

# Somerset Gardens Trust

A member of The Gardens Trust

Issue 80

## SPRING 2022

SUMMER

AUTUMN

WINTER

Somerset Gardens Trust  
A member of The Gardens Trust  
SPRING 2021

Featuring  
Slope Garden Opportunities – p.4

*Featuring*

A tribute to Christopher Bond – p.2

# The Somerset Gardens Trust



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## A tribute to Christopher Bond

It is with great sadness that we share the news that Christopher Bond passed away on Monday 7th March. He was the brilliant editor of our magazine which I know many members have enjoyed. This is his final edition, which I have completed and I hope you enjoy the articles he had commissioned.

Christopher was an energetic and enthusiastic member of the Trust. He served on Council, bringing many new ideas. We will miss his insight and knowledge greatly.

Many of you will have been asked by Christopher to write an article and on a wide range of subjects His boundless enthusiasm has brought us powerful articles on

how gardening improves mental health, horticultural subjects from the first lawnmower 150 years ago to disposing of plastic pots and making compost. There have been inspiring articles on private Somerset gardens to be celebrated as well as gardens further afield. Many of us have our favourite ones. Do you remember the “swoe” being voted members’ favourite garden implement?

During the pandemic, Christopher came up trumps and the magazine became our principal form of communication during lockdowns. There was a special additional Winter edition of 24 articles with 32 contributors to cheer us up over the sad

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Christmas, and the expanded Spring edition nearly matched these numbers. He wrote "Members have responded helpfully by proposing many contributions and photographs unasked. Long may this enthusiasm for writing for the Magazine continue."

Some of the thoughts which SGT members have shared with me are:

*"Christopher will be missed enormously - his knowledge and curiosity made him a delightful companion on SGT trips, as well as being a creative editor of the magazine."*

*"Christopher was so bright and up together with excellent ideas and suggestions and researched everything thoroughly. The SGT magazine was*

*also put together in a very a professional way."*

*"He was such an energetic man with many wide-ranging interests and enthusiasms, and will be much missed by many people."*

*"Christopher was a great asset to the Trust and will be missed."*

As with many such folk, he had a wide range of interests and activities especially in Wells where he and Lindsay moved some four years ago. Christopher will be sadly missed by everyone he knew and cared for. There are many.

Diana Hebditch  
Chairman

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## From the Chairman

The gardening season is well under way, and work is being done in the vegetable plot and the flower garden. It is time to take stock of what we want in our garden, what needs to be improved and what can perhaps not have as much attention. So we must with the Garden Trust.

First the positives. We are making great progress with our website. Its construction is well advanced and we hope you will like the clear revised format, illustrated with beautiful pictures of Somerset gardens. The aim is to promote Somerset Gardens Trust and attract new members.

Encouraging and supporting schools with their gardening projects has been a key part

of our work. Sheila Rabson has got the ball rolling once again and has 2 new committee members on board. Already this year, they have awarded five grants across the county: for sensory and bee friendly plants, plugs to improve a wild flower meadow as well as tools and equipment for an eco-club.

Grants for research are also in our remit. Later in this edition you will see an article on Montacute from Jenny Langford– and be able to read her dissertation in full on the website. It has been good to be able to support one of our members in her research.

We are also looking into how we can preserve our survey data for future reference. Much of it needs to be digitised and how

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## What does our Somerset Gardens Trust charity do?

- awards grants to schools for establishing gardens as an educational resource;
- awards bursaries to horticultural students to develop practical skills in the protection, conservation and re-creation of garden landscapes;
- offers advice and awards grants to garden owners for the restoration of designed landscapes in Somerset which are of historical importance

to store it and where is something we are actively addressing.

Your small and hard-working Events Committee have put together a varied programme of Events. There is an additional visit to Holcombe Court. Now the negatives. To achieve what we want to do relies on active members to volunteer. We need new members of **Council** to help guide the Trust forward, to challenge and to bring their skills to our discussions. What can you, will

you do for us?

Our immediate need is how to take the **magazine** forward. I can attest it takes a great deal of time and effort but is very rewarding all the same. What magazine do we want, in what format – paper or digital – and who will edit it. Let us know.

Diana Hebditch  
[dianahebditch@myfwi.co.uk](mailto:dianahebditch@myfwi.co.uk)

## Somerset Gardens Trust is looking for new shoots: fresh ideas and budding contributors.

Gardens are good for us - great for the environment, wildlife and our well-being. That is why the Trust works with garden owners, local authorities and the community to protect and care for our county's parks and gardens, preserving the precious resources that they are. We are also keen to nurture the next generation of garden lovers.

We need help to do this now more than ever and we are looking for people who share our love for these vital assets to join us as Trustees.

If you would be interested in learning more about what being a Trustee of this worthwhile charity entails, please contact [info@somersetgardenstrust.org.uk](mailto:info@somersetgardenstrust.org.uk)

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## Tuesday 19th July Holcombe Court, Holcombe Regis, TA21 0PA

There will be a morning visit to Holcombe Court on Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> July 10.00am. Holcombe Court was recently featured in “Country Life” magazine. It is a lovingly restored and varied garden. There are trout ponds, a Victorian rockery, espaliered trees and a woodland garden. The cost is £10. No refreshments but you are welcome to bring your own. No dogs.

