

Somerset Group Newsletter



20th Anniversary Year!

Number 51

June 2013

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<http://hps-somerset.btck.co.uk/>

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Chairman's Letter

Comments about the long cold spring have been on virtually everybody's lips, but perhaps the aspect that worries me most is the absence of bees. In the last few weeks there have been just a few Bumble Bees about, but they have appeared far later and in fewer numbers than we would normally expect. Whatever the detailed causes, the cool wet summer last year will certainly not have helped, and with a further 'wash-out' summer apparently predicted for this year, the future of these, our essential pollinators, must be a cause of concern. Whether the various lobby groups campaigning for a ban on certain pesticides have got it right, I'm not sure and I know of at least one apiarist who has said that we really needed more hard evidence to justify the ban. Be that as it may I shall continue to avoid using pesticides, even though there are occasions when I would like to, but more positively to ensure that I have enough flowers continuously available to encourage and support the bees.

The cold spring, of course, posed a problem for producing good plant material for the sales at East Lambrook and our own at West Monkton. But it was astonishing what both the nurseries and our own growers achieved, with very satisfactory financial results. My thanks are due to everyone who grew and donated (or sold!) plants and who helped in many ways at both ELM and West Monkton. Well done. I have yet to have a feedback session with Mike and Gail Werkmeister, but it seems a pretty good bet that we now have an annual event on our hands at ELM and it does a great deal to raise the profile of the HPS.

The summer visiting programme is now underway and the first, to *Plaz Metaxu*, has been very well received. I asked people on the visit to let me have their reactions and received a perceptive piece from Kevin Chittenden which is reproduced elsewhere in this issue, along with a few other comments that I also received. It was surely not possible to come away from *Plaz Metaxu* without being impressed in a variety of ways, as I think Kevin's piece illustrates. As I write we have just visited Cothay Manor and Holcombe Court. Cothay is well known to many of us and it is good to see how the indefatigable Mary Anne Robb is keeping up the standard. Holcombe, however, was a new experience for almost all of us, and what an experience it was! In the short time available before this Newsletter is put to bed it is not really possible to gather views from the large number that made up our party, so I intend to come back to it in the following Newsletter, by which time there will be other visits to review.

In the meantime I must mention an experiment that Jane Hunt and I undertook at Worle School, where Jane works. For some time I have wanted to explore how we might do a bit more to implement the HPS educational remit. Specifically I had in mind some kind of parent and child event. The perfect opportunity to try it out came with an event at Jane's school aimed at showing the range of school activities

to children, who will be coming to the school, and their parents. Jane booked a pitch and we went armed with tough plant material to divide and pot (Phytostegia, Astrantia, Chrysanthus, Solidago, Geranium), a large bag of compost and a supply of pots. Potting trays and hand tools were available from the school. About 20 children were persuaded to come and have a go – and remembered to come back to collect their plants before they went home. We plied the adults with leaflets about the HPS and generally tried to raise their awareness of what we are about.

We had no expectation that we would sign up any new members there and then, but that was not the point. The youngsters had some fun, and certainly seemed to enjoy what they were doing. They liked having something to take home to tend, to be planted in their gardens later on. For their part, the adults were interested to talk to us and find out a bit more about the HPS, most particularly to discover that we are friendly towards newcomers and you don't have to be a plant specialist to be a member. In that sense bread was cast upon the water in the hope of some longer term response. I now plan to carry the idea forward with a local garden centre that seems interested in sponsoring a similar sort of event. I would like to hear from any members who fancy becoming involved in this sort of activity – the more widespread it is the more likely it will be to show benefits, and clearly Jane and I can't do it all on our own.

Do please get in touch to let us know about local possibilities in your area and also any other ideas you may have about alternative approaches to 'hands-on' introduction to the Society. Our membership is still declining and unless we attract newcomers, particularly the rising generation, our future will be limited. Let's resolve to put some effort into attracting their attention.

Roy Stickland

Plant Sales

I wanted to say thank you so much to the many members who have responded to my plea for more plants for our sales table at our monthly lecture meetings and indeed those who brought plants to East Lambrook Manor and our sale at West Monkton Village Hall. It really is appreciated. Despite offering a "cash back" on plant sales, no-one appears to have asked for any money back either which is an added bonus!

For any new members reading this, **we ask that everyone brings at least one plant or a raffle prize to an indoor meeting**, when they can, to help pay for the ever-increasing hall and speaker fees. We hope to continue to offer entry to our monthly lecture meetings free to all Group members for the foreseeable future as a result.

