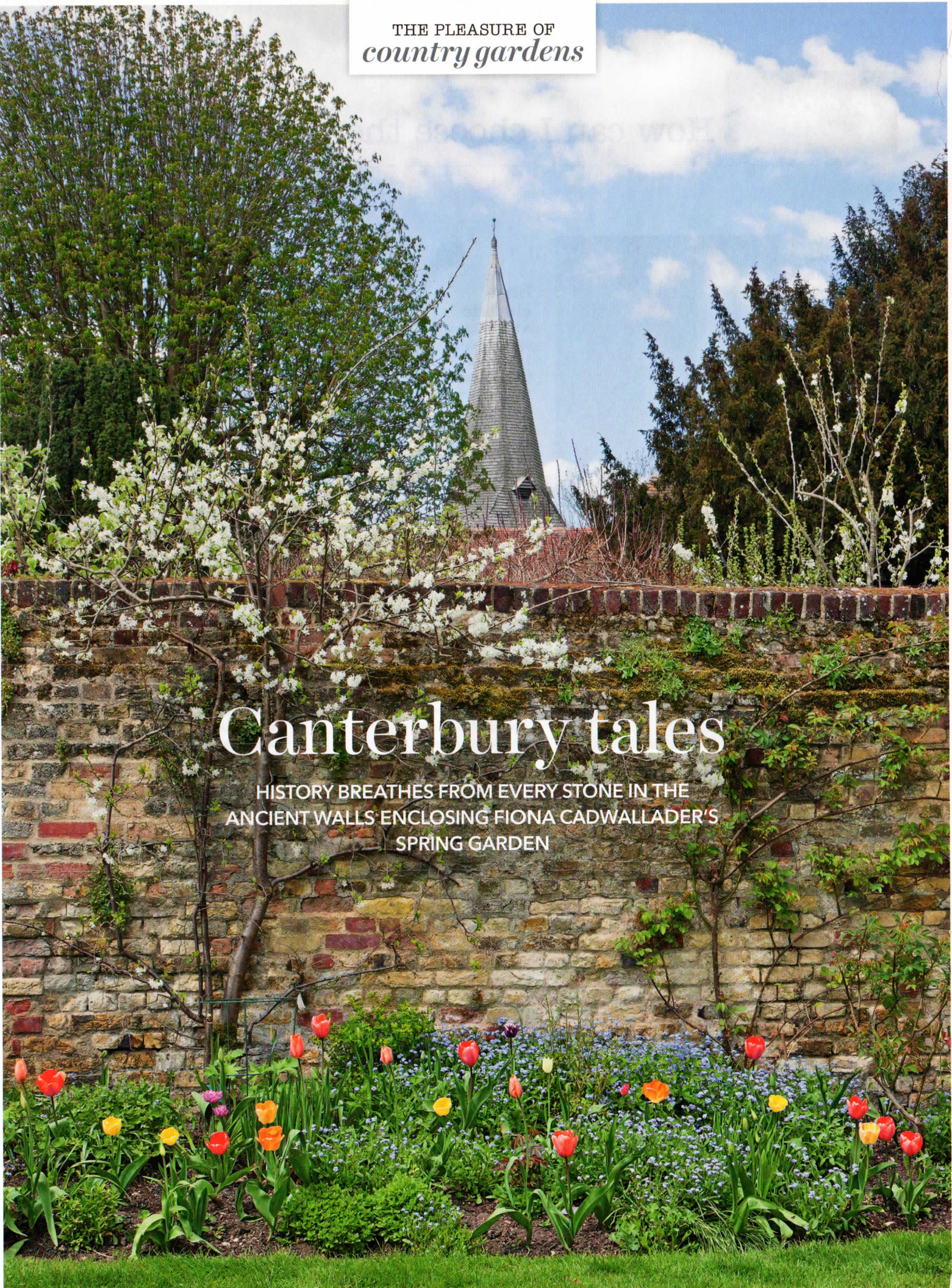


THE PLEASURE OF  
*country gardens*

# Canterbury tales

HISTORY BREATHES FROM EVERY STONE IN THE  
ANCIENT WALLS ENCLOSING FIONA CADWALLADER'S  
SPRING GARDEN





*West Garden (left)*  
Fiona Cadwallader has  
chosen a cheerful mix  
of spring planting,  
including gorgeous  
*Tulipa 'China Pink'* (this  
page) among a drift of  
forget-me-nots. »