Please email [suehatherell@btinternet.com](mailto:suehatherell@btinternet.com) if you wish to go. Alternatively, if you don't have email, you may write to her at Moolham Mill, Ilminster TA19 0PD, but please enclose a SAE for her reply to you.

## North Gate, Agapemone

*Vicky Hemmings reveals a rich history for her garden, and an unusual way forward*

The Abode of Love, or Agapemone near Spaxton, was a sect founded in Somerset by Henry Prince in 1848, a self-styled Messiah and Lamb of Christ – and Curate of Charlynch. In addition to his more regular duties, he provided “ghostly council” to

several local women, which triggered riots from local men and caused considerable concern with the Bishop of Bath and Wells. After defrocking, through proselytising, he steadily gained a number of “Spiritual Brides”, who were to join him in the “earthly

paradise” he built in Spaxton, attracting a considerable number of wealthy people, principally women, to join him. At one stage there were 120 people living in the community with as many as 600 other



*Watercolour of the Agapemone Gardens c1860, Dr Josh Schwieso collection*

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followers living around the UK. However, the community suffered two reversals. The first followed what Prince characterised as “The Great Manifestation”, effectively a divine revelation, which he claimed directed him to take an orphaned sixteen-year-old to be his “Bride of Christ”. This was a purportedly spiritual relationship but it resulted in her becoming pregnant. The second reversal for the Community came through his death in 1899 which caused great levels of upset and confusion in the Sect.

The new leader, Smyth-Pigott, quickly increased the productivity of the grounds and developed the farm through more rigorous management. He also increased income through the recruitment of wealthy young women to become “Brides of the Lamb” and their numbers rose to over 50. It is possible that an arrangement of free love at the Agapemone was preferable to the constraints of a conventional Edwardian marriage. Smyth-Piggott only acknowledged three of the children born to the “Brides of the Lamb”, the children of Sister Ruth. An Inland Revenue investigation following her death some years after his, resulted in the main property and others being sold. The main house was subdivided, though for a number of years there were no separate gardens. The farmland was sold to local farmers, and the grounds gradually subsided into wilderness.

North Gate, one of the separate houses, was bought by my parents in the mid-1950s. It had no electricity or gas, and the water supply was from a rainwater reservoir in the grounds. The greenhouses were falling in on themselves, the old stables had pieces of milk-dewed tack hanging on racks, and there was a flock of guinea fowl roaming wild within the estate walls.

My Mother began the development of my garden and out of the wilderness construct-

*“ My Mother began the development of my garden and out of the wilderness constructed a framework of paths and herbaceous beds”*

ed a framework of paths and herbaceous beds. The particular joy of the top of the garden is the *Camellia Japonica* which was brought to the garden from the 1851 Great Exhibition. Presumably gently nurtured in the former conservatory, it is now a substantial tree 15 foot high.

The garden is bounded along the other side from the terrace by the former Chapel which is now a private house but which still dominates this side of the garden. It forms an impressive boundary, particularly when the evenings draw in and the back-lit colours of the stained-glass windows shine out into the evening gloom.

Our house was built in 1915 in an Arts and

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Crafts style, and I have tried to restore the garden in that spirit, deepening the long border in front of the Chapel, so that it becomes more identifiably an herbaceous border. The paths and steps have been constructed with Lutyensesque curves.

By the time we returned some years after my Mother's death, very little of the original planting remained, though some shrubs took the opportunity to become small trees: we have a *Mahonia grandiflora* Charity which is 20 foot high and a *Pittisporum tenuifolium* of the same height.

As I sat in London and dreamt of coming back to Somerset, I decided on the rather

grandiose ambition that as the garden was relatively small, I would only have unusual plants. To some extent I have continued to follow this rule, but time has shown me that some plants are popular for a reason and that it is through the integration of the less known with the better known that a more satisfying result emerges. I have had many fascinating purchases from Pan Global Plants and Crug Farm and many other small family run specialist nurseries, but after the joy of reading through their websites and then making my choice, they are largely destined for an unnamed life due to my appalling memory for names and a, probably misguided, aversion to labelling.



Former Agapemone Chapel with my garden foreground



## Wild Garlic, the woodland treasure

*Jo Webster describes its health benefits and how to enjoy eating it*

Foraging for food connects us to nature's cycles and the delicate green shoots of wild garlic are a harbinger of Spring. Its Latin name, *Allium ursinum*, means bear garlic and folklore says it was the first nourishing meal for bears awaking from Winter hibernation.

By the time you read this, the first shoots of wild garlic will be visible in woodlands, under hedgerows and in other damp and shady places. All parts of wild garlic are edible. Its leaves are rich green, ribbed and spear-shaped. The flower buds bulge with vitality, contained



*“the delicate green shoots of wild garlic are a harbinger of Spring”*

in a delicate green cowl. From these buds, through April and May, exquisite clusters of white, six petalled star-shaped flowers emerge. The attractive and potent seed pods are also edible. This is an abundant herb, so there is no concern about threatening its existence by harvesting some. Having said that, only ever take what you need and never over-harvest in any one particular area.

