



Somerset Gardens Trust

A member of The Gardens Trust

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*Featuring*

Nerines – the Star of Autumn – p.28

# The Somerset Gardens Trust



## From the Editors

What a strange Summer ! May and August were wash outs and new plants flourished without watering. June, July and September encouraged all of us out into the garden – even seeking shade to eat in. We need to get used to these strange wet hot summers in the West. Now that the equinox has passed we must prepare for Winter - the pleasure of ordering bulbs and to dream of Spring – and of the SGT Tour to North Wales.

This edition is designed to cheer you with a wide variety of articles; from gardens large and small to garden design and plant hunters. So many good writers, so many different angles to gardening.

Please contact us with your articles and ideas for the next issue; they make the Magazine what you enjoy reading.

Christopher and Lindsay Bond

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## From the Chairman

Your Council had our first face to face meeting for nearly 2 years and it was good to get round the table – with actual not virtual coffee and cake – and look back over what has happened during the Covid pandemic and look forward to the challenges we will have to address.

On your behalf I thanked Council members for their continuing hard work and perseverance. I am pleased that work on the website is progressing. While there was no work with schools last year, the Government's Education Recovery Support Programme is an opportunity for our Trust to support schools post-lockdown and I have asked the Education Committee to look into this. We also discussed how to preserve our survey data for future reference. Much of it needs to be digitised and how to store it and where is something we are actively addressing.

And finally, my favourite gardening tip from the Visits I made this year “we’re going to think about it for a year”. Recognise it?

## Events

In the afternoon, the Events Committee met to plan our 2022 programme. There were many good ideas and I look forward to sharing them with you in the next edition of the magazine. Therefore, **a note for your diaries** please to look out for the 2022 programme and booking form in the Spring 2022 Magazine.

The organisation of one event already well under way is the Tour to North Wales. This will take place from Sunday, 8 to Thursday 12 May 2022 and if you have not already thought you would like to go there is an outline of the delightful gardens later in this issue.

## Looking back on 2021: Visits

We once again had varied venues, from summer borders in full flower at Holland Farm, brimming “dig” and “no dig” vegetable beds at Venn, to the wild but tamed landscape of Ashcombe gardens.

We always write to thank our hosts and it is interesting to see what impression a visit from SGT makes on those who are kind enough to give up their time and welcome us to their garden. “Lovely to have you” and “A most interested group who asked good questions” are typical replies. Our last visit this year was to Ashcombe gardens and this is the impression we made. Rob Wilson-North Head of Conservation & Access, Exmoor National Park Authority wrote:

*“It was a pleasure to host about 30 SGT members at Simonsbath, high on Exmoor. Without doubt the picturesque landscape begun by John Knight in 1820 is the most westerly historic garden in Somerset, and possibly the highest. We much appreciated the trek westwards that members had undertaken; the weather forecast offered the customary Exmoor variety, but despite this, spirits were high.*

*SGT members are an insightful audience providing welcome feedback, interesting parallels, lots of questions, and remarkably even a previously unseen photograph of one of the Knight family descendants!”*

You will find photographs selected from the many we have taken this season on the next page.

Diana Hebditch

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*Ashcombe Gardens – ©Joss & Margaret Mullinger*



*Iford – photography by Alice Fowler*



*Hazlebury Manor – ©Joss & Margaret Mullinger*

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## My Secrets of good Garden Design

*Charlotte Sanderson, garden designer*

Writing about secrets of good garden design took me back to my lectures at the Inehbald School of Garden Design 20 years ago: the brief, full site analysis, capturing its essence and using scale, proportion, and colour to create a master plan. However, these appear in many garden design publications and so are not secrets. I will therefore share my secrets from those 20 years, from gardens large and small, from one-offs to those that have evolved over many years, from London, Berkshire,

*“ We are about to share a journey together, with bumps along the way, so we need a good level of mutual understanding”*

Hampshire, Wiltshire, up to Norfolk and beyond.

Gardens are about people not plants.

Nature makes wonderful gardens for itself without human assistance, but people usually lack nature's time and space. Our gardens are also intensely personal and emotional experiences – practical spaces for children to play or reflective hideaways for parents escaping them. This emotional perspective



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is what originally drew me to garden design – a world away from my first career as a Lloyds insurance broker.

## *Trust, Time, and Teamwork.*

Given this personal and emotional nature, it is vital I gain my clients' trust. I spend time immersing myself in their World and the gardens they want me to create for them. When meeting a client, I ask myself “*are we a match?*”, “*how can I help them?*”, “*do we speak the same language and share similar values?*”, none of which may relate to the garden. We are about to share a journey together, with bumps along the way, so we need a good level of mutual understanding. This can sometimes demand a great deal of patience on both sides!

