**The Parks and Gardens of Flanders**

At the April meeting we were treated to a presentation by Melanie Gibson-Barton on the ‘Parks and Gardens of Flanders’.

Melanie lived in Bruges, Flanders for several years, and whilst there, observed and photographed various aspects of the horticulture of this small area.

We began with a series of images of window-boxes in Bruges, which were very striking. Despite the small size, often displayed on terraced houses in narrow lanes, they displayed a high degree of perfection, and a common theme of solid blocks of strong colour.

There followed beautiful pictures from a series of public gardens, including the Brussels Botanic Garden, the Het Leen Arboretum, Hoegarden, Kalenthur Arboretum, and others. A highlight was the Botanical Garden in Antwerp, (Den Botanieken) which was created in central Antwerp in 1825, and although less than 1 hectare in size, holds a collection of over 2000 plants. The Floralia Brussels is a Spring flower exhibition in the park of the Castle of Groot-Bijgaarden, and again we were treated to some wonderful images of the Spring displays of Dutch bulbs.

Unexpectedly, there were a series of images of tobacco growing in the area known as ‘Little Cuba’, around Wervik in West Flanders; tobacco has been cultivated in Flanders since 1650. There are also a number of family businesses growing hops, another unexpected crop from the area.

In contrast, we also saw some suburban front gardens showing interesting modern structural/ architectural features, popular in Flanders, and very different from most English front gardens.

Overall, it was very interesting and unexpected to see the variety of horticultural aspects of Flanders, and afterwards several attendees said they thought they would like to visit the area.

The next meeting will be on **Friday 17th May,** when Ben Hope will talk about ‘Treading Lightly through the Borders’.

Jo Myland