Using your senses whilst foraging is important. Wild garlic smells garlicky! Pick leaf by leaf rather than pulling up handfuls as this

will avoid you accidentally harvesting lords and ladies or lily of the valley as well, both of which you are likely to regret consuming (and neither of which smell garlicky). Wild garlic is nutritious, containing (amongst other things) bioactive sulphur compounds similar to those found in cultivated garlic. It is these volatile compounds, formed when the herb is damaged by crushing or chewing, that give it its unique smell and taste and which are also responsible for some of its health benefits. As well as being delicious, wild garlic's constituents are said to work as anti-microbials and support heart and circulatory health through modulating cholesterol levels, blood pressure and reducing blood clotting activity. This herb is also associated

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with modulating blood sugar levels.

There are many ways to enjoy wild garlic. You can add chopped leaves to salads, wilt them and eat them like spinach or add them to stir fries and risottos. The leaves also make an excellent pesto. The flowers are beautiful and work wonderfully on a salad or to decorate a soup. All parts are delicious mixed into cream cheese or labneh. But my favourite way of consuming this delicious and health-supporting herb involves making an oxymel with the flower buds. This is a

ferment made by adding honey and apple cider vinegar to the fresh flower buds. The result is incredible-tasting fermented wild garlic buds that will be preserved to enable you to enjoy eating them entirely out of season (but without any environmental guilt for doing so) until the next year's flower buds appear.

For the wild garlic bud oxymel recipe, head over to <https://theumbel.org/recipes/wild-garlic-oxymel>

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## Soils of Somerset

*Rob Setchell looks under the surface*

Soil is amazing!

- Plants grow in it
- It stores and purifies water
- It is a carbon store
- It holds a very diverse and massive ecosystem.

Soil as you know is very complex stuff and its make-up and properties are very variable within short distances in a garden or field. However, it is still worthwhile looking at Soil characteristics on a Macro Scale like Somerset to understand why some areas can grow wonderful roses but not azaleas, and others the reverse. A typical soil is made up of varying amounts of:

Solids, a combination of inorganic minerals derived from weathered rock (45%) and organic matter; plants and animals, living or dead (5%).

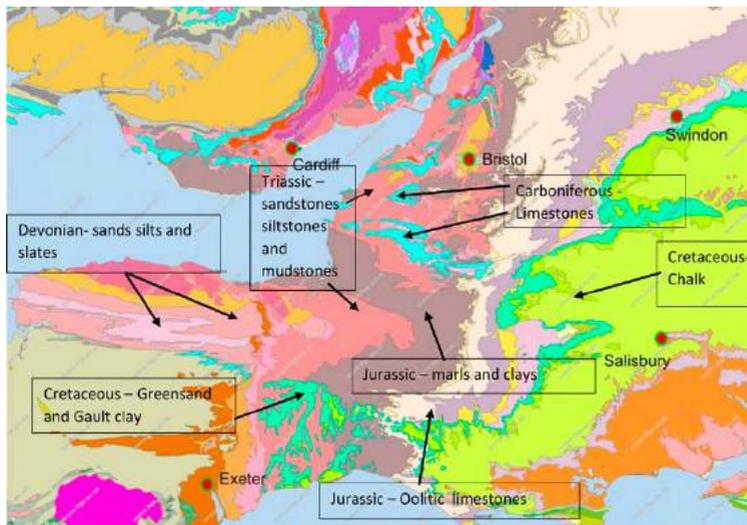
Voids or pores, (50%) which is either occupied by soil water or gas.

It is the product of interaction between weathered rock, climate, relief, drainage, aspect, plants and animals over time.

Amazingly there are over 700 different types of soil found in the UK which is a very large amount in such a small place and Somerset has a large variety due to its varied Geology and Geomorphological history.

Somerset has varied Geology with rocks ranging in age from 430mya to the present

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*Geological regions in Somerset*

Mudstones form red rocks that are beneath Taunton and outcrop in the cliffs of North Somerset, mixed with the Jurassic shales found underlying the south and southwest of the County. Much of these rocks are covered by Drift deposits derived from them, mixed with river silts forming Clay/silt loam soils

day. However, because it was not glaciated the soils are derived from the rocks beneath or brought short distances by rivers -

**Sandstones:** Quantocks, layers within the metamorphic rocks of Exmoor, around the Mendip hills, and many layers within the Triassic rocks of the Vale of Taunton. Generally, freely drained sandy to sandy loam soils which will make the soil more acid, found in mainly upland areas so can be leached and not that fertile without added lime and organic matter.

**Siltstones, Clays, Mudstones and Slates:** These are found over much of Somerset, the Slates make up Exmoor and the mudstones and Clays make up most of the Vale of Taunton, the South-West of the County and the Blackdown Hills. The Mercian

**Limestones:** These are found within layers of the mudstones and Marl is a Lime (Carbonate) rich clay, and this is source of most of the soils in Somerset, providing a Lime rich sub-base layer, but due to leaching it is not always that available to plants. However Carboniferous limestone makes up the Mendip ridge and areas around Frome and Bath. Jurassic Limestones make up the beautiful building stones of Bath Stone and Ham stone and the Chalk is found around Windwhistle and South-East into Dorset; these make free draining distinctive carbonate rich soils.

**Organic Soils:** the periodic water logging of the Somerset Levels has produced waterlogged organic soils such as Peat. Peat is also found in poorly drained upland areas

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of Exmoor; such upland Peats are slower growing and thinner and not exploited economically.

