

Gardens Group Reports - 2022

April - Lee Ford



A very enjoyable visit with a lovely conservatory providing us with a luxurious setting for that all important catch up after the winter. There were a few last minute withdrawals as people succumbed to various ailments but 21 were able to come.



After a much better morning weather wise than forecast, we were welcomed by a heavy downpour on arrival. We were rescued by Mrs Lindsay-Fynn who kindly opened up the conservatory for us to shelter in. It was only a shower and she used the time to introduce us to the gardens, grounds, the family and the history of the house. We were all given a map of the grounds with the history on the reverse.

The rain stopped and the sun came out so it was time to explore. We'd been told that, although rabbits had always been a challenge with the plants there was now a new one - deer, not seen in the grounds before. As we left the lawned area two muntjacs darted across in front of us, quite a speed too! Didn't see any rabbits though.



Camellias, magnolias were in flower with azaleas and rhododendrons just starting. The spring bulbs were plentiful still. The Victorian Walled Garden was immaculate, fully prepared for

Gardens Group Reports - 2022

planting/sowing, best walked past quickly before any comparisons could be made with one's own patch! Two poly tunnels were contributing to the provision of early crops and the greenhouses were a blaze of colour with pelargoniums.



After our tour of the gardens and grounds it was back to the conservatory to be greeted by three tables beautifully laid with a china tea set, serviette and cake fork. Side tables were provided to take the cake platters and tea was served for us. A cream scone and a selection of cakes - I won't say how many, don't want to make you jealous but they were numerous! Tea cups were topped up and the conversation flowed. The



conservatory was a delight with bougainvilleas, orange trees and pelargoniums in pots. We were very comfortably ensconced but had, reluctantly, to bid farewell, thanking our hosts. An excellent start to the season.

ACM

Gardens Group Reports - 2022

May - Avenue Cottage



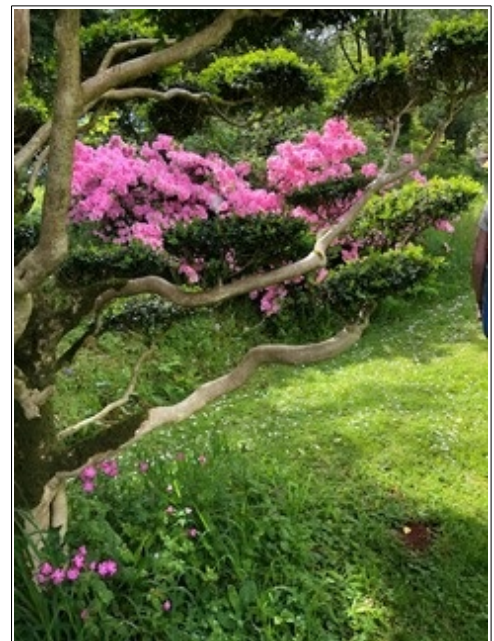
After a nail biting couple of weeks with an embarrassingly low number of people signed up for this visit numbers increased to a respectable 14. Even better, this was with members new to the group or some who hadn't been



able to join us for a while. In a first, our numbers were increased by four shortly after we had started on our guided tour of the garden. I'd gone back to the car park to get something from the car and was just leaving when another car drove in with four ladies in it. I was a bit mystified as I'd counted all 14



in but I kindly showed them where to park. As they got out I realised that I didn't recognise any of them so I asked where they were from - Dartmouth! - as I didn't have them on my list. "Were we supposed to book?" I replied that this was a private



visit but I'd go and tell our host of their arrival. They stayed but didn't get the tour from Richard but David did have enough tea/coffee and cake to add them to the tea. Our hosts had helpfully put signs up from the village for us and these ladies had seen these and assumed it was an NGS Open Day.

On arrival we'd been given an introduction by Richard who'd bought the house and 11 acres in 1987 and a map and description of the history behind the house and

Gardens Group Reports - 2022

grounds. The mature woodland was felled as part of the war effort in 1944 and after that Laurel and Sycamore were allowed to grow unchecked and we all know how vigorous both can be. Richard and David have - on their own - carried out a lot of clearance of these unwanted specimens. In so doing they've revealed views of Sharpham House and the River Dart. So much planting has been done and, at this time of year there is an abundance of colourful camellias, magnolias and rhododendrons together with many rare and unusual trees, shrubs and bulbs.



