday 12th February 2027	Annual Banquet	White tie preferred (equivalent for ladies); black tie acceptable. Decorations & badges.
Friday 12th March 2027	United Guilds' Service & Lunch	We join the other livery companies and guilds for a service at St Paul's Cathedral, followed by an option lunch.
Monday 15th March 2027 - 20 March 2027	Madeira	Madeira: A visit to the magical semi tropical island of Madeira. The trip will include the garden of the Palheiro, the Monte Palace tropical garden and special Madiera tasting at Blandy's.
Wednesday 7th April 2027	Dulwich Picture Gallery and Garden	A tour of the Gardens led by Head Gardener Jack Townson, followed by a visit to Dulwich Picture Gallery Collection.
Monday 26th April 2027	Spring Lunch	Our annual Spring Lunch at Girdlers' Hall, with the opportunity to enjoy their beautiful private garden.
Thursday 6th May 2027	Borde Hill House & Garden, and Duckyls Garden Tour, West Sussex	Borde Hill House & Garden, and Duckyls Garden Tour, West Sussex.
Tuesday 18th May 2027	Fairchild Service and Lecture	Our annual guild service, featuring music prayers and readings, followed by the Fairchild Lecture and drinks reception, St Giles' Cripplegate. Business attire.
Friday 4th June 2027	Serge Hill Gardens and Plant Library	See website for further details.

THE MASTER
David Balfour

RENTER WARDEN
Jonathan Matheson

SPADE EDITOR
Garry Coward-Williams

JOINT UPPER WARDENS
Alderman Robert Howard
and Cindy Peck

SPADEBEARER
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A MESSAGE FROM THE MASTER

It has been an awful few weeks for the Gardeners' Company and we have had to plan for the future, but the speed of making that decision highlights the strength of our livery

I am sitting in the garden on a lovely September afternoon with the temperature of 24 degrees centigrade. When I was young, many years ago, 24 degrees centigrade or 75 degrees Fahrenheit as we knew it then, was considered a hot day. How things have changed: this year the temperature reached over 30 degrees centigrade it seems for most of the summer. With the heat and lack of rain it has been a very difficult time for gardeners, particularly with a hosepipe ban. I hope that most of you will have kept your gardens alive.

Sad losses

It has been an awful few weeks for the Gardeners' Company as we have lost three stalwarts: first David Longman, Father of the Company, died at the end of August. Luckily, at last year's Tradescant Lunch we presented him with a Company Citation celebrating the fact that it was 50 years since he was Master. The new Father of the Company is David Gollin. At the beginning of September we lost our Upper Warden, Bob Ivison. Many knew that he was unwell but at the Installation Court Dinner he seemed to be in reasonably good health. Unfortunately, his cancer took hold very quickly and we lost him a few weeks later. This was closely followed by the news of the death of John Gilbert. John was Editor of The Spade for many years and Master in 2022. He had had leukaemia for a few years but seemed to be battling through and the last time I saw him he looked quite healthy. Unfortunately, he contracted a virus and passed away. I am pleased to say that at the two funerals that have taken place the Livery was very much in evidence. We have an obituary for Bob on the back page and we will be equally honouring David and John in future issues of The Spade.

Installation

My Installation Court Dinner at Haberdashers' Hall on July 1st seems

a distant memory. I hope that those who attended the Dinner enjoyed it as much as I did. I thought it got off to a wonderful start when the Honorary Chaplain was asked to say Grace and he stood up and said: "England 2 Congo 1, Our Father ..." I think that set the tone for the whole evening which, although formal, was very relaxed. An interesting point arose when speaking to the principal guest, George Plumptre, recently retired CEO of the National Gardens Scheme. We are the only country in the world that has such an organisation which proves, if proof were needed, that we are a nation of gardeners and garden lovers, although possibly the lure of tea and cake helps swell the numbers.

Start of my year

I started my year in Office by attending a wonderful dinner at Leathersellers' Hall and a week later returning to Haberdashers' Hall as a guest of one of the Livery Companies. It was noticeable that immediately after Grace jackets were relaxed; however, the atmosphere to my mind was never as relaxed as at the Installation Court Dinner. Sue and I also went on a walking tour of four of the Livery Companies' gardens, culminating in a wonderful barbecue at Girdlers Hall. I had planned to have an operation to coincide with the quiet period in the Livery year and duly went into the Churchill Hospital at the beginning of August. All seemed to go well but a few days later I found myself back in hospital with a post-operative infection. After 13 nights being pumped with three different antibiotics I returned home. Having been effectively bedridden for nearly three weeks my recovery, as apparently I am no longer 21, is frustratingly slow. As a result I have had to miss quite a few events, dinners etc including two funerals, but hope to be up and running at the beginning of October.

Upcoming events

Looking forward, the Gardeners'

Company has a full schedule of events. The first two have already taken place with a visit to Eton College on a very hot July day and in early September what was, I understand as I had to miss it, a wonderful tour of Dorset gardens. Luckily my brother, Liveryman Michael Balfour, who had almost single handedly organised this event, was on hand to make sure it all went smoothly and Cindy Peck stood in for me. Please make sure that you are in a position to sign up for future events when they come on line.

The Future

With the sad loss of the Upper Warden, Bob Ivison, we have had to plan for the future. After much work behind the scenes, the Court has approved that Cindy Peck and Robert Howard will be appointed Joint Upper Wardens with a view, subject to formal election, that in 2027 they will carry out the duties of the Master. Exactly how it will work out is yet to be finalised. I think the speed with which we have managed to come to that decision highlights the strength of the Livery.



AUTUMN DINNER - WEDNESDAY 4TH NOVEMBER
Ironmongers' Hall
Our annual black-tie dinner celebrating our award winners

THE INSTALLATION DINNER 2026

A new Master, two roses, an interesting modern hall and a guest speaker who oversaw the opening of 3,300 private gardens to the public writes John Michaelson

Ours is a Company that plans for the future, so it was fitting that the venue for the Installation Dinner on 1 July was a hall placed firmly in the present. Haberdashers' Hall, tucked behind West Smithfield, is the fourth home of the Worshipful Company of Haberdashers; the first went in the Great Fire, the second in the Blitz, the third was demolished — a casualty rate which rather puts our complaints about slug damage into perspective. Opened by the late Queen in 2002 and designed by Sir Michael Hopkins, it is the last purpose-built livery hall in the City: a cloistered courtyard, a water feature by William Pye, and a Livery Hall panelled in white oak beneath a diagonal grid of oak and steel, offered as a 21st century nod to the medieval hammer beam. Those of a traditional bent might find it more country-house hotel than Guildhall; yet restraint is a discipline gardeners understand, and after all, even Sissinghurst was modern once.