Jane Hunt

Visit to *Plaz Metaxu*

Our visit on 23 April was well supported, and the overwhelming reaction was very favourable. This prompted the interesting question as to why it was that that our earlier visit to a 'conceptual' garden (Througham Court) had provoked very mixed opinions, whilst this one – just as much a design based around a concept – had proved so appealing. Several people pointed out that they had no knowledge of Greek mythology or any of the 'deep psychological inferences' behind it, but they loved the garden on its own terms. Yet it was equally true that most of our members had no knowledge of mathematical sequences or chirality, but were not attracted so much by Througham Court as a garden.



One clue lay perhaps in the comment that *Plaz Metaxu* sat perfectly within its context in the Devon countryside, whilst, although it was divided into secluded and self-contained 'rooms', Througham Court seemed to strike a discordant note within its Cotswold environment. The other element was that Alastair Forbes would explain the mythological connections if asked, but did not expect an understanding of them as a prerequisite for enjoying the garden. This was quite contrary to Dr Christine Facer's approach, which was to start with the scientific construct and then go on to

describe how the garden design had been derived from it. For many of us that approach worked well, but others found it too clever by half and some even suggested that it showed a desire to assert her intellectual superiority.

The difference perhaps is the contrast between the need to explain, secure understanding and perhaps respect on the one hand, and sharing love on the other. At this point, there are two quite different sets of reactions. The first is that if you need to describe the design principles of a garden it has failed to chime with you. The opposite view is that it is better not to have the description. Being told what to think doesn't leave your own intellect/imagination anywhere to go. How much better to puzzle it out for yourself. Both gardens in their different ways have certainly stimulated thought and it must be emphasised that a good proportion of visitors to Througham Court loved it and found it thought provoking in the very best sense.

The most detailed response to *Plaz Metaxu* came from Kevin Chittenden and this is quoted below in its entirety.

"My initial reaction on arriving was, what a wonderful site for an arboretum! I have to admit I am a tree and shrub man (I am able to remember the names of those more easily) and I was 'at home' right away. However, that was where normality stopped and I suppose in retrospect the name should have told me that this was to be no ordinary visit. The whole deep mythological concept, planting and construction sat so comfortably with the Devon countryside. A man's personal dream created in a calm, quiet way – not for show or glorification – but seemingly to be enjoyed and perhaps thought provoking.



I know little about Greek mythology but it has left me wanting to understand it and maybe the reasoning behind it. I found the range of trees most interesting and noticed how carefully they had been chosen – no bulky evergreens, rhododendrons or laurel – just a choice fir or pine discretely included as a focal point. It was noticeable that the house was not 'tarted up' as they usually seem to be, and the barns were conserved for their original architectural value and significance. They had been constructed when the farm had been very prosperous.

Maybe some visitors would be disappointed by the lack of planting in the courtyards,

but again it was all rather understated but not without reason. The whole 'garden' was serene and gentle – nothing flamboyant or out of place, and yet there were items which, had one been told about rather than seen, one might have been aghast.

A truly wonderful morning out. Pat and I would have stayed all day. It must look even better at first light or sunset. We did not go to Througham Court, but maybe the owner has tried to be too clever – unlike *Plaz Metaxu*."

Another member began in a somewhat cynical frame of mind. 'How that changed!' I feared the garden might have lost the native feeling of the valley, but, no, it still

remains a valley in Devon, but enhanced by the planting of beautiful trees and hedges – not too much yew. Around each corner was another lovely view produced by just a single tree or group of trees. I may now try to make another visit, when I think even more will be gained. I never thought I'd be saying that when I arrived!

Another response reflected a general notion that the philosophical or deep thoughts may have gone over my head but that didn't matter. "Why the garden was created was irrelevant to me, it was just beautiful. The setting was magical and the garden blended into the countryside around it. The owner must be very proud of his handiwork, and I would love that walled garden!"

The final thought is the contrast in the materials used in the construction of the two gardens. Througham Court used a lot of hard, modern materials such as stainless steel and red, black and white stone, which certainly stood out and underlined the concepts. *Plaz Metaxu* used more natural materials which might have been part of the landscape. Therefore they blended rather than contrasted. This is not to say that one approach is any more 'right' than the other, and after all there were a lot of our members who loved Througham Court as well. Both gardens have been thought provoking which is why they have invited these comparisons and contrasts.

Thanks to everyone who volunteered their thoughts and I hope I have done justice to all of you even though somewhat different words may have been used in the process of summarising your views.

