

UERSA Gardens Group - 2014

Knightshayes - 21st March 2014

The season got off to a good start as members of the Gardening Group emerged for their first visit. Old friends met up and caught up with the news. Given the forecast, it was particularly impressive to see 14 or so prepared to brave the showers. There was blue sky to frame the magnolias but there were also some occasions when it was best to admire the view from a shelter!

The kitchen garden was looking annoyingly immaculate and was stocked with a staggering number of rhubarb plants - what do they do with it all?! Sweet peas had ornate supports and, like the rhubarb, plenty of manure. Some magnolias were out and the camellias, azaleas and rhododendrons were just starting. The rock gardens had some exquisite small bulbs, but the main effect was the parkland, both sides of the drive were alive with daffodils, narcissi and occasional swathes of blue chinodoxa.



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Pencarrow - 8th April 2014

It was a lovely dry, sunny day but the previous week had been rather wet and we were very grateful to Bruce for overseeing the parking and arranging for us to park on the hardstanding at the end of the Squash Club, the grass being just too wet. There were 29 of us (two joined us there) and everyone really enjoyed the visit.

From start to finish this is a wonderful place to visit. The drive, a mile long, starts by taking you through an Iron Age fort. The fort is big and impressive but you can't stop here, you need to walk back up to it, either through the grounds or up the drive. Thereafter the drive becomes a riot of colour with huge camellias and rhododendrons lining the drive. Then you glimpse the honey coloured house on the right through the trees and shrubs. The setting is magnificent.



After our welcome we headed off to the cafe. Here we bought drinks and snacks and, given our numbers, ordered our lunches. I think we rather overwhelmed the staff as those at the end of the queue did have to wait a while to be served.

After this we divided into two groups to tour the house. This was the highlight of our visit. Both groups had really informative, friendly and helpful guides who really brought the place to life. They were very generous with their time and pointed out all sorts of fascinating things. This is a very wide ranging tour, we certainly saw more of the house than I expected. It is very clear that this is a lived in, family home that you are being shown round. There is a hidden door which Mary Banks in our party was invited to find the opening catch. There is also a 'warning' squeaky floorboard outside a bedroom which we all trod on. We had the history of the various families explained to us, supported by paintings and, latterly, photos. Fans of G and S were intrigued to see the lolanthe memorabilia.

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Lunch was served by very friendly, helpful staff. There was a good choice of tasty food and a choice of two rooms inside and outdoor seating on the grass where you were likely to be joined by the peacocks - they weren't a problem, just noisy on occasions! The grass area was a suntrap and a good place to just sit and admire some energetic children on the climbing frames.

The gardens/grounds are extensive and we wandered round following the map that was available. Paths were well surfaced and there were various options depending on how far you wanted to walk. The setting is magnificent and with the lake, magnolias, daffodils, camellias and rhododendrons at this time of year, very pleasing and relaxing.

Some succumbed to the shop and plants. Again, very friendly, helpful staff. Everyone we met went out of his or her way to be friendly and helpful.

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Lukesland Gardens - 7th May 2014



We all agreed that we had picked just the right time to see this lovely garden. It was a riot of colour with azaleas, rhododendrons and swathes of bluebells. The various trees were coming into bright leaf although the Davidia (handkerchief trees) were going over, their handkerchiefs scattered on the ground like discarded tissues.

The garden has different areas which you discover by wandering round narrow paths in some areas or wide drives in others. There is a wooded area which was awash with bluebells, paths over and alongside streams and ponds and walled areas. It's a voyage of discovery. This isn't a manicured garden, it's probably best described as "tamed wild",



the result is very attractive.

The welcome in the tea room is warm and friendly and the cakes tasty and proportions generous.

Although it rained on the way down, it didn't whilst we were there; the sun even came out on occasions!

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Newton House - 5th June 2014



Thirty-three members braved Yeovil's road network - they seem to specialise in putting signs up after the turn rather than before - and found their way to Newton Surmaville.

We were met by the owners, Robin and Jane Cannon, and given a tour of the house accompanied by its history and the subsequent renovation, which they have painstakingly carried out since their purchase in 2007. It must have been scarcely habitable before - just one example, 12 radiators for the whole house, there are now 54.

