

# Somerset Group Newsletter

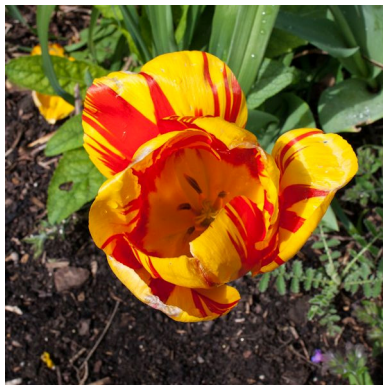


*Brian and Sue Dockerill's garden at Pontypridd - 6 May 2014*

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



## Chairman's Letter

It is good news that we have been able to welcome some new members since the turn of the year. Their names are set out on page 14 and I hope you will all give them the warm welcome for which the HPS is generally noted. I come back to the question of membership in a separate piece on page 11 of this issue.

In the meantime these notes are written following both of our major plant sales and once again we chalk up some great successes. East Lambrook was undoubtedly the best yet: over 760 people came through the gates. Last year it was just over 500. The combination of the pitch fees, sales of books and plants which were donated by members yielded over £640. The nurseries were all extremely happy and I suspect there would be a riot if for any reason the sale didn't continue or if any of the nurseries failed to get a place. Therein lies an issue, since we now have a waiting list of nurseries who have asked for a place, and there simply isn't room for them. The 14 pitches we currently have is really the limit, so the allocation of places is difficult issue. Watch this space!

Our own plant sale at West Monkton was again successful, though very marginally less so than last year. However it has added another £200 to our funds. The number of customers on the door was almost identical to last year and we need to consider how we can attract larger numbers – though the hall seemed to be buzzing for much of the time.

At both of these sales we rely on the generosity of members for the plants they donate and we have emphasised the need for the plants to be well presented and properly labelled. The response this year has been wonderful. On both occasions the Group plant tables have looked very attractive and I have received comments about the general quality of the plant material. My thanks are due to all of who you have contributed in this way. A high standard has been set and this is reflected in the interest shown in the plants we have to offer at both sales. Thanks also to everyone who volunteered to help in various other ways. I am grateful to all of you.

Another success has been the introduction of the Plant of the Month competition. We have all been impressed by the number of entries we get each month and also by the standard of the plants and cut flowers on the table. Well done to everyone and thank you for your support. We have a break now for the summer, but please remember that when we reconvene in September the Plant of the Month competition will also resume. I am also grateful to Ruth Boundy who has volunteered to help Lyn Spencer-Mills (whose idea this was initially) and to stand in for her if she cannot be at any of the meetings.

I was able to announce at our March meeting that the proposed EU plant legislation had been thrown out in the European Parliament. We all took this to be good news, believing that if the Commission wanted to pursue the matter they would have to come up with revised proposals and re-submit to Parliament for approval. An email from Sir Graham Watson our MEP seems to indicate that, for reasons that are totally beyond me, MEP's will NOT have any further scrutiny and it will be a matter of persuading the government to seek to influence the Commission in Brussels. Sir Graham still hopes that sales of ornamental plants and seeds by specialist nurseries and charities/private individuals may fall outside the scope of any new regulations, but this cannot be taken for granted. So it is all up in the air again and we may need to switch any representations to local MP's to persuade the government that this is an important matter, whatever other issues they may have on their plate right now. I have only just received Sir Graham's message and I shall be seeking clarification from him of the constitutional rules that will have produced such an extraordinary outcome.