Grace, and a divine intervention

Proceedings opened, as they should among gardeners, with the Grace given by our Honorary Chaplain, the Revd Canon Jack Noble, and the Laudi Spirituali sung lustily enough to alarm the caterers. The Master observed that a week earlier the mercury had stood at thirty-two degrees, and thanked Father Jack for evidently having had a quiet word in the right quarter; a chaplain who can arrange the weather is an asset to any Company. The scrumptious dinner ended with a raspberry parfait and Blandy's Duke of Clarence Madeira — chosen instead of Port, as the Master plans to take us to Madeira next year, and proof that forward planning need not be a dry affair.

Honours well deserved

The Master presented the Company's Medal of Honour to two Senior Past Masters. David Gollin, a Liveryman of sixty-two years and Master in 1995, has spent decades researching the Company's history; he accepted the honour with the observation that he had done it all for the sound reason that it was fun. Tom Gough, florist, musician and Master in 2002, has served for nine years as an energetic and empathetic Almoner. Tom founded the Future Gardeners, now in its tenth year and

responsible for guiding eighty-two per cent of its charges into horticultural employment. The Master also saluted Past Master Paul Rochford, appointed MBE in the King's birthday honours.

Welcoming the guests

After the Loyal Toasts, Liveryman Sue Medway welcomed the principal guests: Dr David Jefferys, Master Apothecary; Mr John Telling, Master Plaisterer; and our speaker, the Hon George Plumptre, for many years Chief Executive of the National Garden Scheme.

From de Caus to the Yellow Book

Mr Plumptre confessed that this was not his first turn at our table. In 1993, newly appointed gardening correspondent of The Times, he was invited to respond on behalf of the guests and advised simply to *"talk about yourself; they will be fascinated"*. They were not, and he has spent thirty years hoping to make amends; this evening, the debt was handsomely repaid. He drew a line between two revolutions in gardening. The first, under the patronage of King James, Anne of Denmark and her son Henry, and led in part by the polymath Salomon de Caus, ushered in a golden age for gardens and gardeners. It saw not only our Company chartered in 1605 — a year better remembered for the Gunpowder Plot — but also Britain's first botanic garden; Francis Bacon's essay 'Of Gardens', which began *"God Almighty first planted a garden"*; and the first great British gardening book, John Parkinson's splendidly titled 'Paradisi in Sole Paradisus Terrestris' — a pun on his own name, and a reminder that horticulture requires a sense of humour. The second revolution was set in train by the National Garden Scheme, founded in 1927 by the redoubtable Elsie Wagg, which opened private gardens to a newly mobile public. Having raised £8,000 in its first year, it has since raised nearly £80 million for charity. Mr Plumptre raised his glass to the Worshipful Company of Gardeners, *"may it flourish root and branch, as may its Master"*.

Two roses, and a matter of naming

Our new Master, Mr David Balfour, announced that his late parents were with us that evening; there was a

brief and general anxiety before he clarified that he meant in spirit, each represented by a rose. His brother Michael, who organised the visit to Shelbourne and invited the tour party to dinner at his home, wore the 'Della Balfour', named for their mother, and the Master one named for their father Richard, a Past Master known to all as Dick. Dick had wished to call this rose 'Dancing Dick' but was wisely persuaded to settle on 'Dick's Delight', which now grows companionably in the Master's garden beside a variety named 'Maiden's Blush'. This is a family affair. The Master's daughter Catriona serves as his Steward, keeping him on the straight and narrow, a task he concedes is difficult; and Mrs Sue Balfour proof-read the year book and runs a late-night taxi service, on top of fifty-five years' marriage.

Thanks, and a promising year

The Master commended the Immediate Past Master, Alderman Robert Howard, who, despite his Aldermanic duties, a full-time job, and helping Magdalen to raise three children, always made the Company his first priority. He is the fourth generation of his line to wear the Master's badge — a line that has bred remarkably bountiful and true. It was on his initiative that the Company recently held its first Livery Garden Party at The Charterhouse. The Master set out the Company's three parts: the City, the enthusiastic amateur and the Trade, illustrated respectively by the Immediate Past Master, the Master himself, and the Upper Warden, Bob Ivison. The Master promised a full programme for the year, largely he noted, the work of the Spade Bearer, Philippa Burrough. His thanks also went to the Upper Warden and the Renter Warden, Jonathan Matheson, unfortunately unable to attend; the Worshipful Company of Haberdashers for their hospitality; the Beadle, who marshalled the evening with quiet authority; the Clerk, whose labour is easy to underestimate and impossible to overpay; and Liveryman Stephen Crisp, for the magnificent flowers which were almost all English grown dahlias, snapdragon, roses and helichrysum. In all, a splendid evening, and a promising start to the Company year. Root and branch, indeed.



A ROYAL DAY IN BERKSHIRE

On May 6, a group of Gardeners’ met at Royal Ascot Racecourse, for a conducted tour and then onto Bagshot House for a tour of its gardens writes John Woodburn

Royal Ascot Racecourse

The tour was led by Royal Ascot Stewards Don Walsh and Andy Delthorpe. From the reception area, the members visited the Panoramic Restaurant, the balcony of which affords a wonderful view of the two racetracks; the outer one used since 1711 for the Flat racing season and, from 1965 onwards, the inner track used for the jumps in the National Hunt season. Members were able to see the straight mile and further round the curved part used for longer races, and the entrance doors to the Royal Box and the designated lift, both of which are for the sole use by the Royal Family and their distinguished guests. All racegoers within the Royal Enclosure are required to wear black or navy blue top hats and morning suits for men and dresses for women. Level 6 of the building has 260 boxes for use by racegoers. Each box may be tailored for individual requirements with its own kitchen, minibar, and steward as desired; overall, around 7,000 staff are employed to serve a capacity of 70,000 racegoers during Royal Ascot Week.

Amazing views

On a clear day, it is possible to see as far as the London skyline. The racecourse grounds are set in 192 acres of East Berkshire countryside. The enclosed central area of the racecourse was formerly a golf course, and the central lake forms part of the irrigation system. Public access is allowed to this area via the tunnel under the one-furlong marker, but for locals only on race days. The first day of racing at the November meeting is free of charge.

Tribute to Yeats

The white entrance gates to Ascot are the original ones installed at the time the racecourse was built. The darker gates are from Harland & Wolff and being cast iron, they are cleaned using blow torches. The statue is of Yeats, a retired racehorse owned by John Magnier of the Ballydoyle and Coolmore stud in Ireland. He is the first horse ever to win four consecutive Ascot Gold Cups, between 2006 to 2009. The parade course central lawn has recently been re-laid with turf containing a mixture of rye and some creeping red fescue, the previous turf

having been infested by leatherjackets. The parade flower boxes are planted out with pink-flowering geraniums to give colour to the grounds. There are 26 race days during the year; however, none of these take place in April.

