



Oxenhope

Gardening Club News

April 2026

Welcome to the April newsletter.

After the interesting talk given by last month's speaker on The Gardens of the Nabobs of India, which they created when they returned to the UK, I was interested to find out what gardens, if any, the people responsible for governing India for the East India Company had created whilst living there. As I got further into this fascinating research, I found more than I expected, hence this rather long section, which I hope you will also find interesting.

I discovered that the desire by the Nabobs and other people associated with the East India Company to create a British garden was not just out of simple nostalgia or homesickness, but also to put a visible stamp of 'civilization' on an alien, untamed land with a hostile climate. It was also a way for the Nabobs to showcase their worth and status in India. The gardens they created were not only for personal enjoyment but also to reflect the ideals of civilization.



The East India Company governors and officials maintained these large luxurious gardens not only as private, pleasurable retreats but often also as botanical hubs to test commercial crops. These often, expansive estates such as those in Calcutta (Kolkata) (1787), Madras (Chennai) (1783) and Saharanpur (1817) were used to cultivate fruit trees, introduce exotic plants and acclimatise species. The design of these early gardens reflected the design of an English country estate but also acknowledged the Indian climate by including large shade trees and formal layouts. The East India Company supported these projects to boost economic, agricultural and botanical knowledge for profit. Much later, when the British Government took over the ruling of India, the gardening style in India changed to the neat flowerbeds, gravel walks, well-trimmed lawns and hedges of the Victorian sahibs. Every Government House, Civil Lines bungalow and cantonment was carefully landscaped to reflect current ideals of an ordered society.

Of the people named in the list of Nabobs at the talk last month, there are only three that are recorded as having had gardens in India: They are Warren Hastings

(Daylesford House, Gloucestershire), Sir Charles Trevelyan (Wallington Hall, Northumberland) and Robert Clive (Powis Castle Wrexham)



Warren Hastings in the garden at Alipure

Warren Hastings was the first Governor of Bengal from 1773 to 1785. He had an extensive garden at his residence in Alipore, which is now part of the city of Kolkata (Calcutta). Hastings and his wife established a lavish garden here, which was a well-known spot in 18th century Calcutta. (It was painted by Johan Zoffany in around 1784) Both Hastings and his wife were keen gardeners: In 1774, Hastings sent tea seed samples from China to Bhutan to support efforts to cultivate tea in India. His wife collected exotic plants, including introducing the invasive water hyacinth and Palmyra palms. This garden no longer exists.



as My Lady's Garden, which is associated with his wife.

Sir Charles Trevelyan, who was the Governor of Madras in 1859, was the man who established the People's Park in Madras (Chennai). He transformed a formerly barren marshy area near the Cooum River into a landscaped park to provide a large central green space for the health, recreation and entertainment of the city's population. It was opened in 1859 and was typically Victorian in design with formal gardens and ornamental ponds. The only surviving remnant today is known



Robert Clive, also known as Clive of India, was the first British Governor of the Bengal Presidency from 1725 – 1774. Robert Clive's garden at Dum Dum near Calcutta, was a retreat to escape the plague-stricken air of Calcutta. The grounds were typical of other English gardens in Bengal which were designed to be lush green retreats for high-ranking officers growing large shade trees and exotic fruit trees. No trace of this garden remains.

However, there were other Nabobs, all of whom died in India of diseases endemic at the time, who established gardens which still survive today. They survive either as botanical gardens or as parks.



The Indian Botanical Garden

The Calcutta (Kolkata) Botanical Garden was founded by Lt. Colonel Robert Kyd, a military engineer. Robert Kyd, in addition to his military career, had a passion in life: it was horticulture. He had acquired a country house in Shalimar in Howrah, which is on the banks of the Hooghly River opposite Calcutta, where he had patiently and lovingly built an extensive garden. This garden was adjacent to land that became the East India Company Garden. Colonel Kyd proposed making a botanic garden in Calcutta in 1786.