There can be a sense of urgency in early client meetings, a clear desire to complete their garden in time for an imminent summer, so a key first step is to help them understand that, like Rome and unlike some TV programmes will have you believe, great gardens are not built in a day, whatever the budget. Even the mature-looking gardens I have created need time and the love of a great gardener to show their full potential.

*“ I take the opportunity to dream about what magic I can create in this space I have the privilege of seeing, feeling, and smelling ”*

Before the master plan is agreed, I spend as much time as possible re-visiting a garden at different hours of the day and months of the year to see how the light changes, the sounds alter and the scents vary. I consider the effects these have on the space's mood and atmosphere. These visits provide time to pause and think, and to dream on my clients' behalf as well as for myself. I take the opportunity to dream about what magic I can create in this space I have the privilege of seeing, feeling, and smelling. What is its potential next year and in the next ten years?

Teamwork stems from amazing relationships built with the fantastic landscape contractors, plant nurseries, suppliers, craftsmen, and specialists with whom I collaborate; without them there would be no gardens.

I have huge respect for the landscape contractors I work with; their integrity is what separates wheat from chaff. A master plan may be followed on site but there are usually unexpected findings during construction. Team creativity is what allows us to overcome such hurdles; sometimes the best design solutions come about on site with ideas shared and developed for the right solution.

Brexit and COVID-19 made me realise the true value of my long-standing relationships with nurseries in Europe and the UK. Despite plants becoming scarce over a matter

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of weeks, these relationships prevented potential disaster through collectively seeking innovative solutions. Fortunately, things have settled down and trade is moving freely again.

The same applies to specialist artists, craftsmen, designers and engineers, whose passion for their work opens up myriad sculptures, water features, garden furniture, lighting, etc. Sharing the same trust and mutual understanding with them as with clients

ensures these finishing touches complement the main feel and purpose of my designs.

I suppose the final secret is that a good garden can only come from a shared sense of achievement. Whatever it has taken to get there, if both client and I can shut the proverbial garden gate at the end of a project with the same sense of happiness, of realised dreams, if I draw warmth from the pleasure the garden will give the client, then I know it is a good garden.

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## SGT visit to Gardens in North Wales and Cheshire, Sunday, May 8th – Thursday 12th 2022

*Camilla Carter describes an exciting tour*

Our visit is based at the Rossett Hall Hotel, a pleasant hotel in a quiet village between Wrexham and Chester with good access to excellent roads.

**Sunday, May 8th** We leave early, at **8am**, by coach from Hatch Beauchamp having parked our cars at Belmont Farm (with kind permission from John Townson) and set off for Welshpool, with a comfort stop on the way. We will visit the NT gardens at **Powis Castle**; this castle was once a medieval fortress of Welsh princes but has been transformed over the years into a grand home by

the Herbert family; wonderful views from the Italianate terraces which are planted with many tender shrubs and perennials. There is a café for light lunches or there are tables available outside, if members wish to take their own picnics. It is more than 30 years since I was last there and the gardens were looking impressive this September. After our visit we leave for our hotel at Rossett and a welcome glass of wine before a three course dinner.

**Monday, May 9th** Our coach will head west today for the famous gardens at **Bodnant**.



*Bodnant Gardens*

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Grade 1 listed, this garden was established in 1874, and five generations have planted rare trees and shrubs since in the 80 acres of garden; enough for the most ambitious of visitor! There's The Pavilion if visitors are hungry and snacks at the Magnolia Tea Room and Dell Kiosk. Following lunch, we go to the beautiful private garden at **Maenan Hall** further up the Conwy Valley; magnolias, cherries, camellias and rhododendrons. After our visit we head back to our hotel and dinner.

**Tuesday, May 10th** I hope members will have a good breakfast today as lunch is going to be late. We drive south for Chirk, where we visit **Brynkinalt Hall**, both the house and garden. It has been home to the Trevor family since the house was built in 1612. There will be coffee and biscuits before we leave for Anglesey and a stunning drive through Snowdonia, with wonderful views along our route including the peak of Snowdon; we also pass near the slate quarries of Bethesda. Crossing the Menai Straight, we visit the Hidden Gardens at **Plas Cadnant**; a C19th picturesque garden which has been under a period of restoration since 1996; valley gardens with waterfalls, and ornamental walled garden. There is a café where members may purchase light lunches and teas. We travel



*Hodnet Hall*

home by the A 55 back to the hotel and dinner.

**Wednesday, May 11th** Heading east today we visit **Arley Hall**, home of Viscount Ashbrook and his family. It is considered to be one of Britain's finest gardens and has been lovingly created by the same family over a period of 550 years. The double herbaceous border is thought to be the oldest in

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Europe. There will be tickets for both house and garden; the plant centre might interest some of our members. There is a café where visitors can buy lunch. Our afternoon is spent at **Cholmondely Castle** where there are beautiful mature trees, including 35 county champion trees and magnificent magnolias. There are also fine views, water features, camellias, azaleas and rhododendrons. Back for dinner at the hotel.