Watering challenges

Climate change poses an increasing challenge, and water management is a big issue. All compost is peat-free, and all watering is by hand, using rainwater collected on the racecourse building roof and the lake in the centre of the racecourse. A full racecourse watering uses 8,000 litres, and a further 6-8,000 litres for the trees when necessary. The racecourse turf is mown to a height not exceeding four inches. All divots on the course are replaced by a sand/soil/seed mix. The six groundsmen have a 4.15am to 8pm working day, most staff live on site, and they often liaise with staff from golf courses and other race grounds.

Turf administration

Two local nurseries supply the plants, which have two main changeovers annually. Eight tractors are used in racecourse management; selective weedkiller is applied to the turf and granular feeds applied weekly. A liquid feed is applied three days before race days, and the grass is double cut on race day mornings before 7am, using a 16-foot-wide mower for the racetrack; another towed mower cuts the course for the jumps. Vine weevils are the main problem in the plant troughs. All spent plants are recycled by a local farmer. A lot of companies bring in plants for their displays, and these have bugs in them, which Royal Ascot cannot control. Pink flowers are the colour of choice, and no pesticides are used in the flower displays around the course.

Royal attendance

On Royal Ascot race days, the Royal family arrive by carriage down the straight mile on the flat racecourse but leave by car. They use a designated lift (switched off when not in use) and leave by the Sovereign’s Gate.

Bagshot Park

Bagshot House has been the private home of Prince Edward, Senior Past Master of the Company and Duke of Edinburgh with the Duchess of

Edinburgh for over 30 years. Adam Scott has been the Head Gardener at Bagshot and at Windsor Castle. The grounds were sculpted by King George III. The Berkshire/Surrey borders sandy soil favours rhododendrons, and copper beech trees.

The Queen’s Diamond Jubilee Garden

The Company party was escorted by the Duke’s Principal Private Secretary, Brigadier Alex Potts. He showed the garden created for the late Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee. Bagshot Park is dominated by mature trees over an area of 80 acres, and a lot of soft boundaries define the different areas.

The Coach House

There is a Coach House that dates to the hunting days of the 1880s, but this is now used for offices only. Bagshot Park was originally owned by the Duke of Connaught, but it is now leased by the Duke of Edinburgh from the Crown Estate. He does the cutting down and management of plants on the park, while the Duchess does the pretty stuff and design of the gardens and interior of Bagshot Park House. No trainees are used. Because the soil is sandy, the grass is not thick and is left as long grass in places to save money on fuel, making it more environmentally friendly, paths are mown through.

The Blue Garden

In the Blue Garden, two lavender avenues were planted for the Duke’s 50th birthday, but these have been reduced in size as are too much to maintain. There is a rhododendron rise, an azalea rise, and beech trees. The Yew Hedge is clipped annually, and Alex explained that the base of the Yew Hedge is bare due to muntjac deer within the park. There has been new planting in the past 15-16 months with flowering cherry, wisteria, tulips, hyacinths and alliums, away from rhododendrons and azaleas.

HRH The Duke of Edinburgh

As the party gathered outside Bagshot House, the Duke with his three dogs joined our party for brief discussions, and he was presented with a Company plaque by our Master and presented with a plant by Liveryman Nick Evans to commemorate our visit.



In 1785 the ‘Straight Mile’ was built at Ascot when a marked improvement in thoroughbred breeds saw less emphasis on stamina and more on speed.



The members visited the Panoramic Restaurant, the balcony of which affords a wonderful view of the two racetracks; the outer one used since 1711 for the Flat racing season and, from 1965 onwards, the inner track used for the jumps in the National Hunt season.



Uniting Two Societies: showing the original Harland & Wolff cast iron gates (white) erected before World War II for the Royal Enclosure, statues of Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip and members of the public and the Royal Ascot Gates (black) erected shortly after Queen Elizabeth II’s accession to the throne.



The Parade Ring: featuring the statue of Yeats.



Bagshot Park: featuring Lady Georgina Craufurd, Honorary Archivist, in the goose-foot ride leading through plantings of azaleas, dating back to the latter 18th century.



Group photograph: featuring HRH SPM The Duke of Edinburgh, taken by the Duke’s Principal Private Secretary, Brigadier Alex Potts.

PAN-LIVERY SUMMER GARDEN PARTY

A successful inaugural event hosted by the Gardeners’ marks a first for Livery Companies and promises to be an annual favourite

In late June, in the beautiful gardens of the historic Charterhouse on the edge of the City of London, the Master and Court were pleased to host a summer garden party for the Lady Mayor, Dame Sue Langley OBE, together with eighty Masters and sixty Clerks from amongst our fellow Livery Companies reports IPM Robert Howard.

The perfect hosts
Prior to this event, the first of its kind, there had not been a Summer Garden Party in the civic calendar of the City’s Livery Companies. This seems like an extraordinary omission, and who better to host a profile-raising annual Garden Party for the Lady Mayor and Livery Companies of the City of London, than the Worshipful Company of Gardeners’

Beautiful surroundings, finest fizz
The venue was the Norfolk Garden, The Charterhouse’s spectacular event garden for wedding receptions, very generously donated to our Company by the Master of the Charterhouse Peter Aiers OBE. Here the assembled Masters and Clerks enjoyed Forty Hall London Brut, the award-winning sparkling wine supplied by Capel Manor College’s not-for-profit Forty Hall Farm in Enfield. Senior Past Master Stephen Downbiggin, former Principal of the College, reminded us of the little-known fact that sparkling wine was originally an English invention, several decades before Dom Perignon worked his magic in France.

Hayman’s refreshing G&Ts and Capel Manor’s bespoke buttonholes
As well as wine, we were pleased to enjoy appropriately seasonal G&Ts, courtesy of Senior Past Master Distiller Christopher Hayman, whose family distillery produces Hayman’s London

gin. Capel Manor’s Principal Peter Brammall brought with him an expert and industrious team of students and tutors, who produced spectacular bespoke buttonholes for the guests, and displayed leather craft skills.

The Charterhouse
The Lady Mayor wished the party a good summer and expressed a sincere hope that the Summer Garden Party might become an annual fixture. With plentiful positive feedback from the grateful Livery Masters and Clerks, the Master of the Charterhouse was sufficiently impressed that a June 2027 date has now been confirmed for next year. Founded in 1371, The Charterhouse - once a Carthusian monastery, then a Tudor mansion – is now one of London’s oldest almshouses, supporting a community of about forty aged 60 and over. The Summer Garden Party came about thanks to Court Assistant Justin Dennis, Head of Horticulture for the Charterhouse estate, whose seven acres of gardens include Charterhouse Square and the six courtyard gardens within the medieval walls. These courtyard gardens are maintained for the benefit of the residents, and are important in supporting their health and wellbeing, through enjoyment of nature and green spaces, participation in gardening, and inspiration for art and creativity. The site is a Grade 2 SINC (Site of Importance for Nature Conservation), providing an important habitat for wildlife in a highly urban environment. The gardens contain herbaceous borders, lawns and several veteran mulberry trees. They are managed as formal gardens and there are also some rewilded spaces of native hedges, wildflower meadows and a small pond.

