

Gardens Group - Reports for 2010

Marwood Hill

Our weather delayed visit took place a month later than planned but the revised date was spot on and the whole garden was a delight. The magnolias in particular were magical when framed by a brilliant blue sky and the large purple one just outside the house was at its magnificent best. A much appreciated visit by both old and new visitors.

Antony House

Our second April visit was to Antony House and Gardens. A bit of a damp day but fortunately the really heavy rain waited until the journey back. Quite a large group gathered at the ticket office to get our timed entrance tickets for the house. We filled the slight delay by investigating the café, but the choice was very limited. The house though was welcoming, clearly lived in but fascinating and grand in equal measure. Well worth seeing.

The garden contained many Alice in Wonderland features from the filming, sadly we were unable to partake of the Mad Hatter's tea party – wrong day! The garden is quite varied, and in places a bit of a mystery, not helped by the answer we got on posing a question to one of the gardeners! There are some long walks along the banks of the Lynher and many azaleas in full bloom creating a wonderful picture, certainly the right time to go.

Rosemoor

May's visit to Rosemoor suffered, I'm afraid, from a series of last minute cancellations and so, regrettably, was cancelled.

Little Ash Bungalow

This was an absolute delight in all respects. Parking was easy, the weather was wonderful, the turn out was excellent - one of our largest, our hostess was welcoming, friendly and very informative and the garden was superb.

Helen Brown gave us an introductory talk and then accompanied us, cheerfully answering the myriads of questions put to her. The range of plants was fascinating and the natural setting was very inspiring. We were very aware that we were in the presence of a real enthusiast. The visit ended with tea on the patios, it was lovely to be able to sit and soak up the sun and the view.

There was also a good offering of plants for sale, all home propagated though some of our more enterprising members had sneaked back early in the visit to "bag" the rare ones. University staff! If you were unable to come or you just want to return, Helen is open on 22 August under the NGS.

Kilver Court and Wells

The Garden Group, intrepid as usual, set off from a wet and dismal Exeter fully aware of a pretty awful weather forecast. However, it is the Garden Group, so once over the Blackdowns the rain stopped, the mist cleared and before we got to Kilver Court the sun was shining and the temperature had really soared.

Kilver is at the old Babycham factory and was a hidden gem, from the road you would have no idea it was there. The gardens were well stocked and imaginatively laid out with a leat and mill ponds, all intertwined with a disused railway viaduct providing a really strong feature. There were plants for sale, a café, a farm shop, and as a complete contrast, the Mulberry Factory Shop next door. Not

really for pensioners!

On to Wells, still baking hot and many of us took refuge in the Cathedral. Guided tours were available and ours was very informative including how to deal with a detached shoe sole! The Cathedral now has a very impressive entrance complex. Back to the coach via a very tempting fruit and veg stall – well we were getting nibble-ish. Our last stop was a brief but very focussed visit to Clark's Village. Members set off with military precision targeting specific outlets – the shoe shops had quite a few "hits"!

10 miles down the road the fine weather came to an end and we returned to Exeter in the rain. All in all a very enjoyable day.

Prospect House, Axminster

Prospect House was a garden which produced mixed emotions – plain envy, enormous admiration and respect for obvious talent and hard work, almost childlike glee at discovering yet another area of the garden and a great pleasure in being afforded the opportunity to share this garden.

Peter Wadeley was a very welcoming and informative host who cheerfully answered all our questions. He had boundless patience, often answering the same questions over and over again as so many of us revealed our ignorance.

The original walled garden, which had been renovated by the Wadeleys, was a series of hidden rooms all waiting to be discovered. This done, they had then expanded beyond the wall into a much more open garden with glorious views of the Axe Valley and Stockland Hill.

Everyone was full of praise, the only fly in the ointment was my failure to ensure tea, Abject apologies!

High Garden and Nursery

In what turned out to be our last visit of the season we went to Kenton for our September visit. We were welcomed by the owner, Chris Britton, who told us about the history of the 5 acre site and explained how he had transformed a field which had had sheep grazing in it to the garden it is now. They had moved 5 years ago from their previous nursery near Tiverton. Chris pointed out some of the more unusual plants and patiently answered questions from everything from the best weedkiller to suitable sites for specific plants.

Having carefully noted the position of the self service tea and cake summer house we set off to admire the vast herbaceous borders and vegetable garden. They were many unusual plants and many fingers were crossed that they might be found in the nursery. This was often the case as the nursery was extremely well stocked and a delight to wander round. Everyone commented on what an excellent "old fashioned" nursery this was, not a gnome in sight!