## At home with...

**Owners** Garden designer, artist and interior designer Fiona Cadwallader, and her husband Patrick Heren, an energy journalist. They live here with their sons, Bede, 22, Kit, 20, and Theo, 19.

**House** A Grade II-listed 16th-century manor house, an amalgam of at least two houses of differing dates.

**Garden** With a 45-metre frontage on the River Stour on its north side, the garden is enclosed by high walls made from brick, flints and stone. A green oak pergola stretches from east to west backing a spacious lawn framed by deep beds, shrubs and woodland. The rectangular West Garden, laid to lawn, has established trees, including an ancient mulberry, and is filled with massed bulbs in springtime.

**When wandering through** Fiona Cadwallader's walled garden at Watergate House, there is little to suggest today that in the 16th century it was at the heart of a bustling port unloading cargoes of stone from Caen in France for Canterbury Cathedral and hemp as cloth for the monks' habits. In medieval times, Fordwich, in Kent, was as far as ships could sail up the River Stour and so became the off-loading point. St Augustine's Abbey in Canterbury, which controlled it, became rich through the trade. In the garden today are the remains of a great warehouse building at the river's edge, and part of the house was once the Abbot's Bailiff's house.

Fiona arrived in Fordwich from London in 1999 with her husband, Patrick Heren, and their sons, then aged eight, six and four. While they were delighted with the spaciousness of the house, they were alarmed by the amount of work they knew it needed, so it was years before Fiona could even think about embarking on making the garden she had visualised.

With interior design skills and having worked with architectural practices in London, Fiona decided to hone her horticulture skills at the English Gardening School at Chelsea Physic Garden. Now she's a member of the Society of Garden Designers. Usually her clients want help with either interiors or gardens, but sometimes they want both. 'Then it is wonderful to be able to sweep the look from inside to out,' she says. And, as if all that wasn't enough to keep her busy, Fiona keeps alive her fine arts training by creating limited-edition art etchings and prints.

The centrepiece of the main garden is a long pergola, running east to west across the width of the garden. Up it »

## Main garden

Borders on either side of a path leading from the kitchen door are filled with spring blooms. *Magnolia x soulangeana* 'Pickard's Opal' adds further interest.

## Gateway

This watergate is said to be where the Black Prince alighted in 1361 on his way to marry Joan, the Fair Maid of Kent.



*The Secret Garden*

This secluded corner bursts into life when the magnolia and camellias flower in spring.

*Euphorbia mellifera* (in the foreground) with its honey perfume, is one of Fiona's favourite plants.

*What makes this garden so special...*

'The long river frontage with all its amazing memories as a bustling port – and watching the swans fly overhead'