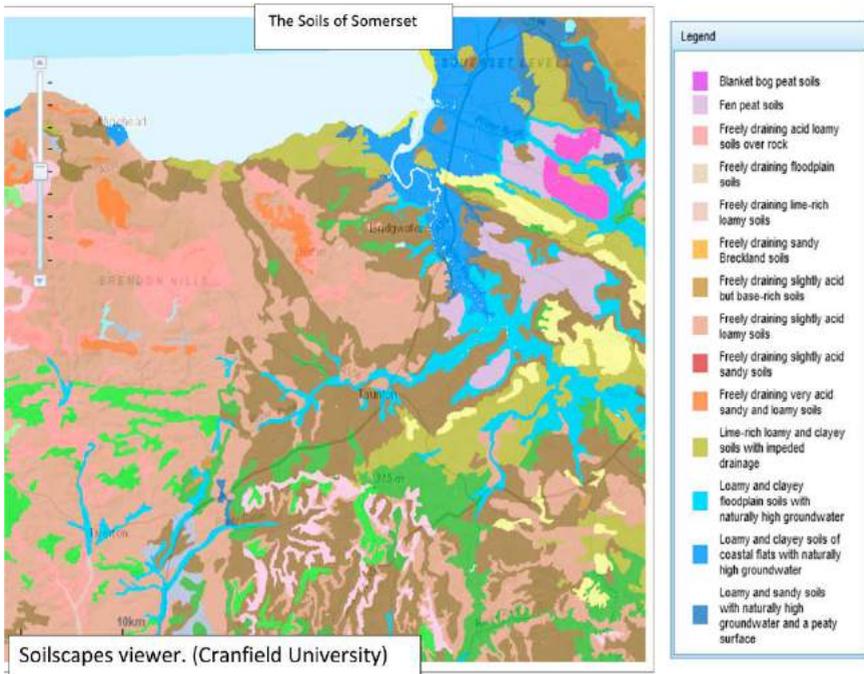
*“ Look after soils and you look after life”*

Drift deposits: In Somerset these are river deposits with some solifluction deposits which make up most of the soils in the Valleys of the region. The material is derived from the nearby hills and the drift material is usually a sand clay loam deposited by river

floods since the last ice age. The deposits surround the hills, and their exact nature are determined by the geological make-up of the eroded hills, but they are generally free drained, though this is affected by the height of the water table.

Soils are the foundation of human civilisation but more importantly are key in the diversity of plants and animals. Look after soils and you look after life.

Rob is an ex-teacher of A level Geology and Geography now running a guided walking company [www.timerambles.co.uk](http://www.timerambles.co.uk).



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## John Knight and the Picturesque

*Mervyn Wilson looks at an architect of the Picturesque Movement*

A number of us from the SGS visited the Ashcombe landscape at Simonsbath. Robert Wilson-North showed us what was left of the garden/landscape planted by John Knight in the 1820s. He had bought a large area of Exmoor and set out to make of it a model estate. That's a story on its own. He built the village of Simonsbath and a large house there, and developed what is now called Ashcombe, as a garden in the Picturesque style. Visitors can see what remains today and Exmoor National Park Authority have established a visitor centre in the old school.

John Knight was a cousin of Richard Payne Knight (1750-1824), who grew up at Downton Castle, the Knight's Herefordshire Estate. They had become very wealthy through iron working,

Richard was a scholar; the family collected paintings – Claude, Poussin and Salvator Rosa were among his favourites. He became a leader in the Picturesque movement, which in garden and park design reacted



*Ashcombe @Joss & Margaret Mullinger*

*“a leader in the Picturesque movement, which in garden and park design reacted against Capability Brown”*

against Capability Brown. He argued that a garden or landscape should be suggestive of many associations – classical painting, rural activity, all that is present in a mind richly stored, and looking for further stimulus.

To give a better idea of this, I quote some lines from his long poem *The Landscape*.

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*Oft when I've seen some lonely mansion stand,  
Fresh from th'improver's desolating hand,  
'Midst shaven lawns, that far around it creep  
In one eternal undulating sweep;  
And scatter'd clumps, that nod at one another,  
Each stiffly waving to its formal brother;  
Tir'd with th'extensive scene, so dull and bare,  
To Heav'n devoutly I've address'd my pray'r, -  
Again the moss-grown terraces to raise,  
And spread the labyrinth's perplexing maze;  
Replace in even lines the ductile yew,  
And plant again the ancient avenue.  
Some features then, at least, we should obtain,  
To mark this flat, insipid, waving plain;  
Some vary'd tints and forms would intervene,  
To break this uniform eternal green....*

These quotations are a small part of the whole poem. The same themes are set out in *An Analytical Enquiry into the Principles of Taste*. A brief quote: "to a mind richly stored, almost every object of nature or art that presents itself to the senses either excites fresh trains or combination of ideas or vivifies and strengthens those which existed before .... Every insect, plant or fossil which the peasant treads upon unheeded is to the naturalist and philosopher a subject of curious enquiry and speculation." Ecology had not then been invented. It is likely to have inspired John Knight.