Committed to biodiversity
The garden team are committed to increasing biodiversity at The Charterhouse and to gardening in a sustainable way, including in the Master’s Garden, the wildlife garden where they garden with a light touch to create a ‘natural’ space to promote pollinators in conjunction with feedback from Pollinating London Together surveys’; and Pensioners Court, which Justin plans on transforming into Pensioners Prairie, a drought-tolerant garden better suited to the changes to the climate.

Justin Dennis, Charterhouse head of horticulture
In the words of Assistant Justin Dennis: *“Biodiversity runs through everything we do, as it’s a great way to encourage people to spend time outdoors. Some of the Brothers have been trained on iNaturalist so they can record the fauna they see in the gardens, and The Charterhouse is a founding member of the Clerkenwell Pollinator Path in conjunction with Islington council, bringing together the varied green spaces in Clerkenwell to work together to create habitats better suited to pollinators”.*

Next year’s event
Overall the Summer Garden Party was judged to be a resounding success, and the hope is that we can continue to host it as a regular annual event. Next year’s date – Monday 21st June 2027 - is already in the diary, so we are well on our way.

Many thank yous
Our sincere thanks to all the sponsors whose generosity allowed it to happen: **Capel Manor College, Hayman’s Gin, and of course The Charterhouse itself.**



Peter Aiers OBE, Master of the Charterhouse.



The Lady Mayor, Dame Sue Langley OBE, hoped that the Summer Garden Party would become an annual fixture.



Capel Manor showcased their saddlery services.



The most splendid bespoke buttonholes were provided by Capel Manor’s students.



Traditional leather craftsmanship on display.



Guests enjoyed Forty Hall London Brut fizz.

A NEW CHAPTER FOR THE COMPANY

Gillian Taylor explains why our constitution was changed to allow trade body membership to the Gardeners' and introduces the organisations that have joined us

Historically, the Worshipful Company of Gardeners has maintained robust connections with the horticultural world through its individual members. For hundreds of years, only individuals could be members of the company but in the Winter 2025 edition of The Spade we reported a significant development for the Company.

A change in the constitution

This was the decision by the Court to change the constitution to introduce Trade Body Members. These were to be a small number of carefully selected trade associations and/or charities. It was felt that the initiative would enable the Company to grow relationships and influence within the horticultural sector and would be to the advantage of the Company and the sector as a whole.

Strategic review sparks concept

The origins of the idea date back to 2023, when the then Renter Warden Alderman Robert Howard instigated a Strategic Review to look at membership and how this could be expanded. The same year Past Master Heather Barrett-Mold attended a Water Conservator event and was amazed at the level of direct involvement by their industry bodies. At that time Affiliate memberships within the WCOG were being discussed and Heather told me: *"As we had the Affiliate grade underway it seemed obvious to extend our desire to extend our industry involvement using this same membership type. As chair it was easy for me to add this to the Election and Membership Affairs Committee (EMAC) agenda on the 3rd of October 2023 and there was good support for the idea"*

Working committee formed

This was followed by taking the proposal to Court and a small group of Heather, Simon Catford, Martin Panter and David Balfour set to work on the project. The group submitted a paper to Autumn Court in November

2024 where it was approved with the following note: *"It was agreed that the appointment of Trade Body members will involve approval by the EMAC and Membership Engagement and Recruitment Committee (MERC). Their recommendations will then be put before the Court for final approval. The Trade Body Representatives need to be employees of the Trade Body in order for them to represent them in the WCOG".* It is an exciting project and Simon Catford told me:



...the industry has embraced this concept with open arms and sees membership as a valuable asset. While some trade bodies do talk to other bodies, it seems that none of them speak to all of them at any one time so the WCOG can act as an 'honest broker' to bring them together

Taking the project forward

These trade body representatives are equivalent to Freeman with similar access to events. The relationship between the Company and the Trade Bodies is still in development and a Trade Body subcommittee has recently been established to take this forward. Its first official meeting is planned for September, and I will report back on this in the Winter edition of The Spade. I will also introduce you to the representatives in more detail and we will hear from them as to what membership of the Worshipful Company of Gardeners means to their organisations.



Alderman Robert Howard
Instigated a strategic review



Heather Barrett-Mold
Had an Affiliate grade underway



Martin Panter
Part of the working group



Simon Catford
Part of the working group



David Balfour
Part of the working group

OUR NEW TRADE BODY MEMBERS

The initiative has been a success and the Company currently has six trade body members covering a wide spread of the many facets of the horticultural industry



Horticultural Trades Association (HTA)

The HTA represents the businesses: retailers, growers, landscapers and manufacturers that work within environmental horticulture. They support them through representation of members' interests to government and media, provision of great garden gifting products and help members develop their businesses by access to first-class advice.



British Association of Landscape Industries (BALI)

BALI is a Trade Association representing all landscape professionals: from design, build and maintenance through to supply, training and education. With over 900 accredited members, BALI is committed to raising standards, championing careers, and improving the sustainability of the landscaping industry.



Garden Industry Manufacturers Association (GIMA)

GIMA is a membership organisation of over 200 companies representing the majority share of suppliers and manufacturers operating within the UK gardening industry, together with an estimated £4billion in annual trade. Their goal is to promote the commercial, trading and industrial interests of its UK and EU-based members who supply the UK garden retail industry.



Fresh Produce Consortium (FPC)

FPC membership stands at around 700 businesses which includes retailers, distributors, importers, wholesalers, processors, packers, food service and a large number of associated members including freight handling, ports, embassies, laboratories, business solutions, lawyers, packaging, recruitment and trade media. They work on behalf of members and engage with legislators and regulators to advise on and to influence current industry affairs.



Chartered Institute of Horticulture (CIH)

As the professional body for horticulturists, the CIH champions professional excellence, continuing professional development, education and career progression. They raise the profile of horticulture with governments and policymakers by creating publications, holding events, and providing awards and bursaries to deserving projects, students, and professionals.



The International Association of Horticultural Producers (AIPH)

The AIPH members consist of thousands of growers of flowers and ornamental plants around the world. It serves the diverse needs of these growers by sharing innovative research to assist in plant production. A key educational role is to emphasise the value of plants in urban settings and to advance the essential role they play in sustaining our planet.

CAROL SERVICE - FRIDAY 11TH DECEMBER

St Giles Cripplegate.