**Thursday, May 12th** We leave today for **Wollerton Old Hall**, 4 acres of modern formal planting surrounding a C16th half-timbered Hall. The house is not open. We follow on to the nearby **Hodnet Hall**, home of the Heber-Percy family. We will

be given a delicious set lunch before setting off around the lake, and vegetable garden. The tithe barn is also worth seeing. Then we leave for Hatch Beauchamp and home.

Four bed and breakfasts, four dinners, and one lunch.

This tour is limited to 30 people; many members have already told me of their interest. Those joining come at their own risk and should have travel insurance. Booking forms and cost will be available shortly. Please contact Camilla Carter, at [camilla.carter@btinternet.com](mailto:camilla.carter@btinternet.com) or 01963 351106

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## The Preservation of Biddulph Grange Garden

*Julian Gibbs describes the rescue of a wonderful garden*

Our Editors asked me to give a brief account of how the extraordinary Victorian garden of Biddulph Grange in Staffordshire was acquired by the National Trust.

In 1986 I visited the garden in the grounds of an enormous Ricketts hospital, rather hidden away to the North of the Potteries. It was the visionary creation of a distinguished plantsman, James Bateman. He collected plants and fossils to represent the creation of the World and historical cultures, through an intricate and eclectic design of contrasting spaces: Egypt, China, America,

Italy and the Himalayas are all here – as well as an astonishing Geological Gallery, which he designed to reconcile evolutionary science with the Biblical days of creation.

Remarkably, the garden had survived through sixty years of use as a hospital, with its structures and much of its planting intact. Latterly it had been maintained by just three loyal gardeners. A small group of Staffordshire garden historians – notably Peter Hayden, Keith Goodway and Alan Taylor – had been endeavouring to persuade the hospital authorities and the local council

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*“ Why not see if the National Trust would like to take it over, by making a formal offer to the Director General?”* )

to find a solution to preserve it long-term, but seemed to be getting nowhere. As the local National Trust representative, I secured an invitation to a meeting of the hospital management, the volunteer committee, the local authority and the parish council. I had been intending just to give encouragement by emphasizing the garden’s significance, but I found myself saying (almost involuntarily, and without any authority), “*Why*

*not see if the National Trust would like to take it over, by making a formal offer to the Director General?”* (I wrote the letter!).

Of course, nobody at Head Office had heard of the garden, and there was certainly no prospect of an endowment.

So we had to drum up local and national support. Brent Elliott, who had just published his seminal book on Victorian gardens, wrote a pithy letter, and a forceful article appeared in *Country Life*, which ended with a plea for the National Trust to preserve it. Eventually the garden was accepted, on condition that we raised £1.5 million for the restoration and endowment. This project was considered at the time to be the largest garden conservation scheme



*Biddulph Grange*

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ever undertaken by the Trust. For me the most exciting aspect was that there was so much evidence of the original garden from contemporary publications, early *Country Life* articles and photography (reflecting its fame in the 19th century) and our own archaeological investigations. We also had the benefit of a detailed historical survey by Michael and Beverley Lear and the invaluable advice of the Trust's chief Gardens

Adviser John Sales.

Now, after 35 years, much of the planting has been renewed, virtually all the known features fully restored (including the Geological Gallery), and I believe it is now on a sound financial footing. I wonder whether the present-day National Trust would have the courage to take on such a place – so derelict but with such great potential. Do visit it.

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## The Bard and his garden

*Shakespeare's plays reveal impressive knowledge of the powerful potential of plants.*

*Lee Hooker enjoys her research*

Humble Weeds were a clarion call from Nature in *Hamlet*, heralding disorder and imbalance, a potent metaphor for the unnatural marriage between Hamlet's Mother and Uncle which subverted the natural order of the realm.

In poor Ophelia's symbolic garland, in the Fennel and Columbine offered to treacherous King Claudius were consummate symbols of flattery, deceit, infidelity, and ingratitude. Queen Gertrude was offered Rue, for sorrow, and a Daisy was withheld as it represented purity.

Shakespeare utilised Elizabethan familiarity with these plant traits as a purging vehicle for Ophelia's descent into madness after Hamlet's faithless treatment of her; as well

as sorrow for the untimely death of her beloved Father, Polonius. It gets worse.

In *King Lear*, he took weed-metaphor to

*“ Fennel and Columbine offered to treacherous King Claudius were consummate symbols of flattery, deceit, infidelity, and ingratitude”*

another level, representing invasive, creeping decline towards mental instability. A kingly crown of weeds signalled a less than regal personage. This powerful costume detail was universally comprehended by Shakespeare's audiences who knew that juice of *Fumiter* engendered bitter tears and

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Jules Joseph Lefebvre, *Ophelia* (1890)

Hemlock represented demonic possession by the poisoning of one's wits.

