

Reports for 2015

Killerton - March

The first visit of the year was well supported, including I believe, a visitor from New Zealand. It was led by Sue Guy as I wasn't fully mobile. I am told that the cyclamen by the church were looking fantastic and that there was much to see in the garden. The house provided a welcome shelter for part of the visit as it wasn't wall to wall sunshine.

I'm afraid that there were no photos to accompany this visit.

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Coleton Fishacre - April



There are many ways to reach CF and I think we tried all of them in an attempt to avoid the various road works. The freest was via Buckfastleigh - Totnes - Torbay ring road at Paignton. Given the frayed nerves and unaccustomed heat it was not surprising that the first port of call was the café for coffees. Sitting outside was really relaxing and set us up nicely for the rest of the visit.

Some then chose the garden first, others the house, both were enjoyed immensely. The house has been carefully furnished in the original Art Deco style even to the extent of having some

copies made from the original pieces. Apparently when the house was handed to the NT the contents went to family members and the NT has been able to use the originals as templates for the copies.

The volunteers in the house were friendly and informative and – a nice touch – one was offering freshly baked scones with cream and jam in the kitchen. Not something to be turned down!

The garden is extensive with wonderful sea views. There are many rare and exotic plants and given it is so sheltered, they were flourishing. There are many paths to wander round, but as it goes down to the sea there is also the question of climbing back up again! Lunch though awaited us at the top so a chance to recover.

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Moretonhampstead Gardens - May



We had a disappointingly low turnout, some had to pull out before Friday but five who had intimated that they would come, didn't. However the seven of us who did enjoyed two beautiful gardens, in good weather, with the chance of cream teas and/or cakes at both venues.

We started at Sutton Mead, wandering round the orchard, the kitchen garden, the woodland area that was awash with bluebells and then on past the wisteria, the croquet lawn, over a stream with banks planted with flowers and down to a series of pools one of which had a very rustic duck house. The



whole garden was a riot of colour and it was a pleasure to sit on the terrace sipping tea whilst admiring the views of the moor. There was an extensive range of home produced plants for sale which proved tempting to some.

Having said our

farewells to the owner we made our way to Mardon. This has an arboretum, another fine wisteria, a huge lawn, a long flowerbed sheltered by a stone wall (and you could see the difference this made), a stream, a pond and a large vegetable garden. Again, a terrace laid out with tables on which to partake of one's tea. Both gardens are well worth seeing though the lane to and from Mardon is one of those which is fine provided you don't meet anyone!

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Longstock and Mottisfont - June

Yes, a long day but it was worth it, generally agreed to be the best visit we've ever made.



Everyone was there at the start in plenty of time though those hoping to take advantage of the toilets at the coach station were to be disappointed – locked still just before 8am! Anyway, we made our rest stop at Cartgate in an hour and were able to stroll in the sun and refresh ourselves with a coffee or two. Onwards to the Water Gardens and the coach driver admitted that he was in “foreign territory”. Armed with a map and memory, I guided him to the entrance of the Water Gardens – a small gate in a hornbeam hedge. We'd had to go the long way round through Stockbridge and then up through a very picturesque village of Longstock.

We were met by the Gardens and Grounds Manager who took us in and then gave a very informative talk about the history of the garden, their planting schemes and maintenance schedule. We were then left to wander round.

The central lake was already there when the founder of John Lewis bought the estate. He constructed the mini archipelago of 16 small islands joined to each other and the edge by wooden bridges. The whole task took six years, as it had to be done by hand.

