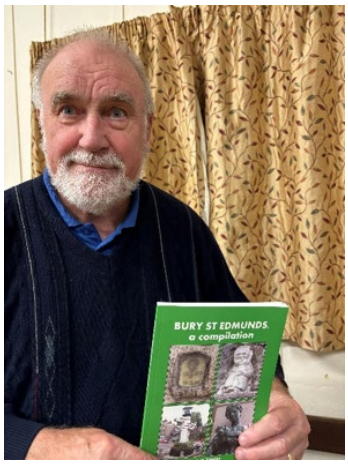
Wickhambrook History Society and Gardening Club Meeting Report October 2026

This month was our joint meeting and we had two excellent speakers, Martyn Taylor and Chris Wylie, for a talk on the Abbey Gardens and Britain in Bloom.



Martyn started by giving us a brief history of the Abbey site, from St Edmund to the dissolution of the monasteries, before describing how the Abbey Gardens came into existence.

Nathaniel Hodgson, a Mayor of Bury St Edmunds, had a Botanical Garden at his home near Shire Hall in the early 19th Century. It was much admired by his neighbour, the Marquis of Bristol whose town residence was the nearby Manor House.

Through a family connection, the Marquis acquired the Abbey Grounds in 1806 he gave it to Nathaniel to make a bigger Botanical Garden. The garden was laid out, copied from a design in Brussels, in 1831 and you can still see the names and numbers on some of the original trees. It was opened to the public for a fee, so only the well off could enjoy it but in 1912 the town took over the lease from the Marquis so that everyone could enter for free.

Chris gave us an overview of Britain in Bloom, started in 1986, including Anglia in Bloom and England in Bloom. Success in the Anglia contest gave Bury entry into the Britain category and over the years the town has had great success in the competition with many gold medals awarded.
Planting in the Abbey Gardens used to be formal, with bulbs and summer bedding but since Chris took over in 2014 there has been more perennial and sustainable planting in line with climate change and drought concerns. Rainwater collection, peat-free compost and electric mowers are now helping with this. Planters and displays on roundabouts and in the streets of the town are sponsored by local businesses and local groups involve schools and other groups in various projects in the town.
We will all be taking a closer look next time we visit Bury!



Martyn sold copies of his latest book, Chris sold plants and we all enjoyed tea and cake to round off an excellent evening.