

Gardens Group - Reports for 2011

Snowdrop Valley, February 2011

Our pre season taster was a February trip to the Exmoor Snowdrop Valley. This is a lovely valley deep in the N Devon countryside absolutely covered in snowdrops. The car ban is essential and is solved by a fleet of minibuses, packed with visitors and their dogs. It remained dry but by gosh was it muddy, particularly on the higher path by the leat. It was clear from some folks' appearance as they dismounted the bus that not all had remained upright, but our party survived despite the odd slip. Boots or wellingtons were an essential item.

Trelissick and Truro, March 2011

Our first visit of the season by coach started in a bit of a panic. The pick up time was 08.30 but those of us who arrived really early were startled to find a rapidly dwindling number of spaces to park at the Squash Club. Unbeknownst to us the Squash/Cricket Club had, quite understandably, decided to let the parking to the builders working on Lafrowda, the latter clearly preferring this venue to the dedicated contractor's car park next to Amory. There followed much frantic hand waving to later arrivals whenever a car was spotted with UERSA members inside and a rapid take up of the few on road spaces opposite. Those arriving even later had further to go for a space. All was well in the end and thanks to Bruce, we shouldn't have this problem again.

The weather was misty but as we neared our destination the view was brightened by fields of Cornish daffodils.

We were welcomed to Trelissick and handed over to our tour gardener who took us round in a most informative way, pointing out many things which we wouldn't otherwise have discovered. He was able to fill in the background to many of the plants and changes which had taken place. Everything was very colourful with some magnificent magnolias and rhododendrons. At the end he showed us the orchard where they were growing many of the old apple varieties, we wouldn't have realised the significance of this without our guide. Lunch, the art gallery and shop completed our time there and we then moved on to Truro. An hour and a half gave us time to wander round, many chose the cathedral and the rather fine refectory. Our whole time outside was in the dry so we were fortunate with the weather.



Chevithorne Barton, April 2011

A typical Gardens Group day – brilliant sunshine and high temperatures! 25 of us gathered in the farmyard car park, marvelling at the hidden gem we had discovered at the end of a long drive. If the house was an unexpected find, then the garden was even better as we could wander round and explore every corner (the house is not open). In a nutshell, the garden was an absolute delight; the national collection of oak trees, magnolias, rhododendrons, unusual tulips, carpets of native bluebells, espaliers of fruit trees in bloom, water features and terraces, the latter thoughtfully provided with seating from which to admire the far reaching views. The final accolade goes to the



teas, a choice of cream teas or TWO cakes! Heaven.

A sad note though, the lady who laid out the garden from 1911 lost her husband in WW1 and by the end of WW2 all three of her sons were dead. The current owner is the sole grandson. I cannot do it justice, do try and visit when it is open through the NGS, you won't be disappointed.

Delamore, May 2011



All but two found the right place and were welcomed at the gate with a brief introduction and explanation of what we would find once through the gate. The house itself is big and square, a solid Dartmoor residence. The garden is only open in May, it is a spring garden, and during this month it becomes an Arts Festival using as a canvas both the gardens and two of the rooms inside. It is clearly a must for those in the know; we were told that many people return year after year, saving up to buy either a painting or a sculpture. Some artists had already sold out most noticeably the paintings by Kieran Williamson, an 8 year old from Norfolk who had visited the West Country on holiday. He is described as a prodigy, a description one could not deny. Looking him up on the web shows that his exhibitions sell out in minutes.

We wandered round the gardens admiring the various nooks and crannies and plants therein. I don't think anyone bought any of the sculptures but I do know that some were tempted. There was a very welcome café in the old dairy offering very tasty food at very reasonable prices. Some of us found our way there twice!

Kingston Lacy, June 2011

I think was probably our most successful visit yet in that there was definitely something for everyone and everyone seemed to thoroughly enjoy themselves. Indeed the only "complaint" was that we could have done with more time, but with busy lives to lead, several people needed to get back for 6pm in order to prepare for the next event.

The day started well solely due to Bruce who gallantly turned up to supervise parking and use his DVC training to insist that some Polish builders did understand that no, they could not park where we were! I really would like to thank Bruce, it makes all the difference.

We had a quick pit stop on the way at Bridport

and then on to Kingston Lacy to be welcomed by a very informative NT official who told us things that we might not otherwise have found out about certain members of the Bankes family, a very colourful introduction! Members then had to choose which to tackle first – the gardens or the house,



factoring in the likelihood of a shower and the timing of garden tours. Some though decided that nothing could be contemplated without a little light refreshment, so this group headed for the Stables Restaurant.

Those of us who had not been before were, I think, taken aback by the amazing collections, room



after room. The guide talks of “an outstanding collection of pictures, including works by Tintoretto, Rubens, Titian, and the outstanding Guido Reni fresco.” (Do note the inclusion of the Oxford comma, sadly omitted in the NT literature!). Added to this were the Spanish Room and the Egyptian artefacts. What many of us found particularly noticeable was the helpfulness and friendliness of the NT staff. Lunch was taken outside in the courtyard, some were even heard to comment on how generous the helpings were! You can never satisfy some people!

Two different garden tours were on offer, unfortunately we did not have the time to do

both. We had a very informative lady guide but I fear the combination of the only shower of the day and our need to get back to the coach, did rather curtail our tour. The gardens are though, quite extensive and varied including the recently restored Japanese Garden. As we also didn't have the time to visit the Badbury Rings I think many will feel that a return visit is a must.

Hill House Nursery, July 2011



Despite days of wet weather this Thursday dawned bright and fair and Garden Group members were able to wander round this "proper" nursery, packed to the gunnells with plants, not a gnome to be seen! There were cries of admiration as many highly desirable plants were spotted, the purchasing decisions were certainly fraught.

As usual, the group found their way to the refreshments and relaxed in appropriate style and hot sunshine over excellent coffee and generous slices of cake.

Whitstone Farm, August 2011

About 20 of us turned out for this and were all treated to a very enjoyable tour by Alan and then a home made tea by Katie. I continue to be amazed by all these magnificent gardens hidden away behind ordinary looking hedges and small lanes.

The present owners have been there for 12 years and took over from a 96 year old who, not surprisingly, had begun to find looking after a 3 acre steeply sloping garden a bit too much! In the 20 years that he had been there though he had laid the foundations by planting



many unusual trees, which were, of course, now mature. Alan and Katie have added a wide variety of eucryphias – I certainly hadn't realised that there were so many – and now are proud holders of the National Eucryphia Collection, though currently the word 'provisional' has to be added until some of the specimens are a little more mature. It is though, the only one in the country.

We were surprised to find some magnolias still in flower at this time of year, rather odd to see these with catalpas, stuartia and clerodendrums as well as summer bedding. (Some of us are getting quite knowledgeable by virtue of collective input!) The views are stunning and as the weather was clear and sunny (we only had a very brief shower at the start) we were in an ideal spot to appreciate them. Homemade cake – coffee, double chocolate, lemon, carrot – was taken on the ample patio, a good opportunity to chat over tea.



Hillrise, September 2011

For those who came along on the day to find our hosts still en route from Venice, they phoned me in the morning to apologise. Apparently they had every intention of being back for us but were delayed by the tail end of Hurricane Irene.

Some made good use of the trip visiting Sidmouth and Waitrose, always versatile!

Anne Mayes