A beautiful service followed by a reception. Business attire



ANNUAL BANQUET - 12TH FEB 2027

Mansion House

White tie, black tie acceptable. Decorations & badges

GARDENS OF THE WEST

Elizabeth Rollinson takes us on a tour of Caisson Gardens, Iford Manor Gardens, Stavordale Priory, The Newt in Somerset, Standerwick Court and Mells Manor

Helen Potts' comment on the WhatsApp group that the Master judiciously set up for this visit to Gardens of the West says it all: *"Such a fantastic selection of gardens, great planting, perfect weather, excellent company."*

Twenty-nine members and their guests joined the Master, Alderman Robert Howard and our illustrious Clerk, Dr Christine Rigden, on this special three day/two night tour to some of the finest and incredibly uplifting gardens near Bath, Somerset. Logistics were smooth, thanks to the hard work of Helen Colebrook, our Events Manager.

Caisson Gardens

To start, Caisson Gardens, the former HQ of the Somerset Coal Canal Company, which featured 15 dry canal locks planted over the past 15 years by Amanda (a designer and colourist) and partner Phil, supported by gardeners Tristan and Zoe. Ironically, there was no water initially but with the help of water diviner George Applegate locating the best places to drill a borehole, the gardens now have 3 ponds. The 20 acre wildflower meadow is a biodiversity haven (the secret for success is to mow late August and graze sheep over winter).

Iford Manor Gardens

Following a delicious lunch at the Wheatsheaf Combe Hay, we set off for the Grade 1 listed Iford Manor Gardens, created largely by Edwardian architect and designer Harold Peto, between 1899-1933 (although dating from 1485), and now owned by William Cartwright-Hignett. The Head Gardener, Steve Lannin, gave us a tour of the private walled garden, and then William followed with a most enthusiastic and informative tour of the main two acre garden. Of special note were the Wisteria (second oldest in the country) and a huge plane tree, some 245 years old. Peto had cleverly incorporated many Italianate/Roman artefacts and features, including cloisters, combining the four sects of Christianity, over various terraces, while William's father, John Hignett had built a tranquil Japanese style garden. As William concluded, Iford is truly 'at one with nature'.

Stavordale Priory

Next up was Stavordale Priory, home since 1993 to the renowned theatre producer, Sir Cameron Mackintosh and his partner Michael Le Poer Trench, who kindly hosted our visit. Dating from the 13th Century, the house is surrounded by Arts and Crafts influenced gardens developed by Georgia Langton in the 1970s and extended over many years by Michael and his team, who have added a grotto with fascinating mosaics. We were free to wander and delight in the innovative planting as well as the menagerie of theatrical 'sculptures' around the garden, taken from various musicals. The rose planting was especially admired, with roses in triangular plots scattered through the meadow – giving the marvellous effect of the roses floating on the grasses. Following lunch at the Italian restaurant Da Costa at Hauser & Wirth, we met with Head Gardener Mark to hear about the 'prairie' style garden designed by internationally renowned Dutch landscape designer Piet Oudolf. The hand watered garden was established about 10-11 years ago, comprising some 35k herbaceous perennials planted in a series of beds, in blocks or matrices.

The Newt in Somerset

Thence to The Newt in Somerset, where the gardens have evolved through the work of several influential horticulturists, from Margaret Hobhouse's Victorian-inspired vision to later contributions by Penelope Hobhouse and colour-focused planting experiments by Nori and Sandra Pope in the 1980s. The current gardens were designed by Italo-French architect Patrice Taravella, and included a mix of florals and vegetables/herbs. Ellie Dunn provided a broad insight into the various gardens: the walled garden (containing fruit trees by county), a walk through the 'gourd tunnel' to the kitchen garden and thence to the flower garden. Ellie trained as part of what is known as the Hebe-GeeTee Training Scheme (really the Historic and Botanical Gardens Training Scheme HBGTS). This was initiated by Capel Manor College (Ellie trained with the College) with support from The Gardeners' Company and others twenty years ago that is now freestanding

and extremely influential. We dined at the Three Horseshoes and, thanks to Tim Cutler for the introduction, were invited to visit the fabulous gardens of Batcombe House, next door – where the cleverly terraced lawn sets off gorgeous herbaceous borders.

Standerwick Court

Now into the final straight on day three, we started at Standerwick Court, home of Guy Monson and Lady Rose Monson. Their striking Queen Anne house, complete with the Old Court House, is set within 76 acres of parkland – in which they have developed impressive formal gardens over the past ten years with designer Catherine Fitzgerald. Julie Dowbiggin was always available for plant ID, while Dennis van Liew was able to offer Guy some advice on his old John Deere tractor.

Mells Manor

We were then warmly welcomed by the Master's wife's family to Mells Manor. We enjoyed a talk from Lord Oxford, the Master's father-in law, and the Lutyens Trust and were able to view various artefacts, including a lovely bronze statue of Edward Horner on his horse, on a plinth designed by Lutyens, who also designed the Cenotaph in Whitehall. We were joined by other members of the Lutyens Trust for a delicious buffet luncheon, after which we visited Mells Park – a truly tranquil English park of Capability Brown proportions, with views to a large lake, making a restful end to a special tour.

As Jonathan Matheson said in his thanks to the Master, this was a truly outstanding tour organised – thank you Master for such an uplifting and inspirational few days.



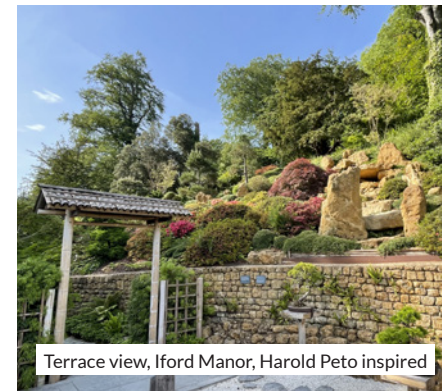
Caisson Gardens



One of the locks at Caisson



The Rill at Caisson



Terrace view, Iford Manor, Harold Peto inspired



Mosaics at Iford



Head Gardener, Steve, Iford, box squares



The group, at Iford Manor



Piet Oudolf prairie planting, at Hauser & Wirth



Admiring one of the ponds at The Newt in Somerset



Ellie Dunn with the Master at The Newt in Somerset



Gourd tunnel, The Newt in Somerset



Batcombe House, showing terraced lawns



Courthouse at Standerwick Court



Mells Manor and St Andrews church, from the garden



Memorial to Edward Horner - Plinth designed by Lutyens



GROWING FUTURES

Inspiring the next generation of horticulturists: Matthew O'Connor details the aims of the Schools Outreach Team and how you can get involved

One of the great challenges facing the horticultural profession is ensuring that young people understand the breadth of opportunities available within our industry. The Worshipful Company of Gardeners' Schools Outreach Team exists to address that challenge by introducing school children, teachers and careers advisers to the diverse, rewarding and increasingly important careers available in horticulture. The team promotes careers in horticulture across the City of London and neighbouring boroughs through a range of educational activities and partnerships with schools.

Aiming to inspire

Our core aim is simple: to inspire young people to consider careers connected with plants, landscapes, science, sustainability, food production and the management of green spaces. Too often, horticulture remains a 'hidden' profession, despite offering opportunities ranging from garden design and landscape management to research, environmental conservation, urban greening and advanced technology.

