

March - Wood Barton



A very keen group, in excess of 20, arrived early for the first visit of the year. We were welcomed by the owner, Rosemary Horton, who was known to some of our group through NADFAS. She very kindly offered to guide us round the garden, an offer we gratefully accepted. The garden was looking very colourful with several magnolia stellata and other magnolias, daffodils, camellias and azaleas all in flower. The two acre arboretum also benefits from many well established and quite magnificent trees. Later there would be rhododendrons in flower and wonderful colour from the

acers. The bluebells were just about to flower and would provide a carpet of colour under the trees.

As usual there were some bulbs and shrubs which we struggled to name but were encouraged to find that their names had also, momentarily of course, escaped Rosemary's memory too.

There are several ponds and water features to add to the interest. Another feature were the various artistic pieces in a variety of different materials - metal, stone and wood.

For our tea and cake we had a choice of being inside or outside and wherever we were we settled down for a good chat and catch up over our teas. A very enjoyable visit.

This is an idyllic spot looking out over open fields, but having seen the map of the proposed new garden village between Cullompton and Kentisbeare it would appear that the outlook may change in the future.

ACM



Gardens Group Reports 2017

April - Castle Hill Gardens



We were a group of 19 (and two four legged members) which caused a slight concern the day before over having enough food for our lunches. The lady very kindly asked what we would like and said she would go shopping. It was fine, we had a very nice lunch.

The view of the house as you turn off the road is stunning, it's very long and in a striking ochre colour. I must admit that my first thought was, "how much did the paint cost and how long did it take?". Parking was easy and right by the entrance kiosk and tea room. We had a warm welcome and, as we were early, ordered coffee which came in individual cafetieres providing a good two cups.

As we waited for everyone to arrive we were delighted to be approached by Lady Arran who welcomed us and offered us a tour of her private greenhouse where she specialises in pelargoniums.



We gratefully accepted and we're able to buy some of them too. We admired the Garden House which she and her husband have moved into leaving the big house for the next generation. Downsizing was to a five bedroomed house, but it was newly built (1989) and clearly much more

Gardens Group Reports 2017

convenient for the retired though there didn't seem to be much evidence that either of them were slackening off.

Lunch was light but just what we wanted, very nice baguettes or quiche or soup. Quick and friendly service from the ladies in the kiosk.

Then to the garden and grounds. They are magnificent and so colourful at this time of year. We were given a guide with a very clear map, a rarity these days. Numerous magnolias, camellias, azaleas and lots of bulbs. The bluebells were fully out and, particularly behind the house, provided thick carpets under the flowering shrubs and trees. The path along the river was an easy one and very scenic.

Quite a few of us climbed to the Castle from where there is a 360 degree view, including Lundy in the distance. You get an idea of the extent of the estate from here as you pick up feature follies on the horizon, a bit like Stourhead. After that we felt we deserved tea with slices of delicious locally made cake. Well, it was only a short staggering distance to the cars and we were carrying all our pelargoniums. These had very kindly been brought down to the exit by the Earl who clearly enjoyed whizzing round in his quad bike and trailer.

This is a wonderful day out for all ages and everyone we met was so helpful and friendly. I think quite a few of us will be back. Can't decide whether the highlight was being given a tour by Lady Arran or the number of artificial hips which made the steep climb up to the Castle!

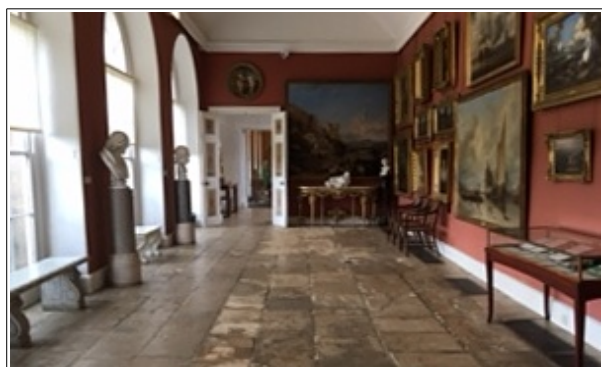
ACM

May - Bowood House

This turned out to be one of our best visits, thoroughly enjoyed by everyone who went. Unfortunately several of the group who had intended to go were not well enough and we wish them rapid recoveries.

Bowood was approached by an exceedingly long drive but just as we were wondering if we had the right road it opened out into the car park where we were given a warm welcome by Debbie who had been dealing with our booking. The Tree House Cafe was here at the entrance so many of us took the opportunity to consult the map we'd been given and plan our routes over some refreshments.

