

Laura Alston & Jill Sinclair

CELEBRATING MARNOCK

Report on a national
festival organised over
Summer 2023 by
Sheffield Botanical
Gardens in partnership
with the Gardens Trust.





Frontispiece to Marnock's Floricultural Magazine. Private Collection.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2023 Sheffield Botanical Gardens partnered with the Gardens Trust to celebrate Scottish landscape gardener, horticulturalist and writer Robert Marnock (1800 - 1889).

As well as being designer and curator of botanical gardens in Sheffield and London, Marnock undertook a substantial number of private commissions across the country, plus sites in Italy and Belgium. He had a significant impact on the landscape of Sheffield and elsewhere.

This report on the celebrations has been written by Dr Laura Alston, Education & Engagement Co-ordinator for the Botanical Gardens, and Jill Sinclair, trustee of the Gardens Trust and Friend of the Botanical Gardens. Many organisations and individuals were involved in the project and their support was warmly welcomed and is acknowledged in this report on page 15.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aims of the celebrations were to:

1. Raise awareness of Marnock's name and legacy in Sheffield and more widely,
2. To share and build expert knowledge about his life, style and involvement at particular sites.



Sheffield Botanical Gardens

Bill Bennett



Laura Alston (left), Jan Woudstra (2nd left) and some of Jan's students at the Marnock exhibition in Sheffield

Jill Sinclair



The display of Floricultural Magazine volumes at Sheffield Botanical Gardens

The objectives were to provide:

- a free, month-long exhibition on Marnock in Sheffield, including display of original editions of his *Floricultural Magazine*,
- a stimulus for county garden trusts and others around the country to conduct or collate research on Marnock and to find ways to share the information,
- a new website to encourage, share and store research on Marnock, to allow information to be freely and permanently accessible to anyone with an interest in Marnock and, more broadly, Victorian horticulture, gardening and design.

APPROACH IN SHEFFIELD

The stimulus for the project was the generous offer from an anonymous collector of a long-term loan to the Botanical Gardens of original editions of Marnock's *Floricultural Magazine*. The six volumes were produced from 1836, when the Gardens first opened under Marnock's curatorship and consisted of descriptions and hand-coloured plates of newly introduced plants, advice on cultivation, and reports from horticultural shows held across the country. They are an important archival resource, created when Marnock was a young man, working as curator of botanical gardens in Sheffield and

then London, and seeking to establish himself as an authority on exotic plant introductions and cultivation.

As part of the loan, the project team helped with some minor restoration and conservation to ensure the volumes were robust enough for display, using the expertise of Sheffield City Council's library and archives conservation and digitisation team. Working with conservator Antony Oliver, the team oversaw repair of damage to the spines of the volumes and purchased suitable protective archival quality boxes to store the books when not on display. Antony advised on the correct display cabinets to purchase and best practice for exhibiting books, including book rests, weights and gauges for temperature and UV light.

The display of the volumes in the Education Centre in the Botanical Gardens throughout June was supplemented by:

- a series of large exhibition boards, containing information about Marnock's life, his design style, his publishing career, and the Marnock designs that have been restored with support from the Heritage Fund,
- display of an original print of the Gardens,
- an illustration of *Acer monspessulanum*, a tree believed to be one of the few original plantings in the Gardens, drawn by Sheila Stancill of the Sheffield Botanical Gardens Florilegium Society,



Laura Alston

The exhibition at Sheffield Botanical Gardens



Laura Alston



A guided walk on plants used by Marnock in Sheffield Botanical Gardens



The talk on Marnock by Jan Woudstra

- a short video explaining more about Marnock and the themes of the exhibition.

The exhibition was launched at an evening reception on 2 June and was subsequently open free-of-charge to the public on 10 days throughout June 2023. During that time, over 1,600 people visited the exhibition.

Feedback was positive: 'Excellent exhibition, I have learnt a great deal and will explore other Marnock sites', 'The exhibition is beautifully set out in an easily accessible way...the use of colour and the floral and other botanical illustrations make for an enjoyable and informative experience', 'What an enlightening exhibition', 'Marvellous, very impressive'.

Supplementing the exhibition, activities in June included:

- guided walks in the Gardens led by historian Alison Hunter, exploring plants that Marnock knew and used, attended by over 60 people,
- a free illustrated talk by Dr Jan Woudstra, author of a forthcoming book on Marnock, attended by 32 people, including representatives from county garden trusts in Derbyshire and Northamptonshire. Participant feedback was very positive: 'The talk was full of interesting nuggets and presented naturally with useful slides', 'Excellent presentation', 'We need to further develop Marnock's influence' and 'Get Jan back again!'.