Helping youth and the environment

With the effects of climate change and global warming in the UK, careers in horticulture are more important than ever, to secure a viable, sustainable future. Moreover, with around a million young people in the UK (16-24) classed as NEETs, (not in education, employment or training), horticulture can secure an enjoyable and productive career for some of them.

Multiple levels of engagement

The Schools Outreach Team delivers this message in a variety of engaging ways. We attend school careers fairs, support environmental and horticultural clubs, facilitate mentoring and work experience opportunities, provide planting advice, and organise educational visits and practical activities. Throughout 2026 alone, the team has participated in events including the Livery Schools Link Careers Showcase at Guildhall, careers fairs at schools and colleges across London and the South East, gardening masterclasses, educational conferences and school engagement projects.



Our practical demonstrations gave the schoolchildren an exciting perspective on opportunities within horticulture

Livery Schools Link Showcase

A highlight is the annual Livery Schools Link Showcase and Discovery Day led by Mike Fitt, where pupils have the opportunity to speak directly with professionals from across the horticultural sector. These conversations help students understand that horticulture is far more than gardening. It encompasses business, science, technology, environmental management, arboriculture, landscape construction, conservation and food production. For many young people, it is their first introduction to the industry's scale and diversity. The response from both students and educators continues to be overwhelmingly positive. Young people are often surprised by the variety of career opportunities available, while teachers and headteachers welcome exposure to a sector that combines practical skills, environmental stewardship and meaningful employment pathways. As schools increasingly focus on sustainability, biodiversity and climate resilience, horticulture provides a powerful way of connecting classroom learning with real-world careers.

Livery Schools Link Showcase

Behind the scenes, much of the team's success is made possible by Camilla King, who serves as the group's administrative lead and, in many respects, the glue that holds everything together. The growth and effectiveness of the programme owe a great deal to her tireless support.

Exciting programme planned

Looking ahead, the Schools Outreach Team has an exciting programme

planned. Building upon successful careers events, garden visits and educational projects, we intend to expand opportunities for students to experience horticulture first-hand through visits, practical activities and industry engagement. We will continue developing relationships with schools, supporting environmental education initiatives and creating new opportunities to showcase the value of horticulture to society.

Would you like to help?

None of this work would be possible without the dedication of our volunteers. Whether you are able to spare time to attend a careers fair, host a garden visit, offer work experience, mentor a student or simply share your career story, your involvement can make a lasting difference. A single conversation can inspire a young person to consider a future they had never previously imagined.

Thank you Jonathan

As we enter this next chapter, we would like to express our thanks to Jonathan Matheson, whose leadership as Chair has been invaluable. Going forward the group will be jointly led by Angela Oliver, of Woburn Farm Plants, and Matthew O'Conner, of John O'Conner Grounds Maintenance. Together, supported by Camilla King and our wider volunteer team, they look forward to inspiring the next generation of horticultural professionals.

To learn more or get involved please contact either Matt or Angela.

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COMMUNITY FOOD GROWING IN LAMBETH

In 2025 the Worshipful Company of Gardeners granted £1400 to Archbishop's Park Community Trust

History of the Park

Archbishop's Park is a 9 acre park in the London Borough of Lambeth which sits on what was once part of Lambeth Palace, the London home of the Archbishop of Canterbury. In the 19th Century part of the Palace grounds were set aside for use by local people for sports and recreation, and it was opened as a public park in 1901. The park has a vibrant mixture of soft and hard landscaping, including mature trees, herbaceous borders, and numerous wildlife habitats. It also contains a popular community garden, which is managed by volunteers from their gardening club.

Helping locals with difficulties

The park has two sessional gardeners who work with a group of 10 vulnerable adults and volunteers each Friday. Fifty per cent of the group are referred by a variety of mental health agencies including NHS South London & Maudsley, Thames Reach and Mind. Thirty-five per cent are from black and

minority ethnic backgrounds and the younger participants are often between jobs. It also attracts local residents and half of these live on the nearby estates where there is no individual space for growing. Many of the participants live alone and appreciate the chance to work with others in an environment where they can actively contribute to its success.

Aim of the grant

Nicky Buley, Community Gardening Manager for the park explains: "The grant helped us to regenerate a large and disused area for food growing and to support wildlife. The area had been used for food growing in the past, but had fallen into disuse and had become overgrown, unkempt and difficult to access. With the support of our gardening club volunteers, and some groups of corporate volunteers, we have been able to carry out a considerable amount of clearance work, repair raised beds that were old and rotten, build new raised beds, install a cold frame and purchase soil, plants and seeds."

A success story

Nicky continued: "We have successfully grown a harvest which has been shared among our volunteers, including tomatoes, salad, kale, courgettes, beans and herbs. We have also grown a range of flowers for pollinators, which have the added advantage of making the area look attractive. The area is now functional and looks well-maintained and cared for. This means we have been able to use the area for other activities as well - for example, we ran some workshops for clients from Lambeth Carers' Centre including an introduction to food growing and an introduction to growing and using herbs. We are now in the process of planting up winter crops so that the area remains in use all year round. We would like to thank The Worshipful Company of Gardeners for their generous donation which has helped us to achieve all of this."



Clients from Lambeth Carer's Centre on a workshop about learning how to grow food.



Volunteer building a cold frame.



Volunteer maintaining a vegetable bed.



Volunteers constructing raised beds.



Volunteers planting out seedlings.



Volunteers clearing fence lines outside the food growing area.

THE FREE RANGE GARDEN

CHARITY



In 2024 the Worshipful Company of Gardeners of London Charity granted £4,826 for Groundwork's Hackney project

About the project

The Free Range Garden project in Hackney, led by Groundwork London, offers an inclusive horticultural space to enhance biodiversity and raise awareness around environmental and ecological issues among the local community. With 40% of residents in poverty and 42% of the older residents isolated, the project also combats key local socio-economic issues by providing a green oasis for local residents to meet and develop horticultural skills.

How the project works

Molly Sweeney, Groundwork's Community Programme Manager, explains how the project works: "The participants decide with the staff what they would like to do, including creating sensory gardens, planting wildflower meadows, building willow structures, constructing herb spirals and installing wildlife cameras. With expert facilitation, a community feel is fostered as people come together to learn about gardening and improve a little patch of their local environment."

Making use of local experience

Participant A: a retired Hackney Council gardener, embodies the spirit of our community gardening project despite facing physical limitations. While unable to participate in certain practical tasks due to his disability, we encouraged him to assume a pivotal role as the 'Gardening Director' within our group. Leveraging his wealth of experience and expertise, he is able to offer invaluable insights on best practices, ensuring that participants undertake gardening tasks with care and precision. He inspires the group, and through his role, he is able to explore his passion for gardening, connect to nature in a way that suits him, and he has a new sense of purpose.

