

Somerset Hardy Plant Society

Coach Visit to Cotswold Farm and Rodmarton Manor on Tuesday, 16 June 2026

Leave Taunton at 9.00 am

Pick up from Clevedon at 9.35 am approx.

Cotswold Farm, Duntisbourne Abbots, Cirencester, Gloucestershire

John and Sarah Birchall

A historic Arts & Crafts house and garden in the heart of the Cotswolds, designed by Sidney Barnsley and Norman Jewson, home to the Birchall family for five generations. The house was previously a 17th century farmhouse and eventually was redeveloped by Sidney Barnsley in 1925 in the Arts and Crafts style. He added two wings. Barnsley's style is evident in the leaded windows with stone drip moulds, and in the old farm buildings with circular pillars. The Library floor 'is entirely taken from two trees which had been lying in W. Barnsley's garden for some years'. Many of Sidney Barnsley's designs for furniture, and his original plans for Cotswold Farm House, are in the Cheltenham museum.

In parallel with Barnsley's house designs, renowned architect-craftsman Norman Jewson redesigned and extended Cotswold Farm's garden. The garden is laid out on descending levels, enclosed by Cotswold stone walls and yew hedges. It overlooks a peaceful valley and has all-year-round interest.

John and Sarah Birchall took over the house and garden in 2020 and are the fourth generation at Cotswold Farm, which was bought by John's great-grandparents in 1926. Each generation of the Birchall family has had twenty years in the garden. Sarah and John's priority has been to revitalise the various areas, removing overgrown shrubs and trees, pruning and improving the soil. They have overhauled the garden's centrepiece, the Jewson Terrace. These beds are pink and mauve with *Rosa glauca*, *Geranium* 'Azure Rush', *Verbena bonariensis*, *Rosa* 'Rosy Cushion' and an unidentified pink dahlia. The garden featured in The English Garden magazine in August 2025. It has a shrub garden, white border, step garden, knot garden, a bog garden fed by a natural stream, a little forest, rock border and lawn areas.

We will have a tour of the garden, including refreshments of tea/coffee and biscuits/cake. If you require a gluten free refreshment, please book on the booking form.

Please bring a picnic lunch to eat on the short journey to our afternoon visit.

Rodmarton Manor and Garden

Rodmarton, Cirencester, Gloucestershire, GL7 6PF.

John and Sarah Biddulph

Rodmarton Manor is a supreme example of a house and all its furniture made according to the Arts and Crafts ideals, and was one of the last country houses to be built and furnished in the old traditional style when everything was done by hand with local stone and timber by local craftsmen. Built for Claud and Margaret Biddulph between 1909 and 1929, today it is the home of John and Sarah Biddulph and their family, the fourth and fifth generation of Biddulphs to live in the house. Ernest Barnsley, who built Rodmarton Manor, was a follower of William Morris, one of the leading proponents of the English Arts and Crafts Movement towards the end of the 19th century.

As we know, the Arts and Crafts Movement was a reaction against poor design and the increasing use of machinery and unnecessary decoration that had featured in the Victorian era, when manufacturers rather than craftsman were directing design. Furniture was being mass produced and poorly made. The ideals of the Arts and Crafts reformers was to re-establish a harmony between architect, designer and craftsman and to emphasise the importance of hand craftsmanship to the production of well-designed, affordable everyday objects with individual and regional expression, simplicity and fitness for purpose. Inspiration was to be drawn from the past.

The eight-acre Cotswold garden was designed originally as a series of outdoor rooms, with superb vistas and views. The garden was drawn up by Ernest Barnsley as he was designing the house and it is still his layout which survives, with terrace, topiary, leisure garden, herbaceous borders and walled garden. There is a strong architectural style close to the house, which relaxes as one moves towards the farmland beyond. Emphasis is placed on looking after the birds and butterflies in the garden.

We will arrive about 2 pm and have a private group tour of the house and we will be able to explore the garden. There will be refreshments of tea/coffee and cake. If you require a gluten free refreshment, please book on the booking form.

Depart at 5 pm.

Drop off at Clevedon at approximately 6 pm.

Drop of at Taunton at approximately 6.35 pm.