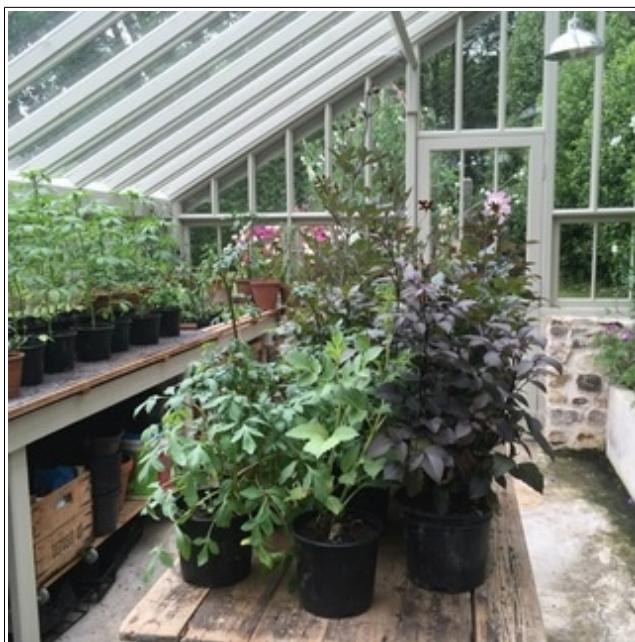
The grounds are vast - 100 acres- and very impressive, in true Capability Brown style. The vistas are stunning, a new one opening with every corner turned. There are formal Gardens, in Italianate style, in front of the Orangery and a very colourful long border along the side of the house. There is also a private walled garden but we hadn't booked for that, preferring to book the house tour.



Our guide was Deidre who gave us a very informative hour long tour. She gave us the history of the house and also of the Lansdowne family, owners since 1754. The original house had been demolished after WW2 and the Orangery, designed by Adams, was converted into living quarters and the part which is open to the public. I think we were all surprised by the number and variety of the exhibits, paintings, drawings, sculptures, furniture - including Queen Victoria's wedding chair - Napoleon's death mask and other memorabilia - and items from one Marquis's term as Viceroy of India. We crowded into the library where Joseph Priestly discovered oxygen, unfortunately no equipment left now. Much more can be gleaned from their website. We had a choice of food outlets as there was a restaurant by the gift shop in the Orangery. We probably wouldn't have enjoyed the grounds and gardens so much if it had been raining, but this was the Gardens Group, so it wasn't!

ACM

June - South Wood, Cotleigh



This was a very popular visit with 25 of us meeting there and it was good to welcome 4 new members.

The lanes from the A30 provided a bit of a challenge - 3 cars turned off together and thought they were safe because of numbers but then they met the milk tanker and in country lanes, size beats numbers. However that was soon forgotten as we were welcomed by Will Smithson, the Head Gardener, our guide and

host for the afternoon. He explained that he'd had a career change from investment banking to this post via Yeo Valley Organics. He gave us a brief history of the house and the development of the gardens. The owner, an academic at Imperial College who'd hoped to be there to meet us, had taken advice from exhibitors at Chelsea.

Will explained the planting plans in the various parts of the garden. The garden in front of the house is quite formal and, at the moment, has some very fragrant old English roses in full bloom. We were then taken up the snake path - referring to the shape not the wildlife! This was a bank of wild grasses and flowers and we were lucky that we saw this just before it was due to be mown. A long discussion ensued about the different varieties and merits of what was growing there.

The next section was the orchard, each tree being surrounded by a square of hedge, we joked that this was to catch any falling fruit without bruising them. The formal kitchen was next with beautiful, neat, square beds, deep in manure and strong healthy plants. Not a weed in sight. The beds with fruit bushes were covered with strikingly ornate, tent like



structures to take the protective netting. At the back is the greenhouse which was sunk into the

Gardens Group Reports 2017

ground so as not to be too obtrusive. There were some healthy tomato plants on the back wall.

Will talked about their plans for the stream which runs down the side of the garden, it now only gets water in the winter so they're considering pumping water up from the pond on a circuit. On down through the sarcococca beds either side of the path leading us to the back of the house. Here was the site of the next project - a knot garden. It was then the pond and again, more plans for the removal/planting of trees and the possibility of fish being added - but worries about the local heron.

The final stop before tea was another greenhouse with pelargoniums. Tea was taken in the corner of the front garden on long wooden benches off long wooden tables. The cakes were delicious. Talking of wooden seats, those who ventured to the loo found an old fashioned wooden plank loo seat, hadn't seen one of those for years!

This is a very impressive garden in a lovely setting, lovingly maintained. A very enjoyable visit.



ACM

Gardens Group Reports 2017

July - Hawkern



The Gardens Group magic held and we were incredibly lucky with the weather, squeezing in between a chilly and damp Wednesday and a really soaking wet Friday. It was dry, sunny and warm enabling us to take full advantage of a wonderful 3.5 acres of garden.

After a few ups and downs over numbers 23 eventually turned up. We were welcomed by Tony who



was in charge of trying to park us all. There was some debate over whether it would have been more sensible to turn round first (yes!), but by then it was too late. All was well, we managed.

Tony introduced the garden to us, giving the history of the site and the former owners. He was persuaded to guide us around it which we really appreciated.

We started in the old clay pit stemming from the fact that, until 1920 this was the site of the Otterton Brickworks. There is very little top soil

here so some trees were unable to put down adequate roots and had to be removed. Tony was a bit

Gardens Group Reports 2017

apologetic because of the lack of colour here, this is very much a spring garden with camellias and azaleas. There were several ponds through the pit area and the paths wound their way around them. From here we went over lawns to summer herbaceous borders and banks and discussed the pros and cons of the plants in them. Then it was up to admire the huge banks of pink hydrangeas which grow on the banks surrounding the swimming pool. There were orchards beyond this and views of Peak Hill. We were then left to wonder round on our own and found some of the other areas with more shrubs and trees.

