



Somerset Group Newsletter



Number 59

June 2017

Contents

Chairman's Letter	3
New Members	5
2017 Programme - 2 nd Half	6
Cancellation Policy	9
Views from the Nurseries	9
50/50 Plant Sale, 17 September	10
Flower and Pot Plant of the Month Competition	11
Tresco Abbey Gardens	11
Haldon Grange	14
Burrow Farm Gardens	15
Committee	16



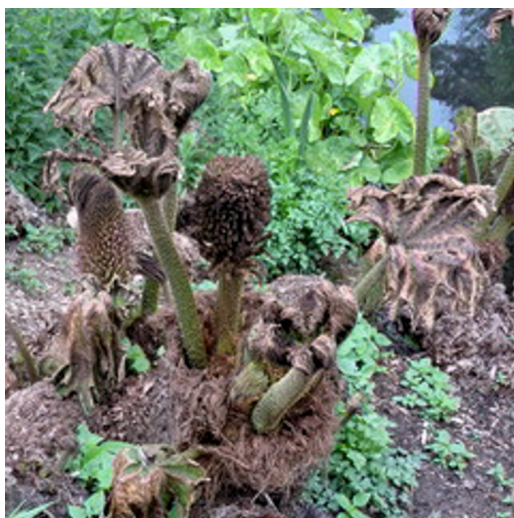
Cercis aff. chinensis and *Narcissus 'Actaea'* by Stuart Senior

Cover photograph by Stuart Senior – *Paulownia tomentosa*

Chairman's Letter

The progression of winter through into spring is a theme I have written about in previous newsletters, and there is a clearly discernible pattern, judging by my year to year observations (which are in danger of becoming repetitive!). In essence what we regarded as normal 10 years ago is not normal anymore. Winters are warmer, which causes plants to start into growth earlier, but this is followed by relatively cold, usually wet springs which at best slow things down or at worst cause losses. I'm not sure that spring temperatures are actually colder than 10 years ago. We have always known there is a frost risk until the end of May and present values are still fairly close to historical seasonal averages. But it is the winter temperatures that represent the real change.

What I have not commented on before is the effect of topography and local microclimates. I heard the Head Gardener at Bishop's Palace Wells at the end of April talking of the serious frost damage that occurred earlier that month. Even the new, soft foliage of *Liriodendron* had been scorched. At Shipham we had very light frost (and on fewer nights than at Wells) with no apparent damage, even to a few tenderish plants for which there was no room in the greenhouse. Different gardens in the village also had differing levels of frost. Then, on 5 May, we were at Scotney Castle in Kent where we noticed a *Liriodendron* with very evident frost damage on one side of the tree.



Scotney is an interesting exemplar because of the configuration of the site. The house sits at the top of a slope and the old moated castle at the bottom, in what is evidently a bit of a frost pocket. The picture shows the damage to emergent *Gunnera manicata* near the edge of the moat. A nearby *Stachyurus* straddling the walls of the old castle was also affected. On one side there were a few fresh racemes about to flower but more that were brown and obviously frosted. On the other side of the wall there was no damage at all.

The damage had occurred on the side receiving the cold air moving down the slope. Meanwhile at the top of the slope near the house was as fine a specimen as I have ever seen of the Judas Tree (*Cercis siliquastrum*) which was in full, pristine flower. In a way none of this is

extraordinary. We have long known about frost pockets and the risk of late frosts, but perhaps the risk is greater when the winter has been warm and encouraged earlier growth which is then susceptible to frost damage.



As most members know, I was unable to be at East Lambrook for the Spring Plant Fair, but the reports I have heard have all been very positive, more than compensating for the storm-stricken event last year. Thanks are due to everyone who produced plants and helped to look after both the HPS table and the table at the entrance gate. Although the footfall didn't quite equal the record, Mike was pretty happy with the result. He has also produced some figures that show that when the event has been held on Easter Saturday, the results are not so good as other years. Since Easter 2018 falls on 31 March we have confirmed Mike's preference to hold the event a week earlier on 24 March. This again clashes with the HPS Annual Lecture Day and AGM at Tiverton

but we'll just have to live with that with individuals making their own choices.