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## Finding the elusive Peonies

*Caroline Stone gives us the result of her appeal to SGT Members*

Somerset Gardens Trust members will remember my plea for help in finding historic herbaceous peonies from Kelway & Son to create a National Collection. I am pleased to say that I have had considerable success this past year, not just in Somerset but much of it in Somerset. SGT member Camilla Carter contacted me and still had the peony lists from her visit to Peony Valley to choose plants some twenty years ago. From her delightful garden I have been very glad to get a division of 'Barrymore', a single white peony named after the farm where Kelways are located.

An article in the free newspaper, *The Leveller*, resulted in several interesting contacts. One kind lady contacted me to say she had 'British Empire' and 'Bridal Veil'. This was wonderful news because 'Bridal Veil' is represented in a full-page colour plate in James Kelway's 1954 book *Garden Paeonies*. To actually see it was very exciting - one

*“ I was led into the back garden  
'for the really lovely peony' ”*

of those happy moments that live in my memory. "And now" I was told as I was led into the back garden "for the really lovely

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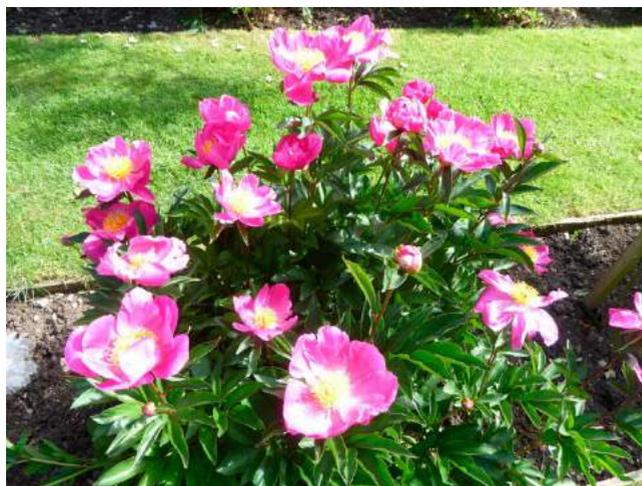
peony". Well! I thought that seems high praise for 'British Empire'. It was a truly magnificent peony in front of me but not 'British Empire'; in fact, it was 'Beatrice Kelway'. I think Beatrice Kelway is a stunning peony and this was a superb specimen. It may have been wrongly supplied but in my opinion, it was a far better peony that had been received, and anyway twenty years or so later it is a bit too late to take it back!



I have made repeated visits to Mallet Court and their 70-foot peony walk planted in the late 1930s with peonies from Kelways. Quickly I realised that top quality varieties had been chosen for the planting

and I have been able to identify a number of them. It has been an extremely useful exercise, and combined with my search through archives for descriptions and details of the Kelways peonies, it has helped sort out some of the confusion on naming.

There will be an article in the September issue of the RHS The Plant Review on the topic. I intend to return in the Summer to Mallet Court to confirm my conclusions. There are repeats in the planting so I believe I have identified a high proportion of the plants. I am very grateful to Primrose and James Harris for their kindness and generosity; I cannot tell you how much fun I have had looking at their peonies.



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## Montacute House and Gardens

*Jennie Langford describes its fascinating Elizabethan Landscape*

Since 2009 I developed an interest in re-searching Montacute House's gardens after attending a foundation degree course at Hestercombe Gardens which was supported by the SGT. In 2011 I began working closely with Montacute House's head gardener, Lottie Allen, concentrating on the Elizabethan foundations of the formal gardens and orchards. In 2019 I enrolled in a Master's degree in Garden and Landscape History at the Institute of Historical Research at the University of London. This degree provided an academically rigorous environment in which students were introduced to key historical approaches, sources

and methods relevant to the study of gardens and landscapes throughout history.

Encouraged by the SGT, I applied for and received a small grant towards the costs of the course, which was very helpful and enabled me to purchase books and helped towards travel expenses. Embarking on any further education course is a financial commitment and I am truly grateful to the SGT for their support. So today I am able to show my gratitude to the SGT and share a little of my research of Montacute House's landscape gardens, which is a property loved by many of our members.



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My dissertation was the study of an eighteenth-century gentleman's inherited estate in Montacute. The research considered how Edward Phelps V (1750-1797) preserved the antiquity of his forefathers, embraced the rules of the eighteenth-century landscape design and embarked on large redevelopment projects. This Georgian gentleman inherited a rundown estate with a house and garden designed with influences from the Renaissance period and with a

*“ He escaped the shackles of past, restored the estate to its former glory and brought a new perspective to the landscape”*

Now under the custodianship of the National Trust, the Elizabethan mansion and the gardens are the natural highpoint to the Elizabethan architectural Renaissance and nationally significant as a rare survivor of an Elizabethan court house; its original

layout, with separate gardens, walls and turrets, have largely been retained to this day. My dissertation demonstrates that this amazing legacy, is in part, due to the design philosophy of Edward Phelps V, who retained many of the property's original sixteenth/seventeenth-century features and layout during a time when many formal



taste shaped in the 1600s. He escaped the shackles of past, restored the estate to its former glory and brought a new perspective to the landscape. The extent of his work was previously unrecognised; he was a self-taught designer, whose life experience equipped him to respond to the land and as a result he transformed the path of the garden history at Montacute House.

gardens fell victim to the English Landscape Movement and were destroyed in the eighteenth century. The aim of the dissertation was to provide new insights in interpretation and an understanding of Edward Phelps V work which would directly inform future management and the protection of the landscape.