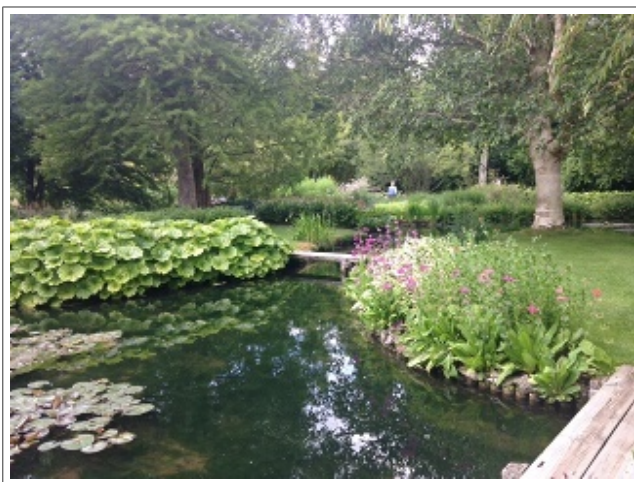
The planting was done with the advice of a botanist and the emphasis is on the changing seasons with plants chosen to flourish at different times of year. One advantage is that although most of the garden is chalk, there is a very convenient peaty area which enables the growth of the acid loving plants like camellias and rhododendrons – rare in this part of the world. There are over 40 different varieties of water lily and over 100 specimen trees, some very rare indeed. Because heavy machinery cannot be used, the grass paths are mowed by hand, every week in the summer, taking one and a half days.

The whole garden was idyllic, so peaceful and just the bird song – it's too far from roads to get any traffic noise. There are numerous seats if you just want to sit and take it all in. There are fish to spot



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and, if you're lucky, some baby coots being carefully chaperoned by Mum and Dad. We admired the primulas, the swathes of astillbe and hostas, amongst many others! One of the many attractions is the reflection of the trees and shrubs in the water round the various islands. The only building in the garden is the thatched summer house – the spotless toilet block is hidden away on the edge of the garden.



We eventually tore ourselves away and made our way down to Mottisfont. This was totally different, the overflow car park was full, the place was very busy, but the coach was booked in, so a space awaited us. This is more open than the Water Gardens and it was very hot with little shade to be found. It was time for food though, so some braved the queues for the café, others took out their packed lunch. Thus fortified there was a choice, head straight for the Walled Rose Garden, amble up the river bank and then across the fields to sneak up on the Walled Garden from the rear, or to explore the house and view the exhibition on Lyon's Coffee House Lithographs. The roses – the attraction in June – are in and around the Walled Garden. They were looking wonderful, those who hadn't seen them before were surprised at the abundance of roses and the numerous varieties, colours and scents. Fortunately there is an ice cream kiosk by the Walled Garden with tables and chairs – the heat was a good excuse to indulge and also to take advantage of the jugs of iced water that they had thoughtfully put out. Mind you they had warned us that several visitors had been carried away by the Ambulance Service suffering from heat exhaustion, so a good move on their part. Useful too, as we were able to refill our water bottles at the same time.



We had a good journey back, another chance to admire not only Stonehenge but also the magnificent displays of poppies either side of the road there. So, a tired but happy (full) coach load arrived back in Exeter after a really enjoyable day.

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Farr's - July



The forecast had, up to the Friday before, been really good, but on the Friday it changed to Heavy Rain. However, it's the Garden Group, so, Sunday turned out to be really hot and sunny! Unfortunately not many were able to come so we were a select group of seven.

Farr's is in the conservation area of Beaminster, hidden away next to the Museum. The hedge outside the property gives a strong hint as to what happens on the other side - the topiary is of a table and two chairs.

The interesting thing about the Farr's gardens is that there are two of them. Apparently Mr and Mrs Makepeace do not agree on garden style, so they have one each!



As you enter the garden you are met by a huge silver ring enabling you to view the garden through it. It is a real statement, plain but very effective. This is 'His' garden where the emphasis is on shape, not colour and there is more topiary round the edge of the garden. A gap in the hedge leads through into another garden with grasses and a pond. A bridge takes you over the pond enabling you to admire the water lilies and leads you into 'His' summer house. This is a very tempting place, easy to imagine spending many happy hours contemplating the views.



Leaving this through the rear door you enter 'Her' garden - totally different. A riot of colour from a traditional cottage garden with fruit cage and greenhouses. This too has a summer house, a really superior shed beautifully kitted out with a desk, coffee making facilities, a wood burner and a comfortable sofa. I think we all thought that we could do with one of these!

