



#### Fairmaids of February

Every year, I get the same feeling of joy when I spot the first common snowdrop, the *Galanthus nivalis* (above). The *Galanthus plicatus* is another well-known 'white lady', which was introduced into England in the 1850s by British soldiers who brought it back from the trenches in war-torn Crimea. The snowdrops in the vases (left) are the tall *Galanthus S. Arnott*, which grow to an impressive 25 cm in height. To prevent them from overturning, I made a grid of sellotape across the rim of the vases and stuck the stems through the holes.



#### The monks at Culham Manor

Across from the church lies Culham Manor, as it has done since the 15th century. Owned by the Abbey of Abingdon, it was originally built to house elderly clerics. Here, the monks saw out their final years in pleasant surroundings. They constructed a fine fish pond (facing page, bottom) overseen by a solitary monk. He continues to spew out water to this day.

#### A house with a history

The idyll came to an abrupt end in Culham when, in 1538, Henry VIII turned against the Catholic Church. The manor was confiscated and sold to William Bury, a wool trader from London, for the price of £600 plus some of his land in Kent. This was a handsome sum, even for a King, but then the house was close to the Thames and the town of Abingdon, England's oldest market town. Bury's descendants lie in the churchyard opposite the manor. The house has been altered and extended over the years, but many fine details have been preserved. The wonderful wide oak doors and the Flemish stained glass windows all help to form a patchwork of history.