The main purpose of establishing such a garden was mainly to raise as many different plants that would be economically useful, such as spices, medicinal plants and timber trees. Having observed the extreme famines of India (The Great Bengal Famine of 1770 is believed to have killed between 7 and 10 million people), Kyd developed a plan to identify and import plant species which could help food scarcity in times of famine.

Kyd's proposal also coincided with the East India Company's interest in improving agricultural output and expanding production of cash crops. In his written proposal to the Governor-General, Kyd had stated it was "*not for the purpose of collecting rare plants as things of mere curiosity, but for establishing a stock for disseminating such articles as may prove beneficial to the inhabitants as well to the natives of Great Britain, and which ultimately may tend to the extension of the nation's riches*".

By 1790, Kyd had 4,000 plants in the garden, mainly obtained from East India Company's voyages; among them were cinnamon, tobacco, dates, Chinese tea, and coffee. The botanist Joseph Dalton Hooker visited in 1848; he noted that it (Calcutta Botanical Garden) had "contributed more useful and ornamental tropical plants to the public and private gardens of the world than any other establishment before or since". Dalton also noted: "Amongst its greatest triumphs may be considered the introduction of the tea-plant from China ... the establishment of the tea-trade in the Himalaya and Assam is almost entirely the work of the superintendents of the gardens of Calcutta".



Robert Kyd Memorial

Kyd was so in love with the labours of his love that he made a request in his will to be buried in the grounds of his beloved Botanic Garden without any religious ceremony. This, however, could not be complied with and after his death in 1793, Kyd was buried at the South Park Street Cemetery. The garden is now known as the Indian Botanic Garden and its's best- known landmark is the Great Banyan Tree which is thought to be 250 years old.

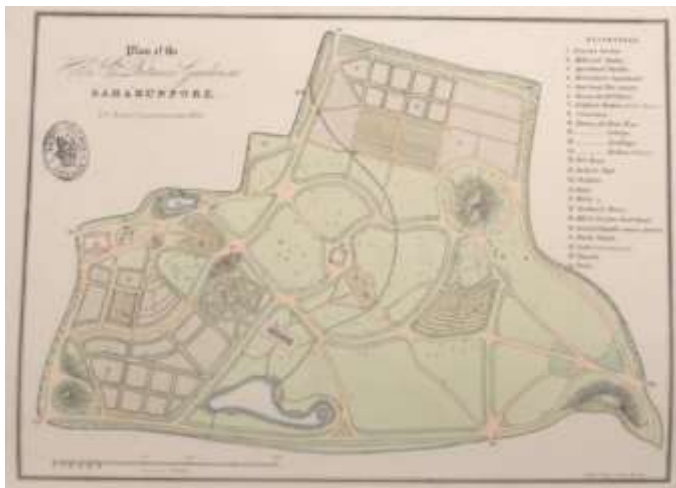


As Governor of Madras in 1820 -27, Sir Thomas Munro established a large estate around Government House, which was known for its extensive and beautiful gardens.

He also established gardens around Guindy Lodge which he used as a country residence made by carving out a large area of the Guindy forest.



This is now the Guindy National Park and within it is the official residence of the Governor of Tamil Nadu. It is a major ecological lung for the city as it is situated within city limits. The grounds include forests, scrubland, lakes and streams that provide a habitat for spotted deer and various bird species.



The Saharanpur Botanical Gardens, in Uttar Pradesh known as the Company Garden, is one of the oldest existing gardens in India, dating to before 1750. It began when Muslim monarch Zabita Khan opted to spend the earnings from seven villages on the development of the Saharanpur garden. The East India Company purchased Saharanpur Garden in 1817, and Sir George Govan, who was a physician and naturalist, was

appointed as its first Superintendent and who developed it as botanical garden. The plant species *Trillium govanianum* and *Polygonatum govanianum* were named in his honour by Nathaniel Wallich, an early pioneering Danish botanist in the 19th century. The introduction of tea plants from China was one of the garden's most notable accomplishments. The Saharanpur Botanical Garden became a major site for taxonomical research during the British Empire. Nowadays, the Garden is recognised historically as being second only to the Calcutta Gardens in terms of national significance for its contribution to science and economy.



