

Somerset Gardens Trust

A member of The Gardens Trust

Issue 66

Spring 2018



Featuring

A promising new start for the
Survey Group – p.5

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From the Editors

We have survived a wet Winter to see the first signs of Spring – the snowdrops giving way to the daffodils – the beginning of the annual cycle. It has been a good time to do hard landscaping but we see that the snails are waiting in their wall crevices to spring out in warmer weather. This edition promises to make you happy. There are articles on some splendid Somerset gardens in Summer, members' useful contributions on making compost and lots of activity in the Survey Committee – now renamed the Environmental and Conservation Committee. A lot to warm mind and body in cold dark evenings. Ideas for future articles will be well received.

Christopher and Lindsay Bond
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From the Chairman

Dear Members,

Ian Clark has taken over the Chairmanship of the Survey Group (now renamed the Research and Conservation Committee (R&C)); he is a Landscape Architect by training, so well qualified for the large amount of Planning that our Trust is involved in weekly, together with Margie Hoffnung from The Gardens Trust. Here we must thank Jenny Kent who has manfully been our Planning Officer for



some time, quietly but busily working away; she has had to step down because of family commitments.

I hosted a R&C Committee meeting which Ian Clark chaired; there was a good turn out and plenty of interest shown. Since then a large group of members visited

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Somerset Heritage Centre in Taunton, where Esther Hoyle had displayed several early plans of Somerset gardens; there was one of Ston Easton Park dating from 1775. She gave us a lecture, telling us the history of the Records Office, how Somerset JP's had started one in 1617 in a side part of Wells Cathedral, how it holds records for the whole of historic Somerset and the Church records for the Diocese of Bath and Wells. The earliest record belonged to the Abbot of Glastonbury dating from 705. I think we were all fascinated. As the records are being digitized they are mostly available online.

Many of us remember Sheila Cotterell with affection; she died shortly after Christmas. She was one of the founder members of our Trust and a member of the Survey Committee as it then was. She lived at Redlynch Park, which she surveyed, until moving to Truro to be nearer her family. She joined us for some of our longer visits, I remember her in Italy and Cumbria; we will miss her.

The Events Committee under the chairmanship of Diana Hebditch has prepared an excellent programme for us this Season and I hope that there will be something of interest for everyone.

Camilla Carter

The Somerset Gardens Trust Tour of Herefordshire Gardens Monday July 9 to Thursday July 12

*Enjoy visiting some outstanding gardens in the cheerful company of your fellow members from all over Somerset
There has been a good take up – only a few places remain !*

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The new Research and Conservation Committee

Ian Clark explains a name change and a new beginning

At the last meeting of the Survey Committee it was agreed to rebrand the Committee as the Research and Conservation Committee. The new name better reflects the work of its members who as well as researching individual gardens will also be undertaking thematic research. The current themes of research are Public Gardens, Garden Nurseries, Walled Gardens and, while it is topical, Repton.

A big thanks to Helen Senior for organising a short study morning at the Somerset Heritage Centre where members were guided through the resources of the Centre by Esther Hoyle. I was particularly interested in the historic estate maps that the Centre holds.



For anyone interested in undertaking research into individual gardens an easy way to get started is to update one of the

“significant planning applications recently affecting Historic Parklands including one at Marston House and the other at Ston Easton.”

existing surveys that were done in the 1990’s. A very useful website for checking on maps is the “*Know Your Place*” West of England digital mapping heritage project www.kypwest.org.uk. It allows you to pore over historic maps and information from the comfort of your own home.

There have been a number of significant planning applications recently affecting Historic Parklands including one at Marston House and the other at Ston Easton. In both instances, we are working closely with the Gardens Trust so that our comments to planning are consistent where possible. For researchers, it is worth checking on your local planning authority website as planning applications often have Heritage Statements submitted as part of the application and these are

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prepared by specialist consultants who have pulled together up to date historic records of the sites affect. The planning records sometimes go back over ten years. If anyone is interested in learning how to comment on planning applications, I would be pleased to hear from you.

I've been liaising closely with the Parks and Gardens UK regarding digitising the SGT records. A lot of work has been going on behind the scenes to bring the old P&G UK database up to date. It is hoped that the

work will be completed by June and then will be available for us to use to update our own Trust records.

Anyone who wants to be kept up to date with news from the Research and Conservation Committee on a regular basis, please let me have your email address.

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Shell Houses and Grottoes

Sarah FitzGerald dreamt one into being in her garden

A 'Folly', by definition, implies a degree of irresponsibility and built for pleasure - our Shell House is no exception.

In about 2007 I was asked to look at the delicious Shell House at Sherborne in Dorset and it set me thinking that perhaps Peter and I could build one in our own garden. We were also much influenced by my brother-in-law who has created several marvellous follies on his own demesne in Wiltshire.

First choose your site: ours was dictated by the chosen spot having running water on three sides of it. As a result, a rather damp spot required several tons of concrete for a lasting foundation. After negotiation Peter designed the exterior and I the interior - a compromise to preserve matrimonial relations! The exterior was meant to be designed in the Turkish style- a blend of Gothic and Muslim styles, what neither of us knew till after we had finished was that

there is no such thing as a Muslim onion-dome, the style is really Eastern European and has been dubbed a 'Putin dome'. And beware of planning officers. Our application was close to refusal until we managed to establish that the planning officer had managed to visit the wrong garden!

