

Somerset Gardens Trust

A member of the Association of Garden Trusts

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Featuring

Lady Farm - A Great Garden - p.5

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From the Editors

What a wet and cold year it has been so far. The plants are all leaf and few flowers – with the happy exception of bog plants such as primulas – and of course the wonderful roses. Hopefully we will be watering in July and August!

This edition of the SGT Magazine has some cheerful articles on excellent Somerset gardens which reveal unexpected private passions which you may share, and some unusual angles on gardens from bees to allotments. There is also lots of information about the activities of the Trust such as planning, visits and education. An edition to dip into – or simply become absorbed in and read the whole - as the rain pours down outside! So we would like to thank our many contributors for their interesting articles which bring such pleasure to readers.

Christopher and Lindsay Bond
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From the Chairman

Dear Members,

The weather forecast was atrocious, gales and lashings of rain but we had promised Edward Strachan a tree, after our AGM at Halswell, as our 25th anniversary gift and it need to be planted. James Harris had provided an *Acer trautvetteri*, a tree from the Caucasus. There was a good party of Edward and his wife, Ann Manders, Roy Bolton and others together with Primrose Mallet-Harris, Stuart and Helen Senior and

myself. We were taken afterwards to the House for coffee and then had a chance to go up on the roof and see the new chimney pots. (*photos - p.24*) The SGT Council has recently awarded a grant of £1000 towards some of the costs of the restoration of the C18 Cascade, at the lower end of Mill Wood, huge progress has been made since we were there last September.

Further to Lucy Nelson's initiative on Horticultural Bursaries, David Freemantle has negotiated for the Trust with Nigel Cox at Cannington, to offer two bursaries

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of £500, the first for Charlotte Fellingham, to assist towards fees, conditional on her enrolment for an HND, and the second to Paul Meir to offset travel and other costs involved in attending a course. Both are outstanding students. It is hoped that we will be able to support students, in a small way like this for several years.

Hestercombe has ambitious new plans. I met Ian Walker, head of the Development Office, who explained their vision to become a Centre for Art and Landscape. A late Elizabethan water garden has been discovered which, when restored, will be one of only two surviving examples of this period open to the public. There are also plans for a green theatre for seasonal performances and a garden for the C21st

in the West Combe valley near to Coombe House, an Arts and Crafts designed house which is to be used as accommodation in a lovely woodland setting. Hestercombe were hoping for an EU grant towards an inspirational design combining sustainability with easy maintenance.

There have been some excellent visits this Spring to various gardens, organised by Diana Hebditch and her team. We are all looking forward to visiting the Monument at Burton Pynsent in July and to going to Bowood in September during the Capability Brown celebration year. We hope for a fine evening for our AGM at Yarlington House, because of the beautiful garden there to enjoy with a drink, then of course we have our autumn lecture on the Elizabethan Garden at Montacute House.

I think our Members had an enjoyable visit to Cornwall, they were certainly very appreciative**. We were extraordinarily lucky with the weather, there was sleet on the way to Trebah but the sun shone as soon as we arrived, and it was dry at every garden we visited.

Camilla Carter 2016

***Editors Note:* We were indeed very appreciative of Camilla and John's informal but professional organization.

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Lady Farm – the garden that everyone should visit

Judy Pearce explains how you should take nature's opportunities

It was never our plan to design a 12 acre garden. In fact, we never meant to come to Lady Farm at all!

The power of rough cider is very strong, so after downing nearly a barrel, my Malcolm and the farmer at Lady Farm stood up and shook hands. The deal was that we would swap houses! We were to only take our horses, cars and kids and move in on February 1st 1973.

Of course, upon sobering up the next day, I really wondered what they had done – but a handshake was an agreement. We moved in to find 3 lambs in the sitting room

recovering from the cold in front of the half-broken electric fire. You get the picture – no need to do any housework!

“We were lucky to have access to a digger and a truly marvellous driver – he could make it dance!”

Initially I was really happy to have plenty of grazing for the horses and Malcolm soon got someone to milk the 100 cows.

