

Gardens Group Reports for 2013

East Worlington - March 2013

For the 16 hardy souls who turned out for our first visit of the year it was a test of stamina - the wind was biting. However we are made of sterner stuff and soon found solace and warmth in the village hall where the ladies of Worlington had done us proud with their baking.

Some of us met at Eggesford Garden Centre where we had hoped to get lunch, but owing to a total lack of foresight on behalf of the organiser who didn't realise that they were so popular that they would be fully booked, that proved a non-starter. A pub was immediately sought.



The garden was beautiful with snowdrops, purple crocuses and wild daffodils in a vast array under trees. If only the sun had come out then so would the crocuses and daffodils to provide an even more colourful sight. We did admire the view over the ha-ha down to the E Dart, but it really wasn't a day for standing around for too long.



This is a very small hamlet which none of us had been to before so it was a voyage of discovery. The residents are in the process of raising funds to renovate the village hall, quite a task for such a small community. It was good to know that every cake we ate would help! A local nursery had brought a selection of plants to sell, so again, some of us succumbed to those.

Anne

Trewidden - March 2013



The day started well - everyone was early and Bruce was on hand to guide us with parking. I asked the driver if he had been to Trewidden before - he said no, but he had printed off directions. I helpfully said that it was on the A30 just beyond Penzance, "No", he said, "Just before Truro". It transpired that he had been told that we were going to Trewithen. A fortunate conversation!



We arrived on time - exactly at 11am - to be welcomed by the ladies at Trewidden. Some immediately took advantage of the coffee whilst others set off to explore the gardens, all clutching the maps we'd been given. The gardens were a delight, very natural, unmanicured and with a maze of paths to wander round. There were many champion trees and unusual shrubs to admire. The magnolias were decidedly unhappy (quite understandable after the winter we've had) but the camellias were in full flower. There were some magnificent tree ferns, some growing in old tin pits. Scattered round the garden were several benches on which one

could sit and admire the view, or for those who brought their own lunch, sit and eat that. Nearly every plant was named - a great help to those of us who know the name but can't quite recall it!

The tearoom was quite small but there were very few other people there and there was a very relaxed atmosphere, we were able to pop back whenever we wanted to take refreshments.

Attached to the tearoom there was a tempting array of plants for sale, needless to say many of us bought some.

Everyone enjoyed the day and with a full coach it was always easy to check if we were all there!



Haldon Grange - May 2013

It was a bit damp, but eleven of us set out to explore the 12 acres at Haldon Grange.

In the Gardens Group we're not used to any sort of rain, but we brushed it off. Armed with maps, which we soon ignored, we just followed the various paths, admiring the magnificent camellias, rhododendrons, magnolias and other, quite rare trees. The grounds have lakes, streams and a relatively recently established arboretum.

Some pottered round, taking advantage of any seats under cover, others were determined to explore every inch, the usual in fact!



Some of us also explored the old tunnel that went under the road to what used to be the kitchen garden for the estate. Sadly, it is now closed off half way through bringing exploration to an end.



This is quite a wild garden with just a few "tamed" areas. Tea was available but most of us had other plans but all in all a very enjoyable visit and it didn't rain all the time!

Anne

Hidcote - June 2013

We had a few last minute withdrawals owing to illness and one unfortunate member - no names! - who got the time wrong, but we ended up with a very respectable 23. It's a long way - 3 hrs of driving - but the roads were clear and we broke the outward journey at the garden centre off junction 22. This was quite fortuitous, as I'd mentioned to Judith on the way up that I was having trouble finding a replacement Dierama. She headed straight for the seasonal clearance section and found a collection of dieramas. So we both indulged in one and even better, found a further reduction at the till.

After passing through some Cotswold villages we arrived at Hidcote to be met by fluorescent-jacketed marshals wielding scanners for membership cards. However, faced with our eclectic mix of annual cards, life membership, NT for Scotland cards and nothing at all they soon gave up and left us to the usual manned desk.



If anyone had any doubts about the importance of Hidcote to the gardening world (it is reputed to be the best English garden), then the plethora of international visitors soon dispelled that and demonstrated what a name it has. It is an archetypal English garden, but designed and planted by an American who was brought up in Paris. The NT has been doing a lot of research and has recently replanted to what, they believe, is the original plan. This has been a 10-year restoration programme costing £3.5m.

It is a fascinating garden that has to be just wandered round. There is nowhere where the whole garden can be seen; in fact there are a series of different 'rooms' - 28 I believe. Whilst we're on statistics, I'm told there are over 4k plant species, 4.5 miles of hedges, 10.5 acres and 600' high. Another description is that of a "wild garden in a formal setting". It is true that many parts are very formal: - The Stilt Garden, the Pillar Garden, the Long Walk, the Great Lawn; but then you stumble across areas like the Poppy Garden, just a wild profusion of great big poppy heads jostling for space. There are wonderful vistas of open countryside and the Malverns, but then you descend into lush, dark greenery bordering streams. There is also the practical side with

a large, and very formal, kitchen garden. As is usual with gardens of this size and age, there is a recently restored plant house.