- training for volunteers involved with the Celebrations on Marnock's life, style and commissions and on how the exhibition and guided walks would run,
- two practical workshops on creating Victorian hand-tied flower bouquets provided by Rosemary and Thyme Garden Companion,
- a Pocket Pollen Market, selling botanical items, visited by over 800 people.

Weston Park was created by Marnock in 1874 from the grounds of a private estate. Now run by Sheffield Museums Trust, it hosted three activities in June: 'Family Activities: Weston Park Designs' which 92 children and their families attended, a Lunchtime Talk: 'Philosophical Foundations - The Origins of Sheffield's First Public Museum' which had an audience of 47 people and a Wellbeing Walk Around Weston Park which had 8 participants.

The team at **Sheffield General Cemetery**, where Marnock was involved in design and planting plans from 1836, worked with Sheffield Botanical Gardens and Sheffield Museums Trust to produce a guided trail through the three Marnock sites, which was made widely available both as a print leaflet and a digital audio trail on the [izi.TRAVEL](https://izi.travel) platform.



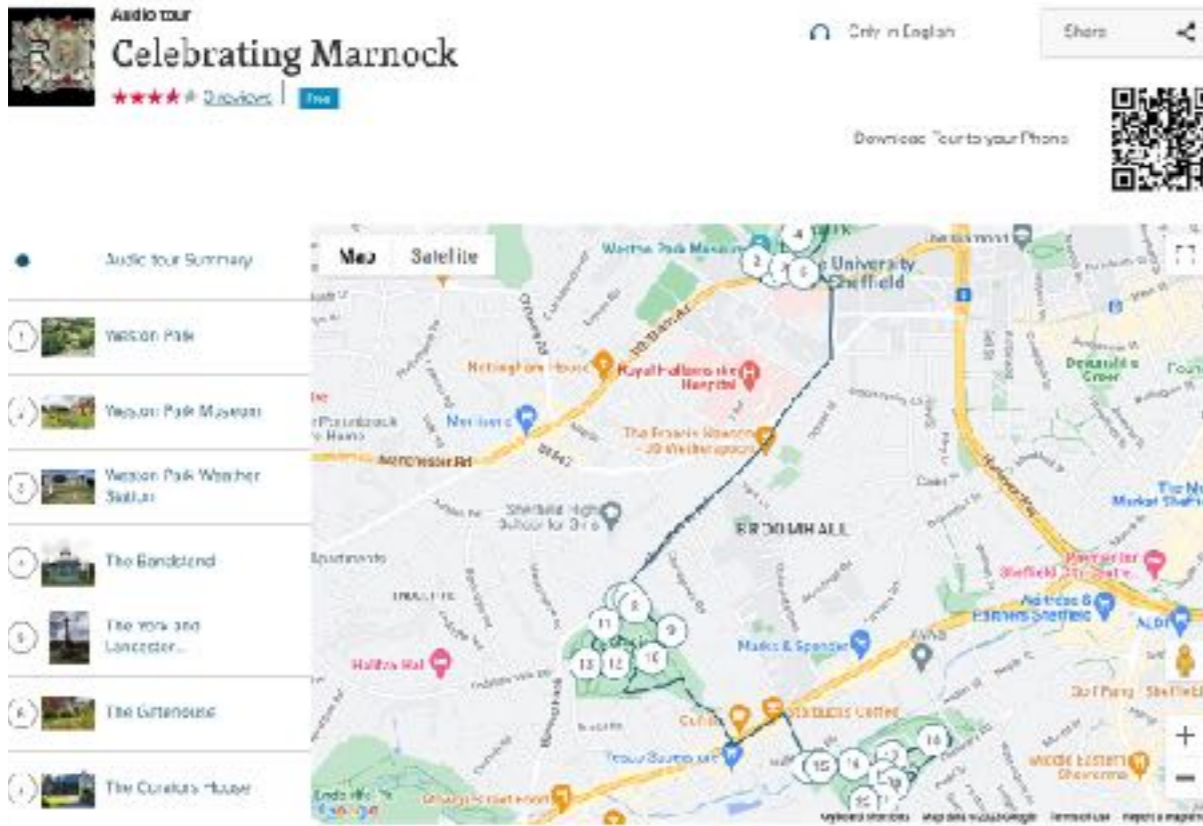
Jill Sinclair

Volunteer training at Sheffield Botanical Gardens



Jill Sinclair

The Pocket Pollen Market in Sheffield Botanical Gardens



The Celebrating Marnock audio trail



The Marnock benches at Sheffield Botanical Gardens

Although it had originally been planned to limit Sheffield events to the month of June, additional activities were subsequently added:

