

Chairman's Letter

Writing these notes is often a 'rainy day job' and this time the rains have certainly obliged! The soil at Shiphams is very free-draining, but I can't remember it feeling so squelchy under foot in the morning following the previous day's rain. The grass was heavily coated with water, looking silver, almost like frost, and walking through it was like paddling. Was this because the amount of rain was atypical? It certainly lasted the whole day without letting up. Or was it that the soil beneath was so dry and non-absorbent that the water was just lying on the surface? Or was it that the very high humidity and a temperature of only 8 to 10 degrees was causing a sort of atmospheric stasis? As is usually the case, no single factor was uniquely responsible, but the combination of all of them in a rather unusual way has led to conditions that I have not previously experienced here.

During a recent trip to Scotland the ground at Kalzie garden was similarly saturated and the water came up over our shoes as we walked around. But the reasons were quite different. There was no dry layer to prevent drainage. With weeks of incessant rain the ground was saturated deep down and simply couldn't hold any more water. It is easy to blame climate change (or to dismiss it if you are of that persuasion): the process may be gradual, but change there certainly is, and we have to adapt to it in the way we tend our gardens. Are you ready for the predicted very cold winter to come?

Just before the sodden conditions described above, we actually had a frost warning. I took it seriously because I have a plant of *Dahlia imperialis* at about 9 feet with clusters of buds beginning to swell nicely. I grow the plant mainly for its spectacular foliage with leaf stems that can reach nearly 3 ft clothed with amazing pinnate foliage, but secretly I have an ambition to get it to flower – though it seldom does in this country. So as darkness fell Helen and I were positioned on opposite sides of the flower bed, each with a broom which we used at full stretch to lift a length of fleece over the top of the plant.

We didn't have a frost that night, the buds are still there, growing imperceptibly and the thought that they might eventually burst into flower is probably wishful thinking. But we can dream, can't we?

My thanks are due to those folk who responded to my invitation to put down a few thoughts about the visit to Througham Court. Their contributions are summarised later in this issue and I hope I have done justice to each one. Througham was a bit of a programme experiment for us: a garden that is unconventional and, almost by definition, would not be entirely to everyone's liking. But it would be wrong, I think, to plan visits around a sort of idealistic notion of what a garden should be. The practice of gardening should be dynamic and its perspectives wide-ranging.

Whilst the Througham trip was actually quite well supported, the general level of support this year has dropped and one or two trips came close to cancellation. In order to understand why this is, we are preparing a questionnaire for you all to complete to help the Committee offer a stimulating programme of visits. In it you will have the opportunity to comment on your preferences. So please give the questionnaire your very careful consideration when you come to fill it in. We really do want your views.



Rudbeckia 'Prairie Sun' and *Chrysanthemum* 'Border Apricot' in combination

Having written about the recent rain, it is worth remembering that October has been one of the mildest on record, and as I look out of the windows, there is still an amazing amount of colour to be seen. A star performer has been the *Rudbeckia* 'Prairie Sun', usually regarded as an annual – but I saw a very 'end-of-season' dead-headed specimen in a garden centre a few days ago on sale as a perennial, albeit reduced from its £7 price tag! I planted two blocks each with 8 or 9 plants raised

from a packet of seed, and they have given us continuous colour impact since early July. Some *clematis* have given us a second flowering, including the huge white 'Mme. Boisselot', and a new soft blue 'Lawsoniana', which sounds as if it is a species but is actually a hybrid that has done very well in its first year.

Chrysanthemums too are excellent late season value, and this year they have peaked even later than usual. 'Border Apricot' – somewhat redder than its name suggests - has single daisy-like flowers in a clump that bulks up remarkably quickly. The dome-shaped 'Mei Kyo' is smothered in small pink button flowers, a darker almost mauve colour at the centre, whilst nearby a sprawling *Knautia macedonica* has been continuously in flower for months. And I haven't even mentioned the dahlias! Such bounty makes it all very worthwhile.