Whilst thinking about HPS national events, it occurred to us at the Shade & Woodland Group meeting that we don't have any idea who among our members belong to any of the specialist groups. I know Sally Gregson is a member of Shade & Woodland – Helen and I met her there and talked about this issue. I also know that Mike & Jenny Spiller belong to both the Galanthus and Pulmonaria Groups, and I can guess at one or two other people, but who else? Do please let us know what groups you belong to: there is nothing devious about the question, it is simply interesting to know how wide the interests of our membership are and also to get some feedback on the interest and value of any of the meetings you attend.

This year for the first time we were invited to join with the NGS in taking a table at the Milverton Street Fair. I had no idea what to expect, but it was fun. The streets were very busy and we had plenty of opportunities to engage with passers-by in talking about HPS and of course the NGS; and since we have a reciprocal arrangement advertising them on our Specialist Nursery List, and they advertising us in their local Yellow Book there is a useful two-pronged approach which was very effective in talking to people. On a personal level it was great see Jane Masters in good form and busily engaged in the street fair. Many of our members will

remember Roger Masters as a long-standing and loyal member before he died two years ago. Thanks to all those who did a stint behind the table.

Next up is the three day event at Bishop's Palace in Wells 9-11 June, where again we have been invited to have a table for publicity purposes and to sell a few plants. We already have some volunteers for each day, but there remain just a few gaps, particularly in the afternoons, so if you fancy 'earning' free entry to the event please let Jane or me know and we'll see what slots we can offer. Like Milverton it could be fun and we need to take every opportunity to spread the word about HPS (Somerset Group) to entice new members.

Finally, this year is of course the 60th anniversary of HPS and we have the open garden scheme in which several of our members will be participating (see our website for details). Please make sure you support them. Also as part of the anniversary, we plan to use the AGM in November as a special event, with the wonderful Helen Dillon as our guest and a modest buffet and wine (or soft drinks) to follow, rather as we did for the 'summer special' when Mary Toomey was our guest. Non-members will be welcome and we will be charging them £5.00 as a contribution to refreshment costs.

I think you will agree we have quite a lot to look forward to, in addition to all the programmed visits through the summer. I look forward to seeing many of you during that time.

Roy Stickland

New Members

We welcome the following hardy planters to the Somerset Group:

Marion Spear, Yeovil
Karen Sutton, Seavington
Jenny Shukman, Langport
Kay Williamson, Compton Dundon
Jennifer Bower, Pen Selwood
Angela Whinfield, Bourton
Nigel & Vivienne Wood, Exeter
Karen Rowe, North Newton
Judith Chapman & BJ Lewis, Kilminsteron
John & Pauline Saunders, Somerton
Edward Goddard, Chard

2017 Programme -2nd Half

Please refer to this and future Newsletters or the website <https://somersethps.com/> 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 Friday 1 July), but there is a modest levy of £2 for each visitor/guest. The Group will have a plant stall and a book stall at most of the lecture meetings listed, plus the 'Plant and Flower of the Month' competition.

All trips and visits must be pre-booked

There are some places available for this year's remaining trips and visits but not sufficient to warrant sending a booking form to all members. So if you would like to book places please contact me in the first instance by 'phone or email (details on the back page) to check availability.

Janet Murley

SUN 18 JUNE

COACH TRIP

Cerne Abbas Gardens

nr. Dorchester

There is something to suit everyone in this selection of around 30 gardens opening over the weekend for charity. Highlights include the garden at Cerne River Cottage, designed and planted by Chelsea gold medallist Nick Williams-Ellis. His designs characterise many of the Cerne Abbas gardens. This natural garden is bordered by trees and shrubs with a beautiful and colourful bog garden running along the south side. Don't miss the lilies, persicaria, filipendula and the statuesque *Gunnera manicata* alongside the river. Two white bridges link the separate parts of the garden providing a Monet feel to the overall.



Lunchtime meals may be obtained in the local pubs or teashop. The Squibb Garden next to the church is open all day and is a good place to picnic. Plant stalls in the village square.

