

Gardens Group - 2012 reports

Trebah - March 2012



A less than full coach set off for Trebah and our first visit to Cornwall this year. An uneventful journey in a very comfortable coach brought us to Trebah in glorious sunshine. We were met by Nicky, our guide who is also their plant archivist. After a quick refreshment stop in the café – noting the possible goodies for lunch later – we set off on our tour. It was nice to be joined by one of our Cornish members too.

An early stop was to admire the koi carp pool and to learn about the amorous ambitions of the toads therein (ask anyone who went!). Nicky, of course, knew the names of all the plants and was a mine of information giving us a very

interesting tour. The views are wonderful and were enhanced by some shrubs being in full bloom. There are some very unusual plants and they say they have the tallest of some species. The gardens drop right down to the beach (where one member spent the whole time sunbathing). There is much of historical interest here too as the beach was used by the Americans in WW2 and the house was owned by the Heeley family at one point. The exhibition in the foyer goes back to mentions in the Domesday Book.

We returned to the café for lunch, which was very good, and then faced the temptations of the plant shop and gift shop. We got back to the Squash Club at 18.00 hrs exactly and maintained the Group's fine weather record.



Mothecombe - April 2012

April 2012 will go down as the wettest April on record so the omens for a dry, sunny day were not, shall we say, good. We had originally been asked to park on grass and I had visions of those “happy” days at the County Show when held at the previous site, with tractors having to pull cars



out of a quagmire. Fortunately the owner was kind enough to offer us hard standing in front of the house so all was fine. So, unbelievably, was the weather. All right, we did have one short shower, but compared with the torrential downpour the day before, this was insignificant.

I think it is safe to say that all 34 of us were utterly enchanted by Mothecombe, it was as if we were in a time warp, hidden away in a world of its own. There do appear to be several ways to get there; in a month like this we all ignored the route via 'Ford' however direct it might appear.



We were greeted by the Head Gardener who kindly gave us a map / information sheet and pointed us in the right direction. The house was built in 1710 for John Pollexfen passing in 1800 to Henry Legassicke and finally to the Mildmay family in 1870. A later Mildmay commissioned Sir Edwin Lutyens to add to and remodel the house in 1925. Planting started then with tree rhododendrons and

agapanthus and subsequent members of the family continued with bog gardens, ponds and camellias. The present owners empty and replant the long borders every five years (a lesson to us all?!). The gales of 1990 saw 1000 trees lost over the estate so new wind breaks were planted and this has encouraged swathes of bluebells, campion and foxgloves. We wandered down through the gardens to the beach, a lovely sandy expanse which was difficult to leave. Tea was taken in the old Schoolhouse following a walk through the village street. There was a warm welcome inside but you could sit outside or shelter in the old bike shed – that brought back memories!

All in all, a most delightful day much enjoyed by everyone who went.

Heddon Hall - June 2012



Well, we struck lucky yet again and given the weather this year, very lucky indeed. Ten of us drove up to N. Devon and followed the yellow signs which took us through Parracombe (despite the online directions telling you to avoid the village). The house is a former rectory with wonderful walled gardens and sweeping grounds down to lakes, the whole overlooking the valley in which the village sits. There was much to admire in the gardens, clematis, big poppies, ferns, old fashioned roses and much more besides (as usual, the names of many were on the tips of our tongues but got no further...)

After our thorough exploration we retired to the sun drenched terrace for drinks and cakes and soaked up the view. We were alternately **red** (with the sun) and **green** (with envy at the garden). At the end we collected the various plants we'd 'bagged' at the start and made our way back after a really enjoyable visit.

Lewis Cottage, Spreyton - July 2012



The weather was kind to us and we only had a shower whilst we ate and drank. I don't know if you know, but John Sargeant's mother (Olive) (John Sargeant being the T.V. broadcaster) had once lived there and it was she who Richard, Michael and Michael's wife, bought the property from, although they have added to the land by purchasing other bits. The lovely house originates from the 1500s. The site is on a slope, but not too difficult to manage. They have various areas laid out as hot border, white border, smoking border etc. (The smoking border so named because Michael threw his cigarette end onto some rubbish, which he could never manage to burn as he couldn't light it, when it set alight and they ended up having the fire brigade out.) There is also a bog garden as there are springs in the garden and at the lowest point there is a large pond, partly dug out by them, but fed by the springs. They have two resident geese and a duck and four cats running around.