Turning to more prosaic matters, the change from a long wet winter to a warmer, later Spring left most of us about 3-4 weeks behind in our work in the garden. This was particularly frustrating if you were intending to lift and divide perennials with our plant sales in mind. But it is amazing how things have now caught up. The bulbs particularly have done very well, from the snowdrops, to the narcissi and now the tulips which are giving me the best display I can remember. It is often said that tulips are best in their first year and then deteriorate, so it is best to treat them as annuals and dig them up and replace them each year. That has not been my practice. I plant them very deep (about 9" down) and leave them to do their own thing. Over a period of about 5 years or more they have made ever increasing clumps and get better year on year, and by selecting early, mid-season and late varieties I get a splendid display. The secrets are probably paying a little more for high quality bulbs from a specialist supplier, and planting the bulbs deeply. Another bulb that has performed well for me this year is the Erythronium, including some newly acquired cultivars. In particular the vigorous white, Harvington



Snowgoose (see picture) is still spectacular as I write these notes at the end of April. Whilst talking of Erythroniums I found it surprising that at both Trebah and Glendurgan there was not an Erythronium to be seen despite conditions in both gardens that would on the face of it be ideal. In fact neither garden had very much under-planting in the woodland areas and it seemed a very obvious missed opportunity.

These gardens were of course the subject of our first visit this year and that brings me to an enquiry made by one of our members, which also links back to the answers you all gave to our questionnaire about visits. Put simply, the question was, 'could we organise visits to gardens further away lasting 2 or 3 days with a hotel stay and a programme covering 4 or 5 outstanding gardens (plus some nurseries!)'. A comparison was made with success of such visits organised by the Worcestershire Group and as you think about it may I urge you to refer to that Group's website and look at the programmes and members' write-ups (what enthusiasm!) and consider whether you would support them if we were to organise them. We have the offer of using Worcestershire's archives if we wanted to replicate any of their visits.

We have discussed the proposal in committee, and the first point to be established was that we would need a member(s) to organise and manage the programme, since all committee members are fully loaded with what they are doing already – and remember we have been running for some time short of at least one committee member. Secondly, we have to think about the balance and potential cost of our programme, and since our programme for 2015 is already being prepared, it would be 2016 before we could schedule an extended visit – but then such an event takes a lot of careful planning, so the timing is not unreasonable. If the potential demand from members enabled us to proceed, we might need to reduce or remove the one day visits to avoid an unacceptable overload of the year's programme. Worcestershire do not have the one day visits that are the core of our programme, and there are very good reasons for that.

Do please give this some serious thought, take a look at Worcestershire's website and most importantly the tone of their members' comments, and consider how we might introduce this fresh component into our programmes. Get in touch with any of the committee members to try to answer the key questions: would members welcome the extended visit suggestion? If it were introduced, would you support it? (cost will be an important consideration and we are probably looking at £4-500). Would you offer to organise it? Would there be room for it as an addition to our programme, or should we reduce the one-day visits? This is a big decision and we would only proceed with it if we knew we had goodwill of the majority of members, so please let us know what you think. In this case it really does matter that we should hear from all of you.

In the meantime I hope you enjoy the programme we have for you for the rest of this year. Unusually I have refrained in this letter from saying very much about the vagaries of the English weather. Suffice it to say the conditions have been very trying!

***Roy Stickland***



## Trip to Trebah and Glendurgan

I am writing this on the day that Cornwall received official recognition as a 'minority' so probably in the not too distant future there will be a Passport check on crossing the Tamar! Joking aside, the weather on 2nd April was typically 'Cornish' - rather dull and chilly with a bit of drizzle - but this did not deter the Hardy Planters who set off with enthusiasm to explore the two gardens. The sites of them are very similar with houses perched high above valleys which run dramatically down to the Helford River, each house having stunning views through the gardens and out to sea and each having a 'private' beach.



Allegedly the present owner of Trebah bought the property without knowing the size or importance of the garden but subsequently set up a trust to secure it for the future. Planted before the Victorian fashion for collecting had really got under way there are over 5000 plants from around the world arranged in a spectacular manner - vast swathes of hydrangeas (shown in flower on BBC's Gardeners World a few days

after our visit), a swamp of giant gunnera, a forest of magnificent tree ferns and a jungle of tall and stately bamboos with stems of amazingly varied colour and girth. Many of the rhododendrons were in bloom and the view across the roof of them from high up near the house with a framed fleeting glimpse of the sea in the far distance demonstrated just how much careful planning had gone into the original planting scheme. I must admit I found the white painted 'Monet style' bridge rather overpowering but maybe I am just jealous there isn't room for one over our tiny pond!