Happily, the stinging nettles in *Lear's* crown fared a little better as useful weeds which moved them higher up the rank of plant

hierarchies to represent pain and cruelty, something Hamlet's Ophelia carried in her heart as well as in her fantastic garlands. It would be churlish not to include the tragic tale of Romeo and Juliet as plants took centre stage in thwarting their young love. Juliet's loyal Friar herbalist in *Romeo and Juliet* faked her death with either Leopard's Bane or Deadly Nightshade (*Atropa belladonna*); either would induce a coma with careful dosing. Desperate Romeo would have reached for toxic Monkshood (*Aconitum napellus*) to induce rapid respiratory failure with no known antidote.

No-one is entirely confident which plant was meant by *Cymbeline's* Azure Hare-bell, but as he was King of the Britons, perhaps they were native bluebells, or harebells? In Ancient Britain they were associated with death and grief, often planted near graves with the flowers referred to as 'Dead Man's Bells'.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the Bard employed flowers to create mischief in a love potion made by Puck from the juice of the Wild Pansy (*Viola tricolor*) to confuse and annoy the lovers Lysander, Demetrius and

Queen Titania. Shakespeare was indeed making mischief as Wild Pansy extract is the equivalent of hand sanitiser, not known to inflame passions but then in his enchanted forest, anything could happen. In the words of the Bard, *All's Well that Ends Well*.

“... and annoy the lovers Lysander, Demetrius and Queen Titania. Shakespeare was indeed making mischief as Wild Pansy extract is the equivalent of hand sanitiser”

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## My Garden

Barbara Shaw

On first viewing our house, I was attracted to the garden mainly for its manageable size and dog proof potential. There was a high Victorian, Quantock sandstone wall on the West side and an impenetrable hedge to the East. Described in 1880 as one rood and twenty-eight perches, it has lost a small amount of that area in the ensuing years and is now about quarter of an acre but still large enough for us. Dominating the main garden was a huge weeping willow. It fortuitously died within a year or two (possibly honey fungus), allowing much more freedom to design. We dug a small pond; installed a greenhouse; moved the summer house; made two raised vegetable beds; planted a horn-beam hedge and five fruit trees; the straight path made winding; and the beds along the wall widened for more impact. The horn-beam hedge disguises a 'working' area with shed, compost bins and a bug hotel made of pallets and old bricks together with a couple of overgrown log piles. Hedgehogs have been spotted from time to time so I hope this untidy area is giving them some suitable habitat.

A looming presence at the front of the house was a *Magnolia* 'Grandiflora'. It

obscured both ground floor and first floor windows and had an awkward shape from bad pruning. We decided it had to go but a few weeks later I received an alarming letter from the Council informing me that as I had felled a tree in a conservation area, I would be liable to a fine of £20,000! Once I had recovered my equilibrium, I sent a pleading letter and thankfully they relented on condition that I planted a replacement. This was done in a more sensible place, has thrived and has a much more pleasing shape. This year it has had more flowers than ever and their subtle lemon scent is a delight (see next page).

Some years ago we introduced honey bees into the garden and made a small apiary some way from the house. It has been a steep learning curve and we have suffered both swarms and winter losses but we now have two busy colonies. Last year was a bumper year for honey but this year's variable weather doesn't seem to have suited the bees and

*“Some years ago we introduced honey bees into the garden and made a small apiary some way from the house. It has been a steep learning curve and we have suffered both swarms and winter losses but we now have two busy colonies”*

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they have produced very little - probably just enough to see them through the Winter. Their presence has prompted me to plant more bee-friendly plants. They especially love my Prunus 'Kojona-Mai', *Ceanothus*, *Geranium* 'Rozanne' and autumn flowers like Asters and Sedums which prolong their

collection of pollen.

Looking back, like all gardeners, I have had both successes and failures but as Gertrude Jekyll said "*The love of gardening is a seed that once sown never dies*" so I am forever optimistic.



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## The Douglas Fir

Anthony Pugh Thomas on its extraordinary discoverer

David Douglas (1799 – 1834) was a Scottish botanist. He was born in the village of Scone, Perthshire and, on leaving school, was apprenticed to William Beattie, head gardener at Scone Palace. He spent seven years as an apprentice, and also learnt more of the scientific and mathematical aspects of plant culture at college in Perth. He then moved to the Botanical Gardens of Glasgow University where he impressed William Jackson Hooker, the Garden Director and Professor of Botany, who recommended him to the Royal Horticultural Society of London.