The Sherborne Shell House was a strong influence on the interior design, but it was freely interpreted and depended much on

“there is no such thing as a Muslim onion-dome, the style is really Eastern European and has been dubbed a ‘Putin dome’”

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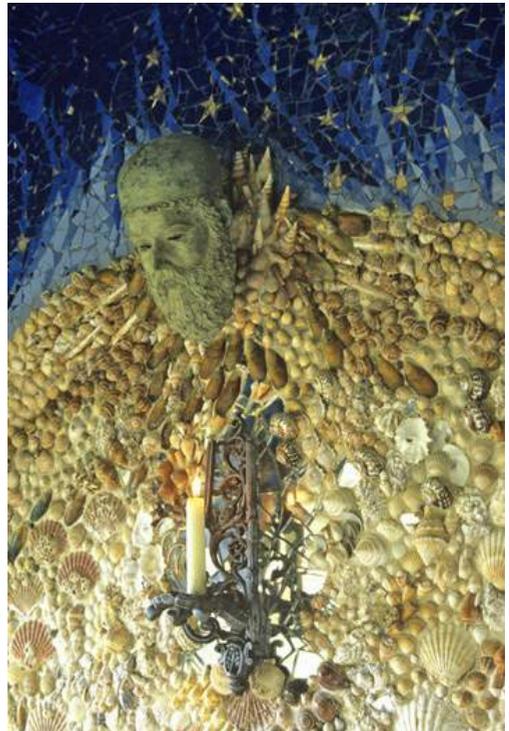
The Editors met Candace Bahouth in her brightly decorated old cottage in Pilton; completely tucked away, you would not imagine the treasures hidden within. An inspirational artist, Candace covers all surfaces with shells, broken china, or indeed anything she finds and likes. The commissions vary in size from large and complex (one shell grotto took 9 months) to small, but never simple.

She does little advance planning, and will start at the bottom of her chosen surface - wood, vertical walls of cement, plaster, stone, mirror - and work upwards to avoid

the supply of shells available at the time, often donated from shoe-boxes resting on top of bedroom cupboards. I owe several confessions: the roof is not made of lead as we would hope you believe; The shell adhesive is modern shell grout mixed with dye and the internal ribs of the roof are made of foam rubber pipe lagging.

A folly should have no real purpose but whenever we open the garden I notice that most of our visitors dwell in it. Our daughters like to retire to it when the pub closes and it is an ideal venue for reading the Sunday papers, playing bridge and drinking white wine cooled in the running stream.

Candace Bahouth explains how they are made.....



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the shells falling. All shells are filled with cement but “*you have to take care not to spill any on the outside of the shell since it sticks*”. She only works on a small section at a time (as the cement dries quickly), but matches both sides roughly. “*It seems to come as second nature.*” She likes to create drama by placing the largest or most colourful shells such as scallops in key positions. Heavy shells need drilling to fix them securely, but once up they are very resilient and do not require much maintenance. The details can sometimes be

difficult, but she “*loves every moment*” of her individual creations. Candace gets her inspiration from many sources; her garden, old ceramics and nature.

Candace also produces wonderful and quirky shell encrusted shoes and mirrors, and many other treasures. She has an important exhibition of her mosaic pieces at the Victoria Art Gallery in Bath on the theme of “Flowers” from May to September. Websites - candacebahouth.com and mosaicbahouth.com

Milton Lodge, Wells

Simon Tudway Quilter writes about his family garden

We, as a family, came to live at Milton Lodge at the end of the 1950’s. My Father, David Tudway Quilter, one of the founder members of the Somerset Gardens Trust and erstwhile Chairman, had inherited the house and garden from his bachelor uncle whose own father – so my Great-Grandfather – had moved his family from their mansion home in the Liberty (now the main building of Wells Cathedral School) effectively downsizing to Milton Lodge, at the beginning of the 1900s. This was where the garden was conceived, the terrace structures built and the yew hedges planted.

The garden lay derelict for twelve years after the Second World War and so the necessary clearing and replanting began. It took my parents eight years to achieve the complete transformation which they wanted, albeit they opened under the

National Garden Scheme first in 1962. My Father died in 2006, by which time I had come back to live at Milton Lodge. For me, my Father had an innate gift for successfully blending heights and colours and he became a proficient plantsman. He also loved trees as evidenced by the small arboretum at Milton Lodge, as well as in the Combe, the old woodland garden which he transformed latterly on the far side of the Old Bristol Road.

I am first to admit that I am not the gardener that my Father was, but I feel privileged and fortunate indeed to be living

“my Father had an innate gift for successfully blending heights and colours and he became a proficient plantsman.”

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at Milton Lodge – capitalising as it does on the remarkable views of Wells Cathedral and the Vale of Avalon – as the current custodian until the next generation. The architectural terraces are the main feature of the garden; we continue to replace and replant as necessary to suit the alkaline soil, and we will consolidate (rather than expand) within the existing four acre site now that we are listed as Grade II within

the Historic Parks and Gardens Register.

Spring approaches – an ever-inspiring time – and we will again look forward to welcoming visitors over a six month period when hopefully there will always be something to see; in particular the natural wildflower meadow (April-May), the long Rose Border (May-June), the Central Terrace (June-August), the Bottom Border (August-September), followed perhaps by a stop in the Stables Courtyard for tea with my Mother. She too loves the garden and its surrounding landscape as it has been so much part of her life.

miltonlodgegardens.co.uk for further information.