- an August talk on the Celebrations for the Friends of the Botanical Gardens by Jill Sinclair and Laura Alston, attended by around 70 people, and recorded for sharing more widely, with the *Floricultural Magazines* again on display,
- re-display of the exhibition as part of Heritage Open Days in September 2023, visited by over 300 people,

The Friends of the Gardens also commissioned two seats inspired by a bench shown in an 1840 engraving of the Botanical Gardens. One was privately funded as a memorial, and the other paid for by the Friends, in honour of Marnock, as part of the Celebrations.

APPROACH NATIONALLY

The project team informed around 30 Marnock sites outside Sheffield of the celebrations and encouraged them to run events or activities of their own. Contact was made both through the network of county gardens trusts and directly with many sites. It was a 'light touch' approach, with organisations invited to identify activities or publicity that suited their situation, rather than trying to impose standard activities or a set national programme.

In addition, information about Marnock and news of the Celebrations was disseminated in Gardens Trust publicity material, including the print *GT News*, various e-bulletins and mention in the *Garden History* journal. Several county gardens trusts also included reports and publicity in their local newsletters, and other local media picked up on the initiative.

Around a dozen Marnock-related events were held over Summer 2023 in addition to the ones described above in Sheffield. Some of these were explicitly dedicated to Marnock; others were existing events or activities where information about Marnock was added because of the celebrations.

National events included:

- Three Open Days at Inner Temple, where Marnock added a raised terrace lined with London plane trees from 1870,
- A visit to the private house in Rusthall, Kent, where Marnock and his wife lived in 1870s, and a chance to examine Marnock's plans of the gardens he redesigned,
- A guided tour of Dunorlan Park in Tunbridge Wells, laid out by Marnock in the 1850s and 60s when it was the private home of businessman and evangelist Henry Reed,



Examining the Marnock plan for the garden in Rusthall

Clare Kelly



Visit to the Marnock garden in Rusthall

Clare Kelly



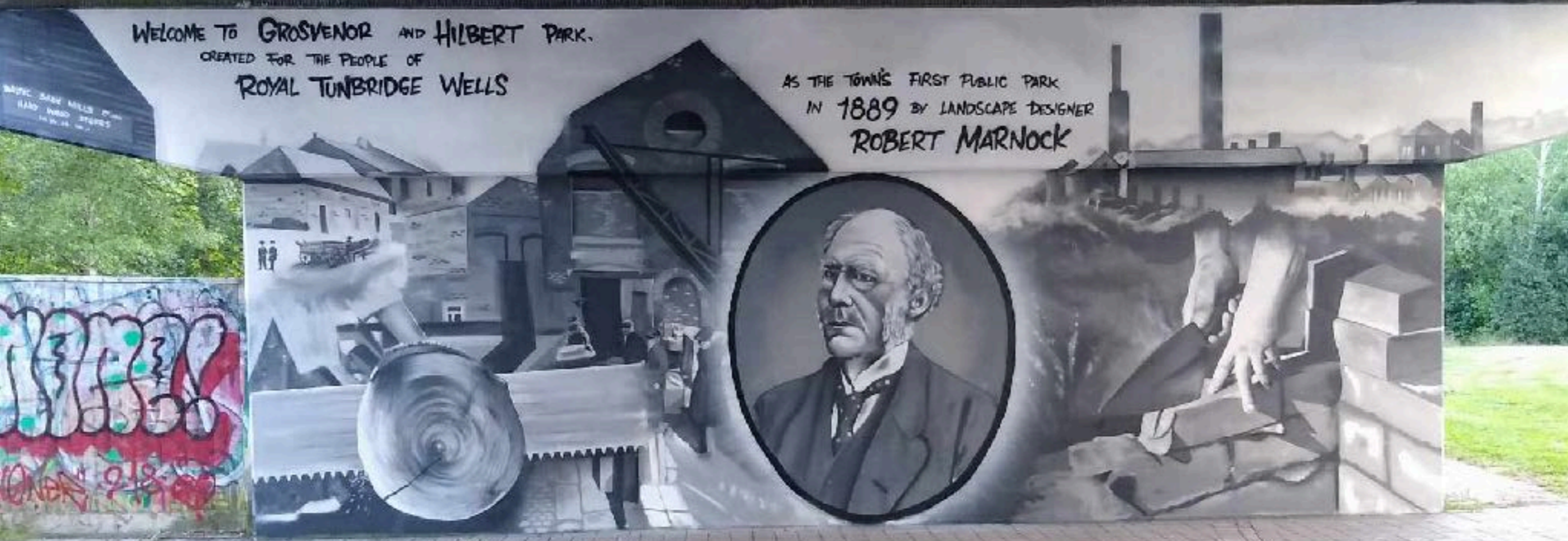
Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust's Marnock display for Heritage Open Days at Taplow Court, September 2023