Everything was looking very healthy and vigorous; the plants were clearly enjoying their new

homes. They weren't labelled, so there was much "I know what that is, but I just can't put a name to it now". Apparently the reason is that, to be authentic, as a private plants man's garden, labels would not have been needed. Major Johnston clearly had a better memory than we do!

Everyone enjoyed the visit to this Grade One Listed garden and we didn't get wet, the weather had the decency to wait until we were safely on the coach and our way back before raining. Given the dire forecasts this was another Gardens Group triumph! The only slight fly in the ointment was something we have encountered before at NT properties - the running out of food for lunches during the lunch hour. What we did manage to get left a lot to be desired. Seems it's always sensible to take a reserve ration.
Anne



Venn Cross Railway Garden - July 2013



This visit attracted several people we hadn't seen for a while and so we had a very healthy turn out of twenty-four. I think everyone was intrigued by the prospect of finding out what could be achieved at an old station, in a steep cutting, with a tunnel at one end. We were not to be disappointed and were amazed and full of admiration of all the hard work that had clearly taken place.

This is a unique site where our hosts - one in the old Engine House, the others in the Station House - have worked together to provide a seamless garden experience. The challenges were clearly

immense, to add to what one would expect to be the problems in such a site; the previous owners had allowed spoil from a road widening to be tipped on the old line, hence the slope up from the tunnel. This though, did provide a boggy patch at the entrance to the tunnel, ideal for growing gunnera. We went on a blistering hot day but our hosts were saying that this time last year the garden was under water. Nothing like a varied climate!



The Engine House garden opened out to a wild flower meadow made more poignant by an old signal post in its midst. There were other remnants of the railway along the old track, all keenly photographed! The owners had dug out ponds to add more interest and in their higher garden, had installed some unusual animal sculptures, which seemed to fit in very well with an abandoned railway.

The Station House garden ran along both sides of the old track towards the tunnel. You could climb up over the tunnel but you needed to be nimble footed. Both are clearly keen plants people as there was an impressive variety of interesting plants in various parts of the gardens.



Both too were offering plants for sale at very reasonable prices.

They had kindly set up tea tables in the shade and we enjoyed drinks and home made cakes whilst poring over the photo albums of what the station used to be like and noting the frequency of the service when it was running from Taunton to Barnstaple - those were the days! So, a unique experience on the Devon/Somerset border, two lovely gardens and two very welcoming hosts. We all really enjoyed this visit.

Anne.

Forde Abbey - September 2013



We arrived in good time for a cup of coffee and then gathered at the entrance to the house. We were held up by the fact that the previous group had been late for theirs but this did mean that we were treated to a spectacular display from their Centenary Fountain, the highest-powered fountain in England. (Sad to say that some were so busy talking that they missed it...!)

The tour of the house was very leisurely - there was plenty of time to ask questions - and savour the answers! It is a house with a fascinating history and it has undergone many physical changes. After 400 years as a monastery it suffered from Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries. In 1649, after a

100 years of plunder and neglect it was bought and transformed into a private residence. The tour was quite extensive, ranging from the Great Hall, through the State Rooms to the Monk's Dormitory. There was much of interest in all the rooms, from pictures to furniture. The gardens too have evolved over the centuries, the oldest part being the Great Pond that originally powered the mill. The gardens are large and very varied - from a substantial walled kitchen



garden to an arboretum. The herbaceous borders alongside the Long Pond were particularly fine at the time of our visit. The fountain was installed in 2005, so a very recent addition. It was turned on again at 3pm, so some saw it twice.

We had a very pleasant lunch in the Undercroft after the house tour and thus fortified sallied out to visit the gardens and grounds.

Apart from the fact that one of our group lost their phone and it became clear that someone had found it but was going to hold on to it, it was a very enjoyable visit.

Anne.

Andrew's Corner - October 2013

This was our last visit of the year and 16 of us made our way to Belstone to see the garden at Andrew's Corner. We parked amongst the cows and sheep and bravely ignoring them, walked to the house. There we were greeted by the owners, Robin and Edwina, who told us about the history of the house and garden before taking us round the garden.

There is an abundance of trees of various sorts and, at this time of year, carpets of cyclamen.

The view over the valley at the bottom of the garden was made more impressive by the sheets of rain blowing across the other side of the valley - but not on us.

We didn't escape totally, there was some fine mist, but at that point we wisely retired to the conservatory for tea.

Edwina treated us royally and plied us with a seemingly unlimited selection of cakes. Why is it that the smaller the slices of cake the more you are tempted to take? I'm afraid too many of us admitted to having more pieces than we should have done. Many too, said that they would like to go again, but at a different time of year.



Anne