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Leaving this garden takes you through to the orchard and a large enclosure with geese.

Three rooms in the house were also open so one could admire John Makepeace's furniture skills.

There were several chairs and tables, including what he told us was the prototype for the Plymouth Graduation chairs. All very impressive but sadly, all out of our league! As well as the furniture there were paintings and intriguing ornaments. Two talks were given.

We finished in time honoured fashion with tea and cakes, the ladies of Beaminster having produced a very fine array of cakes.

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Highcroft - August



Another beautifully hot day saw us over the border in Cornwall to see the gardens at Cargreen on the River Tamar. Linda had spoken to Gordon Newton, who many will recall was Head Groundsman, before we went and he revealed that he had

bought flowers and displays for the University from the wholesale side of Highcroft for many years. He phoned them to warn of our arrival! It was easy to find and there was plenty of parking. Many of us arrived early, some had a picnic, and some found bargain plants for sale further down the lane.



At the entrance we were given a guide outlining the ten different gardens at Highcroft. These were: - Japanese Style garden, Chapel garden, Hot Border, Grass Border, Arboretum, Prairie Planting, Buddleia and Rose Bank, Pond, Lawn Borders and, finally, Plant House and Veg Garden.

One problem with many gardens is that August tends to be a month that lacks colour but Highcroft was an absolute riot of colour. There were vast swathes of often fairly ordinary plants, but the effect was stunning and often the colour was unusual – see the photo of the deepest purple hydrangeas we

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had ever seen. There were still plenty of unusual plants, some of which were for sale in the Plant House. The garden is big, 3 acres, and has been extended over the years and now has over 2,500 plants. There are collections of 25 different hydrangeas and a collection of agapanthus, over 100 varieties of camellias. We were surprised to see Magnolias in bud and in flower.



When we got up to the lawn we met the owner who explained the recent changes to the garden. They'd had a lot of storm damage and had had to remove many trees – they now had a massive collection of logs, would keep a log burner going for a lifetime!

After admiring the vegetables (comparisons with ours, odious!) and buying some plants, we left, but not before being tempted by bunches of alstromeria that had appeared at the entrance. A short walk to the Methodist Chapel next door for a cream tea brought the visit to an end.

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Hauser & Wirth and Midney Gardens - September

Our last visit of the year was in our usual weather conditions - a gorgeously sunny and hot day. Our first venue was on the southern outskirts of Bruton, itself a very attractive town. Hauser & Worth is in a beautifully converted set of buildings which have an almost monastic air.



We started in the garden, a very relaxing place with the sound of mowing on the one side in the

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neighbouring school playing fields and a field of sheep on the other. The beds are huge and are packed with a wide variety of plants. Two things attract your attention, the enormous clock high above the garden which has a loud tick, and a large structure, a sort of outdoor event venue,



which looks as if it's been dropped from outer space. Flying saucer/mushroom?!

We then walked through the galleries. I'm afraid that I clearly don't "get" this sort of modern art, others might! They are selling sheepskin rugs, books, T shirts etc, but they are all quite expensive. We did look at the Roth Cafe and Bar menu but there were no prices and most of the tables were reserved - two coaches arrived as we left. Not sure how it is all funded, entrance donations are for a local charity.



We decided to go on to the second venue for lunch. This was Midney Gardens just south of Somerton. It proved a challenge to find (a right hand turn on a left hand bend) but totally different. A warm welcome from the hands on owners and a choice of soups or salad and scone, not to mention the cakes! We sat outside in the sun to eat lunch and then toured the garden. They have only been there for five years and have completely remodelled the garden. There are now "rooms" with odd bits of furniture in amongst the plants. One was a bedroom with plants that are supposed to combat insomnia. It was all a bit wild, certainly not manicured in any way. We then returned to the cafe and our seats outside to lap up the sun and tea/coffee and more cakes! All in all a very pleasant way to end the season. Hope to see you all next year!

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