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## Vegetable Gardening

*Mervyn Wilson explains how you can combine beauty and utility*

I started growing vegetables in the 1970s, in Bermondsey where I was rector. The Surrey docks had just closed: one was filled with waste below and sludge on top, and made into allotments. I had one: odd grey, cakey soil, and unusual weeds, but after importing quantities of rotted horse manure, leaf mould and spent hops (Courage's brewery was in the parish), it grew excellent cabbages and beans.

*“In the five radial beds I grow brassicas, potatoes, legumes, roots and a mixed lot, including leeks and sweetcorn”*

In 1978 we moved to Northamptonshire. The rectory walled kitchen garden, during the war a pig run, then put to grass, I steadily recovered, starting with potatoes and ending with most vegetables you could mention. My garden bible was *Your Kitchen Garden*, bought in Greenwich for the allotment. I found the work, digging and growing, therapeutic after eight and a half years in a tough area of Inner London. It also fed a family with up to six children. Mainstays were potatoes, beans, climbing and French, peas, spinach, carrots, parsnips, and brassicas. I tried my hand at everything in the book. We had the garden open, I maintained then, as I still do, that beauty and utility should go hand in hand. There I remade the

paths, planted box hedges and ended with an area that visitors loved to walk through.

Here in Somerset, I pursue the same policy of growing all we need, with a smaller family, but I have gone a step further in integrating the vegetables into the flower garden. Within the 1/3 acre walled area I dug a 15-metre diameter circle with stone circumference and clipped box bushes. In the five radial beds I grow brassicas, pota-

toes, legumes, roots and a mixed lot, including leeks and sweetcorn. Squashes of the trailing sort wander around in late summer. I also

cultivate another smaller plot to make up numbers in potatoes, beans, spinach and Jerusalem artichokes. There are separate asparagus and globe artichoke beds.

Cultivation is not strictly organic, but uses a lot of compost (in Northants there was also horse manure) and fish blood and bone. I avoid inorganic fertilisers. Pest control I try to limit. Something is necessary against flea beetle in young brassicas, and sometimes against caterpillars and aphids, etc. later on. We like to think that we have fostered a healthy soil life, so what we eat includes minerals and nutrients from the living earth.

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## Readers Forum – Why I Garden .....

### Simon Tudway Quilter

When I was invited in Spring 2018 to write a short article about the family garden at Milton Lodge, I was first to admit that I



am not the gardener that my Father was. It was he who had to restore the four-acre site within its architectural terraces overlooking Wells, and he became a proficient plantsman. The garden first opened under the National Garden Scheme in 1962. We are fortunate to have skilled help at Milton Lodge which is a blessing for me. Our mission is to continue my Father's legacy, to consolidate (rather than expand), and to

replace and replant as necessary to suit the alkaline soil. Furthermore, it is important for there always to be something to show during the six months when we are open to the public. My Father was always keen to share the garden with others and so it is for me. That is why I garden (such as I do) in the sincere hope of giving to others. Further information can be found at [miltonlodgegardens.co.uk](http://miltonlodgegardens.co.uk).

### Mary Stirling

I garden because I enjoy creating an attractive and appropriate setting for our homes. Each garden has responded to our changing needs and been a source of great pleasure. Our first garden was in a Hampstead terrace. We parked the pram on the paved front garden, where successive babies waved at the Household Cavalry as they clattered past, leaving welcome droppings for us to scoop up. In the back garden we watched our two small sons dig a hole in the flowerbed then wait for a rabbit to emerge. Our large garden in the Chilterns was an on-going challenge, and we gardened to the exclusion of many other activities, until 40 years later, in our eighties, we limited ourselves to the confines of a walled garden in Somerton. In old age I delegate the tough stuff to others, for fear of toppling over in a flower-bed. My garden is a cure-all for bad moods, and I can watch the succession of seasons from a sedentary position, inside or out. Carpe Diem

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## Pleiones

*Anthony Pugh-Thomas takes us into the colourful world of miniature orchids*

Pleione is a small genus of miniature orchids that are predominantly terrestrial but sometimes epiphytic (i.e. growing on other plants) or lithophytic (i.e. growing on stones).

The genus was named by David Don in 1825 after Pleione, mother, in Greek mythology, of the Pleiades. It then faced something of an identity crisis being transferred to other genera before Robert Allen Rolfe, an English botanist specialising in the study of orchids, resurrected the name Pleione in 1903. Common names include Peacock Orchid, Glory of the East, Himalayan crocus, Indian crocus and Windowsill Orchid.

The mythical Pleione presided over the multiplication of the flocks and one meaning of her name is: to increase in number, especially apt as unlike most other pseudobulbous orchids, Pleione produces annual pseudobulbs (being the bulb-like swellings at the base of the stem) that can easily be potted on for future years.

There are about 22 species distributed in the mountains and foothills of the Himalayas, India, Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand,



*Pleione formosana*

Laos, Vietnam, Taiwan, and China. Notwithstanding their natural habitat, Pleiones are among the most popular orchids as they bear large and colourful flowers and are easy to grow and propagate. Common species in cultivation include *P. bulbocodioides*, *P. formosana*, *P. limprichtii*, and *P. praecox*; and there is a large variety of spectacular hybrids.