The book, Newton House 'Restored for Life' has a detailed description of the room-by-



room changes. It also has a history of the house and garden and is well worth reading. We were taken into the Great Hall, now devoid of its black painted walls decorated by "invitation" of Queen Victoria to share the mourning of Prince Albert's death. It is now a warm, vibrant room.



From there we saw the Drawing Room and Dining Room, each with their own stories. Upstairs we were shown the Master Bedroom and the Music Room. When I visited last year we also saw the Justice Room, in 1612 this was the buttery, but in the nineteenth century it was used to hear legal cases for Yeovil and the Museum Kitchen with its large fireplace and shelves of gleaming copper utensils.

The gardens are large and varied and

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beautifully laid out with many intriguing sculptures. The frog jazz band is particularly enjoyable as music emanates from the base.

As we picked the only dry and sunny day that week we were able to sit outside the barn for our afternoon tea and bask in the sunshine.

Some of us actually started in Tintinhull, Montacute being closed for filming Wolf Hall. Some started in the garden and then went to the pub, some just started in the pub! Both the garden and the adjacent pub were highly rated by us and several made a note to use the pub again on trips up and down the 303. The least said about the journey from there to Newton House, the better! Everyone though, enjoyed their day.

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Sand - 8th July 2014

We had a very enjoyable visit to Sand. It was easy to find and parking was plentiful. Twenty-four of us were given a warm welcome by our hosts, the Custodians of Sand and the outline of our visit was given. We were invited to wander round the garden whilst the finishing touches were put to the tea.



The gardens are what you might call "gently wild", in other words, not manicured; in other words, probably a bit like many of ours with the odd bramble rearing its head. There are some wonderful trees and plants with superb vistas. The grounds seem to wrap themselves round the house and mediaeval hall house in a very "comforting" manner. There is a delightful thatched summerhouse, which dates from 1600.



Because of our group size we were divided into two groups, it should have been an easy calculation, 12 in each but somehow we ended up with 11 and 13, no comment! Both

groups commented on how informative and interesting our hosts were, undoubtedly when the family has been in ownership for over 500 years and the current members live there, you really do get the full story of the history and the delights and drawbacks of living there.



The Huyshe family rebuilt the Elizabethan manor in the 1590s and restored and extended it in the early 20th Century. We had all the changes explained from both inside and outside and found the collection of papers and legal documents dating back to the 13th

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Century in an upstairs room to be fascinating as were the wall panels. The barn or hall house has a world-renowned roof.

On the way round we picked up a useful tip for ascertaining whether your bread oven is going to be hot enough - throw a handful of rice into it and if they turn brown the oven is just right!

Both groups managed to be indoors when we had a heavy shower but we weren't rained on when we were outside and indeed, got some sunshine. The teas, served on bone china, were much appreciated; there was a choice of delicious cakes to suit every taste. We would probably have spent longer in the 6 acres of grounds but we had really overrun on our tours (asking too many questions!) and we were acutely aware that our hosts had another event that evening so we reluctantly bid our farewells.

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Trematon Castle Gardens - 24th July 2014



Well, we were warned that there were no facilities but there wasn't even anyone to relieve us of the entry fee, just an old money box on an old card table at the edge of the car park!

A small, but select group found their way through a maze of narrow lanes to the Castle gates. The drive was flanked by very colourful, packed borders, a riot of colour and plants that brushed the car as you passed. Further down, bordering the car park, there were wigwams of very prolific sweet peas that didn't seem to be being cut.

It is a truly magnificent site, not surprised that John Betjeman praised it and the views from it, so highly. We didn't see it at its best; though dry it was a bit hazy, so the pictures of the Lynher and Tamar over towards Plymouth are not as good as they could be. The site has glimpses of naval shipping and the Brunel stone railway viaduct taking



the main line onto the Royal Albert Bridge. Unfortunately we weren't allowed onto the higher parts of the site so couldn't get the best view of the railway viaduct. In its heyday this nine-acre site must have been very impressive, rummaging through the undergrowth numerous walls appear with archways, which must have led to more parts of the garden/estate.