TUE 4 JULY

COACH TRIP

Longstock Park Water Gardens

nr. Romsey

Part of the Leckford Estate, purchased by the retailer John Lewis in 1929, the Longstock Park Water Gardens covers around seven acres. Over the years it has become one of the finest water gardens in Britain, home to 40 varieties of waterlily, over 100 different species of trees and a wealth of native wildlife. Visit Longstock Park Nursery, with its large collection of unusual wall plants, magnificent herbaceous border and 100-yard arch entwined with roses and clematis.

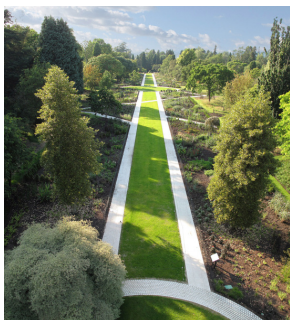
Lunches available at the Leckford Farm Shop Cafe, or bring a picnic. Plants for sale.

WED 26 JULY

COACH TRIP

Sir Harold Hillier Gardens

nr. Romsey



Following Wolfgang Bopp's talk last November, this is your chance to see the Hillier Arboretum in all its glory. Established in 1953 by the distinguished plantsman Sir Harold Hillier, the gardens currently hold one of the world's most important plant collections, incorporating over 42,000 plants from temperate regions around the world, set within 180 acres. The Centenary Border, one of the longest in Europe, is a summer highlight and is not to be missed.

Lunches and cream teas available at the restaurant.

SUN 13 AUGUST

PLANT SWAP & LUNCH

At Creech St. Michael, Taunton



SAT 16 SEPTEMBER**50/50 PLANT SALE & LECTURE**

At West Monkton Village Hall, Monkton Heathfield

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

Kevin Hughes - "Less Common Trees and Shrubs for the Small Garden"

Kevin Hughes Plants is based at Heale Gardens, near Salisbury, where he grows a superb choice of good quality hardy trees, shrubs and herbaceous perennials, many of them not widely available elsewhere. With a vast horticultural knowledge yet an unassuming manner, he is a popular and absorbing speaker. In this talk, he will be showing us some of the more unusual plants we can enjoy in our own gardens. Bring a notebook! Plants for sale.

SAT 21 OCTOBER**LECTURE**

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

Mary Benger - "Burrow Farm Gardens"

Mary moved to Burrow Farm, near Axminster, almost 60 years ago and has since transformed the accompanying ten acres of fields into the stunning garden it is today. Encompassing a variety of different garden styles, Mary's creation is a feast for the eyes, both within the garden itself and in the views which surround it. In this talk, Mary will be bringing the development of the gardens to life and guiding us around some of the highlights.

SAT 18 NOVEMBER**AGM & LECTURE**

At West Monkton Village Hall, Monkton Heathfield 10.30am for 11.00am AGM and 11.45am lecture followed by a buffet lunch. (Note: this is a timing change.)

Helen Dillon - "Moving Gardens? Only The Best Come Too"

Over the course of 44 years, Helen Dillon and her husband Val created an astonishing garden at 45 Sandford Crescent, Dublin. Robin Lane-Fox of the Financial Times described it as 'the best walled town garden one can hope to see'. Having made the decision to downsize, the Dillons held their final garden opening at the end of September 2016 and say they are looking forward to the challenge of a new plot. Don't miss out on this world-renowned plantswoman's visit to our Group. Helen is a mine of information and a lively speaker with years of experience.

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 £10 will not be refunded under any circumstances.

Views from the Nurseries

Phillip Johnson's article on '*The end of garden life as we know it*' in the last Newsletter repeats a familiar refrain. Running a nursery has rarely been worthwhile financially.

I recall thirty years ago when I first entered this profession, a 'meeting' of all the current students at Hadlow College where I trained was called to discuss the low pay and the serious under-valuing of jobs in the horticulture sector. Most were 3-year full-time students (I took the quicker 1-year option in just 'Nursery Practice' as I knew that was the direction I wanted to go in - and I had a young family). We were only too aware that we would barely be able to earn more than the minimum wage after our years of training. And as one young student pointed out, the reason wages were/are so low is quite simply that plants are too cheap and professional gardening is seen as a job for the less academically gifted.