Pleiones are quite easy to grow: they do not need a lot of winter heat as they rest for most of the Winter and grow in Spring and

*“The genus was named by David Don in 1825 after Pleione, mother, in Greek mythology, of the Pleiades”*

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Summer. They should be planted in half pots, say 2 1/2"/6 cm deep, with plenty of drainage holes. A good compost is a mixture of 6 parts of small sifted orchid bark, 1 part Perlite and 1 part sphagnum moss – all readily available at good Garden Centres.

They start to go dormant in September/October, so by December are resting and can then be re-potted by discarding the old shrivelled pseudobulbs and potting on, in fresh compost, the new



*Pleione limprichtii*

start growing fast, they should be given liquid feeding at about half the usually recommended strength and at about 10-day intervals.

Further advice -

“The Genus Pleione”. Phillip Cribb and Ian Butterfield. Pbd. Kew in association with Christopher Helm and Timber Press. 1988. ISBN. 0-7470—0422-6

The Pleione website. [www.pleione.info](http://www.pleione.info). This website is maintained

by Paul Cumbleton, who was head of the Alpine Department at RHS Wisley Garden for 11 years, before he retired to live in Somerton. It contains a great deal of information about how to grow Pleiones and where to buy them and includes over 1000 photographs.



*Pleione bulbocodioides*

pseudobulbs that will be surrounding them. They can be kept in a temperature as low as 34°F/1°C. Towards the end of February/early March, as the sun gets stronger, they should be slightly shaded, and the compost should be moistened. Pleiones flower between late February and May with the main batch in April, and as the flowers fade and the leaves

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## Art and the Garden

*Sheila Rabson*

What is art? The answer can be many things but, as you would expect in a Garden Trust's magazine, it will also involve the natural world of landscape, trees and flowers

A recent trend has been for people to have large folding windows so that the house flows naturally into garden. What would happen when the building is a church, with windows which can be seen through and yet are needed to bear some sort of memorial? I would suggest that you should all go and visit St Nicholas of Myrna Church (formerly St Magnus the Martyr), Moreton, Dorset to see how something beautiful can be created by adding landscape to the medium of engraved glass.

Moreton Church windows were created over a thirty-year period by Sir Alan Charles Laurence Whistler (1912 – 2000). He began his working life as a poet and author, even being the first recipient of the King's Gold Medal for Poetry (1935) before turning to glass engraving to earn more money. He became the first President of the British Guild of Glass Engravers in 1975. He often designed his own goblets and bowls to engrave and also made large panels both for private houses and churches. He engraved a glass casket for the Queen Mother, which held her daily tasks list and made a wedding goblet for the Queen. Laurence's brother, Reginald John Whistler (1905 – 1944) (known as Rex Whistler) had been living

in the Cathedral Close at Salisbury before he was killed in action in Normandy. A special three-sided glass prism was made in America, engraved by Laurence and then set in a brass lantern as a memorial to his brother. The prism has three different scenes engraved on it and is on view in Salisbury cathedral.



The window above is dedicated to an airman killed in the Battle of France in 1940 and is in the Trinity chapel at Moreton Church. The blooming magnolia is easily recognised along with the crashed plane in the bottom right corner. Whistler's love of

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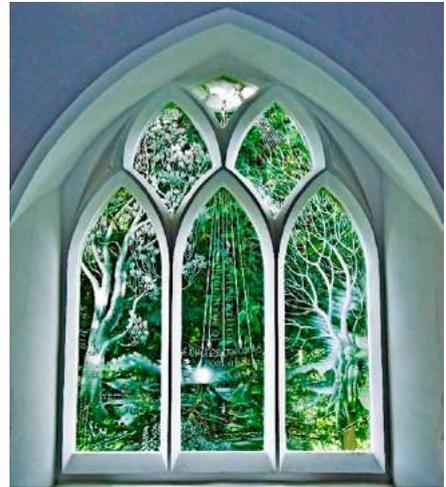


nature clearly shows in the plants, butterflies and landscapes in the window but the whole thing comes to life when you see the living landscape in the surrounding churchyard. Not only does the natural background help you see the engraved glass but it becomes part of the picture as well.



There are several windows making use of the theme of light in the church. In the above window the candles appear to be positioned on the real trees

growing behind. It is part of a triptych where the windows depict “Light”, the *Dream of the Rood* and “Darkness”. The full inscription on this window depicting “Light” reads “*Truly the light is sweet*”. The window depicting “Darkness” has the candles extinguished, but still smoking, and the words read “*Remember the days of darkness*”.



The final window is a memorial, made in 1971, to the Anglo-Welsh poet Edward Thomas (1878 – 1917) and his wife Helen.

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Edward Thomas is regarded as a war poet but he only started writing poems in 1914. His most famous poem is “*Adelstrop*”. He died at the Battle of Arras, France and this memorial window is in St James’ Church at Eastbury, Berkshire, where the family had

been living. There were also two windows at Steep Church but, regrettably, one was vandalised and a replacement made by a follower of Whistler. Helen Whistler and her two daughters lived in Steep and are buried in in the churchyard.