They've uncovered a lake now full of lilies, a ha-ha and the original carriage drive past the Cottage and up to Sharpham House. There are seats scattered round the garden. Some of the paths are on quite a slope but two of our party - one with a roller and one with a buggy conquered the heights.

We returned to the terrace in front of the house with the backdrop of a magnificent wisteria to be offered a choice of cakes and tea and freshly brewed coffee. The usual teatime chats took place until it was time to bid farewell and wend our way back. A very enjoyable visit in brilliant sunshine.

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Gardens Group Reports - 2022

June - Kentlands



A very enjoyable visit in glorious sunshine - hats to the fore! A warm welcome from our hosts who included an adorable Labrador puppy whose tummy was quite partial to being tickled.



Unfortunately two couples couldn't find the drive to the house and gave up. I'd sent a screenshot from Google Maps but I admit that I had to use the phone number they'd given us to check that I'd got the right lane.

This is a 2 acre garden on a south facing slope with far reaching views across Exeter and out to the Sidmouth Gap. It was redesigned by the current owners who've worked tirelessly to create a wonderful garden. It's now full of a wide variety of plants and trees. They have a vast and ever growing collection of salvias and, fortunately for us, they had some for sale. There's an unusual water feature with a collection of goldfish all carefully protected by mesh.



There are numerous pots and tubs all around the patios - watering must be quite a task! Citrus fruits are being grown in pots, they're outside now but are taken into greenhouses over winter. We were impressed by all the lemons on the tree we saw.

We were divided into two groups to be given a tour of the whole garden by our two hosts. This gave us much more opportunity to ask questions about the different plants.

Gardens Group Reports - 2022

In another area, raised beds provided a productive source of vegetables and salads. Fruit was protected by fruit cages. Chickens added to the self sufficiency aspect. We settled down for tea at tables on the patio under parasols and were offered a choice of three cakes, all delicious and even seconds! All happily consumed while admiring the view and catching up with everyone. No one really wanted the afternoon to end, so comfortably ensconced we were!



This was a lovely garden with very hospitable hosts in lovely weather.
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Gardens Group Reports - 2022

August - Bickham House



We were given a warm welcome by Julia who pointed out that she was eligible for membership of Uersa having worked at the University for a while. She gave us an introduction to the gardens and grounds and advised which way to go round. The pond with koi carp which we'd seen on previous visits was no longer in existence because they belonged to the resident gardener whom she no longer had, the property was now an Airbnb. Despite the heat and drought many areas of the garden looked



very impressive, particularly the fruit and vegetable garden where everything was planted out very neatly and weed free. The tables with plants for sale started to attract attention and



several succumbed, maybe looking to replace casualties in their gardens. Not surprising as they were very good, strong plants.

Tea beckoned, a choice of cakes and a cream tea. Top ups were kindly offered of both tea and scones. For entertainment we could watch the robot lawnmower going backwards and forwards on the big lawn in front of us. A very enjoyable visit.

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Gardens Group Reports - 2022

September - Whiddon Goyle

A beautiful warm and sunny day for our last visit of the year. Easy to find off the old A30 if you took it slowly at the end and plenty of parking. It was good to see some members who'd not been able to get to earlier visits. Numbers fluctuated but we ended up with 15 which was good.

We were welcomed by the owners who kindly offered to show us round, an offer we gratefully accepted. They'd come from a farming



background and Priscilla had started a business

growing cut

flowers for bouquets. They hadn't been there very long but had transformed the garden and work was ongoing. We admired the neatness of the cutting of quite tall hedges in places, very impressive. The site is quite open, 1,000ft up with stunning views of the high Moor so judicious siting of hedges form a windbreak to protect the garden.

The flowers for cutting were grown in beds interspersed with green houses, there was a wide

variety of firm favourites. This in turn opened up to a croquet lawn, rockery, roses, herbaceous borders and some very 'busy' ponds. A very



Gardens Group Reports - 2022

noticeable feature were the two tall monkey puzzle trees either side of steps.

After our guided walk round the two acres we retired to the terrace and a choice of tables and chairs, tea or coffee and two delicious cakes. We were urged by Priscilla to have seconds of cakes to save her husband from finishing any leftovers. Ever keen to oblige, some did ... The conversations continued, the sun was warm and the chairs were comfortable.

Hope to see you all next year.

ACM