The herd grew to 200 and we ran out of room. The cows were moved to another farm and our children left home.

Desperation set in and we decided to knock the buildings down and tidy the place up. We were lucky to have access to a digger and a truly marvellous driver – he could make it dance! It took 12 months to clear the buildings and about 4 acres of concrete. This left us with the problem of having no soil so we moved a 4 acre paddock down to the House. The digger driver said to me one



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day – “Where would you like me to put it dear?” – I had not given it a moment’s thought!

“I love everything looking really good for 12 months of the year, with very low maintenance.”

So work began and we sowed grass seed everywhere. I went to Hilliers Wholesale in Romsey and they were so helpful – they must have felt sorry for me because I knew absolutely nothing. Still no overall plan, we planted trees and shrubs all around the perimeter and got someone in to mow the grass.

We quite fancied a small garden in the Orchard above the House where we kept a few ducks, chickens and geese. The digger came back to dig them a small pond but, as soon as the bucket went in, a fountain of water burst out and flooded everywhere.

Desperation again, the local builder sank a shaft to direct most of the water down a pipe across the front of the House, then it just ran across the grass to the bottom of the valley. Malcolm suggested that, as the spring water used to supply the House and the cows (they only went onto mains 2 years before we came) that we could make a small feature of it. Fatal! The feature now covers 12 acres – stream and two lakes! The swans arrived on the lake as soon as it was dammed and have bred every year since – they are exciting to watch when they all take off together and find a home of their own.

Not being a real gardener, I love everything looking really good for 12 months of the year, with very low maintenance. This is where I fell for grasses and associated perennials – they even look good in January and the heads of the *Echinacia* etc feed the birds all winter.

The last 20 years have been very hard work – learning on the job, but most of all, it’s such a pleasure showing garden lovers around – they are all delightful and we now have many friends all over the World.

What makes the Rainforest grow?

Philip Davison, botanist at Bosque del Cabo Forest Lodge in Costa Rica, explains

For people from higher latitudes it is sometimes very difficult to conceptualize just how fast the plants do grow in the tropics. Here the vegetation is free of

climatic constraint; there is light, water and heat in optimum quantities for twelve months of the year so the plants grow like nowhere else on earth.

Trees such as the *Cecropia spp* are pioneers. When a light gap opens in the forest canopy due to a large tree falling, then overnight the microclimate changes; light levels increase, temperature goes up

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and humidity drops. This change stimulates the seeds of the pioneering plants to germinate and grow, sometimes at a rate of over ten feet a year. Within fifteen years they will have filled a light gap before the larger more shade tolerant trees grow up and shade them out. Those shade tolerant species generally take no more than 50 years to form a canopy which alters the microclimate beneath.



Tailbot Palm

In a tropical garden many plants that are non-native ornamentals, familiar as potted houseplants in temperate living rooms, grow to spectacular sizes in a short time. The gardens of Bosque del Cabo Rain Forest Lodge were pasture 26 years ago. A variety of trees and shrubs were planted in the nascent lodge gardens. Some, such as the Talipot Palm from Southern India, have grown into huge structures. (*see above*)

Vines and lianas can be observed growing day by day. Their sinuous stems can be seen snaking their way up through the supporting vegetation or dropping vertically down like plumb lines.

“This change stimulates the seeds of the pioneering plants to germinate and grow, sometimes at a rate of over ten feet a year.”

The rate of growth is equalled by the rate of decay. The high temperatures and humidity within a rainforest create a fantastic incubator in which bacteria and fungi serve to rapidly decompose organic material. There are also larger organisms such as beetle larvae and termites at work, the combined actions of which can break down a leaf within two days. Huge structures such as trees can break down in anything up to two years.

The nutrients go into the soil but nothing stays in the soil. The nutrients are quickly taken up by the lush vegetation facilitating the rapid plant growth which also paradoxically creates nutrient poor soils.

So if you ever visit the tropics, depending on how long you stay, don't be surprised if the plant life around you looks slightly different when you leave to when you arrived!