Roy Stickland

Banana Saga

When the plant of *Ensete glauca* arrived, it was in a 1.5 ltr pot and was barely 18" high. Because it is not reckoned among the hardier banana species the plan was to grow it in a terracotta pot, sink it into the ground for the summer and lift it again in the autumn for protection during the winter. By its second year it was in a 10" pot, the next it was a 12" pot: and then what? It becomes an expensive business to buy ever larger clay pots, though it might be argued that so splendid a specimen plant deserved no less. Be that as it may, the next phase involved plastic pots and then small shrub tubs, which of course do not permit moisture transfer from the surrounding soil. By this time the root system was filling 10 ltr and 15 ltr tubs and the stem was more than 6ft high and expanding in girth.

It continued to thrive in the sunken plastic containers provided I regularly fed and watered it, but it was getting heavier and more difficult to dig out of the ground without damaging the container ... and more difficult to trundle to the greenhouse for winter protection. Now the ridge height of the greenhouse is 8ft 6ins and in

2010/11 the growing pint was bent over beneath the ridge. For 2012 we re-potted into a 50cm x 40cm tub, which just passed through the dividing door between the front and rear sections of the greenhouse (provided you got your knuckles out of the way in time!). We almost immediately regretted this decision since it was really too heavy to lift into the wheelbarrow, but we managed it (and turned to the Tens machine afterwards!).

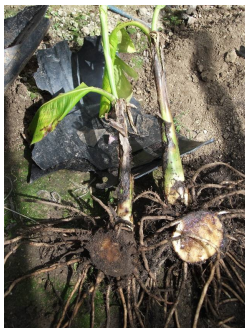
The next challenge was to excavate a hole at the end of the Dahlia bed large enough to take a 50 x 40cm tub, firming the soil back around the pot to keep it nice and steady. But this was as nothing compared with getting it out again at the end of the season. What was a very heavy and cumbersome object to lower into the crater we had prepared, seemed totally immovable when it came to lifting it out. The tub (only £10 on a special offer) was punctured and cracked in the process – using a pickaxe to ease things probably didn't help, and by the time we had wobbled the precarious cargo in the wheelbarrow to the greenhouse, amid weak roadside jokes about 'heavy plant crossing', we realised that the only way it would go into the greenhouse was horizontally and we needed half-inch rope to drag it there. Then what? Yes, of course, we had to dig another big hole in the greenhouse bed to enable the plant/tree to stand (nearly) vertically.

By now the trunk, no longer just a stem, had fattened to more than 6" in diameter, and interestingly it had produced a couple of dinky little side shoots about 18" high and producing their own leaves. So an immediate decision was made: the plant would not be re-potted, the side shoots would be removed and the parent would be planted in the open ground and wrapped in situ with fleece and polybubble at the end of the season, - and if that proves insufficient winter protection..... tough!

Predictably the growing point was again curled over beneath the ridge, despite the depth of the hole, and having removed soil from around it, we were still unable to get it totally horizontal – yet somehow we had to get the tub off in order to get at the side shoots to give them a life of their own. In the end it was the heavy hammer that did the trick, and the tub went in the dustbin in small pieces. Great! We're nearly there.



All we have to do now is scrape away the compost around the base of the new shoots and gently cut them off and pot them. The accompanying pictures reveal how quickly we moved away from that delusion, for the base of the new shoots was already between 4" and 5" with 15" to 18" roots tangled among and seemingly welded to the matted roots of the parent.



The jokes now moved on to Mickey Mouse, the Sorcerer's Apprentice in the film Fantasia as we imagined a forest of new shoots emerging from the two cut surfaces at the base of the plant, growing as we watched – a situation running totally out of control and requiring a super-human force to conquer it.

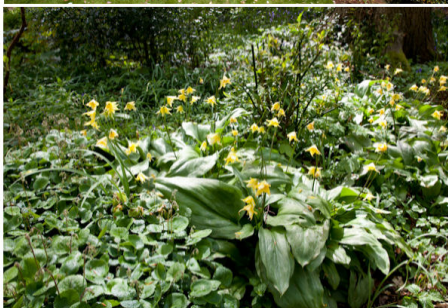
Would anyone like a dinky little *Ensete glauca* as an unmatched specimen plant?

Roy Stickland

Visit to Cothay Manor



Visit to Holcombe Court



2013 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 27th 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.