Fittingly our AGM speaker in November was the well-known Mary Payne whose topic was 'So you think it's all over'. And as those who were present know, she added a few star performers of her own to those I have already mentioned.

Roy Stickland

Subscriptions for 2012

A gentle reminder that subscriptions for 2012 fall due this month. The rates are £8 for joint and £5 for single membership. Thank you to those who paid at the AGM and for those who pay by standing order. For those who prefer to pay by cheque, the usual payment slip is included with this Newsletter. I shall be at the 21 January lecture if you would like to save the cost of an envelope and stamp. Alternatively, for those of you who are adept at internet banking, you can do a BACS transfer direct to our bank account:

Bank Branch:	NatWest, Bridgwater
Sort Code:	60-03-27
Account name:	Hardy Plant Society (Somerset Group)
Account number:	46429956

Please remember to quote your membership number.

Under the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998 it is necessary that I advise you that, for the purposes of record only, details relating to your membership are stored electronically. If you object to your details being so recorded, please notify me without delay.

Stuart Senior

Visit to Thorougham Court

During our magical mystery tour to reach Thorougham Court, an article by Mary Keen in the Daily Telegraph was circulated. It was an excellent piece, comprehensive in its coverage, but one sensed that the author was struggling a bit to try to be fair and appreciative. By the end it was clear that this gardening guru had reservations about the garden and was not convinced by some of the conceptual ideas behind the design. She came away provoked and possibly even a bit bewildered. She quoted the owner, Dr Christine Facer, as saying that she was aware that not everyone would like it, but if they went away thinking about the ideas and were prepared to be open-minded about their validity, she would have succeeded.



So it was very clear, even before we got there, that this was a potentially controversial visit and it would be interesting to discover how we as a group would react to it. As we began our journey back, I therefore asked that everyone should make a note of their thoughts and email them to me so that I could try to compose an overall view. What follows is an amalgam of the handful of contributions that I received, plus verbal comments made to me on the day and afterwards and some thoughts of my own.

As expected there was a wide range of different reactions, some of them very strongly held. Some loved the garden without reservation and were impressed by the ideas and their translation into a garden. Most offered a mixture of likes and dislikes and were glad they had made the visit, though one or two found its didacticism overbearing and strongly disliked the garden and its owner for that reason. But there was a good deal more to it than the mathematical garden, and it is worth starting with the context in which it is set. The house itself was unanimously admired, and some people said they would love to have been able to see it from the inside – not necessarily wishing they could live there, since it might well be dark; to say nothing of the heating bills! Externally this mellow, characterful Cotswold





house enjoys a lovely setting and sits delightfully within it. Unusual features (stone guttering and water spouts) drew particular attention and the Arts & Crafts garden served to blend the property sympathetically with the landscape.

So far, so good. But then one is hit by the contrast between this rural idyll and the new conceptual garden in all its various elements, and although no-one specifically posed the question, it was I think implicit in some of the responses – if you want to design a garden of this kind, is this really the right setting in which to do it? Isn't the stark contrast too great, jarring uncomfortably with what had gone before? The owner's view would be that gardens are not museums and she had been very careful to ensure that by containing the concepts in separate rooms, the integration of garden and landscape has not been

jeopardised. But some felt there were just too many rooms defined by high (mainly Yew) hedges, which tended to produce a claustrophobic feeling. It may equally be argued that it facilitated concentration on what lay within each room. Others suggested it was all just a showcase for her landscape design business and intended to show just how clever she was.



Some features however were much admired, particularly the red flags, an eye-catching focal point on the far hill. The slate water feature too was popular, though there was some uncertainty as to whether we should walk on it and one eagle-eye noticed that its centre seemed not to line up with the centre of the path by which you approached it. There were positive comments about the birches (*Betula utilis* var. *jacquemontii*) for their aesthetic impact rather than their exemplification of the Fibonacci Sequence. Several loved the bamboo maze for its close embrace and seclusion. I was personally less impressed by this and rather agreed with the suggestion that the stainless steel ovals didn't work very well as well as the practical notion that when the bamboos start doing what bamboos do, control may become a difficult issue.