A slide from the Brent Elliott talk on Marnock

- A guided walk and Victorian buffet at Grosvenor and Hilbert Park in Tunbridge Wells, one of Marnock's final projects in 1889,
- A heritage walk and afternoon tea at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park (formerly Bretton Hall), where Marnock worked as foreman and then head gardener from 1825,
- Heritage Open Day displays at Alexandra Park, Sussex, a seaside public park which Marnock designed from 1876, and at Taplow Court in Buckinghamshire, covering the three sites he designed in South Bucks (Hitcham House and Berry Hill being the other two) in the 1850s and 60s,
- Tours of the gardens at Park Hill in Streatham (also known as Henry Tate Mews), a 5-acre site which Marnock redesigned for the sugar magnate from 1880,
- A free lecture entitled 'Robert Marnock: Giant of 19th Century Gardening' by Dr Brent Elliott, renowned expert on Victorian gardens, organised by the Streatham Society as part of the Lambeth Heritage Festival. A recording is available on the Streatham Society YouTube page: <https://www.youtube.com/@streathamsociety>

As well as specific events, several county garden trusts and individual researchers undertook new research on Marnock, re-examined known materials, commissioned new photography or planned improved interpretation, including for Golders Hill Park (where little had been



Marnock mural near the entrance to Grosvenor & Hilbert Park, Tunbridge Wells. Photo by Carolyn Gray

known about Marnock's involvement), Inner Temple and Park Hill, all in London; Taplow Court (where the local team did not know of Marnock), Hitcham House and Berry Hill, all in Berkshire; Fairmile Hospital in Oxfordshire; The Plantation in Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire; Park Place in Berkshire; Draycott Hall in Yorkshire; Alexandra Park in Sussex; and on Marnock's Scottish childhood.

As well as the planned Celebration activities, there were several serendipitous events that added to the publicity about Marnock:

- a scholarly article by Jan Woudstra about Marnock's work at Alexandra Park in Sussex, which appeared in the

summer 2023 volume of the Garden Trust's *Garden History* journal,

- a mural featuring Marnock on the Grosvenor Bridge in Tunbridge Wells, produced by Humor Street Art and EKS, part of a larger public realm art project organised by the Tunbridge Wells Museum with the help of the local community and the Friends of Grosvenor and Hilbert Park,
- the award of a Gardens Trust community grant to Northamptonshire Gardens Trust to form a Friends Group to support the historic landscape of Billing Road Cemetery, Northampton, a Marnock design from 1847,