The RHS proposed to send him to China but that country being unsettled he went instead to the USA, where he was the first plant hunter to work in a temperate climate, with a brief to collect plants not in cultivation. He made three separate trips there – in 1823, 24 and 29. His plant-hunting expedition in the Pacific Northwest in 1824 ranks among the great botanical explorations of a heroic generation. His success exceeded all expectations and altogether he introduced about 240 species of plants to Britain. The Douglas fir was brought into cultivation in 1827 as well as the Sitka Spruce, Sugar Pine, Western White Pine, Ponderosa Pine, Lodgepole Pine, Monterey Pine, Grand

Fir and Noble Fir: in one of his letters to Hooker, he wrote “*you will begin to think I manufacture pines at my pleasure*”. Amongst the shrubs he sent back were *Ribes sanguineum*, (the Flowering currant); *Escholzia californica*, (the California poppy); and *Limnanthes douglasii*, (the Poached Egg plan). Over eighty species of plant and animal have “*douglasii*” in their scientific names, in his honour.

Douglas first briefly visited Hawaii in 1830 on his way to the Pacific Northwest. He returned again in December 1833 intending to

“*The Douglas fir was brought into cultivation in 1827 as well as the Sitka Spruce, Sugar Pine, Western White Pine, Ponderosa Pine, Lodgepole Pine, Monterey Pine, Grand Fir and Noble Fir*”

spend three months of Winter there where he died under mysterious circumstances at the age of 35 in 1834 having, apparently, fallen into a pit trap and being possibly gored to death by a bull that fell into the same trap. There was suspicion that he had been murdered by an Englishman Edward “Ned” Gurney, as Douglas was said to have been carrying more money than Gurney subsequently delivered with the body. Douglas was buried in an unmarked common grave

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near Mission House in Honolulu, Hawaii and there is a memorial to him in the Old Church at Scone.

The common name honours David Douglas, who first reported the extraordinary

nature and potential of the specie and introduced it to this country. That said, the common name is misleading since it is not a true fir, ie not a member of the genus *Abies*. The specific epithet “*menziesii*” is after Archibald Menzies, a Scottish physician who first documented the tree on Vancouver Island in 1791 but did not introduce it.

The Douglas Fir can reach 295 feet with a diameter of more than 13 feet and the oldest trees can be more than 1500 years old. Seeds are produced for the first time at the age of about 25 years and in large crops every 5 to 7 years. It is a valued timber tree, used for building and construction, for roof trusses, and for boat building due to its strength.

And appropriately the magnificent Douglas Fir at Scone Palace was grown from seed collected from

the lower reaches of the Columbia River, near Fort Vancouver, in 1825, arriving in Britain in 1827, raised in a nursery and planted in 1834, the year of Douglas’s death.

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*Battery Park. This is at the Southern tip of Manhattan, where I was hoping to see warblers in the Spring and Autumn migrations.*



*Tudor City. This park is just around the corner where we go to in the shade and read.*

## New Yorkers Go Green

My brother who has spent life mainly in downtown New York since 1964 takes his daily peregrinations around the local pocket parks. These resemble our London Squares and gardens, being local entities funded by donations from or the service charge paid by the residents of neighbouring buildings.

Over the last few years, he has seen a noticeable change in fertility and better flowers. All that is needed is a chipper. The waste plant material and chippings are mixed and spread on site working together to recreate their microbiome, taking around 5 years to complete this virtuous cycle.



*White Bud, an amazing tree in the Spring. The blossoms appear along the branches and trunk. The Redbud has pink or reddish flowers*

Dilly Bradley

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## What Art can bring to your garden

*Melanie Deegan explores a fascinating topic*

Introducing shapes into a garden in the form of art or sculpture can add a new dimension such as height or different materials to the space regardless of how large or small the garden is. It can achieve so much that plants alone cannot. For example, you can make it the main focus and plant around it; or use it to create drama, for example in contrasting a light-coloured sculpture with a shadowy background; or create reflections in water. Sculpture can be particularly useful in the Winter when there is less foliage available to fill a space or add focus. Sculpture can also add humour to a garden or be an invitation for reflection; it can even be used to create artificial perspectives or add a more structured geometry to a space.



*“ It doesn't matter what size the garden is and often with small or challenging spaces it can be a real benefit where planting options are limited ”*

Art in the garden is not sculpture alone. It extends to sculptural plants or pruning to create a specific shape; it could take the form of poetry with the

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words carved into stone or wood, maybe flowing along a path or around a pool.

It doesn't matter what size the garden is and often with small or challenging spaces it can be a real benefit where planting options are limited.

The process does not need to be expensive or complicated and it is easy to experiment with shapes by drawing onto photographs of the area or cutting out a cardboard template or using other materials to try different angles and outlines. If you like the work of a particular artist, they may be able to help

with this but equally it can be fun to play around with your own ideas.