What of the concepts themselves and what role do they have in the design and function of a garden? A fairly common reaction was that it should not be necessary



to have to explain a garden in order to understand and appreciate it, and that it was somewhat pretentious to set the concepts at a level that is way beyond the knowledge of the average person. Is this really what a garden is for? But not everyone took this view, and some were ready to accept the thought provoking stimulus and make off to the library the following day to find information on cosmic evolution. Most people were happy with the Fibonacci connections, not least because the gradually changing intervals are themselves aesthetically pleasing. But to most, pi to 1,000 decimal places was quite over the top.

Chiracity and left- and right-handed molecules fascinated many of us and though these were difficult ideas to translate into a garden, the explanations made a lot of sense and referred to ideas that we could relate to - especially if you have twins in the family. That did not mean however that everyone liked the black, red and white marble terrace! The entrance via the Chaos Gate left several of us with mixed feelings and some uncertainty about what exactly was its import on passing through it into the garden.

Turning to the planting, the rusty garden was generally liked a good deal and there were good comments about the wild flower meadow, though clearly this is a seasonal feature. One member spotted a higher than expected proportion of cornflowers in the seed mix and resolved to use the idea at home. The design and planting in the older Arts & Craft garden was admired, though I personally wondered about dahlias densely planted within a low box parterre which by mid-season the dahlias would completely over shadow. The trussed and shaved conifers around the old croquet lawn were met with disbelief and the obvious question, 'why?' Although not a planting as such there was equal dislike of the red carpet.



Reading through people's comments and trying to summarise them here, it is clear that overall we found it a challenging garden and very few people said they didn't like it at all. Most were glad to have seen it, some quite liked it as a garden on its own terms, but didn't like "the conceptual mumbo-jumbo". What no-one could deny was that apart from the lavish resources that had gone into its making, a great deal of very creative imagination had gone into it as well. It was challenging in a constructive way and, yes, it did send many of us away thinking about the ideas

and wanting to explore them further. In this sense Christine Facer's creation has succeeded.

My thanks to everyone whose comments have contributed to this summary. I hope each of them will recognise at least some of their own thoughts, even if expressed in slightly different words.

Roy Stickland

The Great British Elm Experiment



Elms were once a major feature of the Somerset landscape but most have long since succumbed to Dutch elm disease and the regenerating elms, occasionally spotted in hedgerows, have proven to be just as susceptible to the *Ophiostoma ulmi* fungi as were the parent trees from which they have suckered.

But some elms, particularly in East Anglia, appear to have resisted the disease for over 60 years and these form the basis of the Great British Elm Experiment. Cuttings have been skilfully micro propagated and the resulting saplings are being distributed to hundreds of schools, community groups, local authorities and private landowners. Participants in the experiment are being asked to log their tree's progress over the long term (up to fifteen years).

In September 2010, I purchased two specimens of *Ulmus minor*, one from a parent tree in Keyston, in Cambridgeshire, and the other from Mellis, in Suffolk. Both survived the cold of the 2010/11 winter and the drought of last summer and are healthy and well established. Of course, it is an experiment and only time will tell if they grow to maturity. But it is surely a chance worthy taking. So if you have a hedgerow, a village green, a local playing field or a large garden, why not get involved?

For further details, visit <http://www.conservationfoundation.co.uk/>.

Stuart Senior

2012 Programme

Please refer to this and future Newsletters or the website <http://hps-somerset.btck.co.uk/> for further details and booking slips. Location maps or directions will be supplied following booking a place on an event.

All meetings at West Monkton Village Hall are free to members (except Saturday 28th April), but there is a modest levy of £2.00 for each visitor/guest. The Group will have a plant stall and a book stall at most of the lecture meetings listed.

All coach trips and garden visits must be pre-booked with Janet Murley:

Tel: 01884 820840 or email: janet.murley@btinternet.com.