Growing Heritage Vegetables, the why's and wherefore's

Chris Smith of Pennard Nurseries on why and how to do it

What is a 'Heritage Vegetable' and why should I grow them in preference to

modern day varieties? This is a question so often asked and so very complicated to answer as there are so many reasons. Initial thoughts would say modern varieties must be more prolific, more disease resistant and easier to grow; however one can counteract that by the answer that the heritage varieties have been around for

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such a long time they would not have survived unless they were disease resistant, easy to grow (after all these older varieties were bred for the home gardener, not mass

“the heritage types crop over a long season giving ‘little and often’ pickings”

production), and prolific? Many of the older varieties had dual uses too, take beans, many could be eaten fresh or dried for use in Winter. Most of the modern F1 types are bred to crop all at one time whereas the heritage types crop over a long season giving ‘little and often’ pickings, something so much better in the home garden.

However, the best thing about the Heritage varieties is FLAVOUR! Taste any supermarket tomato (things are improving) and they will have little to no taste, compare that with ‘Black Russian’ (1850’s) or ‘Cherokee Smokey Purple’ (1890), or ‘Livingston’s Golden Queen’ (1882), not only do they have great flavour, but they have thin skins as well. Herein lies the problem, these Heritage types will not travel, they are grown to be picked, taken to the kitchen and eaten, not to suffer the ravages of transportation half way around the Globe.

The next reason for growing them is to maintain biodiversity. Growing a very limited number of varieties can be very dangerous if pests or diseases are present. The wider the range grown, the less likely

it is that you will lose a crop due to pests or diseases. In Peru for example they never grow one variety of potato in a field, they always grow a selection of varieties exactly on this premise. Loss of varieties can also mean loss of disease resistance which had not been previously noticed.



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Heritage (or Heirloom) varieties are always open-pollinated meaning you can keep your own seed from year to year (certain crops must be isolated to prevent insect cross pollination), they are usually pre-1950's, although this is not always the case. Many varieties have disappeared since the 1970's because of EU seed regulations requiring that all vegetable seed varieties had to be listed on a

'National List', the cost of which made maintaining some varieties uneconomic.

Heritage varieties are just as easy, (some might say easier) to grow, as modern F1 Hybrid varieties for which the seed is so much more expensive. They have flavour, colour (Heirloom carrots can be red, white, yellow, purple or even orange), and you are helping to keep a little bit of our horticultural heritage alive by growing them.

Members' Forum

What's in my Compost?

Cicely Taylor looks beyond her Compost Heap

The best thing about our compost heap is the view beyond it. When I have staggered up the hill lugging a bucket of apple peelings, I pause for breath and look out

over the fields and across the Bristol Channel. On a clear day, I can see the Black Mountains, sometimes with snow, and on an even clearer day, Skirrid, the mountain above Abergavenny.

We made the compost container out of two old doors, with removable slats in the front. It sits in rather a stupid place under a beech tree where it hardly gets any rain or sun. It is divided into two of course – one being filled up now, and last year's covered with an old bit of carpet. Once I have picked out the fallen twigs and beech leaves, and dug into last year's heap, I am always amazed that almost everything has rotted down into delicious crumbly compost. Sometimes there is a bonus, like a favourite kitchen knife, or the odd coin, but it is depressing to come across bits of sweet-wrappings or milk bottle tops completely unbiodegraded. We had a surprise this year when several courgette plants appeared in the flower beds. The seeds could only have come from the compost.

“Sometimes there is a bonus, like a favourite kitchen knife, or the odd coin, but it is depressing to come across bits of sweet-wrappings or milk bottle tops”

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Jean Hunter creates leaf mould in a town garden.....

I came, as part of ‘downsizing’ from a two acre, country garden with large compost heaps, to a small, paved town garden. I brought with me a rotary compost panel, and inherited a box which leans against the side of a shed. There is no grass and the main thing I am interested in is leaf mould, as there two trees at the bottom of the garden, a dark leaved *Prunus* and a Crab Apple, both with small leaves. Those which are surplus to my compost makers are packed into black plastic bags and hidden between the tree trunks and the surrounding wall until after a year or so when the contents are added to the soil in the beds.



One complication to the leaf collection is the huge plane leaves which are blown into every corner of the garden from across the road, and which have to be collected

separately and taken to the dump, as they do not break down quickly. Most of the herbaceous material also goes to the dump, as do the pruning of shrubs; green vegetable waste (eg outside of sprouts) does go into compost bins. The barrel should be turned regularly!

Richard Chandler explains how delay benefits growing courgettes.....

