

LATE SPRING OUTING

Wednesday 19th June 2024

Haslemere
Gardening
Society

Waterperry Gardens, Oxfordshire, OX33 1LA.

Waterperry Gardens, located near Oxford and easily accessible from London, features 8 acres of landscaped ornamental gardens, a plant centre, gallery, museum, tea shop, and gift shop. Originally known for Beatrix Havergal's School of Horticulture for Ladies (1932–1971) with an emphasis on food production, the site has since expanded to include formal gardens, the Mary Rose Garden, a Waterlily Canal, the Long Colour Border, and a newly planted arboretum.

The **Herbaceous Border** at 200 feet long, is one of the most studied borders in England. Originally laid out by Beatrix Havergal in the 1930s, when Waterperry was a pioneering women's horticultural college. Planting is classic English mixed border: tall structural perennials at the back (delphiniums, helens, phlox), mid-height colour blocks, and low edging plants. The border is designed for sequential flowering, giving interest from May to October — a hallmark of Havergal's teaching. This border alone makes Waterperry historically significant in women's horticultural education.

The **Knot Garden** features geometric shapes and meticulously trimmed plants, drawing inspiration from Tudor-era designs. Box and yew form its main framework, while seasonal plantings fill in the spaces. It provides a crisp contrast to the softer lines of informal herbaceous borders.

The **Rose Garden** is a well-designed, compact garden that features a collection of modern shrub roses. The planting scheme prioritises both fragrance and repeat blooming, ensuring more than just visual appeal.

The **Waterlily Canal** is a straight canal bordered by lawns and specimen trees. Staggered-bloom waterlilies provide a formal nod to Monet's Giverny.

The **Walled Garden & Plant Centre** was formerly a kitchen garden and has been transformed into a plant centre while preserving its original brick walls. These walls create microclimates that are particularly advantageous for plant propagation. The current layout subtly reflects its historical purpose, with traces of previous fruit cages, vegetable beds, and training wires still discernible.

The **Riverside Walk** follows the River Thame and features woodland managed for open understory planting, ensuring visibility year-round. Seasonal highlights include snowdrops, aconites, bluebells, and autumn colours.

The **Saxon Church** (St Mary's) is a small, historic structure originating from the 7th–8th century. It houses a 13th-century-stained glass panel, which is notably early for a rural parish setting. The church's existence situates the estate within an ancient sacred landscape, predating the development of the horticultural college.

The **Museum of Rural Life** is located in a granary dating back to the 18th century. Inside, you'll find a range of exhibits featuring tools, horse brasses, and household artefacts from the surrounding region. The museum provides insight into Waterperry's history as an agricultural estate before it became renowned for horticulture.

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