Monitoring planning applications relating to the historic gardens of Somerset

Ian Clark of the Survey Committee explains an exciting initiative

For a number of years the Survey Committee members have undertaken the monitoring of planning applications likely to have an impact on historic gardens. The monitoring work is rather long winded and not what most surveyors are interested in undertaking; however, the work is necessary to safeguard potentially vulnerable sites within the County.

“The main issue is the number of planning applications that are dealt with by the seven local planning authorities in Somerset”

The main issue is the number of planning applications that are dealt with by the seven local planning authorities in Somerset (Exmoor National Park, Mendip DC, Sedgemoor DC, Somerset CC, South Somerset DC, Taunton Deane BC, West Somerset DC) which on a weekly basis can easily reach well over a hundred planning applications. The amount of time it takes to sieve through them to find relevant applications is considerable and doesn't

always reap any rewards. Most of the applications will have no relevance to the historic landscape and a mechanism is thereby required to help sieve through the number of consultations to find the most relevant.

The Somerset Wildlife Trust approached a similar issue some years ago and in liaison with the local planning authorities have developed a system called BioPlan. Bioplan is a computer program that uses overlaid geographical information (maps) from the planning application site and relevant sites of nature conservation interest. For example if a developer wants to build houses within the grounds of a historic mansion, a search overlaying the wildlife interest such as bats or veteran trees, and of the planning application, is undertaken as part of the programme. Where there is an area of mutual interest the programme signals the SWT to tell it that there is a development happening that might affect wildlife by sending it an email with the details of the planning application. Conversely the programme may not find any overlap and therefore doesn't need to send an alert. Such a system, tailored to the needs of the SGT, would allow the survey

“The Survey Committee is in the process of identifying important gardens – County and Local”

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team to focus their members' time more precisely with applications relevant to historic gardens rather than spending considerable time checking through unrelated planning applications.

The Survey Committee is in the process of identifying important gardens – County and Local – so that when planning applications are assessed they can be given a level of significance or weighting. This information can then be used to help sieve

Enjoying the bees in your garden

Vanessa Becker-Hughes tells you how to do it

Most people are amazed to discover that we have over 270 species of bee in Britain and that bumble bees and honey bees amount to only 10% of these. Some are also surprised to learn that over 25% of bees do not collect pollen or make nests but are cuckoos of other bee species. Bees

the relevant planning applications.

As the BioPlan system is already up and running within Somerset – it is run by a subsidiary of the SWT known as SERC – development costs should be reduced. What is required however, is for all the garden sites of importance to be identified and their boundaries digitised. The Local Authorities already have information on the Historic England Gardens Register sites but it is the

County and Locally important sites that would need to be identified, assessed and then their area of interest digitised on a map-based system. Some of this work is already underway but more help is needed.

If you would like to help in identifying sites or you know someone interested in GIS mapping, please contact Ian Clark in the first instance; he can be contacted by email at oliveleafdesign@yahoo.com.

are all around us - even in the flowery urban garden you stand a chance of seeing a variety of species. The increasing popularity of wildlife gardening and bee hotels means that gardens are now one of the few habitats where bee numbers may actually be increasing – what a wonderful thought!

We keep bees in our garden and have done so for many years. I was taught my

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beekeeping following the more traditional route of keeping bees mainly for their

around the wild flowers) and of course we have made some solitary bee hotels.



Vetch, Larger Celandine, Red valerian, Speedwells, Scarlet pimpernel, Selfheal, Ground ivy – the amount of wild plants and flowers we have here go beyond 50 species from the Cuckoo flower to Cranesbill – a large list attracting many varieties of insects. The plants that we have introduced to the garden for pollinators are Honeysuckle, Lavender, *Verbena bonariensis*,

honey; but now I'm far more relaxed about it and think of myself as more of a bee guardian. How is that different? Well, it's quite simple really, the needs of the bees come first - I suppose it's a more bee centred approach. I no longer arrange and manipulate the bees in a fashion to maximise the honey crop, but provide the bees with a more natural home where I take nothing from them – just enjoy the fruit of their labours from pollination. This is I believe their true gift to us. I look at honey as *their* food and not something we should help ourselves to!