THU 13 JUNE

COACH TRIP

Marwood Hill, Cliffe & The Gate House,

North Devon

Marwood Hill Gardens covers 20 acres. In addition to three small lakes the gardens contain rare flowering shrubs, a rock and alpine scree, waterside planting, a bog garden, many clematis and many Australian native plants. It also holds National Collections of *Astilbe*, *Iris ensata* and *Tulbaghia*. Plant Sales and Tearoom: see www.marwoodhillgarden.co.uk.

To learn more about Cliffe see the HPS Journal of earlier this year: Autumn 2012, Vol.33 no. 2. It is 150 yards up a steep hill on the coast road. A cliff-side terraced garden with spectacular views and a diverse range of habitats from Mediterranean to woodland. Colourful herbaceous borders with *Hedychiums*, *Cannas* and *Salvias* through into autumn. It also holds National Collections of *Heuchera* and *Schizostylus*.

The Gate House is also covered in the same edition of the HPS Journal. It is a peaceful streamside garden, with a range of habitats including a bog garden. There is woodland, a large vegetable garden, herbaceous borders, and patio gardens with semi-hardy exotics. It holds a National Collection of *Rodgersia*.

Marwood Hill and the Gate House are included in the cost of the trip. Because of the access issue at Cliffe some members may not wish to make the climb: those that do should budget for a entry fee of £3.50 on the day.

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.

SAT 29 JUNE

20th ANNIVERSARY LECTURE

At Horton Village Hall, 13.30pm for 14.00pm.

Roy Lancaster – “Mad About Plants”

Roy, President of the HPS, should need no introduction. This meeting will be open to the general public so booking is strongly advised. The following nurseries will also be attending: Special Plants, Hill House Nursery, Desirable Plants and Long Acre Plants.

WED 10 JULY

COACH TRIP

Bryan's Ground, Aulden Farm & Ivy Croft

Herefordshire

Bryan's Ground (www.bryansground.co.uk) comprises three acres of garden rooms, created in 1913, furnished with follies, fragrant flowers and topiary, pools and potager. Paths lead to five acres of specimen trees on the banks of a river on the border with Wales.

Aulden Farm (www.auldenfarm.co.uk) is an informally planted three acre country garden with wildlife in mind. Irises, hemerocallis, grasses and kniphofias. Structure and form and quirkiness!

Ivy Croft (www.ivycroftgarden.co.uk) is a plant lover's garden designed for all year interest with raised beds, mixed borders, trees, alpine troughs and a formal vegetable garden framed by trained fruit trees. Collections of ferns, willows and snowdrops. Tea and cake is included!

SUN 11 AUGUST

PLANT SWAP & LUNCH

At Shipham

FRI 6 SEPTEMBER

SELF DRIVE GARDEN VISIT

Little Ash Bungalow & Cadhay

East Devon

The morning visit will be to Little Ash Bungalow with its plantswoman's one and a half acre garden packed with different and unusual perennials, shrubs and bamboos. It has been designed for year round interest and the owner's pleasure. Inspirational colour co-ordinated long mixed borders provide interest in late spring, summer and autumn. The garden includes a natural stream and damp woodland area with wildlife meadows and gravel alpine garden. Tea or coffee and cake are included. <http://www.ngs.org.uk/gardens/gardenfinder/garden.aspx?id=21320>. In the afternoon we will visit Cadhay. Arrive promptly at 1.30 pm if you wish to tour the house. We will then have unlimited time in garden. According to Country Life, Cadhay is one of the top Manor houses in the country, dating from 1550. The garden is beautiful: it is not a formal show garden but it does attract garden enthusiasts. There is a tearoom. <http://www.cadhay.org.uk/>

SAT 14 SEPTEMBER**LECTURE & 50/50 PLANT SALE**

At Bridgwater College Cannington Centre 10.30am for 11.00am.

Diana Guy – “Cottage Gardens”

Diana was the winner of the BBC gardener of the year in 2004. She specialises in consultancy and design and runs workshops and courses.

[See page 14 for details of the National HPS event taking place on the day.]

SAT 19 OCTOBER**LECTURE**

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

Ron Scamp – “Daffodils”

Ron is a specialist grower of over 2000 named varieties of daffodils. The RHS has awarded him the Cory Memorial Cup for his daffodil breeding. His website is www.qualitydaffodils.co.uk/ and he will bring bulbs for sale.

SAT 16 NOVEMBER**AGM & LECTURE**

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

Stephen Lacey – “What makes a great garden?”

Stephen is a well-known author, journalist, broadcaster, plantsman and garden designer.