Moving on to Glendurgan I wondered, not having visited either garden before, whether it was going to be a 'repeat performance' as we had driven but a few hundred yards along a lane. Alfred and Sarah Fox who created the garden described it as a 'small peace(sic) of heaven on earth' and so it is. Their 12 children must have had a wonderful time even though the garden was in its infancy (were they told to 'keep off' I wonder) - the maze was designed especially for them - and what fun they must have had on their private beach (with children from the little seaside settlement of Durgan maybe?). Whilst the range of plants is in someway similar to Trebah the overall concept gives a much more relaxed feel with the emphasis on enjoyment rather than obsessive collecting. Comparing the two is rather unkind and you certainly need to be fit to make the most of them but overall and perhaps oddly I must admit to preferring Trebah; perhaps its privacy, compactness and surprises make it more to my taste. I regret my Victorian ancestors did not purchase a valley near the Cornish coast although according to family legend some of them could have afforded to do so!

***Kevin Chittenden***



## 2014 Programme – 2<sup>nd</sup> half

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 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](mailto:janet.murley@btinternet.com).

### SUN 10 AUGUST

### PLANT SWAP & LUNCH

*At Long Sutton, Langport*

### SAT 20 SEPTEMBER

### 50/50 PLANT SALE & LECTURE

*At West Monkton Village Hall, Monkton Heathfield*

Plant sale commences at 10:00am, Lecture at 11.00am.

### Roger Turner – “Michaelmas daisies and other late flowering perennials”

Roger is a garden designer and writer of gardening-related non-fiction books. He trained as an architect and now works as a landscape designer. He is a knowledgeable plantsman, and is active in the HPS. He has written a books on Euphorbias, Capability Brown, Better Garden Design, Design in the Plant Collector's Garden and Tall Perennials and he contributes to a number of journals and magazines including Hortus and The English Garden.

### WED 1 OCTOBER

### COACH TRIP

### The Picton Garden & Hanbury Hall

*Herefordshire & Worcestershire*

**The Picton Garden** is a plantsman's garden sited at the base of the Malvern Hills. It contains many unusual shrubs and trees and holds a National Collection of Michaelmas Daisies which the extensive nursery on site has been growing since 1906. At the beginning of October the garden will be a tapestry of colour with the asters and autumn colouring shrubs.



**Hanbury Hall** is a William and Mary-style House which was built in 1701 by Thomas Vernon, a lawyer and MP for Worcester. Surrounding the house are 20 acres of recreated early 18th century gardens and 400 acres of park. Features include the intricately laid out parterre, fruit garden, grove, orangery and bowling green.



**SAT 18 OCTOBER**

**LECTURE**

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

### **Duncan Coombs – “Climbers & Wall Shrubs”**

For the last 23 years Duncan has been a lecturer in Decorative Horticulture at Pershore College. See his horticultural blog at [www.warwickshire.ac.uk/blogs/duncans\\_horticulture\\_blog.aspx](http://www.warwickshire.ac.uk/blogs/duncans_horticulture_blog.aspx). He will bring plants to sell.

**SAT 15 NOVEMBER**

**AGM & LECTURE**

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

### **Bob Brown – “So Many Plants, So Little Space”**

Bob is an outspoken and sometimes controversial plantsman with a well known nursery, Cotswold Garden Flowers, near Evesham where he has a great collection of unusual and interesting plants. He has been awarded the Veitch Memorial Medal. He will bring plants for sale.