SAT 21 JANUARY

LECTURE

At West Monkton Village Hall, Monkton Heathfield 10.30am for 11.00am.

Julian Sutton – “Flowers of the Western Cape”

Dr. Sutton is a botanist, nurseryman and lifelong plantsman. His nursery is Desirable Plants in Devon. His website is www.desirableplants.com. He will bring plants to the talk and you can also order from him for a delivery to the meeting.

SAT 18 FEBRUARY

LECTURE

At West Monkton Village Hall, Monkton Heathfield 10.30am for 11.00am.

Frank Hardy – “Creating a Chelsea Flower Show Garden”

Frank is the ex Vice President of Pershore College of Horticulture and currently writes for Garden News. He has created numerous Chelsea Gardens.

SAT 10 MARCH

LECTURE

At West Monkton Village Hall, Monkton Heathfield 10.30am for 11.00am.

Julie Ritchie – “Hardy Geraniums”

Julie has run a perennial and alpine nursery for 24 years, having originally trained as a landscape architect. The nursery website is www.hoohouse.co.uk.

SAT 31 MARCH**HPS SOMERSET EARLY SPRING PLANT SALE**

At East Lambrook Manor Gardens, 10:00am – 5:00pm

15 Nurseries will be attending – see website for details.

(Admission £4)

SAT 14 APRIL**LECTURE**

At West Monkton Village Hall, Monkton Heathfield 10.30am for 11.00am.

Kevin Hughes – “Trilliums of the South East USA”

Kevin has always had a keen interest in natural history and trained in ecology. He spent time as a head gardener of a 15 acre estate, was at Spinners, a well known nursery in Hampshire and now runs his own nursery at Heale House near Salisbury.

www.kevinsplants.co.uk

TUE 17 APRIL**SELF DRIVE GARDEN VISIT**

Greencombe & Woodborough, Near Porlock

SAT 28 APRIL**GROUP PLANT SALE - See page 14**

At West Monkton Village Hall, Monkton Heathfield 10.00am to 12.30pm.

(Admission £1)

WED 13 JUNE**SELF DRIVE GARDEN VISIT**

East Lambrook Manor & Mid Lambrook Manor, South Petherton

WED 27 JUNE**COACH TRIP**

Ridleys Cheer & The Priory, Gloucestershire

SUN 12 AUGUST**PLANT SWAP & LUNCH**

At Shipham: details TBA

TUE 11 SEPTEMBER**COACH TRIP**

The Garden House & Wildside, Devon

SAT 22 SEPTEMBER

LECTURE & 50/50 PLANT SALE

At West Monkton Village Hall, Monkton Heathfield 10.30am for 11.00am.

Roy Stickland – “Dahlias and Other Tuberous Plants”

SAT 20 OCTOBER

LECTURE

At West Monkton Village Hall, Monkton Heathfield, 10.30am for 11.00am.

John Sutton – “Salvias”

SAT 17 NOVEMBER

AGM & LECTURE

At West Monkton Village Hall, Monkton Heathfield 10.00am for 10.30am AGM and 11.15am lecture.

Colin Crosbie, Curator of RHS Wisley – “Shady Characters”

All events must be pre-booked

If you would like to book places on any of these events, complete and return the entire enclosed Booking Sheet. As you will see from the Booking Sheet, you can receive the Joining Instructions for each event either by email or by post. To receive these details by email, simply fill in your email address on the Booking Sheet **even if you believe I already have a note of it**. If you choose this option, not only will I email your Joining Instructions prior to each event, but I will also send you an email confirming your booking. If you prefer this option **PLEASE** print your name clearly and remember to advise me of any change to your email address. Should you wish to receive this information by post, **PLEASE** remember to send me **TWO** SAE for **EACH** event you wish to attend.

Janet Murley

Cancellation Policy

A reminder about our cancellation policy. There will be no refund of either coach or pre-paid entrance fees unless a replacement participant can be found. The only exception will be for "serious" illness if the organiser is notified before the visit. Amounts of less than £5 will not be refunded under any circumstances.