I am well aware that my compost-heaps are unscientifically constructed, in short, very amateur. I have seen the real thing, top of the compost-market, at Greencombe under the aegis of the late Joan Loraine. Anyway, here goes: lawn-mowings in profusion, all vegetable matter from our kitchen except potatoes, Autumn leaves by the boatload, prunings from shrubs, fallen twigs and minor branches, a layer of (horse, generally) manure on top to bed all the above down. I am too lazy to turn this over from time to time. There are two heaps, largish (say 2.5 – 3 metres long x 1.75 wide, height variable), and I can afford to let the older heap mature for two or three years or more – meanwhile very useful for Butternut Squash/Courgette/ Cucumber, especially the heap adjoining a South

wall. Aerobic or anaerobic? Answer, a bit of both/neither! I did tell you I was unscientific. I do not put any weeds in, not even annuals, nor of course anything that

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“meanwhile very useful for Butternut Squash/ Courgette/ Cucumber, especially the heap adjoining a South wall.”

might attract rats, always the opportunists, such as meat or bread or cheese. A propos of leaves: I find late Autumn mowings of lawns covered with fallen dry leaves particularly useful, the leaves mixing well and leavening the subsequent tendency of the grass to go mushy in slabs; indeed I have just been performing such a task earlier today before writing this piece! Happy composting to all and sundry!

And the professional approach to potting compost for Alpines by Paul Cumbleton

Talking now about potting compost rather than garden compost, I grow many potted bulbs and like to use a loam-based compost i.e. a John Innes (JI) type as the basis, adding grit for extra drainage. However, it is almost impossible (for amateur gardeners) to find a decent quality

JI compost. (Such complaints are hardly new – growers were making the same comment over 40 years ago!). Thin, sandy loams in small amounts, too much organic content of dubious quality, poor drainage and no consistency from batch to batch are just some of the problems with the commercial offerings. To regain control and consistency I now make my own JI using Cricket Loam for the soil fraction. Sold for repairing cricket wickets, this loam is available in several versions. I



use the Boughton Mendip Cricket Loam. Critically, you get a published specification and consistency from batch to batch. Consistency is so important as you need to understand how a mix is going to perform in order to manage it correctly. Otherwise it is a new learning experience with every bag and you risk potting precious plants into an unknown mix that you have no idea if they will like.

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Events for 2018

In the bicentenary year of Humphry Repton's death, we have three opportunities to hear a talk about different aspects of his work. Depending on when this comes in the post, there is

- On Tuesday 27 February, Dr Laura Mayer's talk entitled "*All Around Is Fairy Ground: Repton & the Regency Garden*"
- On Thursday 15 March Stephen Daniels' subject is "*Revealing Repton: Approaches to the Art of Landscape Gardening*"
- On Wednesday 13 June John Phibbs' talk is "*Humphry Repton, Making Nature Natural*" at Ston Easton, Somerset's only Repton Garden.

recording of historic landscapes, on which parkland plans and conservation management plans are now based. He is a

"we have three opportunities to hear a talk about different aspects of his work"

specialist advisor to the National Trust, and serves on the Design Review Panel of the Georgian Group, which has a statutory role in the conservation and preservation of Georgian houses and landscapes.

Also in Somerset we are able to visit Halswell House and Mill Wood to see the extensive restoration work undertaken to restore the 18th century pleasure gardens, which are situated about half a mile to the

John is a leading authority on the landscapes of Capability Brown and Humphry Repton. His gazetteer of sites attributed to Repton is regarded as authoritative and was published with Professor Stephen Daniels' *Humphry Repton*. John Phibbs, the principal of Debois Landscape Survey Group, began his professional career with the National Trust at Wimpole Hall and in so doing laid the foundations for the



The restored Temple of Harmony, Halswell Park, January 2016. (© Halswell House)

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*“a mystical place of
Druids’ huts, waterfalls,
bridges, mock ruins and
classical temples
scattered around its five
lakes”*

west of the house. They were once described as a mystical place of Druids’ huts, waterfalls, bridges, mock ruins and classical temples scattered around its five

lakes. Edward Strachan, the owner, will host our visit.

Full details are in the programme sent out in mid-January.

Please do let us know if you would like to receive information solely by email. We will always endeavour to get the information to you in the form you have requested.

Hoping for some good SGT weather when we visit these gardens.

Diana Henditch

Event Committee Chairman

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Repton’s designs for Pentillie Castle, Cornwall

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Welcome to Coombe House Gardens, Glastonbury

Alan Gloak MBE explains why you should visit

The garden was designed and planted by Colin Wells-Brown (1926-2013) and it was hardscaped during the Winter of 1992.

“This involved changing the ground levels in almost all the flower garden area, and whilst the perimeter walls are old, all the ‘retaining’ walls, the terraces and the steps within the area are new” - the first paragraph of a leaflet we printed way back in the mid 90’s when we first opened our garden for the NGS.

The landscaping and creation of new beds still goes on. A garden is a living entity and we enjoy opening new vistas and planting new beds. Colin may have gone but I have a great gardener, self-taught, in George - someone I could not do without.

A hot sunny afternoon, on our first opening, no idea really what we were doing, but 523 people came, tea by the gallon, cake by the ton, later we knew. However regardless of

what we had been told there was no damage and we opened the gardens many times after that.

Planting had begun in March 1993 in what was by then a virtually barren site of bare soil and muddy puddles. Apart from four trees, two shrubs and a laurel hedge, everything was planted within the last 24 years. The growth has been remarkable, and the garden is now mature. The planting is such that there is always, somewhere in the garden, something in flower, from the heady scent of the box early in January to the last of the Geraniums in December; colour is always present.