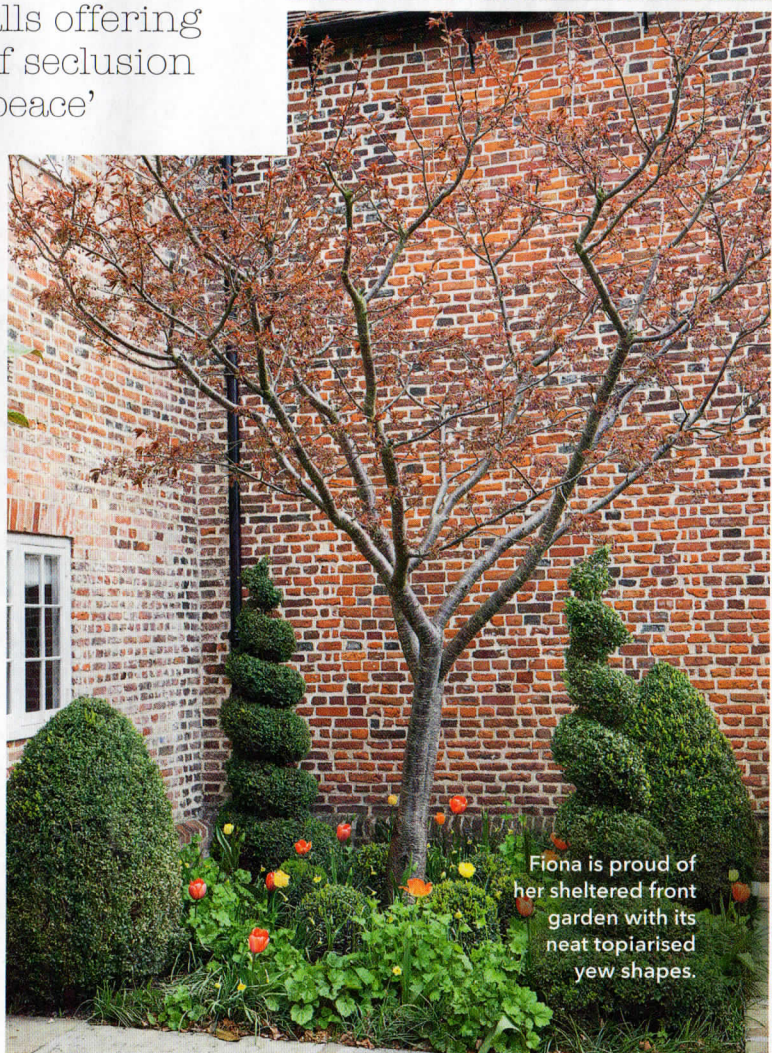
Fiona makes full use of her elegant Alitex greenhouse, propagating plants and sowing seeds for the garden.



Kent garden

Some of the archways in the ancient walls have been made by Fiona using old stone found lying around the garden.

*What we love most...*  
 'The cloistered feel of the ancient walls offering a feeling of seclusion and peace'



Fiona is proud of her sheltered front garden with its neat topiarised yew shapes.





*The pergola* An Italian amphora sits at the east end of the green oak crossway pergola, which Fiona designed. Nearby (above right), is a beautiful white *Spiraea 'Arguta'*, commonly known as bridal wreath.

climbs *Clematis* 'Early Sensation' in spring, followed by *Wisteria sinensis* 'Alba' and, later, a mass of roses. Behind the pergola along the river frontage is what Fiona calls her 'early spring garden'. Six lime trees, umbrella pollarded with their skirts kept high, are underplanted with snowdrops, followed by daffodils, camassia then *Fritillaria persica* 'Ivory Bells' merging with a host of tulips in a soft colour palette. Fiona has designed this part of the garden so that, when looking out from the house in the early months of the year, there is a clear sightline to the spring flowers at the far end.

Running alongside the main garden is the West Garden, which was once part of a neighbouring plot. It is bordered by an ancient section of three-metre high flint and brick wall, and already had a Lawson cypress, an Indian bean tree, a fig and a pear, and is dominated by a giant mulberry tree, possibly 100 years old. Fiona added an Indian chestnut and a sweet cherry, *Prunus avium* 'Plena' to the collection underplanting the area enthusiastically with bulbs. The borders against the walls are filled with tulips – Fiona works out a different colour scheme every few years – while forget-me-nots are allowed to self-seed freely so that they form a soft blue blanket.