Are plants too cheap? Consider the amount of space a plant takes up on a nursery and for how long. Think of the rising costs of plastic, compost, water rates, glass etc. At current prices that plant does not sell for enough money to make that space economic. It's rather like bread. It sells for a very low price given the space it takes up. It's almost impossible to sell enough bread daily to cover the costs of running a shop. So bakers, like garden centres, try to make the space pay by selling coffee, cakes, even lunches. Garden centres would never be able to cover their costs if all they sold were plants. Even those plants they do sell are decreasing in number and variety.

And are we specialist nurserymen, and women, left as enthusiasts pursuing our dreams regardless of whether it's profitable or not? I know of one or two who not only don't make money, it actually costs them money to produce their plants. Equally I know of one or two who have got well-named, efficient websites who make a comfortable living.

The world has moved on. Back in the 60s and 70s when garden centres started up they began using plastic pots that were cheap, light in weight, and re-usable

instead of waiting for their customers to turn up and buy plants dug directly from the 'field' in the autumn. The revolution that started was the foundation of the modern horticultural industry. Now, as prices fail to increase in line with costs, specialist nurseries, my own included, sell on-line. It's the only way we can sell enough volume to cover our costs. Yes, we love what we do. But we all need the support of enthusiasts such as the HPS to attend the meetings and plant sales and buy the latest plants. When I started my nursery I was coming home with £400 from a plant sale. Today, 25 years later, that total has actually gone down.

As we nurserymen get older and think of retirement, we turn around to look for the next generation of nurserymen and find them seriously lacking. Is it any wonder?

As members of a nation that is so renowned for its gardens, and especially as members of the HPS, let us enthuse and involve our friends, educate the next generation, and demonstrate just what pleasure growing plants can give to anyone. Support our specialist nurseries. Please!

Sally Gregson

Mill Cottage Plants, Wookey

50/50 Plant Sale, 16 September



Magnolia 'Daphne'

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.

Jane Hunt

Flower and Pot Plant of the Month Competition

The rules of the competition are as follows. Members are invited to bring a flower and/or a pot plant to each of our seven meetings at West Monkton Village Hall throughout the calendar year. The entries will be judged by our guest speakers and the top three in each section will be awarded points: 3 for 1st, 2 for 2nd and 1 for 3rd. Points will be accumulated during the year and the overall winners will receive gardening vouchers as their prize.

For the flower section the requirement is a single flower (usually displayed in a vase) if that is how the plant grows, e.g. a narcissus or a dahlia. If it is a flowering shrub, for example with clusters of flowers along the stem, then it is the whole stem that you display. The point is that it is not a flower arranging exhibit, so multiple blooms or stems are not what we are looking for. If you are an Ikebana fiend then you'll know, of course, that even a single bloom may be displayed very artistically!

For the pot plant section much the same rule applies. The requirement is for a single plant in a pot. For a plant that naturally produces little offsets all around the central growth, as many succulents do, you do not have to remove all the offsets!



Tresco Abbey Gardens, Isles of Scilly

A trip from mainland Britain to Tresco is not straightforward, but it is very well worth the effort. We flew from Exeter to the largest island of the group, St Mary's, where we stayed, and took the ferry across to Tresco.

The gardens were created in the mid-nineteenth century by Augustus Smith, who bought the ruins of the Abbey and built a house. A glance at the countryside outside the garden walls reveals how bleak and unpromising a site it must have been - nothing much grows except gorse. The islands are bathed by the Gulf Stream, and the climate is mild, but they are also subject to the salt-laden Atlantic gales. Smith started by planting shelterbelts, first of European gorse and later of conifers - the Monterey Cypress, *Cupressus macrocarpa* and the Monterey Pine, *Pinus*



radiata - both, as their names suggest, from California, and relatively salt-proof. He then terraced the south-facing site to create a sheltered environment for tender plants from all around the world. Even within the garden there are different micro-climates, with the upper, slightly drier levels home to plants from South Africa and Australia, and the lower, more humid, to mostly New Zealand and South American species. Height and structure are given by the many trees. Among them are the great New Zealand Pohutukawa, *Metrosideros excelsa*, palms from the Canary Islands, tree ferns, *Nothofagus*, *Eucalyptus*, *Pseudopanax*, *Leucadendron* and many others. The architectural shape of the Norfolk Island Pine, *Araucaria heterophylla*, stands out.