Visit Notes

April 17 – Self-drive visit to Greencombe, 11:00am, and Woodborough, 2:00pm, near Porlock. Bring your own lunch!

Greencombe is a post-war garden, having been started in 1946 by Horace Stroud. It is a strip of 3.5 acres on the edge of ancient woodland. The light comes from the north, with a sweep of sky down to the Bristol Channel. To the south rise wooded slopes that tumble between high Exmoor and the sea.

The name comes from the combe (or valley) behind, which is the only one in this arc of hills with a sward of grass but no water. Since September 1966 it has been in the care and custody of Joan Lorraine whose dedication to the garden has produced what you see today. She has just written a book on *Erythroniums*, "*In Search of the Dogtooth*", which will be available to buy.

The gardens contain four national plant collections: *Erythronium* (small mountain lilies); *Polystichum* (the thumbs-up fern); *Vaccinium* (Wortleberries world-wide) and *Gaultheria* (berries for bears).

Woodborough, Porlock Weir, a very interesting garden of about 3.5 acres created on a steep hillside with magnificent views over Porlock Bay. The wide variety of shrubs includes rare rhododendrons and azaleas. The owners are getting old and say that, while there are still some lovely plants to see, they have not been able to keep it in its former pristine state. In spite of his wife's terminal cancer the owner would very much like us to visit on the understanding that we show ourselves around. We are warned that you will need to be steady on your pins: it is a very long way down if you fall on the hillside! For this reason, Greencombe and Woodborough are bookable separately. But please make the effort to visit Woodborough - it may be your last chance!

The costs of the visits are: Greencombe - £6 per person, Woodborough - £5 per person.

June 13 – Self-drive visit to East Lambrook Manor, 11:00am, and Mid Lambrook Manor, 14:00, near South Petherton. Bring a picnic or enjoy a pub lunch!

East Lambrook Manor has a Grade I listed cottage garden and also a nursery, which will be well known to HPS Somerset Group members. The garden was created by Margery Fish from 1938 onwards. Many of you may recall that we were fortunate to have a talk on the history of the garden by the Head Gardener to whet our appetites for this visit.

The two acre garden has a great deal of charm and like all gardens has not remained static. It is good to know that the intention is to keep the garden open and, while respecting its garden history significance, keeping it alive and well. There are plenty of interesting plants for Hardy Planters.

Coffee or tea and cake will be available (£3.50) but you might care to bring your own lunch if you intend to move on to Mid Lambrook. Alternatively, the Rose and Crown pub at East Lambrook would be a good option.

Mid Lambrook Manor is less well known than its East Lambrook neighbour and not generally open to the public. So we are delighted that Sir Geoff and Lady Valerie Mulcahy have allowed us to visit. Sir Geoff and Head Gardener Linda Duck have, over the past few years, restored the old gardens and have extended them to include a large pond and bog garden. The Grade II* listed manor house and the restored barns are exceptional. Linda will have managed the garden to peak condition the weekend before for an opening on behalf of the village church. So we will be seeing it at its very best. **Highly recommended.**

Note that East and Mid Lambrook Manors are bookable separately and the costs are: East Lambrook - £4.80 per person and Mid Lambrook: - £5 per person.

June 27 – Coach Trip to The Priory and Ridleys Cheer, near Chippenham. Bring a picnic!

The Priory, described as a “magical” two acre garden, has been created around the buildings of a Benedictine priory by respected writer and garden designer, Anita Pereire. It has a firm overall structure and lavish planting. There is an avenue of weeping silver pears, a French garden of topiary and standard roses, a water garden, a Ha-ha with rock plants perennials and flowering shrubs and a classic rose garden of old fashioned varieties and more and more. Let us hope it looks as good as it sounds!