The Oak House, The Square, Axbridge, BS26 2AP

## 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**

## 50/50 Plant Sale, 20 September

The 50/50 Plant Sale prior to the lecture at our September meetings continues to prove popular so we'll be repeating it this year. The Group keeps half the money taken and returns the other half to the seller. The hall will be open from 9.40am to 10.10am to receive your plants to sell. Please ensure that each one has two identical labels bearing the name of the plant, your name and the price. One will be removed so that the amount you are owed can be totted up and given to you at the end of the meeting, when you can also remove any unsold plants and your labels (*tip: use pencil on labels so that they may be reused*). Selling will begin at 10.20am and finish at 11.00am. Offers of help with selling on the day will be most welcome. The Committee reserves the right to restrict the number of plants accepted for sale if demand and space so require. However this has not been necessary at our previous sales.



*Schizandra rubiflora* in Brian and Sue Dockerill's garden at Pontvridid - 6 May 2014

**Jane Hunt**

## HPS Conservation Scheme

The Society runs a scheme to conserve plants that for various reasons seem to have dropped out of popular cultivation. Plants are passed to participating groups to be “bulked up” by keen propagators within the group and then returned to the scheme for distribution amongst other groups. Extra plants may be sold for group funds and, of course, the participants may get to keep one or two!

The Somerset Group used to participate in the scheme but hasn’t done so for many years. The new Conservation Scheme national co-ordinator, Helen Mount is keen for more local groups to get involved with this worth-while project as currently only 16 groups and two individuals take part.

The HPS website contains a lot more very interesting information about how the Scheme works, how plants are assessed and what you would have to do to become involved.

The Somerset Group Committee would welcome applications from Somerset Group members who would be interested in helping the Group to take part in the Conservation Scheme. Ideally, one individual would “take ownership” and co-ordinate the project for the Group, reporting back to Helen Mount. So if you are an enthusiastic propagator and would like to get involved please let Roy Stickland or me know.

***Jane Hunt***

## What can we do about it?

Like many other organisations, the Hardy Plant Society has experienced a falling membership over a period of several years. There has been a lot of speculation about the reasons, which clearly include an ageing population and reduced opportunities for gardening either because of the domestic pressures or hopelessly small gardens. For many people, gardening – like cookery – has become something of a TV spectator affair. Since I became a Trustee I have become more acutely aware of the longer term issues that this raises and put simply it boils down to whether the Society will be able to survive if the current trends continue.

The RHS has exactly the same problem and one of their responses has been to launch a campaign to involve children in schools. This has received a lot of coverage in their journal and on TV. I believe we should do something similar. It is foolish to imagine that this will result in an immediate increase in membership, but what it does hope to achieve is a greater awareness by young people of the opportunities for a career in horticulture, or for those who follow a different

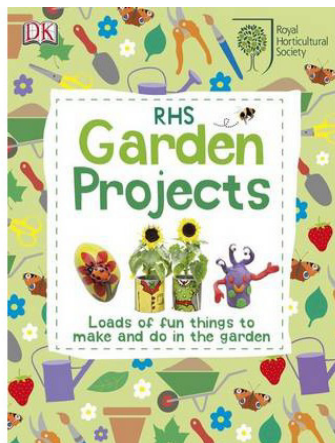
occupation, to have at least inspired a fascination in gardening. The idea is to “catch ‘em young” so that the next generation regards gardening as a normal part of everyday life and will grow up with the expectation of continuing with it.

Last year the school where Jane works gave us a slot at their open day. Armed with pots, compost and chunks of tough perennials to divide up, we engaged some 20 children in getting their hands dirty. It was gratifying that all 20 remembered to come back at the end to collect the plants they had divided and potted. Whilst one of us guided and supervised the kids, the other spoke to the parents, uncles, aunts, grand-parents, neighbours – whoever was there – about HPS, and many of them had never heard of us. So in effect this was a two-pronged attack. It is worth noting that the involvement of parents may be crucial in avoiding the need for security clearance to work with children.