Filming the BBC's Bargain Hunt in the Bear Pit, Sheffield Botanical Gardens

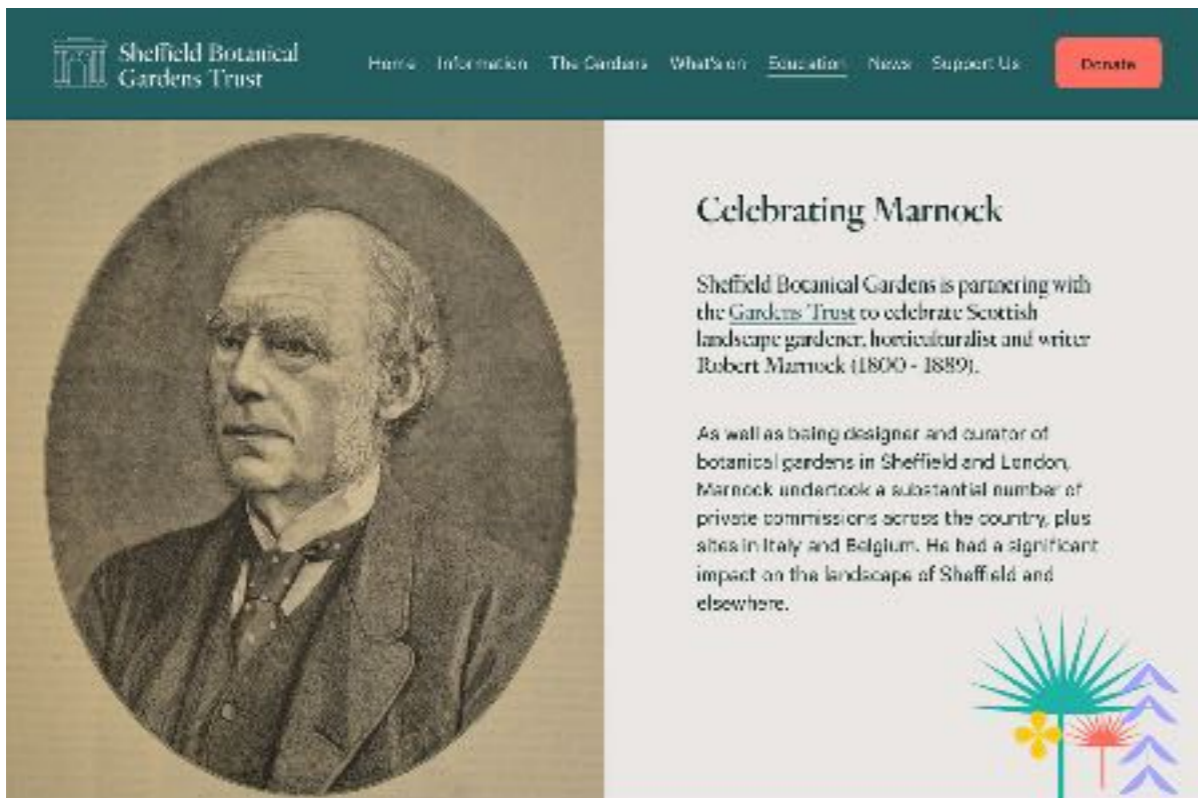
- the opportunity to talk about Marnock as part of a Sheffield edition of the BBC's *Bargain Hunt* television programme, to be broadcast in Autumn 2023.

THE WEBSITE

Rather than create a discrete new website, with the resulting costs, development time and need for ongoing maintenance, the project team made use of the existing, newly redesigned site for Sheffield Botanical Gardens. New pages were created and signposted that allowed for both event listings and the display of information and images in a blog post format. The intention is for the site to be permanently available at <https://www.sbg.org.uk/celebrating-marnock>.

Over the course of the celebrations, around 25 Marnock-related events were advertised on the website, 35 separate blog posts were published and over 150 photographs and other images were displayed.

Information was provided by the project team in Sheffield as well as by a range of other contributors, including a genealogical researcher in Aberdeenshire on Marnock's early life, several county garden trust volunteers on individual sites, Sheffield undergraduates on the histories of plants used by Marnock and a PhD scholar on evidence of Marnock's philanthropy.



The Celebrating Marnock website

A map showing Marnock sites around the country was gradually populated by researchers and, by the end of the Celebrations, had information and images on more than sixty places with links to Marnock, from northern Scotland and west Wales to the south coast of England.