A visit is recommended. We will always be pleased to let you look round a typical English garden, mixed beds, pools, shrubs, semi-wild bantams, who always seem hungry, the garden reflects Somerset. We have water and apples - two vital



“Dahlia beds, Peonies in the early Summer, kitchen garden orchards, mown paths, a jungle and so much more”

ingredients for a Somerset garden. We have formal and very informal beds, old walls, Dahlia beds, Peonies in the early Summer,

kitchen garden orchards, mown paths, a jungle and so much more.

We are a working garden, if you call we are happy to walk round with you, views from two terraces, the kitchen garden sometimes looking very neat, not at other times - take your choice. Plums in pots, grapes on a wall, loganberries likewise, the kitchen garden is a scrumper’s delight and long may it remain so.

If you have access to a computer then “YouTube” Coombe House Garden - it is worth a look. I do hope to see you.

The Man Who Planted Trees

Stuart Senior on chattering trees.....

I’ve been planting trees for some ten years in my four acres of Somerset. Starting out as a dendrological virgin I’ve learned a few things on the way and if I had the opportunity to start again I’d do a few things differently. So, in this article I’ll share some of the key messages.

Forget global warming, it’s all about climate change

Ten years ago, *The Garden* magazine was encouraging us to embrace Mediterranean planting because mean temperatures were sure to rise. Looking back on the -15°C of 2010 I now know that planting almonds and North American paw-paws (*Asimina triloba*) was a bad call. What we see nowadays is much greater variability in our weather, rain and wind especially, and hindsight says I should have made more

use of expendable nursery trees to give greater protection to some of my rare ornamentals.

“Before Christmas I lost half of a mulberry swept away by gale force south-westerlies because I hadn’t dealt with it as an infant”

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Bad planting technique kills trees; some sooner, some later

I follow the Kew protocol learned first-hand from Tony Kirkham, Head of the Arboretum (see picture). It continues to amaze me how many contemporary articles continue to promote discredited practice: for example, round rather than square planting pits, deep pits full of organic matter rather than shallow pits to keep the hypocotyl clear of the earth etc.

Even the best nurseries get it wrong

Imagine my surprise when a sweet chestnut turned out to be an unknown ornamental *Prunus* (very attractive but hardly edible) and when a ‘Sunset’ apple turned out to be nothing of the sort. These were both bought bare root and you are entirely reliant on the nursery getting its labelling correct. Buying a specimen in leaf/flower/fruit would reduce the risk but is not always possible. Be prepared for surprises!

Sir Harold Hillier didn’t do it, but I do

The subject here is formative pruning: apparently Sir Harold was inclined to let nature take its course. While formative pruning goes without saying for cordoned and espaliered fruit, ornamentals also need a watchful eye. For example, I’ve been reasonably good at avoiding compression forks: it takes a bit of courage to remove one of two competing shoots but, with the exception of some naturally multi-stem species such as *Betula*, it must be done.



Before Christmas I lost half of a mulberry (*Morus alba x rubra*), swept away by gale force south-westerlies because I hadn’t dealt with it as an infant.

Arboretum best practice 2018

The tendency nowadays for new or re-designed arboreta is to adopt a continental zoning technique: for example, having an area devoted to, say, Chinese specimens. This gives a much better appreciation of their companions in the wild and eases the language difficulties. We now know that plants talk to each other but a Chinese *Heptacodium miconioides* might not have too much to say to the *Corokia x virgata* ‘Red Wonder’ from New Zealand which is planted next to it. A *Tilia henryana* might make a more loquacious neighbour. You won’t believe the amount of chatter in my next arboretum!

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The Gardens Trust Conference 2017

Helen Senior enjoyed it

Plymouth showed us its best and its worst sides, weather-wise, for the Gardens Trust Conference, held at the University last year. The overall theme of the Conference, which was titled “*Blest Elysium - sustainable?*” was the future of designed landscapes amid the various pressures which are acting on our historic parks and gardens.

After our welcome by the Chairman of the Devon Gardens Trust, Dianne Long, who were hosting the event, we heard first an overview of garden history and Devon from Dr Todd Gray, a hugely knowledgeable historian of the County. This was followed by a talk on the Designed Landscape of Mount Edgumbe by Dr Kate Felus, and an introduction to the History and Restoration of Drakes Place - once the terminus of the aqueduct which brought water into Plymouth, now converted into a small public garden. After this we walked up to Drakes Place, which is close to the University, and had a buffet supper in the Cafe there.

On the Friday morning we heard a presentation of four papers by the New Research Symposium, reminding us that The Gardens Trust is the main forum for publishing research into garden history. We then piled into coaches to go down to the Barbican where we embarked onto a boat for a tour of the harbour. The weather was glorious, and our guide was excellent,



pointing out points of interest along the way.

We disembarked at Mount Edgumbe and had a tour of the gardens in the company of members of the Friends and other experts. We stayed there for a discussion on the subject “*Blest Elysium - sustainable?*” chaired by Dominic Cole MBE, with contributions from Kim Auston of Historic England, Shaun Kiddell, Parks Policy Adviser at Heritage Lottery, and Ian Wright, Garden Adviser for the National Trust in the South-West and Wales.