Foxglove, Scabious, *Centaurea montana*, *Aquilegia*, Cotoneaster, *Sedum*, Bluebells,

“I take nothing from them – just enjoy the fruit of their labours from pollination.”

One large focus for us has been to get the garden right. We provide the bees with many plants and trees, and one in particular, the willow, is good for early pollen; there is also a pond nearby for year round water supply, old walls for nesting, a lawn that sees geese graze more than a mower, (this is good as they tend to graze

Crocus (great for early pollen) and Viper bugloss. Our aim is to provide all the bees whether *Apis* (honey bee) *Bombus* (bumble bee) or solitary bee with a variety of plants that flower at different times and have flowers with a variety of shapes - cups, bells, tubes and open. It is quite wonderful to integrate some of these plants into your garden. The bees will come!

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A Glimpse of Allotment Heaven - in Frome

Neil Cameron shows us that the allotment movement is very much alive and well

In 2012 the waiting list for an allotment in Frome with its population of 26,000 stood at 120 names. The 100 plots on the town's seven sites were all allocated. There was a clear demand for new allotments in the town, but Frome Town Council's hopes for a new site were proving unsuccessful. Things were not looking good: if your name was at the bottom of the waiting list then you had a 10 year wait for a plot.

However, in September a five-acre field with excellent soil, on the edge of the town, came onto the market. Frome Town Council and Frome Community Interest Company, with funds from the Muriel Jones Foundation, jointly purchased the

field for new allotments for Frome. Today a team of volunteers from FAA (Frome Allotment Association), led by site representatives Gerry and Arthur Gasson, manage the site, allocating the plots and keeping the place in good order.

“if your name was at the bottom of the waiting list then you had a 10 year wait for a plot.”

The five-acre field was originally pasture and slopes down to the River Frome with a view across the river and into the trees. In the distance the hills of Longleat Forest can be seen and to the left stands Cley Hill, across the border in Wiltshire. The Bristol to Weymouth railway line follows the river valley and Muriel Jones Fields can be briefly seen from the train. *“A little glimpse of heaven,”* said one rail passenger. The site drains very quickly and the soil is fertile, having been farmed for many years.

A traditional allotment is 10 rods, a measurement dating back to Anglo-Saxon times, which is approximately 250 square metres. But with



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such a long waiting list FAA decided that it was best to serve the interests of as many people as possible with smaller plots. In addition, smaller plots are suitable for families and those busy with full-time work and other commitments. So, at Muriel Jones there are 89 plots 15x5 metres and 9 plots 10x5 metres, as well as eight raised beds for less-mobile gardeners. Schools and voluntary groups also garden at the allotments.

There is no running water at the site and there is unlikely to be any in the future, as the cost of installing a mains connection is £32,000.00. Therefore, from the start, it was essential to harvest rainwater. Site representative Arthur Gasson refurbished the semi-derelict barn and added a run-off from the guttering to feed 2 large tanks. In

addition, individual plotholders harvest rainwater from their sheds.

Plotholders are responsible for keeping their plots in good order and cutting the immediate grass paths. Any fruit trees they plant must be on dwarf rootstock but otherwise plotholders are free to grow whatever they wish. A diversity of approaches can be seen on different plots, with some opting for a no dig method or smaller beds while others have gone for a traditional plot. The variety of gardening styles creates a patchwork effect and means that you never quite know what you will encounter as you walk along. “*The prettiest allotments I’ve ever seen*” said Penny Snell, ex-Chair of the NGS.

Muriel Jones allotments open as part of the National Garden Scheme.

SGT April Visit to Cornwall

Jean Hunter remembers with pleasure

We set off on Thursday April 7th, with a rather unpromising weather forecast but otherwise with great expectations. We were to visit Heligan and Trewithen en route to our hotel in Falmouth; Trewidden, Tremenheere and Godolphin on Friday, Trebah and Glendurgan on Saturday morning and Pencarrow on the way home on Sunday.