The choice of shape is only limited by what is physically possible in terms of materials and supporting structures. Classic materials such as bronze and stone are familiar to most people and lend themselves well to either figurative or abstract styles. More recent developments have created new options such as a variety of resins,

*“ If you have the time, pebbles can be arranged to form interesting and ever-changing shapes and surfaces.”*

stainless steel, glass and recycled materials among other things. Natural materials like driftwood, tree roots, interesting rocks or fossils can make suitable forms without any additional work. If you have the time, pebbles can be arranged to form interesting and ever-changing shapes and surfaces.

In other words, a garden without art in it is not complete!

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## Weacombe House in its setting – a re-visioning of a Georgian landscape

*Dilly Bradley visits Christopher and Alex's remarkable garden*

Lying to the East of West Quantoxhead, Weacombe House sits comfortably within its own Combe on the lower slopes of the Quantocks enjoying fine 360-degree views over the surrounding land. Formerly part of the St Audries Estate, it was built around 1760, probably as a Dower House, in the classical Georgian square style. Since then, the layout has barely altered. It is now the home of Christopher and Alex Courage who have brought their own artistry and perspective, with a most striking eye for line, to re-establish it in the context of the original Georgian vision/understanding of the landscape.

The former owner, Johnnie Greswell, was a well-known plantsman with a passion for rhododendrons; the acidity of the soil allowing them to thrive there. In the past he opened for the National Garden Scheme. Visitors arrived by the lower gate and came up a drive embanked on each side by rhododendrons, camellias and rare shrubs, ending in a large, handsome *Catalpa*. This meets with a short avenue to the house.



The main interest of the garden visit was the focus on the dense planting around the lake lying well to the South of the house. This enabled visitors to enjoy a full and broad view of the main building as originally conceived and to appreciate its classical

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*“...spacing a Davidia involocruta, cedar of Lebanon, limes, and oaks across the extensive lawns and into the field beyond, moving on into pastureland now morphing into wildflower meadows, as they rise upwards to the Quantocks behind them.”*

*Davidia involocruta, cedar of Lebanon, limes, and oaks across the extensive lawns and into the field beyond, moving on into pastureland*

proportions and balance.

The new owners have maintained this layout but have taken the opportunity to open up the planting and refresh it by spacing a

now morphing into wildflower meadows, as they rise upwards to the Quantocks behind them. Around the house they have introduced low clipped hedges and a parterre



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garden to the West. To the East the ground level has been lowered and the bank pulled to allow the creation of an enclosed patio with formal pool and statues.

Behind the main house are the usual ancillary buildings, courtyards and the former, but still functioning, kitchen garden. This is where we find new ideas and experiments in plants and planting with the focus on vegetables for the house and flowers for cutting.

Passing the current dahlia and herb beds and a trumpet vine clearly invigorated by fierce pruning, (awaiting reinvention in 2022), you enter the old walled garden with fruit trees and a handsome peony and tulip bed. This is separated by a curious North South pit which was once a storage water tank fed by the stream running down the Combe. It powered generators for the house

*“ Most striking is the comprehensive and cohesive vision Christopher and Alex have for their home and its relationship with the landscape of the Quantocks ”*

and the woodworking machinery in the estate workshop.

Recently planted soft fruit, red, white and black currants and a new and successful blueberry bed, give way to a well-proportioned arcade of *Wisteria*. The vegetables have been planted in raised beds, the potting shed has been re-thatched and the remainder awaits a rethink of the planting.

This is a most felicitous re-interpretation of a Georgian garden and landscape. Most striking is the comprehensive and cohesive vision Christopher and Alex have for their home and its relationship with the landscape of the Quantocks.

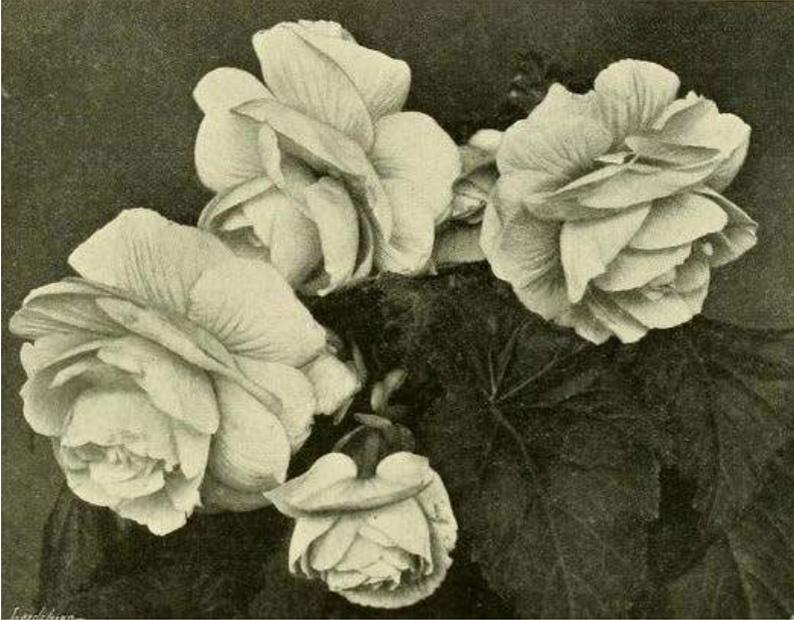
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## Blackmore and Langdon Limited

