

# SPRING OUTING

Wednesday 13th May 2021

**Abbotsbury Sub-Tropical Gardens Buller's Way,  
Abbotsbury, Dorset, DT3 4LA**

Abbotsbury Sub-Tropical Gardens is one of Dorset's most atmospheric and botanically rich landscapes. In this place, the county's mild microclimate, centuries of estate history, and a dramatic coastal setting all come together in a way that feels almost otherworldly. The Gardens originate in 1765 and have developed into 8 hectares (20-acre) site with exotic plants, many of which were newly discovered species when they were first introduced. There are formal and informal gardens, with woodland walks and walled gardens; in addition, the gardens also contain certain "zones" that exhibit plants from different geographical areas.



Established in 1765 by the Strangways family of Abbotsbury House, Abbotsbury Sub-Tropical Gardens originally functioned as a kitchen garden supplying the estate. Over time, it evolved into a notable centre for botanical collection, benefiting from the global introduction of new plant species to Britain. The gardens' location in a sheltered valley, combined with warm, humid breezes from the Chesil Beach coastline, has provided optimal growing conditions for tender exotic plants.

Abbotsbury's south-facing, bowl-shaped valley effectively retains warmth, while surrounding woodlands and steep slopes protect the area from cold winds. The moderating influence of the Gulf Stream further enhances the microclimate, allowing species such as tree ferns, bananas, and palms to thrive outdoors.

The Sub-Tropical Gardens are distinguished by several notable features. The Burma Rope Bridge presents a striking crossing amid lush underplanting, and the Camellia Walk is recognised as one of the earliest sites for flowering in the United Kingdom each year. Seasonal highlights include displays of rhododendrons and hydrangeas in late spring and early summer, while the Victorian Garden reflects the estate's nineteenth-century horticultural heritage. Magnolia Avenue offers an impressive spectacle during March and April, and rotating contemporary sculpture installations provide a modern counterpoint within the historic landscape.

The gardens support diverse wildlife; songbirds inhabit the dense canopy, dragonflies frequent the ponds, and coastal species occasionally make their way inland from Chesil Beach. The overall environment is notably humid, sheltered, and unexpectedly verdant for Dorset.

Visiting between March and June is recommended to appreciate the peak blooming of magnolias, camellias, and rhododendrons, or in September for the display of late-season exotics. The gardens can be conveniently paired with nearby attractions such as Abbotsbury Swannery and the Children's Farm, all within walking distance. While most paths accommodate visitors comfortably, some areas feature challenging gradients.

Founded as a kitchen garden, Abbotsbury Subtropical Gardens capitalised on its temperate, south-facing coastal setting to cultivate tender plant varieties. During the Victorian era, the site became a hub for botanical experimentation, introducing species from Asia, Australasia, and the Americas—developments that continue to inform the garden's character today.

A distinct microclimate, milder than much of Dorset, supports outdoor cultivation of species like tree ferns, palms, and magnolias, reinforcing the garden's subtropical reputation.

Twentieth-century restoration preserved many Victorian attributes while integrating modern additions such as the Burma Rope Bridge. Presently, Abbotsbury Sub-Tropical Gardens stands as a celebrated coastal garden, combining historical significance with ongoing horticultural advancement.

On Wednesday, 13th May 2021, the Haslemere Gardening Society visited Abbotsbury Subtropical Garden.

*"It was a great contrast to the first visit of the day with unusual shrubs and plants, which, although coming from sub-tropical regions of the world, seemed very happy in the warmer, sheltered climate that prevails in that part of the south coast. The garden had originally been planted as long ago as 1765 and has developed since then as new plants have been brought back to this country. The fact that the threatened rain did come during the afternoon did not spoil the visit, as the warm, damp weather made it feel more tropical. At both gardens, there were fine selections of well-priced plants for sale, and many members went home with lovely souvenirs of the trip. We are all very grateful to Georgina Trout for arranging and re-arranging this trip and for the two more which we hope will go ahead in June and July. The June trip has been moved twice to comply with various regulations at the venues and will now take place on 30th June at Cliveden and Bedlow Manor Gardens. We would also like to thank Steve, the coach driver, who drove us so comfortably and coped very well with a change of route for the homeward journey due to an accident on the A3. It was a most enjoyable day, and everyone was very grateful for the opportunity of getting back to some normality."*

telephone +44 1305 871387

website <https://www.abbotsburygardens.co.uk>