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## Medlars

*Dilly Bradley shares her recipes for medlars*

From John Nott’s *The Cook’s and Confectioner’s Dictionary* 1723

“To preserve medlars: Scald your Medlars in Fair Water, till you can easily take off the Skin; then take out the Stones at the Head, and put 1 Pound of double refin’d Sugar, and a pint of Tent to each Pound of Medlars, boil them together till the Liquor is become a Syrup; then put it up for use.” “Tent” is derived from the Spanish *Vino Tinto* which actually was a popular drink at the time. Often wine was simply referred to as “tent”.



Skinning the medlars is fiddly and I would describe the stones as large pips. Be prepared for medlar mush to cover your fingers and hands. I worked to 2 pounds of medlars, one pint of “tent” and 1 pint of apple juice (i.e. boil up 2 pounds of finely sliced apples cores and skin and all with 1 pint of water, then strain. Generally I reduce the sugar and here I used a rate of 14oz instead of 1lb. To avoid overboiling the fruit I reduced the 1 pint of apple juice to half a pint before using it. It all boiled up and reached setting point in 10 minutes or so.

I found this recipe quoted in a delightful book *The Cook and the Gardener - A Year of Recipes and Writings from the French Countryside*, written by Amanda Hesse who was food editor of the *New York Times*. Having studied French Culinary History and trained at the *Ecole de Cuisine La Varenne* she spent a year cooking in a chateau in North Burgundy using the produce from the vegetable garden and making friends with the peasant gardener. ISBN 1-904573-39-8

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## From the Scree Slope

*Maggie Langdon adapts to the rubble just below the surface*

When moving to a smaller garden the hope is to have more free time and less work. One exception is when you move to a building site. Our present garden couldn't be more different from the level one we left behind. It is a narrow sloping site, with wonderful views of the Cathedral and Tor, and a wide borrowed landscape. We demolished a problematic small bungalow to build a convenient modern one and were then left with a garden full of rubble. We confidently thought that we would be able to design the site ourselves until we realised the complications of the steep incline made it quite difficult. The challenge was to make the slope fully accessible for ageing owners and various wheels. After discussion with



landscapers we realised the importance of a clear plan so we employed a garden designer for the structure. She knew how to interpret and define our ideas. The curving paths for our wheelbarrows, leading to a pond, suit the rounded hillsides of our view and the Mendips behind us.

We are delighted with the result, but decided to source and place the plants ourselves. We are enjoying this continuing challenge. Each time we plant we need to remove rocks and bricks, but they do have the advantage of making our exposed and windy south facing site well drained. We noted the brave plants that arrived unannounced before we landscaped the garden which

*“ We noted the brave plants that arrived unannounced before we landscaped the garden which encouraged us to use mainly Mediterranean style planting ”*

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encouraged us to use mainly Mediterranean style planting. We were inspired by Beth Chatto, with her gravel garden, and the excellent French nurseryman, Olivier Filippi. Further drainage and fertility are being created by raising some beds and adding grit mixed with mulch for plants including grasses, euphorbia, sedum, ballota, salvia,

lavender and, over the years, an increasing number of bulbs. Agapanthus and cistus also thrive on the site. I would like to have had more shade for diversity but we have to compromise as we don't want large shrubs and trees to interrupt the views. The planting and beds on the north side around the drive are more traditional with roses, clematis, dahlias, astrantia, geraniums and other perennials.

It is very encouraging to look back over photographs and snippets of earlier writing and see how much progress has been made in a few years. The planting is already getting quite established which gives great reassurance for the future.

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## Glebe Farm Gardens

*Rhona Gilmore shares how she has developed her garden*

Once a working dairy farm for well over 50 years, the family made a decision to make huge changes and exchange animals for more of a conservation theme, although conservation always played a big part alongside the dairy farming. In the last 3 years the gardens have had a major overhaul, and

being amateurs, we had the joy of being able to experiment with new designs and planting. It has been so exciting. Our idea was to incorporate many different garden styles, some may seem a little strange 2 miles from Taunton town centre. The gardens have been divided into categories.

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*“a vine covered pergola leads to a hidden Mediterranean oasis, a swimming pool decked by beautiful grasses”*

Firstly, a traditional English walled House Garden. Originally this area was very much a spring garden with very little appearing for the rest of the year. Loving Alliums, we planted them extensively together with lavenders, these take over two large beds. Traditional shrubs and a herb area fill the rest of the garden.

Following the path, a vine covered pergola leads to a hidden Mediterranean oasis, a swimming pool decked by beautiful grasses and a variety of well-established palms.

Loving the Italian countryside and their



*©David Batten Garden Services*



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formal gardens, we made a set piece of shrubs and pencil Cypress trees.

And then following the path you will find a hidden Japanese Garden - Hydrangeas, Cherry blossom trees and a Japanese Rill, so tranquil to sit and contemplate. On leaving this area the garden opens out to what was a traditional Paddock. Several apple trees and to the left a large pond with grasses and Water Lilies. Several beds of traditional shrubs and perennials, and green houses for fruit and vegetables. This area is still being developed. Further afield there is a plan for a 95-acre wild flower meadow. We still have lots of enthusiasm to put into the garden.



*The long-lasting Mulberry Tree,  
a symbol of the healing  
character of Nature*

*Back Cover: Symbolic Mulberry Tree © Alice Fowler photography*

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