*Anne Kaile looks at a pivotal Somerset nursery*

Whilst researching Somerset nurseries a name that most always appears besides that of Kelways is Blackmore and Langdon – a nursery that celebrated its centenary in 2001. Their website link <https://www.blackmore-langdon.com/page/history> gives their full story.

The firm started in 1901 in Twerton, Bath, after James Blackmore and Charles Langdon met at Bath Flower Show where they were both exhibiting prize begonias. Marriages took place between the families and the firm today is still owned and run by the Langdons (currently great grandsons of



*Begonia 'Hilda Langdon' a beautiful variety with large pink flowers, RHS Award of Merit 1921. Shown by Messrs Blackmore and Langdon, Bath (Gardeners Chronicle August 13 1921)*

Charles Langdon), now based in Pensford, Bristol. The Blackmores lasted for just two generations.

Known for their delphiniums and begonias, they trade begonias Worldwide; they have

won many RHS awards including over 80 gold medals at Chelsea Flower Shows which they have attended since it started in 1913.

They started winning prizes for their begonias as early as 1903 when it was reported in

*The Gardeners Chronicle* that “though the youngest in the competing firms they had the honour of exhibiting the best collection of tuberous rooting Begonias”. The article goes on to report that “So large in size and effective in colour were the varieties shown,

*“ Known for their delphiniums and begonias, they trade begonias Worldwide; they have won many RHS awards including over 80 gold medals at Chelsea Flower Show”*



Delphinium ‘Turkish Delight’. Blackmore and Langdon

that a lady in passing was overhead to remark, ‘I don’t like those things a bit now, they have got them so large’. Her companion (also a lady), added ‘and vulgar’’. However, this was not the popular opinion and Blackmore and Langdon received a number of awards at this their first show and continued to receive many awards over the years.

However, it is probably delphiniums that gardeners know them for latterly, and Brian Langdon gave a lecture (reported in *the Journal of the RHS* November, 1961) when he discussed the cultivation of this plant and outlined to the audience what he considered to be then the unusual aspects

of delphinium growing. For example, he advised that seed of certain shades of delphiniums take longer to germinate than that of others, although he did not advise as to which!

Just some of the names of the Delphiniums that were being raised and trialled during the 1960s were ‘Icecap’ ‘Turkish Delight’, ‘Sea Mist’, ‘Emir’, and ‘Julia Langdon’ – some of which still exist to this day.

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## Leaving My Garden.....

*Cicely Taylor looks back (and forward)*

When you haven't the energy to push the wheelbarrow up the hill to the compost heap, and aren't weed near the pond in case you topple in, you know it's time to go.

That's us.

We bought our house, a folly on the Halswell estate, 23 years ago. There was no garden – a bare hillside with a pond and a stream running through it. I wanted to leave it as it was, but Max, young and enthusiastic, planted hundreds of trees and

*“ Brambles started growing through the shrubs, the stream became clogged with weeds and the paths were so overgrown that you could hardly see them, definitely time to move on ”*

shrubs. After about eight years it looked good. The soil is wonderful and everything grew quickly. Too quickly. I was away a lot and Max, who enjoyed the planting, was beginning to find the constant pruning and cutting back a real chore. In short, the



*Ladbroke Grove Gardens, Notting Hill.*

# The Somerset Gardens Trust



garden was becoming a burden. Brambles started growing through the shrubs, the stream became clogged with weeds and the paths were so overgrown that you could hardly see them, definitely time to move on, and thank goodness our buyers are young and enthusiastic.

We are going to live in a top floor flat in Notting Hill. I know that many people are horrified. But we have seven acres of glorious garden, Ladbroke Square, across the road, where I could volunteer to pull out ivy if I wanted. There are also lots of lovely

gardens in London, or within easy reach. Cliveden, near Slough, has always been a family favourite.

I will miss the 600 year-old oak in the field opposite, the sight of the Sugar Loaf, near Abergavenny, on a clear day and the colourful mess in front of the house that used to be my flowerbed.

So we will sit in the Square, thinking of you all bent double over your borders, watering your tomatoes, complaining about the weeds, while we relax and drink our gin and tonics without a care in the World.

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## The Marvel of Nerines

*Caroline Stone looks at the pale star of Autumn*

Tender *Nerine sarniensis* get their common name, Guernsey Lily, from the Latin name for the island due to a disproved legend that they washed up on Guernsey's beaches from a shipwreck. But how many people associate *Nerine bowdenii* with the West Country?