The gardens had been carefully chosen and showed great variety. As expected there were magnificent huge magnolias, rhododendrons and camellias in flower in most of the gardens, apart from Tremenheere, a modern sculpture garden with tropical plants, and Godolphin, a

garden made round an ancient, romantic house built in the 1660s, and recently restored by the National Trust. The gardens there were rectangular with areas of lawn edged with herbaceous plants to come, and there were fritillaries and daffodils in the grass and bluebells in the banks.

“It has a remarkable Dicksonian fern dell made by parachute bombs dropped in WW2”

Trewidden and Trebah were my favourite gardens. Trewidden is a Bolitho garden, approached down a drive with a camellia



hedge. It has a remarkable Dicksonian fern dell made by parachute bombs dropped in WW2, which uprooted the ferns and flung them wide where they re-rooted. A lovely feature was an *Erythronium* glade

“The beach beyond the garden was concreted in WW2 to take transports of American troops to ships in the Helford river”

in full flower, and the evergreens were well sited with the fresh green of deciduous trees such as *Cornus controversa* between them. A Jelly Pine (*Butia capitata*) of considerable age had been damaged by frost with a badly pitted trunk, but had survived. Some of the magnolias were of immense height and girth.

Trebah and Glendurgan are neighbouring valley gardens running down to the Helford river, developed by the Fox family.

We started at Trebah, picking a route down the stream pools with vistas of the river filled with great clumps of rhododendrons, as well as Camellias and magnolias, and an enormous tulip tree. A large *Gunnera* plantation, dormant at that time, later grows so high one can walk under it, as in a tropical jungle. Lower down the valley is a mass of Hydrangeas. The beach beyond the garden was concreted in WW2 to take transports of American troops to ships in the Helford river, destined for Omaha beach on ‘D Day’. Glendurgan is similar in layout, but I thought not so colourful that day.

We left Falmouth on Sunday morning in a raging gale, but true to form, what we had come to call “Camilla weather”, it cleared before we reached Pencarrow. This was a house and garden visit with a buffet lunch during which the owner, Lady Molesworth St Aubyn, told us how she and her husband had restored the House which had been empty for 18 years. It had a friendly, family feel, and was a good place to end our trip, which had been so well organized and run, and full of friendship and fun.

**“Capability Brown:
Perception and Response in a Global Context”**

9 - 11 September 2016 - The University of Bath

<http://tinyurl.com/jo7scur>



Cornish Spring

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What is the Somerset Rare Plants Group?

SRPG Member Rosemary FitzGerald tells us why it's important

British wild plants are in crisis! We never had an enormous flora, being at the end of the line for recolonization after the last ice sheets retreated, so what we have is precious and uniquely adapted to this damp oceanic outpost. Throughout history humans have influenced our vegetation. Prehistoric farmers, Roman settlers, Cistercian monks bringing plants from the Continent to their apothecaries' gardens, all changed wild habitats but often added species to our modest native list. By Tudor times a growing nursery trade was importing new plants.

Established plant communities, set in a pattern of traditional farm management were able to flourish until about 1950, when post-war pressures on food

“plants are the poor relations – fur and feathers score much higher points!”

production caused a tipping point. The years since have seen rapid and catastrophic intensification of farming methods, degrading our biodiversity; escalating development for a hugely



increased population eats up land; now there is climate change. Governments give lip service only to ‘Nature Conservation’ (always at the mercy of budgeting) and plants are the poor relations – fur and feathers score much higher points!

There is a strong sense among those who know and love wild plants that irreplaceable losses are accelerating. An august and splendid society, the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI), after generating and recording knowledge of our flora for more than a century, has lit a distress flare. In 1962 they produced the *Atlas of the British Flora*, mapping each species according to its distribution in every 10 kilometre square of our OS maps, updating this botanical information landmark in 2002. Collecting such

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immense data sets is a huge undertaking, so it is telling that the *next* Atlas is planned for 2022 – after twenty not fifty years – because a snapshot of our plants in crisis is considered essential. We need to know what remains, how much there is left, where it is, and what immediately threatens it.