When we were there the echiums were particularly striking, in subtly different shades of blue. Proteas grew everywhere; aloes and aeoniums abound. There are great masses of *Fascicularia bicolor*, which must be wonderful in the autumn, when the leaves turn red and they produce their exquisite blue flowers.

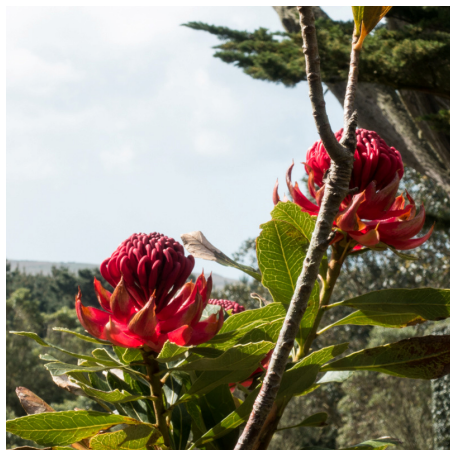
But the garden is not just a plant collection. It is a beautifully designed garden. From the entrance the path leads up to a formal pool with a wonderful fountain in the form of an agave. Beyond that is a terrace with a shell house. You cross the Long Walk, which runs the whole width of the garden, and opens up vistas in both directions. There are terraces, paths, and shady lawns.

As if this wealth of wonderful plants were not enough, there is the extraordinary 'Valhalla' - an exhibition of figure-heads collected by Augustus Smith from some of the many wrecks that occur on the islands. In recent years they have been restored to their original glowing colours.

All this and red squirrels!

Helen Senior





Haldon Grange

Our first excursion of the year was across the border to Haldon Grange near Exeter. The most memorable sights from your correspondent's point of view were the azalea layering techniques and the new arboretum.

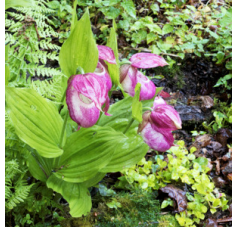


Burrow Farm Gardens

On Wednesday 17 May a few intrepid souls braved the rain to visit Burrow Farm Gardens. They were well rewarded - in spite of the weather, the gardens were looking lovely.

The garden has been created over the last sixty years by Mary Benger. Close to the house are the millennium garden which has a rill leading down to a formal pond; a terrace garden, with informal planting; the anniversary garden with lots of grasses and other herbaceous plants, and lawns surrounded by a wealth of trees and shrubs. The ground then slopes away, with many more interesting trees and areas of wildflower meadow where orchids are slowly establishing. At the time of our visit there were colourful beds of azaleas in full bloom. The garden culminates in a hollow, formed by an old clay pit, which has been transformed into a woodland garden. Everywhere Mary has taken advantage of the borrowed landscape, shaping her planting to frame views of the surrounding countryside.

Mary is clearly a great plantswoman, and we are looking forward to her talk about the gardens in October.



Committee

Chairman:

Roy Stickland
01934 843280
herongates@hotmail.com

Herongates, Horseleaze Lane
Shipham
WINSCOMBE
BS25 1UQ

Secretary:

Jane Hunt
01934 732441
hunt.frogshole1@btinternet.com

Frogs Hole Farm
Brinscombe, Weare
AXBRIDGE
BS26 2LH

Treasurer, Membership**Secretary & Newsletter Editor:**

Stuart Senior
01823 442344
stuart_senior@msn.com

Court Barton, Bull Street
Creech St Michael
TAUNTON
TA3 5PW

Speakers:

Ruth Boundy
01823 668678
rubyfield@btinternet.com

5 Greenway Road
Rockwell Green
WELLINGTON
TA21 9DE

Visits etc:

Sandra Macqueen
01934 843363
sandra@enamelsandra.co.uk

105 The Lynch
WINSCOMBE
BS25 1AR

Visits etc:

Janet Murley
01884 820840
janet.murley@btinternet.com

Marigold Cottage
Whitnage
TIVERTON
EX16 7DT

Visit us at <https://somersethps.com/>