Our hosts then called us in for our cream tea. The garden room/kitchen was set out with China plates, two segments of Tony's scones, a pot of jam, a pot of clotted cream, a knife and a serviette. It all looked lovely. Claire made the tea, and having collected our teas we then had the choice of sitting inside at one of 3 tables or outside with a choice of another 3 tables and chairs.



This was a lovely, relaxing way to end a very enjoyable visit in which we were made very welcome by our hosts. We disentangled our way out of the front drive and made our way home.

Gardens Group Reports 2017

July - Streatham House

Yet again our luck with the weather held and we squeezed in between rain and showers. This visit was a first for us, a member of the Group being brave enough to open their garden to us. People arrived by bus, foot or car and gathered in the garage which Roger had cleared to provide shelter if it did rain. He had prepared a guide outlining their plans and the timeline for the garden's evolution since they moved in three years ago.

We started by admiring all the work which Helen had done on the drive. She had planted so many buddleia that she was thinking of naming it Buddleia Drive. Roger told us how many trees they had planted, there has been a particular concentration on fruit trees.



We then divided into two groups so we could stagger the tea and cake sitting. It was all clearly timetabled! Roger described all he'd done in his fruit and vegetable plot and how he'd constructed the fruit cage. Onions and garlic were grown in abundance and the fruit was looking very healthy. We admired a very prolific pear tree which had risen, not from the ashes, but from a compost heap there when they arrived.



Helen described the mixed planting with a very colourful border dropping down to the lawn. Beds in the lawn have standard roses with fuchsia underplanting.

Helen's real love is her Japanese garden, inspired by one in Cornwall. Hers is a miniature garden but has several Bonsai, water features, sculptures and pergolas.

Roger had set a quiz with 10 questions with a prize of a courgette, this too was a first.

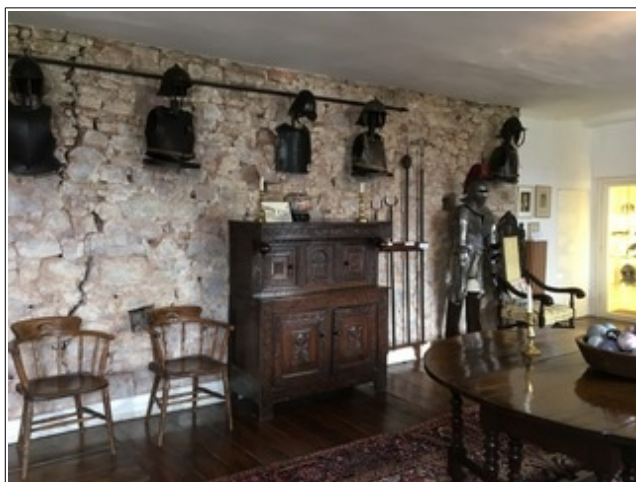
Helen had baked cakes for us and we were able to enjoy our tea and cakes sitting outside admiring the garden and the views. Our thanks to Helen and Roger for their hospitality.

ACM

Gardens Group Reports 2017

August - Tiverton Castle and Gardens

A very small and select group were to be found, not champing at the bit, but champing at the Castle gates, firmly closed. We hadn't realised that they are only opened when the church clock struck the half hour at 2.30pm. Until then cars were drawn up outside the gate but there is only room for 3 so others had to find parking elsewhere. When the gates were opened, the entertainment was to watch some drivers squeezing through the gates and entrance tunnel with their fingers crossed.



We started by touring what's left of the old Castle part of which dates back to 1106. It was besieged in the Civil War in 1645, hence the collection of Civil War arms and armour. There is a tower with some challenging, wooden, loft like stairs/ladder to the upper floors from where there are good views. The long gallery over the entrance houses the Civil War collection.

The Gardens extend to 3 acres, mostly level but with steps down to the Exe and a bog garden. The Gardens are colourful and enhanced by the backdrop of the ruined walls of the bigger Castle. Two members took the opportunity to go on the barge trip on the Great Western Canal in the morning which they said was very enjoyable. All in all an enjoyable visit on a sunny day to a hidden part of Devon.

ACM

September - Castle Drogo



It was good to welcome two new members for this visit while at the same time assuring them that our numbers were usually much larger. I can understand that if people have been recently then they wouldn't particularly want to go again. If you're not a National Trust member then a 4 hour visit would cost you at least £11 plus £4 for parking. Although the Gardens are vastly improved with many interesting shrubs and trees and looking very colourful, the house was a disappointment. So very little is still open, what is is wrapped in polythene and all quite dark. Understandable, but the general feeling was that, in this state, a reduction in the entrance fee would be appropriate. There was

an exhibition of clocks and watches, laid out on the floor as an artistic statement. There was a vague attempt to link this with the great clockmaker, Harrison.

The Visitor Centre is welcoming as were the staff and we enjoyed our lunch there.

ACM