Present day park in Delhi

More than sixty years after the British left, their garden legacy still lives on, reflected in the design of municipal parks and IT campuses, and in the tastes and practices of countless Indian home gardeners who take pride in their green lawns and flowerbeds full of English flowers.

Sandra

Woody Plants: The Speaker for April is Kevin Pratt.



Kevin will be sharing his extensive knowledge of woody plants. Kevin has been a speaker and lecturer for over 45 years; the previous Owner of Village Plants Nursery and 35 years as a landscaper in Hale and Altrincham. Kevin is known for his experience and knowledge of plants and his skills in their identification, growing and horticultural needs. Plant identification is his speciality with a particular specialism in Alnus, Stachyurus, Fritillaria, Bulbs, Cupressus, Betula, Sorbus and the new Aria groups. He has recently been asked to identify plants at National

Trust Nymans, Edinburgh Botanical Garden, Ness Botanical Garden and Borde Hill. Kevin will be bringing some plants for sale.

Plant of the Month: Styracaceae (Styrax) family, Halesia Diptera. The Snowdrop Tree.



This graceful shrub produces a mass of bell-shaped flowers in its canopy, the flowers arriving in spring when clusters of lovely white, bell-shaped flowers which appear before the leaves. These flowers also have a delightful fragrance that attracts pollinators such as bees and butterflies.

The two-wing silverbell is a flowering tree or shrub, one of only five species of hardy trees or shrubs from eastern China and the south-eastern United States. All are commonly called the snowdrop tree, because of their pendulous, short racemes of four-lobed, pure white flowers, which appear before

the leaves in April and May. It's genus name honours Stephen Hales (1677–1761), an English clergyman, inventor, physiologist and botanist. The name diptera is from the Greek words *di* meaning two and *ptera* meaning wings, which refer to the two-winged fruit of this plant. The two-wing silverbell has low branches and can be grown either as a large, multi-stemmed shrub or trained as a single trunk tree. Halesia like moist, humus-rich, neutral to acid soil and thrive best in sheltered sunny positions with some dappled shade.

The Two-wing Silverbell plays a vital role in its ecosystem; its flowers are integral for pollinators that rely on early-season blooms. Bees particularly, flock to its fragrances in the spring, aiding in the pollination process. The tree provides shelter and food for various birds and small mammals, while its fruit serves as a food source for squirrels and other wildlife

Upcoming gardening Club events:

Plant Sale.

In May, on Thursday May 21st, we have our Plant Sale. I hope that over the last few months you have all been taking cuttings and planting seeds to contribute to the sale. Every year, you have amazed and delighted us with the many interesting plants you have donated to the sale. Equally, we have been amazed and delighted with how many plants you have bought. All of this has contributed to the strength and success of the club. **Thank you.**

We will be taking names at the next meeting for the garden trips we have organised for you.

The visit to the Scapegoat garden is £10, (pay on entry). The visit to Hooton is £7 (pay on entry). The cost of the visit to Jacqueline Iddon's garden is £22.50 which includes a hot and cold buffet.:

May 15th, Visit to NGS Scapegoat Gardens Golcar, Huddersfield.

July 13th Visit to Hooton's Walled Nursery Rotherham:

August 11th Visit to Jacqueline Iddon Garden Bretheton, Leyland.

Our speaker for June, will be Daniele Altieri: His subject will be Mystery, Surprise & Illusion.

Just to remind you that access to the video of speaker's talks is removed after 30 days and access is limited to paid up members only.

Gardening news and events:

Harrogate Spring Flower Show: April 23 – April 26.

**Harlow Carr: Spring Tulip, Daffodil and Rhododendron Competition
2-3 May.**

Burnby Hall Gardens: Tulip Festival: April 18 - May 9th

Happy Visiting!



**Once again, thanks to our volunteers who help
with teas and coffees!**

www.oxenhopegardeningclub.co.uk