Jane and I are now scheduled to repeat the event on 20 June. I had also got the agreement last year of a local garden centre to host an autumn event, but unfortunately the garden centre was taken over and became one of the Wyevale chain, and they had no knowledge of our discussions. Once the dust has settled I'll return to the fray, since I don't believe our efforts have to be confined to schools.

In the meantime I want to urge each of you to consider what you can do to give these ideas some added impetus. Do you have connections with any local schools or garden centres? Is there the opportunity to engage with them in organising an event? The marketing will generally be undertaken by the host organisation. Jane and I can achieve very little by working with one school and one garden centre. The aim has to be to multiply this effort by involving many more across the county, and it has to be done at local level by establishing contacts and gaining their commitment to encouraging children to become interested in gardening. The lure of technology these days may make these ideas difficult to sell, but unless we do manage to get youngsters tuned in, even the basic practice of gardening in the not so distant future may fade out. I would therefore like to set a target for the Group for the coming year to have ten active local projects of this kind, and that means asking you all to try to share with the younger generation your passion for plants and gardening (its impact on environmental conservation and diversity is a good theme to develop). Please don't just think about it, talk to Jane or me about how to get started, and become a real shaker and mover. Our long term future may depend upon it.

**Roy Stickland**



## Kenneth Black Bursary Scheme

A gentleman called Kenneth Black, who had been a member of the HPS, left a large sum of money to the Society in his will. The trustees decided to use the money to provide bursaries to horticultural students to from the bequest to pay for travel or books to enhance their studies. They also make payments to “projects” which advance horticulture.

As some of you might know, I work at a secondary school in Weston super Mare as a "land based sciences" technician. This involves helping teaching staff with the practical tasks associated with horticultural and animal care studies for GCSE and Btec students. I also run gardening clubs for predominantly younger students.

Our polytunnel at the school is probably our most valuable resource as it allows the students, and members of the gardening club, to work and have fun with gardening in all weathers, to grow all sorts of exciting plants, as well as to store all of our pots, seed trays, compost and so on. However, the polytunnel "skin" has become very dilapidated in recent years and I was surprised that it survived the high winds we experienced a couple of months ago.

I learnt that, as part of “The Kenneth Black Projects”, the trustees would also consider applications from schools and colleges for equipment to enhance the “horticultural experience” for students. As a consequence, I applied on behalf of my school for money to pay for a replacement cover for our polytunnel, something that our current school funds wouldn’t stretch to.



I was very excited to hear that the trustees had agreed to pay us the £250 we need to purchase a new cover. I am very grateful to the HPS for helping the school with this. I now look forward to fitting the new cover this summer.

If you know of a horticultural student or project that might benefit from a small amount of extra funding please ask them to have a look at the HPS website for more details.

**Jane Hunt**



## New Members

We welcome the following hardy planters to the Somerset Group:

Karen and Margaret West, Creech St. Michael  
Anne Pember, Brithem Bottom, Cullompton  
Michael Vernoum, Street  
Martin and Dawn Preston, Holnest, Sherborne  
Joyce Keyte, West Monkton  
David Byfield, Longburton, Sherborne  
Robin Goodfellow, Axbridge  
Brian and Jenny Henn, Langford

## Trip to South Wales – 6 May

There was nothing about the pleasant cul-de-sac on a hill overlooking Pontypridd to indicate that, hidden behind a hedge at the end, was an absolute treasure-trove of a garden.