Helping vulnerable people

Participant B: joined the Mobile Garden at a particularly vulnerable time in her life. She was experiencing social isolation and lacked confidence in engaging with others. At the Free Range Garden, Participant B has found a welcoming and supportive environment where she connects with others through a shared interest in nature.

Her enthusiasm for discussing wildlife became a way for her to engage with the group, boosting her confidence and sense of belonging. She now takes a lead on the 'nature appreciation' check-ins at the beginning of the sessions, as the group is so eager to hear her insights. Recognising Participant B's passion for nature and the benefits of continued participation, we signposted her to additional gardening groups in the area. She is now far less socially isolated and continues to build her confidence and skills through community gardening.

What the participants say

Participant C said: "I love the pond. I enjoy tidying up around the pond, and using a net to clear the duckweed. Duckweed is invasive. It stops sunlight getting into the pond and uses up nutrients, making it difficult for other wildlife to survive. I use a net to clear the duckweed every week. The pond is my favourite part of the garden and I am very proud of it. I also enjoy finding frogs!"

How they used the money

Molly Sweeney explains: "Over the past year, we have used your generous donation to fund the equipment, tools and plants in our Free Range Garden delivery. The key projects that this fund has helped make happen include: We used the funding to purchase gravel and a range of herbs to complete our herb spiral. Participants carefully designed the layout, placing each herb according to its preferred light and moisture levels. They prepared the structure by drilling holes in chimney pots, securing them with cable ties, and filling them with gravel, soil, and herbs."

Mushroom project

"We launched a home-grown oyster mushroom project, giving participants the opportunity to grow and harvest mushrooms themselves."

Wildlife camera

"Although we already had the camera, the funding enabled us to get it up and running. So far, we've captured footage of local foxes. Participants enjoy regular wildlife viewing sessions."

Birdfeeders

"We purchased birdfeeders and feed to attract more birdlife to the garden. This supported a bird-spotting activity that participants really enjoyed."

Wormery

"We built a wormery from scratch, now thriving with worms and contributing to our composting system."

Craft activities

"Funding supported a range of nature-based crafts, including pressing cuttings from the garden to create collages, making personalised Free Range Garden T-shirts, and making concertina baubles from wallpaper scraps to give as gifts."

Improving our compost

"We invested in a compost thermometer and a canvas tarp to help manage and maintain healthy compost."

Books

"We use these for days when people can't get outside so that people still feel engaged in nature and horticulture."



The participants worked together to create a herb spiral.

LONDON CHILDREN'S FLOWER SOCIETY

This year 80 schools took part in the LCFS Spring Bulb Competition and thanks to The Gardeners' Charity's support they were able to provide free bulbs to all schools

We are delighted to share an update on our activities over the past year, and to thank you once again for your generous support reports Emma-Jane McGrath, LCFS Director. Your grant of £1,500 has enabled us to continue providing free bulbs and seeds to schools across London, helping hundreds of children experience the joy of growing and gardening.

Spring Bulb Competition

Our Spring Bulb Competition continues to go from strength to strength. This year, 80 schools took part in the competition, an increase on previous years, with children across London planting and nurturing bulbs throughout the autumn and winter months. Thanks to your generous support we were able to provide free bulbs to every participating school, ensuring that cost was not a barrier to taking part. The quality of entries was exceptional, and our volunteer judges were once again inspired by the enthusiasm and care shown by the children.

Summer Seed and Garden Competition

Participation in our Summer Seed and School Garden Competition has remained strong, with over 100 schools taking part so far this year. Thanks to your grant funding, we were able to provide free seeds to every participating school, enabling even more children to grow flowers, vegetables and herbs within their school grounds. Sunflowers and nasturtiums continue to be firm favourites, while interest in school vegetable gardens remain high as children learn about sustainability, healthy eating and biodiversity.

80th Anniversary celebrations

This year marked a special milestone as we celebrate 80 years of inspiring children to grow and garden. To honour this, we held a special 80th Anniversary Celebration, bringing together friends, supporters, volunteers and long-standing champions of the Society to reflect on our history and look ahead to the future. It was a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the impact LCFS has had on generations of young Londoners and to thank those who continue to make our work possible.

Annual Trophy Ceremony

Our most recent Annual Trophy Ceremony at the Guildhall was a wonderful celebration of the children's achievements. We welcomed 27 winning schools to receive awards for their outstanding work in gardening, biodiversity and environmental projects. The ceremony remains one of the highlights of our year, bringing together children, teachers, volunteers and supporters to celebrate the creativity, dedication and environmental learning taking place in schools across London. It was especially meaningful during our 80th anniversary year, reflecting how far the Society has come since its founding in 1945.

New Project: 80 Years of Growing Together

As part of our anniversary year, we launched our new '80 Years of Growing Together' school greening and biodiversity initiative. This exciting new project empowers schools to create their own pupil-led greening projects, helping transform school grounds into vibrant, pollinator-friendly spaces that support wellbeing, biodiversity and outdoor learning. We are delighted to share that we have already secured funding for 25 schools and remain

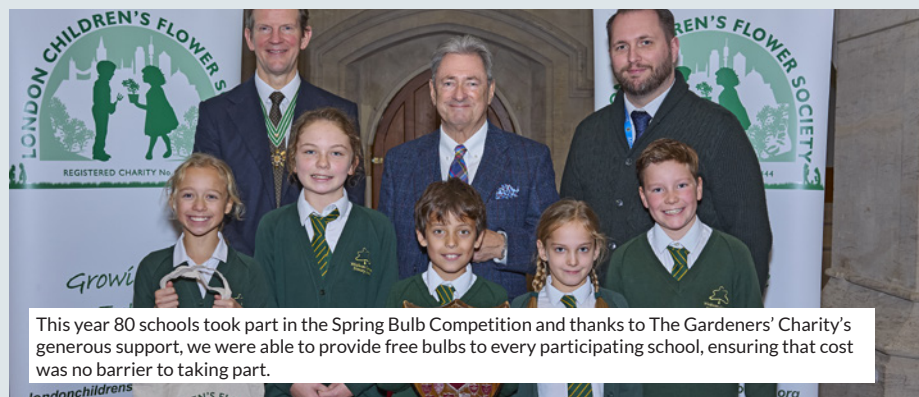
hopeful of securing further funding in the coming months. Each of these schools has received a £500 grant and is now beginning work on their individual greening projects. We are already seeing fantastic ideas emerging and look forward to sharing their progress and results when they attend our Awards Ceremony in November 2026.

Looking ahead to the future

As always, demand for our programmes continues to grow, and so do the associated costs of delivering them. Rising postage, staffing and operational costs remain a challenge, but we continue to work hard to maximise every donation and ensure it directly benefits the schools and children we support.

Thank you

Your generosity plays a vital part in making this project possible. Because of your support, more children across London can connect with nature, develop gardening skills and contribute to greener, healthier school environments. We are extremely grateful for your continued support and hope you feel proud of the impact your contribution has made.