Somerset has a rich flora by British standards, some of it well-known like the Cheddar Pink, some more obscure - Somerset Hair-grass, *Koeleria vallesiana*, is as rare in global terms but hardly a household name! These threatening times mean that knowledge of how commoner plants are faring is important too. Rare and common are recorded and studied nationwide by county flora groups, who report to the BSBI. The SRPG produces a

county Rare Plant Register *and* records all common plants, noting locations, monitoring the health of populations, comparing current status with historical records. By 2020 there will be a very detailed picture on which to plan survival strategies.

The SGT could be an enormous help to this endeavour. Footpaths and road verges leave much countryside inaccessible, so an invitation to record in a landowner's woods or fields is a valuable privilege. Records are not publicised, but contribute hugely to overall knowledge of our wild flowers *before it may be too late*. If you would like to welcome the Group (or a representative) please contact Liz McDonnell. 01934 712649 lizmcdonnell2005@gmail.com

The Making of an Elizabethan Garden at Montacute House - November 3rd

Helen Lawrence gives us an advance taste

Many SGT members will be familiar with Montacute with its majestic Elizabethan House and formal gardens. SGT member, Jennie Langford has been researching Montacute for several years now and has discovered much more than the House and garden we see today. Jennie became an SGT member while studying for a Garden History Foundation Degree at Hestercombe in 2009. Living not too far from Montacute, this became the focus for much of her research for the Course.

However, when the Course ended in 2012, Jennie continued to research the history of the garden, and Elizabethan gardens in general, both for personal interest, and for the National Trust. In fact, visitors to Montacute today can take an Elizabethan Welcome tour, for which much of Jennie's research helped inform.

Her investigations have uncovered fascinating things about the missing gatehouse, the mystery of the two storey pudding houses without access to the upper floor. She's also looked at the wider estate, and discovered lost features and interesting connections with the Phelps family, plus much, much more.



Sarracenia – A Neglected Genus

Nigel Hewitt-Cooper of Hewitt-Cooper Carnivorous Plants, Glastonbury, explains why we should grow them (www.hccarnivorousplants.co.uk)

Many of us are familiar with the North American Pitcher Plant genus *Sarracenia*, but comparatively few grow them. This is a genus which deserves a second, closer look.

Distribution - The plants are mostly found naturally in the South Eastern states of North America in peat bogs and marshy areas where they can dominate the landscape with their unmistakable pitchers. Sadly, because of land drainage this sight is now rarely seen, and coupled with fire suppression, those remaining bogs are rapidly choked out by encroaching vegetation. They are now critically endangered in the wild with many populations gone forever, fortunately existing in cultivation in some cases.

Morphology - There are currently 11 described species (though generally only 8 of these names are accepted) and they are rhizomatous perennials, with a growth point which divides, and hence over time the plants can become large and impressive. Their growth cycle commences in Spring with each growth point producing a flower which has a unique structure with an upturned

umbrella shaped style underneath 5 sepals and petals (normally either red or yellow) which after pollination are shed - the remainder gradually turning upwards so as not to inhibit the release of seed in the Autumn. After flowering, the first leaves of most species are ready to open - vegetative growth can be rapid at this time with the leaves growing to full height and opening in 4 or 5 weeks. The number of insects caught can be surprising, with the pitchers sometimes



S. x popei



filling to within 2 cm of the mouth, attracted by the sweet, narcotic laced nectar, and slipping on the waxy inner surface of the mouth and throat which extend downwards in to the pitcher tube (and is replaced mid-way down by downward pointing hairs which allow the insect to fall deeper into the leaf, but prevent upward movement). The insect prey is broken down by enzymatic action and the nutrients absorbed and stored in the rhizome. By early Autumn the pitchers

begin to die back from the top downwards, and the plants become

“They are now critically endangered in the wild with many populations gone forever”



S. flava

dormant.