The bulbs have a strong connection to Devon having been discovered by a Newton Abbot man, Athelstan Cornish-Bowden, who went out to South Africa in Victorian times getting work as a surveyor. Eventually rising to become Surveyor-General of the Cape Province, he is credited for much of the lay-out of modern Cape Town. It was while he was working in the King William's Town area in the Eastern Cape in 1898 that

he came across the bulbs and sent some back to his Mother in Newton Abbot.

*Nerine* 'Athelstania' or *Nerine* 'Athelia'. The names sound so strange, but both were suggested as names for the bulb now called *Nerine bowdenii*, by his Mother,



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*Nerine bowdenii* subsp. *wellsii*

Mrs Cornish-Bowden, to Kew Gardens. She had sent a flower and some bulbs to Kew in 1902, and then in 1904 wrote again to suggest the names. Mrs Cornish-Bowden had also given Robert Veitch, of the famous Exeter nursery, some bulbs and Veitch Nurseries exhibited the bulbs without a name in 1904 gaining it an Award of Merit.

Bulbs were quite quickly circulated and grown under the name of *Nerine lucida*, and *Nerine excellens*. Eventually they were identified as being distinctly different and the name

*bowdenii* was affixed to recognise Athelstan Cornish-Bowden's role in collecting them. Although the bulbs had been reported as growing in quite inaccessible places, Athelstan sent back further collections of bulbs after the initial collection in 1898. It is now probably extinct in this form in the wild, partly due to over collection perhaps, but also due to the long periods of drought that the area has been experiencing. The subspecies *wellsii*, which has an edge to its tepal as if it has had a gathering thread run around it, is still growing in the Drakensburg Mountains.

Easy to grow so long as they are planted with the neck of the bulb above the ground, they are not fussy about soil conditions but do need to have reasonable drainage. Dig in some grit if your soil is heavy. There are

*“ Easy to grow so long as they are planted with the neck of the bulb above the ground, they are not fussy about soil conditions but do need to have reasonable drainage ”*

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many named varieties in a every shade of pink - and also white. The RHS recently ran trials with the Nerine and Amaryllid Society and gave Awards of Garden Merit to fifteen

cultivars. *Nerine bowdenii* give a wonderful splash of colour to the Autumn garden combining well with the purples, mauves and pinks of Michaelmas daisies.

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## Propagating from Hardwood Cuttings

*Iain Shaw describes his experience*

When it came to taking hardwood cuttings from hydrangeas, my grandmother had a natural gift for success. In Winter, with little else to do in the garden, she would take pencil-length cuttings from that year's healthy growth, removing soft growth at the tip, cutting at a slope just above a bud and flat at the base below a bud.



*“ Was it as easy as it looked – pushing sticks into the ground – and would a natural aptitude have passed through the generations? ”*

An empty patch in the corner of her small garden would serve as the nursery, and each cutting was submerged two-thirds into the soil. Left to largely fend for themselves until the following Autumn, a crop of healthy young

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hydrangeas would invariably result.

Armed with this piece of family history, lockdown-induced spare time and a homework task from my RHS course, I decided in early January this year to propagate from hardwood cuttings for the first time. Was it as easy as it looked – pushing sticks into the ground – and would a natural aptitude have passed through the generations?



I decided on hardwood cuttings of (obviously) hydrangea, blackcurrant, *Cornus alba* ‘Sibirica’ and privet, as well as semi-ripe cuttings of hardy *Fuschia* and *Leycesteria formosa*. It is important to take the hardwood cuttings from material that is fully ripe, with no softness at the end, at about pencil thickness. I used a sheltered corner of the vegetable garden to plant the cuttings, labelling each row. A pot of compost is an alternative and rooting hormone powder dabbed on the buried end is an option but not essential. The planted army of sticks in the corner of the garden was a satisfying, if slightly bizarre, result to the morning’s work.

Throughout the year I have weeded the

patch, watered occasionally, and fed infrequently with nettle compost tea, but largely left the cuttings alone. Now we hit Autumn it is time to dig up the saplings and appraise the results.

Sadly, the hydrangeas have been the least successful plant – I do not have a genetic gift – and in hindsight the cuttings were too soft, not ripe enough. The *Cornus* have also failed for a similar reason and cuttings were thinner than the recommended pencil. But the good news! The privet have succeeded at a great rate, and although growth to date has been slow, there are enough saplings to infill two hedges. The blackcurrants have bloomed and, along with the semi-ripe cuttings, been successful in sufficient quantities to gift to friends.



*Front Cover courtesy of Caroline Stone  
Back Cover courtesy of the editors*

[www.somersetgardenstrust.org.uk](http://www.somersetgardenstrust.org.uk)