Please bring a picnic lunch to eat at

Ridleys Cheer (<http://www.ridleyscheer.co.uk/>), is a stylish garden, filled with treasures. There is a two acre arboretum and a three acre wild flower meadow. In all the garden covers 14 acres with rare shrubs and trees. Fifteen different *magnolias*, lots of *daphnes* and *deutzias* and 125 unusual varieties of roses. There is also a potager, a gravel garden and a conservatory. In the main this is an informal garden full of appeal to plantsmen. There is a small nursery with all plants propagated from the garden (but it does not take credit cards so bring plenty of cash!).

We depart from Sainsbury's car park bus stop at Hankridge Farm (M5 J25) at 9:00am with a pick up at Clevedon. The cost of the trip is £25.50 per person.

Newsletter & Website Material



(Image courtesy of Sue Taylor)

Your editor and webmaster is still seeking brave individuals who have some facility with the English language and/or digital cameras to contribute material for this newsletter and the website. Anyone who is prepared to contribute 12 pictures and some suitable text for **Plant of the Month** throughout 2012 will be rewarded with a 2013 calendar featuring those pictures. So get snapping!

Plant Sales Table

I'd like to thank everyone who has brought plants to be sold on the Group's sales table this year. However, the last year or two has seen a drop in the number of plants being donated. This has, of course, impacted on the plants available for sale to members and, as a consequence, the revenue gained by the Group.

For any new members who may be unaware, the plant sales table at our monthly meetings is stocked entirely with plants donated by our members, which may be purchased at a reasonable price prior to and following the meeting. There are often some real gems and rarities available to buy.

I'd be very grateful if you would all consider potting up excess plants from your gardens and bringing a couple of plants each time you come to a Group lecture meeting. The monies raised from this table and the second-hand gardening books stall really do help us to continue to provide members with great value for money for their membership. The cost of hiring the hall and booking the guest speaker for each lecture meeting is not inconsiderable and at present entry to lecture meetings is free for members. If everyone coming to a lecture could bring a plant or book with them for the tables this would go some way to paying your "entry fee"!

Jane Hunt

National Matters



You will, I hope, have spotted a number of interesting items in November's National newsletter. Firstly, the Society's website, at <http://www.hardy-plant.org.uk/>, has had a makeover and includes even more useful information for Hardy Planters. And secondly, galanthophiles (i.e. those suffering from that incurable disease, snowdrop envy) will have noted the creation of a new specialist group devoted to *Galanthus*. The Group's

inaugural meeting will be held on Sunday 19 February in Chaddesley Corbett near Kidderminster in Worcestershire. It will be followed by a lecture by Jim Almond entitled '*Special Snowdrops and How to Keep Them*' and a visit to Olive Mason's garden at Dial Park. (*Many of you will recall our coach trip in March last year to this garden and to Ashwood Nurseries. Ed*)

Jane Hunt

Group Plant Sale, 28 April

Members can contribute to the plant sale in two ways: (a) take a table in your own right, or (b) grow plants to donate to the Group table. If you want your own table, please contact me (details on back cover). The charge will be £5, payable on the day. This will be waived if you commit to donate all your takings to charity. There are only 16 tables available, and it's first come, first served. If you have plants to donate to the Group table, just bring them along on the day. So get propagating and do ensure the plants are correctly named, properly labelled and well established in their pots, so that they look attractive for sale.

PS We will also need plants for our Group table at the East Lambrook plant sale on 31 March so please bear this in mind when you plan your propagating!

Roy Stickland

Stop Press!

Readers will be pleased to know that Roy's *Dahlia imperialis* did indeed flower magnificently. Here's a picture and some notes from Roy.



"Dahlia imperialis is usually grown here for its impressive stature and amazing foliage. Never making the 15ft height of its native Mexico, it can nevertheless make 9-10ft but it is rare for it to flower in this country. This autumn has been exceptionally mild (November was the second warmest on record). This enabled the flower buds that are usually cut down by the frost, to develop and provide a spectacular display. It has flowered at Bicton this year for the first time, and here it is in all its glory at Herongates. It could be a long wait before I see it again."

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