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“Endsleigh, now a hotel, but with a breathtakingly beautiful garden designed by Humphry Repton”

On Saturday morning the weather continued fine. We went first to Saltram, a National Trust property very close to the city, facing problems of increasing development on all sides. The tour was led by Judith Teasdale and National Trust volunteers. After lunch we moved onto Devonport Park, a smallish urban park which was at one time rather run down, but in recent years has been rescued and redeveloped into a very successful park in

an area which badly needs such a facility. In the evening we had a walk on the Hoe followed by dinner in the magnificent Plymouth Guildhall. On Sunday the weather changed, and a number of wet and bedraggled, but still enthusiastic, delegates could be seen walking around Ford Park Cemetery in the pouring rain.

This is a Victorian cemetery with many interesting features, including a very fine chapel. Our final visit was to Endsleigh, now a hotel, but with a breathtakingly beautiful garden designed by Humphry Repton.

Thanks are due to the Devon Gardens Trust, which hosted the Conference with enormous efficiency, provided a varied and interesting programme and a magnificent and scholarly set of conference papers to accompany our visits.

Humphry Repton's Memoirs - edited by Ann Gore and George Carter Published Michael Russell (Publishing) Ltd. 2005. ISBN 0 85955 295 0

*Anthony Pugh-Thomas reviews a
fascinating autobiography*

Humphry Repton came late to landscape design. This Memoir records his encounters with public and private garden owners, and his professional relationships with architects, such as John Nash, Sir John Soane and the Wyatt brothers. What it will not tell you is how he planned his improvements and prepared his Red Books; but the anecdotes of his clients and its picture of contemporary Society are hugely enjoyable.

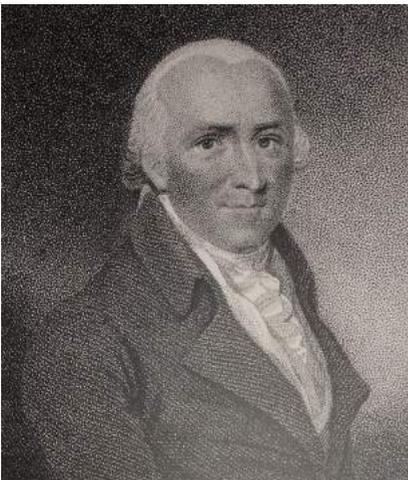
Repton was a personable young man when, *“at the age of 36 years I commenced a new career.”* Confident that he *“was gifted with a peculiar faculty”* for seeing almost immediately how a landscape *“might be improved”*. His descriptions of his clients' personalities and appearances are part of the charm of the Memoir. Lady Salusbury, one of his first clients, was *“dressed in the richest brocade with treble ruffles of costly lace.”* She was *“then residing in a magnificent mansion in Upper Harley Street,”* and had recently bought an estate at Brondesbury. Repton's Red Book of March 1789 showing 'before' and 'after' was the first to be bound.

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Throughout the book there are vivid portraits, – of the Duke of Portland at Bulstrode, whose affection for children led to his employing “*fifty children furnished with little spades and wheelbarrows*” and for whom a special mild beer was brewed for their refreshment. Of Henry Addington, Speaker of the House of Commons, and William Pitt, Prime Minister, who displayed “*a degree of cheerfulness and lightness in his manner, which no-one could suppose from his natural formality and stateliness of person.*”

Not all clients were aristocrats. One who was particularly valued was a Mr Walker who, with his wife were, “*a couple on whom the Wheel of Fortune had profusely showered gifts,*” and who staged an annual Masquerade, tickets for which were highly sought after, and to which Repton went dressed as a Dutch Burgomaster (and talked in Dutch to the Prince of Orange), with one son as a Greek slave and another as a Man from the Moon.



“Repton went dressed as a Dutch Burgomaster (and talked in Dutch to the Prince of Orange), with one son as a Greek slave and another as a Man from the Moon”

Repton had unhappy dealings with Nash but a better relationship with the Wyatts. He admired Sir John Soane (although that did not appear to be reciprocated), and his response to the attacks on himself and on Capability Brown by Richard Payne Knight and Uvedale Price, the proponents of the Picturesque, interested King George III who instructed Lord Harcourt “*to tell you, that in the controversy between you and Mr Price, His Majesty’s opinion entirely coincides with yours*”.

To complete the Memoir, Repton records his dealings with the Prince Regent at the Brighton Pavilion. These started inauspiciously when he did not realise that the request for a meeting “*as soon as I conveniently could*” really meant immediately. Subsequently, however, they prospered, when he found that the Prince had a “*similarity of tastes*” that gave him confidence in his plans. Sadly however they ultimately came to nought because there was, “*no prospect of any advance from HRH’s Treasurer.*”



The Old Hall, Cow Square, Somerton

Mary Stirling on how to make the most of your luck

Cow Square was once the site of the cattle market, and is still a green space at the junction of several roads in the old part of Somerton. Since then the whole area has become gentrified, prompted by the break-up of the Ilchester Estate in the early nineteenth century. Cow Square, now empty of livestock, is a circle of grass enclosed by a formal clipped yew hedge, and the single ancient *Prunus* tree, we found on arrival has now had to be replaced by a Liquidamber which provides a blaze of Autumn colour. We decided that the walled garden behind the Old Hall would be ideal for us hands-on down-sizing oldies, and there were many fine features and good plants to form the basis of the sort of garden we enjoy – open lawn, a few trees, flowery borders, paved terraces, outhouses, a nice view – and it's a lovely place to relax in.