There is an impressive keep, which is now the entrance to the house, which was built in the castle grounds in 1823.



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Behind the house are well stocked borders, with architectural features, which rise up in a half moon shape with the old castellated or toothed walls behind. Apparently their continuation to the front was knocked down to afford views to the house. Overlooking everything is a round castle on a big mound. This was where Sir Francis Drake hid the treasure he brought back from Spain until it was moved to the Tower of London. We couldn't get access to the castle, there was a dark tunnel leading into the bowels of the mound, but that didn't look very inviting! A path does wind its way round the mound but again there was a rope across the entrance. A flag was flying from the flagpole so access is maintained.

We stumbled across the swimming pool and then, after a good wander round, we repaired to the Waitrose café at the Saltash Services roundabout to partake of tea and cake. We followed this by a thorough look round as this is a larger store than the Exeter one and has a Home section.

We were all glad that we took the opportunity to see this castle and garden, it really is amazing what is hidden away in our part of the world!



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The Walled Gardens of Cannington - 14th August 2014



Well, hats off to the 15 members who stuck to their guns, had faith in the Garden Group record, and turned up when the forecast for the day was so dire. As we approached Cannington there were flashes of lightning to be followed by a heavy downpour that was best sat out in the car park. The combination of torrential rain, leading to flash flooding and the building works, meant a diversion for the entrance resulted in that path being under water when we arrived. However, when we left it had either drained away or been swept away, so was then fine. We started in the cafe, which is quite small, and several tables had been reserved for a coach party but we managed to get some seats.

The gardens are a delight with many specimen trees and interesting plants. The whole area has an air of serenity about it; the old buildings provide a very pleasing backdrop. The Bishop's Garden is intriguing, wish we could have read all the words on the tomb, and the plaque of nuns' names poses unanswered questions. It was rumoured that in 1328 there was a network of tunnels leading from the Priory to various spots in the village where the monks and nuns could meet in secret.



The Australasian Garden has some interesting shrubs and most of the plants and trees are labelled, which is excellent. The colour schemes are good and the whole garden is well designed. The greenhouses are large (useful if it rains) and well worth wandering

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round, a mini Wisley/Kew if you like. There's quite a cacti collection. The National Collection Garden looked tired - wrong time of year I guess and it was during the vacation, so there were no students around.

The plants in the sales area are quite evidently home grown, not bought in ones, a welcome move and meant that you stood a good chance of finding a plant which you'd seen in the gardens.

We had been impressed with the scale of the building works in the adjoining buildings - the monastery, the dairy etc - and wondered where the money came from, could this really be the College? We started talking to one of the men who was working there as we left; it transpired that this was going to be the EDF College, presumably linked to the nearby Hinkley Point power station.



The journey back was utterly foul; an ark would have been a more appropriate form of transport. Some of the group found themselves in a Highways Agency convoy because of the conditions. Despite the weather, the gardens were really worth seeing and we were glad we went.

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Holcombe Court - 17th September 2014



A really hot day saw us on our last visit of the season at Holcombe Court. After some last minute additions and withdrawals, 16 of us found their way there. Those of us who arrived early took the chance to visit the adjacent church which has an intriguing set of monuments, adults lying prone but a row of children standing one behind the other, 8 daughters, very moving.

Kathy, the Head Gardener, let us in, gathered us in the courtyard outside the



house and told us about the development of the garden. We commented on the sad state of the big trees either side of the gate, one of which was a Luccombe Oak. Unfortunately several of the big trees were showing their age but they are nurturing them and also planting new ones.

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Kathy was very generous with her time, being on hand to answer our many questions and to show off her potting shed, a real 5* shed beautifully equipped with some wonderful wooden fitments. No plastic - the owner is adamant on that one - even the toilet in there has a high level wooden cistern, a first I think!

There are different areas providing a mix of planting and vistas. The walled garden is particularly impressive, imaginatively laid out and packed with fruit and vegetables. Refreshments were served on a very sunny terrace, soft drinks and Duchy biscuits - very welcome. I think we could all have happily dozed off in the sun!



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