Turning right off the main path from the house heading towards the river, you come to the Secret Garden. It is a secluded, shady corner that is bursting with camellia flowers in spring. 'I like pink and white varieties, especially 'Nuccio's Gem' and 'E.G. Waterhouse', and mix them with pulmonarias and hellebores, including the hybrid Bradfield Stars,' says Fiona. 'I put in hellebores of all kinds wherever »

### Modern Country Classic

## Spring colour

Plan your seasonal displays to add interest early in the year.

### Need to know...

- Think about your colour schemes carefully in advance. Winter is a good time to browse the plant catalogues and decide what to grow.
- Build up layers in the scheme. Ensure you have good groundcover plants with perennials among them, and add height with a mix of shrubs and trees. Use annuals to fill in any gaps. Allow plants such as forget-me-nots to self-seed.
- Don't be afraid to plant trees. Chosen with care, a flowering tree can make a beautiful statement.





## On our doorstep...

**Visit...** 'Trenley Park Wood (on the Stour Valley Walk, 0300 041 7171, [kent.gov.uk/explorekent](http://kent.gov.uk/explorekent)) in spring to see the bluebell and wood anemones.'

**Shop at...** 'The silversmith Gabriella Lane at Hythe (01303 239444, [gabriellalane.com](http://gabriellalane.com)), who makes beautiful silver jewellery in shell shapes.'

**Go for a meal at...** 'The Fordwich Arms (01227 710444, [fordwicharms.co.uk](http://fordwicharms.co.uk)), on the river. They do great homemade food and a traditional Sunday lunch. There is a terrace to sit on and watch the swans slip by.'

I can because they thrive here and don't mind facing north.'

The main lawn sits as an elegant and generous square within the enclosing walls, echoing the solid twin-gabled north wall of the house. 'I have a very dense planting style, so when I designed the garden I tried to keep the lawn as spacious as possible and have resisted – so far – any thoughts of encroaching into it. It brings a calmness to the garden which offsets the rich tapestry of colour from the plants.'

A front woodland area is dominated by a great white cherry, *Prunus* 'Tai Haku' planted 11 years ago, an old and very large yew and a mature variegated *Acer platanoides* 'Drummondii'. Everything here is underplanted with *Anemone blanda*, as well as more tulips and hellebores.

By the front wall of the house are two 'Mermaid' roses, which Fiona loves. 'They are vigorous climbers with single flowers in sulphur yellow and just perfect for the house. Under a beech hedge I have planted the dark purple *Crocus tommasinianus* and *Narcissus* 'Sun Disc' and I love the way it snakes a ribbon of spring colour along the whole front wall.'

Fiona and Patrick have put much thought and care into the sympathetic restoration of both house and garden and are grateful for their good luck. 'I suppose we have the thick walls to thank for the fact this garden is here at all and we are so lucky to have found this space with an amazing sense of history everywhere you look.'

**Watergate, Fordwich, Canterbury, Kent CT2 0DB, opens for the National Gardens Scheme on 26 April and 14 June, [ngs.org.uk](http://ngs.org.uk). Fiona Cadwallader Designs, 01227 719584, [cadwallader.co.uk](http://cadwallader.co.uk).**

**West Garden** The mulberry tree in this part of the garden may be 100 years old and is still full of mulberries every autumn. Fiona has underplanted it with chionodoxa and grape hyacinths.





**Fiona's favourite spring charmers**

**1** *Brunnera macrophylla* 'Jack Frost' makes good groundcover.

**2** *Camellia x williamsii* hybrid 'E.G. Waterhouse' is a lovely light pink.

**3** *Epimedium x versicolor* 'Sulphureum' grows in shady areas.

**4** *Magnolia x soulangeana* 'Pickard's Opal' has pretty goblet-shaped flowers.

**5** *Tulipa* 'Lilac Perfection' is loved by Fiona for its blue undertones.

**6** *Tulipa* 'Daydream' is a clear yellow that turns to apricot in April.

**7** Harvington Hybrid white hellebores form pleasing clumps of spring colour.

**8** *Tulipa* 'Menton' has been chosen by Fiona for its deep pinky apricot shade.