We brought a certain amount of plant life with us, to make us feel at home, blissfully unaware that large-scale plants which sat well in a country setting can very quickly overwhelm a

town garden. Over the years we have had to offload some of these onto an obliging neighbour with a much larger garden. We said goodbye to 'Bill Mackenzie', the yellow *Clematis* which shares its name with a cousin of ours and quickly took possession of a whole wall, likewise the dreaded 'American Pillar' (anathema to Christopher Lloyd and many others but beloved by us). The once far-distant clump of pampas grass (after which we had christened one of our labradors) could no longer be set on fire each Autumn and its tall plumes still wave gaily above its hostile leaves - but in the Old Vicarage garden.

We had always planned to enjoy our lovely garden in our leisurely old age – and we did, thanks to a little bit of extra help with the heavy stuff. There is easy access





“We had always planned to enjoy our lovely garden in our leisurely old age – and we did, thanks to a little bit of extra help with the heavy stuff”

through side doors as well as French windows, and there are several paved areas and a sun room in which to sit and relax. We extended the paved area at the rear of the house and planted a vigorous ‘Bobby James’ rose against a wall of the house next door, with clusters of out of reach white flowers, and in the bed beneath it, a *Carpentaria* bush with flat white flowers and yellow stamens, was here when we came.

Teaching Garden History in Schools

Sheila Rabson on an important question

Some years ago when I was walking through the Botanic Garden in Cambridge, I became fascinated by one particular bed. It had been planted with well-known plants in the order of their introduction into Great Britain. It was not a bed of beauty and had some vegetables mixed in with both garden and wild flowers. Plants that we think of as being native were, in fact, introductions.

The house and garden have very recently been transformed by the carefully considered and Council-approved felling of a huge *Magnolia grandiflora* which was planted as a shrub without living memory by a previous owner but quickly grew into a forest tree with 4 metre long roots tearing up lawn and paving all around the massive trunk, and heading for the wall. Now that it’s gone, light and air flood in, and there will be no more uncompostable leathery leaves to rake up all year round. The long shady herbaceous border that was home to *Hellebores* is now in full sun and will have to be re-thought as my next project, which may well involve a big heave-ho from elsewhere in the garden. The *Magnolia stellata* tree in the island bed, and a huge dark red Norwegian Maple at the far end, create pools of dappled shade, but I’ve blown my cover where we sit near the house for outside eating, and if we have any good Summers I shall have to rely on parasols!

Under the National Curriculum, junior schools are required to a) study the topic of the Romans and b) have the opportunity for horticulture. Hopefully this article will provide some food for thought.

The Romans brought olives with them to eat but found our climate too cold and wet for them to grow successfully and fruit. Climate change does now allow us to grow modern varieties although we do not have many olive processing plants as yet. We are much better suited to growing cherries and plums which they also brought.



The Garden Fresco in the Villa di Livia, nr Rome

Clearing out Roman wells shows that they also brought box trees with them and it is thought that they had some sort of religious purpose. Box trees were also used to surround growing areas – much as in a potager today.

Our vegetable range was considerably increased by the seeds they must have brought. It is known that they gave us onions, shallots, garlic, leeks, cabbages, peas, celery, turnips, radishes and asparagus. Wild fennel was known to grow in Britain but the Romans used the seeds, along with celery and dill, in preparing and flavouring their food.

The Romans brought apothecaries with their armies as they went on their travels. Evidence has been found of phials and curative potions to help deal with medical problems. There is also some written evidence to show how they used some of

the plants they had brought with them and those they were now growing. Fennel seed are recorded as being good to sweeten the breath and would also aid one's digestion. Greater celandine, much less common than the lesser form, was used to cure warts and corns on the foot. The latter would have been a real problem for a marching soldier.

Not all the plants the Romans brought us are considered good or useful these days. Ground elder is one plant I can imagine that most of us would have wished they had left at home! They grew it as a pot herb and used its leaves like a form of spinach or Swiss chard. A broken pot may have let this weed escape; the following year, the Romans may have moved on to

“they [the Romans] gave us onions, shallots, garlic, leeks, cabbages, peas, celery, turnips, radishes and asparagus”

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another area leaving ground elder to spread its roots and take over untended gardens.

Some of the villas in both Italy and Great Britain had floors and frescoes which showed gardens of the time. Certain exotic plants were left behind in Italy and yet they appear in local villa floors e.g. pomegranates. Was this an artist thinking of home (or his stomach) as he did the floor design? Looking at frescoes allows us to see how some of the gardens may have looked on the ground. Dining rooms were

often painted with edible fruits and vegetables on the walls. It is somewhat ironic that most of the dye stuff would have come from the same fruits and vegetables they were depicting.

The Romans brought the good and the bad to Britain but I hope this will give teachers a new approach to this topic. It would be good to see some Roman gardens being recreated in a school and you could eat from it as well!