This year 80 schools took part in the Spring Bulb Competition and thanks to The Gardeners' Charity's generous support, we were able to provide free bulbs to every participating school, ensuring that cost was no barrier to taking part.



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TOWER BLOCK ORCHARD

CHARITY



In 2025 The Worshipful Company of Gardeners granted SocietyLinks Tower Hamlets £5,000 to fund a project worker for their community orchard

SocietyLinks promotes education, training and support for people in the borough of Tower Hamlets. The Swedenborg community orchard is an initiative hosted by SocietyLinks and delivered at Swedenborg Square in East London. It is a green haven among the surrounding tower blocks; a place of serenity and escape for many residents.

Community bonding through gardening

The space and its gardening activities enhance social interactions and community bonding, reducing isolation, encouraging friendships among the members of the community. The orchard also enhances access to nutritious food as participants will have access to fresh fruits and vegetables from their own gardening, improving their nutrition.

Project worker needed

Joyce Archbold of SocietyLinks explained: "The orchard is a beautiful asset to the local community and brings together many people who are facing difficulties and hardships. It runs on the support of volunteers — however we needed a professional project worker to be in place to handle health and safety and manage the volunteers and that is why we appealed to the Worshipful Company of Gardeners. Your funding also allowed us to buy additional equipment including tools, compost bins, gloves, cleaning and health and safety equipment. We are very grateful for your support."



Engaging children with nature and planting for the environment.

Defining the project aims

Archbold continued: "The aims of the project are to address the significant issue of food waste within the St Georges Estate by collecting and repurposing it for composting. To promote sustainable practices: use green waste for mulching, food composting, and wormeries to reduce landfill and carbon emissions. To empower community involvement by engaging residents in every stage: from collecting food waste to growing produce and harvesting it for community use. Enable residents to grow fruits and vegetables, reducing reliance on costly or inaccessible shop-bought produce."

Composting workshops

"We hosted regular demonstrations on food composting, including leaf mulching, wormeries, and hot bin techniques. Residents were actively involved in collecting, sorting, and processing food waste, learning how to transform everyday scraps into nutrient-rich compost for the orchard and garden beds."

Planting sessions

"Weekly planting sessions encouraged residents to sow, propagate, and nurture a variety of fruits, vegetables, and herbs. Our plant swap events created a vibrant culture of sharing—residents exchanged seedlings, cuttings, and growing tips, fostering intergenerational learning and neighbourly connection."

Arts and crafts

"We ran creative workshops using natural materials sourced from the orchard—



Teaching the local community about better waste management.

fallen leaves, twigs, dried flowers, and fruit peels were transformed into eco-art, decorations, and storytelling props. These sessions were particularly popular with families and children, blending environmental education with creative expression."

Community food events

"Seasonal gatherings brought residents together to share meals made from locally grown produce. These events celebrated cultural diversity, offering tastings of traditional dishes and encouraging residents to try new flavours and recipes. Food was used as a bridge—connecting people, sparking conversation, and reinforcing the value of sustainable, community-grown ingredients."

KEY ACTIVITIES DELIVERED:

Orchard maintenance: pruning, compost turning, weeding.

Interactive composting workshops.

Hands-on food growing sessions: sowing, propagating, planting.

Engagement with diverse residents in a safe, green learning space.

Community engagement events to welcome new residents and reach out to local people.



Everyone gets involved doing the work which brings people in the community together.

ROBERT 'BOB' IVISON

It is with great sadness that we report the passing of the Upper Warden Robert Ivison FCIHort, FILAM

Bob Ivison died peacefully at home surrounded by his family after a grueling battle with a metastasis from a melanoma. Whenever able, he continued to take an active part in the affairs of The Worshipful Company of Gardeners, in particular in the procedures and duties surrounding his role towards becoming Master, a role we believe he would have excelled at. Bob was born in Liverpool and a lifelong supporter of the football team bearing that name, but what you may not know is that both Bob and his brother David went to Dovedale Primary School: the same school as two of the Beatles, John Lennon and George Harrison.

Apprentice Royal Parks and Palaces

From an early age, Bob was fascinated by the natural world. With his exceptional knowledge, gained as a former indentured apprentice with the Royal Parks and Palaces, followed by a studentship at The Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, he applied that learning to his work. He belonged to a generation of horticulturists who understood that great gardens and landscapes are not created overnight, but through patience, skill and a deep respect for nature.

Buckingham Palace

His career involved working at Buckingham Palace and local authorities' Parks Services. He was Head of Service at Enfield Borough Council and also with the nascent Green Flag Award and London in Bloom: his being only the second Parks Services to win in three consecutive years.

Royal Parks Guild

Bob was also a co-founder of the Barley National Contractors' Forum and one of the founder members of The Royal Parks Guild. One of his proudest achievements however, was his involvement with The Canadian Communities in Bloom scheme. Following his retirement from Enfield, he founded his own specialised consultancy and was much in demand.

Mentoring role

Throughout his very active life, working in the public services and advising clients or mentoring younger

colleagues, he brought the same meticulous attention to detail and genuine enthusiasm that was his trademark. Bob possessed that rare ability to look beyond what stood before him and imagine what could be achieved with time, dedication and thoughtful stewardship. He was a problem-solver who preferred solutions to excuses and collaboration to confrontation.

Qualified pilot

Another of his accomplishments was that he held a Pilot's license, which he was rightly very proud of. That perfectly underlined his technical precision and calm confidence, qualities that defined him in every aspect of his life.

Family first

Yet, he never allowed work to eclipse what mattered most. His family was always at the centre of his life. He spoke of them with quiet pride rather than grand declarations, and his love was demonstrated through steadfast devotion, kindness and an unwavering presence. His remarkable strength, integrity, patience and generosity will be a source of guidance for them for many years. His satisfaction came seeing something flourish under his care, and from knowing that he had made a positive difference. That quiet humility was one of the qualities we admired most

Gentle wit

Those of us fortunate enough to call him a friend and business partner will remember his warmth, humour and natural charm. His wit was gentle rather than sharp, his observations thoughtful rather than loud, and his company invariably enjoyable.

Generous life, modestly lived

Some people leave their mark not by seeking attention, but by the quiet, consistent way in which they enrich the lives of everyone fortunate enough to know them. Such was the life of our dear friend, colleague and business associate, whose passing leaves a profound sense of loss, but also immense gratitude for having shared in a life so generously and so modestly lived.

We mourn the loss of a remarkable man whose influence reached further than he ever realised. The people he mentored will carry forward his standards, and the family he loved so deeply will remain his finest achievement. His was a life lived with dignity, purpose and quiet grace.

Our thoughts go to his wife Teresa and their children Emily, Alexander, Edward, Gregory and Sophie.

Dr Sidney Sullivan and Michael Fitt OBE