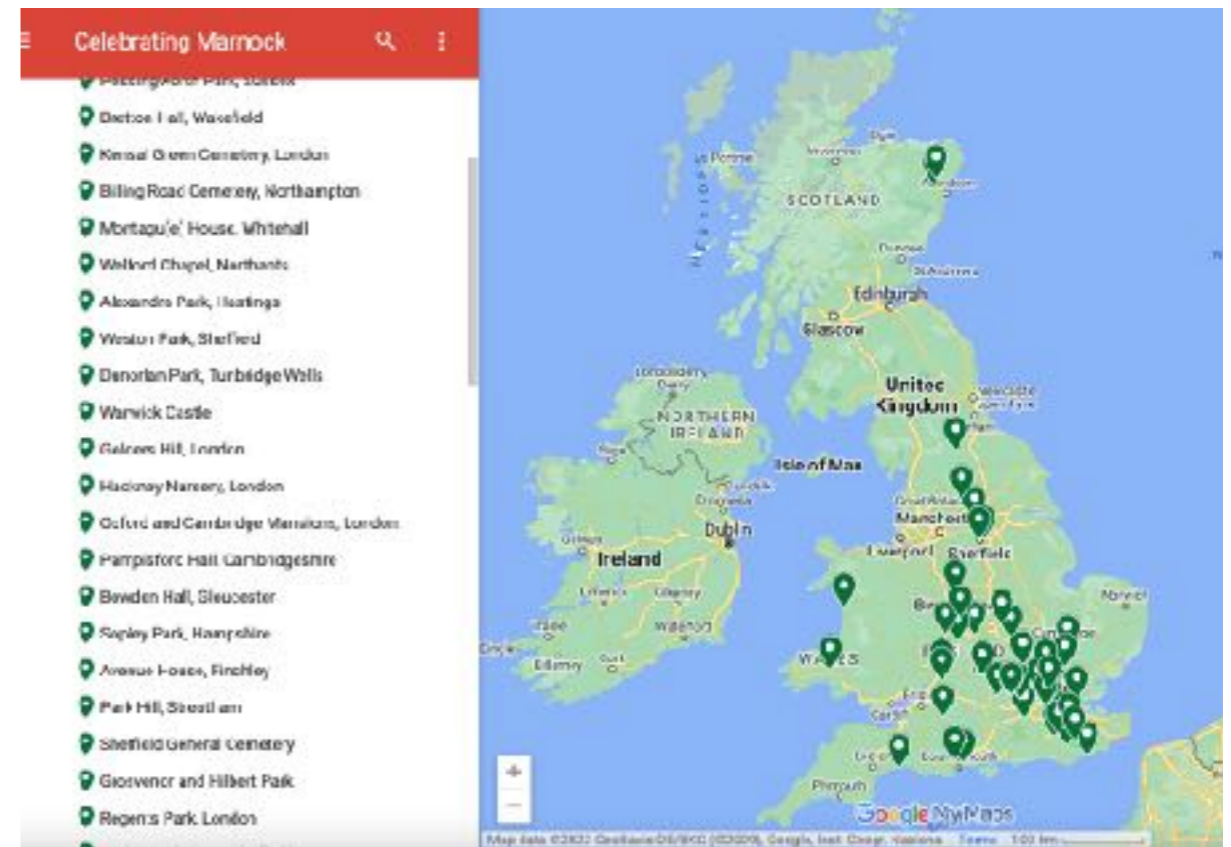
The Celebrating Marnock website had over 5,500 views to the end of September 2023.

SUMMARY AND LESSONS LEARNT

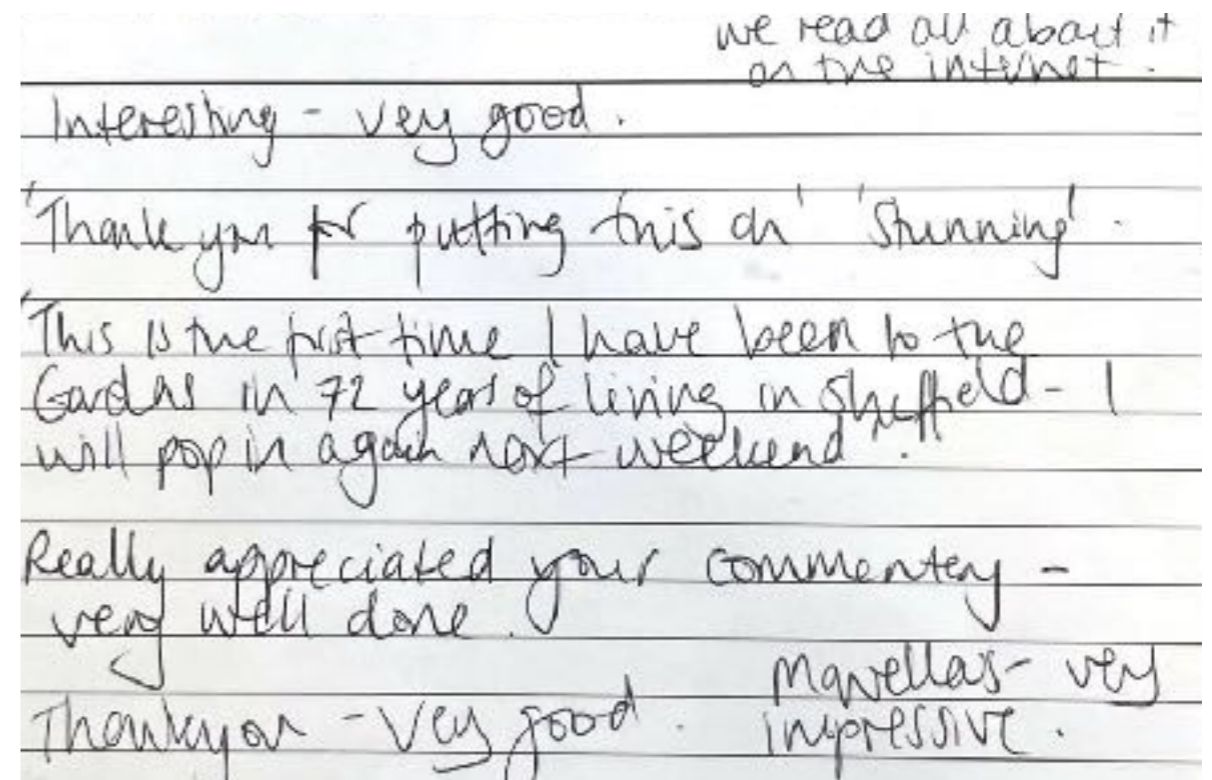
All the objectives for the Celebrations were met and feedback was positive: 'an excellent initiative. It promotes the importance of Robert Marnock, locally, nationally and internationally with a superb collection of on-line material available.'