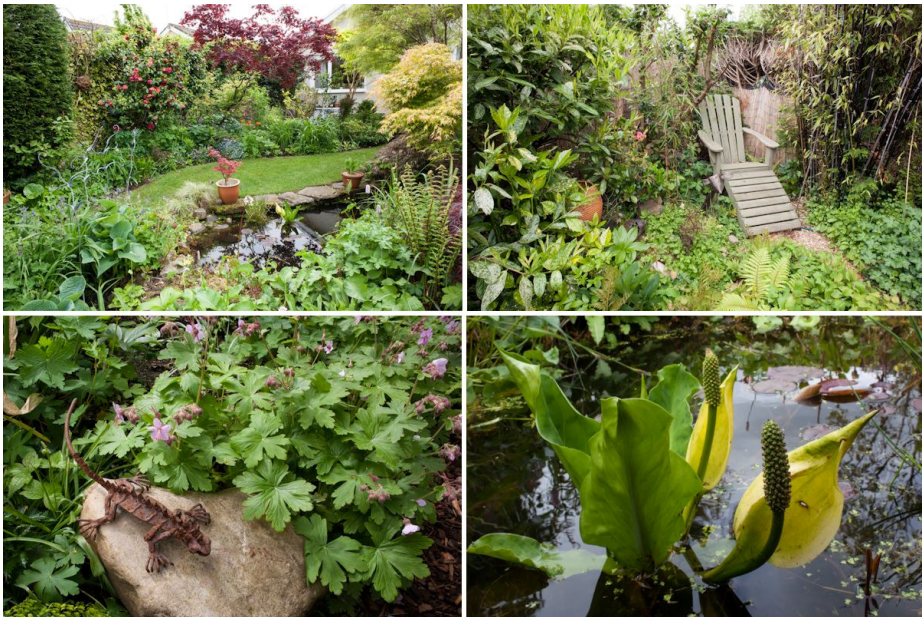
Brian and Sue Dockerill (Brian is a former Chairman of the National Hardy Plant Society) moved to the end bungalow thirty five years ago. At that time it had a narrow garden, but after some years they had the chance to acquire the adjacent strip of land. As they cleared the bracken and brambles they discovered a number of dry-stone walls; some of these were incorporated into the design, and some of the stone used to construct paths and raised beds. The site is shaded by a number of mature trees – oak, sycamore, silver birch – and they have planted more. As we went in to the garden our attention was caught by a *Clethra barbinervis* just by the entrance. In a bed against the house were *Impatiens omeiana* and *Dracunculis vulgaris*, and close by was a raised bed packed with treasures: among them many ferns, dodecatheons, and a number of cultivars of *Anemonella thalictroides*.

One area of wonders led to another. At the bottom end of the garden, in a sunnier site, was a *Davidia involucreata* in full bloom. Elsewhere were more shade lovers, including several species of trillium. Brian was kept busy the whole time we were there with members asking him to identify one rare plant after another. One favourite of mine was *Schizandra rubiflora*, a red-flowered climber scrambling through a tree. Brian told us that he had bought this some years ago at Dixter, where they were selling male and female clones together; this ensures that the flowers are followed by large bunches of red berries.

We then moved on to another surprise garden in Swansea. This was hidden behind a bungalow named 'Brynyrenfys,' which translates as 'Rainbow Hill,' owned by Edith Morgan. This originally had its own small back garden, but in 2000 Edith was given

the chance to acquire a strip of land at the back of the property. There are not many people who would have the vision to see a garden in a steep, north-facing bank, overgrown with brambles, sycamore and Japanese knotweed (not to mention the odd washing machine and supermarket trolley). It took two years to clear the site (the Japanese knotweed was dealt with by a contractor), and another two years to construct the steps and build a 200ft retaining wall.

Edith envisaged it as a woodland garden, and planted a number of trees, including birch, maple, magnolia, a wedding cake tree (*Cornus controversa* 'Variegata'), rowan and lilac. There were hostas everywhere, both in the ground and in pots. Many members were particularly struck by a large podophyllum growing by the steps, with its strange maroon flowers half-hidden beneath the leaves; there were other podophyllums around, including some variegated ones. Again there were many rare and special shade loving plants.



The original, upper part of the garden has a Japanese air, with a pond, several Japanese maples and a black bamboo; also a very striking *Astrantia major* subsp. *involucrata* 'Moiré Reed' – like 'Shaggy', only more so.

It was a day when the hardy planters saw many new and interesting plants and met some true plant enthusiasts, who are creating wonderful gardens out of seemingly impossible sites.

**Helen Senior**

## Committee

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