SUN 1 DECEMBER**WINTER LUNCH**

At Blostin's Restaurant, 29-33 Waterloo Road, Shepton Mallet, BA4 5HH

See: www.blostins.co.uk

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

Our September Lecture Meeting

We wish to remind you that our meeting on 14 September 2013 will take place in the main lecture hall at Bridgwater College, Cannington. The reason for this is to enable members of our Group to more easily take part in the afternoon lectures organised by the national HPS for the same day and venue.

The morning will follow the usual format for our September meeting: a members' 50/50 plant sale, starting at 10.00am, will precede the lecture. If you wish to bring plants for sale they should be delivered to the sales table, in a room adjoining the hall, between 9.30am and 10.00am. You should provide TWO IDENTICAL LABELS for each plant, each with the plant's name and price and your own name to enable us to easily tot up the amount owed to each seller by removing one label when a plant is sold.

At 11.00am the lecture will begin. Our speaker will be Diana Guy talking about "Cottage Gardens". Afterwards you may either go home as usual or stay on to hear the renowned speaker, Mary Toomey, talk about "Clematis" followed by a chaired conversation between Mary and Roy Lancaster. Details of this event are available on the HPS website and also appeared in the last HPS Newsletter.

We have managed to negotiate a special rate of £15.00 for Somerset Group members to participate in the afternoon events only. If you wish to do so, you should complete the standard booking form available on the HPS website and

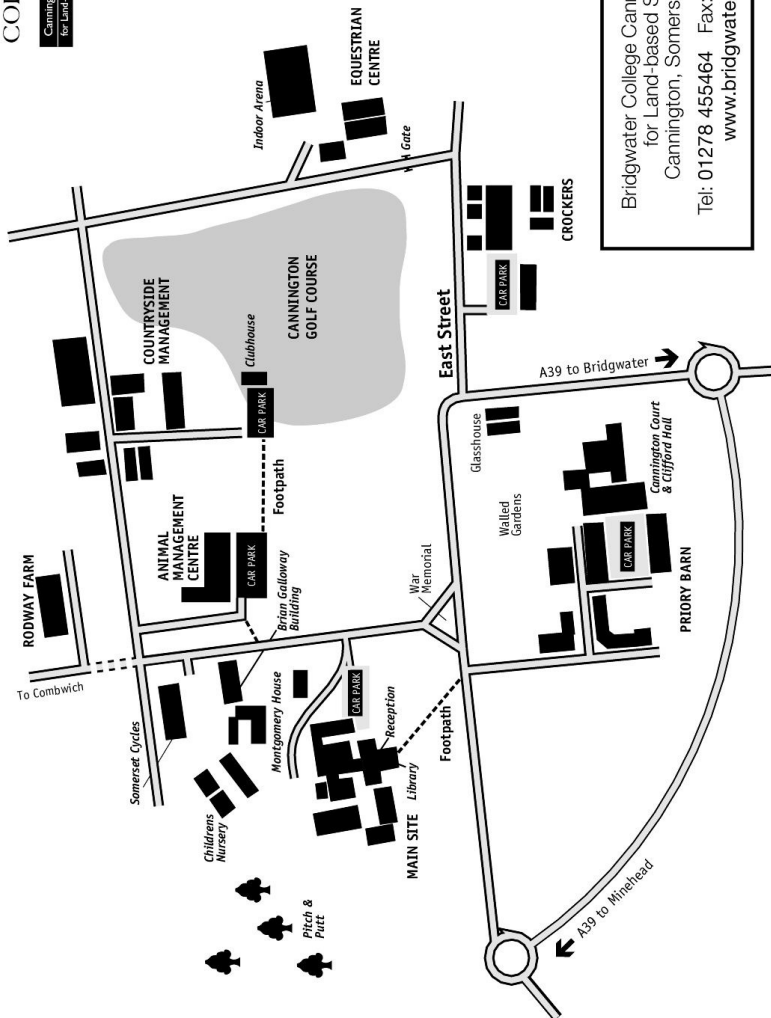
mark it clearly "Somerset Group Member – afternoon only" and submit it to the address provided, with your cheque for £15.00. Do not send it to Janet Murley! If you are staying on for the afternoon, you should note that you will need to make your own lunch arrangements, although this may be eaten in one of the rooms adjoining the hall.

Cars must be parked in the Animal Management Centre up the road from the main college building (please see map provided), although if you are bringing plants for the sale you may unload these in the small car park adjoining the hall before removing your car to the main car park.

Jane Hunt



How to find us at the Bridgwater College Cannington Centre for Land-based Studies



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