Two key lessons were learnt from the project:

- while there were some advantages in being nimble and producing something that grew and developed in unexpected ways over the summer, a clear lesson is that more planning time would have been helpful, and enabled more Sheffield sites and more county gardens trusts to get involved, more known Marnock sites to be contacted and more time to be spent on publicity,
- it proved essential to have some central expertise at the start of the project (provided by Dr Jan Woudstra, Kay Keeton and Alison Hunter), who were able to supply



Map of Marnock sites at www.sbg.org.uk/celebrating-marnock/marnock-map



Some of the verbal comments captured at the Sheffield exhibition



Discussing next steps for the project at the Gardens Trust Historic Landscape Volunteering Celebrations in September 2023



The exhibition boards on loan to the Streatham Society for a Marnock event, September 2023

baseline information from which to launch the celebrations, and to advise on frequent queries about Marnock and his involvement at particular sites, citing archival sources and providing links for local researchers.

FUTURE PLANS

Although the Celebrations officially ended in September 2023, various activities will continue into the Autumn and beyond. These include:

- on-going curation of the website to provide a permanent online resource on Marnock,
- publication of material on Marnock in the FOLAR newsletter, the Friends of Sheffield Botanical Gardens' annual print journal, and the Gardens Trust's *GT News*,
- a potential project to supplement the details of some sites registered on the National Heritage List, to include new information on Marnock's involvement, as part of the Historic England 'Missing Pieces' project,
- further Marnock-related activities in Sheffield, based around the loaned editions of the *Floricultural Magazine*, and sharing of the exhibition boards with other Marnock sites and Marnock-related events,
- a potential online lecture series organised by the Gardens Trust to mark the launch of Jan Woudstra's forthcoming book on Marnock.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the organisations and individuals whose support, time and expertise made the celebrations possible, including:

- Kay Keeton, Jan Woudstra, Alison Hunter and all the volunteers and staff involved in the Sheffield projects;
- Sally Bate, Paul Rabbitts, Francesca Murray and colleagues at the Gardens Trust;
- all the volunteers at county gardens trusts who shared their time and expertise, with special mentions for Claire de Carle in Buckinghamshire, Jeffrey Haworth in Hereford and Worcester, Val Hepworth in Yorkshire, Bettina Kirkham in Berkshire and Joan Pateman in London;
- everyone who helped organise events or undertake research at local sites around the country;
- contributors to the website, including Hannah Baber, John Baxendale, Chris Beevers, Robert Curtis, Carolyn Gray, Jennie Hinton, Alison McCall and Marion Shawcross;
- the anonymous collector whose kindness was the original stimulus for the Celebrations.



A Marnock-themed evening walk at Grosvenor & Hilbert Park

Clare Kelly



Display of Marnock's Floricultural Magazine, on loan to Sheffield Botanical Gardens from an anonymous collector

Jill Sinclair

Evaluation Report

CELEBRATING MARNOCK

A national festival organised over Summer 2023 by Sheffield Botanical Gardens in partnership with the Gardens Trust.



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