National Garden Scheme
Fun facts from the last 100 years



The Garden Visitor's Handbook

A bestseller before the internet! Long before garden visits could be searched online, the National Garden Scheme 'Yellow Book' was a publishing sensation. In 1991, it featured in the paperback bestseller lists for 16 weeks, reaching number one for five of them. It repeated the feat in 1993, spending 13 weeks in the top ten and five weeks at number one. Not bad for a guide to gardens.

BBC

A date with the radio! From 1945 to 1993, the start of the National Garden Scheme garden-visiting season was announced each spring with a five-minute BBC radio talk, encouraging listeners to buy the Yellow Book. These broadcasts generated thousands of orders and were delivered by some well-known voices of the day, including John Betjeman, Constance Spry, Beverley Nichols, Penelope Keith and Alan Titchmarsh. Not bad publicity for a garden charity!

AA and RAC

A helping hand on the road! From 1932, the AA and RAC helped motorists discover the gardens opening for the National Garden Scheme. Their guides and patrols were supplied with copies of the national and county garden lists, so they could point drivers in the right direction when asked. A rather useful addition to the motoring services.

During World War II

Dig for victory, but keep the gardens open! When war broke out in 1939, there were calls for the National Garden Scheme to continue, even if gardens were a little less tidy, lawns became vegetable plots and flowers took a back seat. An article in The Sphere in November 1939 argued that gardens were just as valuable for cheering people up as ever, declaring that "the gardens of England are the very best antidote to war". A lovely reminder that a little garden escapism was needed even in wartime.

Winston Churchill

Even the Prime Minister opened his garden! Sir Winston Churchill opened his garden at Chartwell for the National Garden Scheme before the war, from 1933 to 1939, and then resumed after the war, from 1948 to 1953. A little wartime break, but thankfully Chartwell was back on the garden-visiting map in 1948.

Frogmore

A royal attraction! Frogmore House in Windsor Great Park was one of the National Garden Scheme's most popular openings. First opened by King George VI in 1946 and then Queen Elizabeth II, it helped rebuild the number of gardens opening after the war. It attracted an astonishing 13,587 visitors in just two days in 1986.

Refreshments



Tea and cake helped bring in the crowds! After the war, refreshments became an important part of the attraction of an National Garden Scheme garden visit. At the County Organisers' Conference in October 1945, it was suggested that teas, garden-produce stalls, soft drinks and ices could help draw in more visitors, alongside children's activities and even visits inside the house. Garden owners were encouraged to provide teas wherever possible. Clearly, a garden visit was about more than just the flowers.

A family of county organisers

A family affair! The Anton family kept the Worcestershire garden scheme flourishing for nearly 70 years, with three generations of women serving as County Organisers from 1928 to 1997. It began with Mrs George Anton, who also served on the National Garden Scheme Garden Committee, followed by her daughter, Mrs Threfall, and then her grandson's wife, Elizabeth Anton. Elizabeth went on to become Worcestershire Treasurer and Vice Chairman of the National Garden Scheme from 1989 to 1997. A remarkable family legacy.

For more about the charity visit ngs.org.uk

The National Garden Scheme is a charity registered in the UK. Charity Number 1112664