

## **U3A Gardening Group – February 2026**

In February we held our first talk of the year at Stainton Village Hall. The guest speaker was Ady Davis who came along to tell us about the landscape design history of Ushaw Historic House, Chapel and Gardens.

Ady told us of how his interest in horticulture began as a child, his mother had a plant nursery and he helped with the planting and watering of lettuce and lavender. His mother put together 700 hanging baskets for Cheltenham in Bloom and Ady helped with these before and after school. He went on to complete two degrees in horticulture and botanical design but then worked in the NHS for 30 years. During Covid he spotted an opportunity to manage the volunteers at the Ushaw garden and subsequently became Head Gardener. He works part time in the garden with a full time and part time gardener and a team of 30 regular volunteers. During a recent project to plant 24,500 trees to form woodland corridors, 250 local people assisted with the project.

Ushaw was built on the site of the medieval village of Ushaw in 1808. It was designed in the style of a Georgian house although it's purpose was a Seminary to train Catholic Priests. The chapel was deliberately understated and at the rear of the house as the political climate could be unfavourable to the religion. To infer that the building was older than its actual age an outdated style of landscaping was used. This was to use the style of Capability Brown and Ramsey to bring the landscape up to the front of the house. The 1828 garden design introduced a curved path and roadway to the house lined with yew trees. Ady showed us an image of the garden laid out with tiny yew trees which have now grown substantially.

In the 1830s John Loundon and then his widow Jane designed the new paths and garden beds to show off plant collections from around the world. It is said that the upper path was for the priests to use and the lower path was for students.

Over time the garden fell into disrepair, the seminary closed in 2017. The garden has been restored by a team of mostly the volunteers.

The garden is taking on a mirror role with the national plant collections including veronicastrums. This will give additional plants to the garden and make it more interesting.

On Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> June there will be a Specialist Plant and Garden Fair with stands including 3 Chelsea Flower Show award winners.

The garden is holding the Ushaw Flower Festival 10-13<sup>th</sup> September based on the theme of Music of the North East.

Ady was a great speaker with a keen interest and knowledge of the subject and this was enjoyed by all those who attended.

On Friday 6<sup>th</sup> March we are having a trip out to Kiplin Hall Gardens, this will be of particular interest as we had a talk about these gardens in October.

Julie, Fran and Kate