A new *Quercetum*

James Harris on a bold experiment

It is our vision that when the years roll on and you reach your eighties you do not downsize or retire, but that you have projects. To realise this we took back from our tenant farmer an area of land to add to our garden. We decided to plant out a collection of oaks. Our soil is very alkaline, with a pH of 7.6 to 7.8. It is good, fertile, heavy soil – not clay, and it lies on a layer of limestone. It is not known how compatible many

“For example, will the American oaks grow on our soil?”

species of oak are with different soil types. For example, will the American oaks grow on our soil? Some of the soil in America is neutral to acid and they have a continental climate, cold in



Quercus pubescens



List of Quercus (oaks)

<i>Q. acutissima</i>	<i>Q. lobata</i>
<i>Q. agrifolia</i>	<i>Q. mongolica</i>
<i>Q. aliena</i>	<i>Q. muehlenbergii</i>
<i>Q. aucheri</i>	<i>Q. ogiethorpensis</i>
<i>Q. berberidifolia</i>	<i>Q. petraea</i>
<i>Q.x bushii</i>	<i>Q. polymorpho</i>
<i>Q. cerris</i>	<i>Q. pubescens</i>
<i>Q. chenii</i>	<i>Q. robur 'Cristata'</i>
<i>Q. chrysolepis</i>	<i>Q. robur 'Purpurea'</i>
<i>Q. coccifera</i>	<i>Q. rotundifolia</i>
<i>Q. dolicholepis</i>	<i>Q.x runcinata</i>
<i>Q. durata</i>	<i>Q. rysophylla</i>
<i>Q. elipsoidalis</i>	<i>Q. sadleriana</i>
<i>Q. gambelii</i>	<i>Q. serrata</i>
<i>Q. frainetto</i>	<i>Q. suber</i>

Winter, hot in Summer. We have a maritime climate with many cloudy days in Winter, which may be a factor. Thus this is a scientific experiment.

We started with planting at the end of March 2017, 48 oaks, some of which are shrub oaks or dwarf shrubby oaks. A few other trees were included to provide variety. A list of trees is shown alongside. After planting we experienced dry weather and all trees were kept well watered. They have settled down well and many species have shown good Lammas (late Summer) growth. Nonetheless, it will be two or three years before one can really tell whether the project is a success. The progress of the planting will be closely monitored and annual reports given.

Leaving East Burford House Garden, Pilton

The Editors

After 27 years of developing the old walled kitchen garden and pasture into a 3 acre garden, here are some wonders and some 'no regrets' about leaving it.

Ten Wonders

- Walking around the half acre pond we dug at sunset with the dog
- The maturing wild garden with cut grass paths between the low trees

- The fun of collecting shells from the seaside for our pond pier and beach
- The evening when SGT members visited us improved by David Freeman's 'Somerset Mist'
- The mirroring in the pond of the red Chinese Pagoda over the purple loosestrife
- The serendipity of the door we cut into the courtyard garden emerging through the potting shed into the wild garden
- The glory of the wisteria scent from the red scaffold pergola in a late May evening



- Opening the garden for the NGS when it swallowed up 600 people over 2 days and raised thousands
- Sitting in the Pavilion in the Courtyard hearing the water flow through the Persian Garden
- Watching the red rumps of Greater Spotted Woodpeckers at the Bird Table

Ten No Regrets

- Losing the annual battle against the bindweed in the herbaceous border
- Failing to water proof the pond so its level rose and fell six feet depending on the rain



- The slimy algae in the Canal we built in the Walled Garden
- Creating surface pits in the hard tennis court on removing the moss
- Facing South we had no sunsets
- Pruning the tall shrubs that ladders found difficult to reach

“Sitting in the Pavilion in the Courtyard hearing the water flow through the Persian Garden”

- The spiky trifid branches of the loganberry bushes
- Seeing the slugs eat some wonderful and expensive lily bulbs
- The magpies eating the young ducklings year on year

•My annual very muddy visits to the island in the pond to cut back the willow and hazel

Future

We moved to a much smaller garden in central Wells in July. It has a large walled garden for the dog (and us), a yew Maze that used to take up half the garden, a Cathedral view and few flowers. We have also kept 4 acres of Woodland which we plan to make into a sculpture garden wood.

There will be 14 clearings, a day cabin with compost toilet and a 25 mile view over the Levels from top of Mendip to Hinkley Point. Members must come and see the results of the experiment of growing garden plants in woodland when it matures (combatting deer, rabbits and shallow topsoil). We even have a flagpole if only we could decide what flag to fly – ideas welcome!

Events for 2016

Wednesday 21st February

An early visit to see carpets of snowdrops at Camerton Court

Tuesday 27th February

We have been invited to join Devon Gardens Trust in Exeter to hear Dr Laura Mayer's talk entitled "*All Around Is Fairy Ground: Repton & the Regency Garden*"

Thursday 15th March

"Revealing Repton: Approaches to the Art of Landscape Gardening"
A talk by Stephen Daniels at the Museum of Bath Architecture

Thursday 26th April

We have invited Devon Gardens Trust to join us to see the considerable restoration work undertaken at Mill Wood, Halswell

Thursday 24th May

Kiftsgate Court and Daglingworth House
A coach trip to two splendid Gloucestershire gardens

Wednesday 13th June

A visit to Somerset's only Repton Garden at Ston Easton. A tour of the garden and a talk by renowned garden historian John Pibbs entitled "*Humphry Repton, making Nature natural*"

Thursday 28th June

Hainbury Mill Farm Ilchester
A beautiful garden by the River Yeo with its own hydroelectric plant

Monday 9th to Thursday 12th April

A tour of some of the wonderful Herefordshire Gardens

Monday 3rd September

A visit to enjoy the extensive gardens at Stoberry House with views overlooking Wells, and the AGM

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