Not only did we have tea out of a silver teapot, milkjug and sugar basin, but also lovely china cups and saucers with matching china teapot and milk jug. We were served beautiful sandwiches and two types of cake, all

homemade, again on matching china teaplates. Not our usual tea and cake! Added to all that, Richard, Michael and Michael's wife, Penny, were lovely. A lovely place to visit.
Linda.



Kia Ora, Cullompton - August 2012

The usual trepidations before an outdoor visit – thunderstorm the night before with torrential rain, low cloud in the morning – but true to form, come 2pm the sun shone and the afternoon was hot and dry.

An easy drive up (though two did get lost following someone else's instructions!), good parking and then into the garden. We were told it went round bends; actually it just went on and on until you got down to the lakes at the bottom. These were heavily populated by Canada Geese and other ducks. The grass was well manured!



We marvelled at all the lawn cutting involved and, as usual the almost total lack of weeds in the well stocked borders. Having admired the caged birds and one peacock we then decided it was time to sample the teas. We “bagged” the summerhouse (the only place in the shade) and then went off to face temptation. Suffice to say the teas were excellent and several of us succumbed to buying extra cakes to take away. Some bought plants, some won something in the raffle, but all went away content with a pleasant afternoon in good company – (it was nice too to welcome two soon to be new members).



Anne.

Bickham Gardens - September 2012



Another break in the incessant rain gave us the opportunity to make a return visit to these lovely gardens. The owners had just returned from a holiday and were there to greet us, which was nice. It was also Devon Artists week and the daughter in law was exhibiting her artwork so we had the added bonus of viewing and purchasing some of her work.

We were also very pleased to welcome two new members; we hope to see them at future events. We wandered round what are essentially three gardens admiring the various plants. New since last time was the Head Gardener's gardens and Koi carp pool. He kindly talked us through his South African border – we tried desperately to remember the names of the various and unusual plants. We admired his vast collection of nerines in the greenhouses, all very neatly set out, truly a labour of love. (As someone who seems totally unable to grow nerines, this was hard to cope with!) There was a tempting array of plants for sale, and, yes, some of us succumbed. Everyone though succumbed to the teas specially provided for us, we were very grateful – we do appreciate our teas!

Anne.

Stourhead - October 2012

This was our first October visit and it was a success, even this year! We had an almost full coach, including some new members.

The weather wasn't great, it was very misty, but it didn't rain and for that we were grateful.

Neither was it too cold.

We had booked a tour of the grounds around the house, which also took in the history of the house and estate. John and David were waiting for us as Guides and did an excellent job.

The Hoare banking family created Stourhead in the 18th century and one member still has a flat in the house for occasional use. The estate is



array of plants of all shapes and sizes; the variety in the leaves took your breath away. I don't think any of us had any idea that there were so many different types.



huge, though now considerably smaller than it was. The landscaping is magnificent and is really mature, but then it was started in 1740! The house seems almost to be an afterthought now, situated as it is, on the edge of the grounds. It was certainly well worth investigating with wonderful Chippendale furniture, a very lived in feel, and many fine paintings. The Chippendale had been rescued from a major fire and there were pictures of it set out on the lawns. The house guides were very welcoming, friendly and informative which helped to enhance the visit. We were very impressed with the pelargonium collection there. This was a staggeringly large

Our guide had taken the opportunity to point out the various architectural features and viewpoints in the grounds so we knew where to look afterwards. We also had some interesting diversions off into the undergrowth to get to some of them!

Some of us thought we would try the Spread Eagle for lunch – in the hope that it would be less crowded than the café. However, a) it wasn't; and b) it seemed to be operating the SIRO system for bar service so we went back to the café where although the queue was slow and long, at least it was a FIFO system.

After a warming bowl of soup it was off out

again to find our own way round the grounds. We admired the colourful acers and tulip trees, which looked particularly good in the brief shafts of sunshine that occasionally broke through. Yes, more sun would have been nice, but this is a severely rationed commodity this year.

Everyone got back on time – we threatened to leave if they didn't – and we got back to the Squash Club in good time. Have to find another autumn garden for next year now!

Anne.