Cultivation - These plants are easy to grow successfully. Being North American these aren't tropical species so avoid keeping them in a heated environment year round. They are bog plants so need to be kept wet, standing in 2-3 inches of rain water is ideal, and prefer full sun in a south facing aspect. They are ideal candidates in Winter for unheated greenhouses, conservatories, and in Summer months, South facing windowsills within the house. However, it can be just as straightforward to consider growing them outdoors year round. These are perfect plants for pond margins or as container plants on sunny patios or decks, and whilst they cannot tolerate garden soil they can be planted in a bog garden environment. An old plastic pond is perfect for this, especially if it can be given a sheltered

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Southerly aspect. Begin by ensuring it is watertight, and fill with moss - not sedge - peat. Fill the bog with rain water until the surface is spongy (peat has the remarkable ability to absorb and hold water); plant to the same level they grew in when potted and place some sphagnum moss around them, hiding the edges with cork or logs. The sphagnum will grow on the peat and form a vibrant green carpet, as happens in

habitat, and makes the perfect background to the red and green shades of the pitchers.

Apart from ensuring the planting doesn't dry out, maintenance is minimal - simply remove the dead growth in Winter when the plants are dormant. They can be covered in frost and snow with no detriment, and growth will resume in Spring when conditions are more favourable.

Joan Lorraine , Vice President of the Somerset Gardens Trust

David and Joan Freemantle remember an inspirational plantswoman

It is, with regret we have to report the death of Joan Lorraine, the inspired creator of **Greencombe Gardens**.

Joan's mother bought her Greencombe in 1966 when Joan came back from teaching in Uganda. During her time in Africa she discovered the joys of gardening and how it fitted into the ecology of West Somerset.

We first met Joan 23 years ago when establishing our garden tour business. Unlike many others who were dismissive of our plan, Joan was enthusiastic and supportive and as a result for 10 years we visited Greencombe once a fortnight during the Spring and early Summer to show our overseas guests her remarkable garden. During this time we enjoyed her enthusiasm for plants and gardens and her ecological fervour. Although tucked away in the far West of Somerset, Greencombe was a place of pilgrimage for enthusiastic

gardeners and the media. The BBC devoted a whole *Gardeners' World* to the garden whilst the *Guardian* rated it one of the top twelve gardens in the country. Joan had inexhaustible energy - immediately after her stroke 8 years ago she was attempting to write a novel with her undamaged hand. When confined to a wheel chair she wrote children's books as well as running the garden.

“Greencombe was a place of pilgrimage for enthusiastic gardeners and the media”

She maintained four national collections, *Erythroniums*, *Polystichums*, *Gaultheria* and *Vaccinium* which she claimed were the dull ones that nobody else wanted to collect. In typical fashion she travelled widely to see and collect specimens of the collections in the wild and wrote monographs of her experiences.

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For the Millennium she had a sweet chestnut felled and planked. From this she had a chapel built at the bottom of the garden. The main bole of the tree was carved into a magnificent Madonna and child reflecting Joan's conversion to the Catholic faith. The chapel is roofed with shingles from a village in Rumania to which she had run or organised several aid convoys during their difficult times. She organised the consecration of the chapel which was attended by 4 clerics, it was a wet and windy evening everywhere in Somerset except Joan's garden where the weather



was quiet and mild. Her influence even extended to the weather!

The future of Greencombe lies in the hands of its Trustees, but however well they look after the garden, it will not be the same without the indomitable Joan.

The Bath Society of Botanical Artists and Bowood

Anthony Pugh-Thomas finds a thriving organization

The Bath Society of Botanical Artists (www.bsba.co.uk) was formed in 2002, with the primary aim of helping members to develop their interests in botanical art and illustration by weekly meetings at which they exchange ideas, respond to constructive criticism with other members

and enjoy painting. Membership fluctuates at around forty with many members of the BSBA also being members of the Society of Botanical Artists and also the Society of Floral Painters. A number have been awarded Royal Horticultural Society medals in recognition of the distinction of their work.

Members can take part in day workshops that are arranged three or four times a year with well-known botanical artists. This is an opportunity for members to study



different techniques with established artists using various mediums such as watercolour, pen and ink, graphite and coloured pencils. More specialist topics such as using watercolour on vellum have also been studied and last year two workshops were held on drawing and painting insects to help members produce paintings of these with their appropriate plants.

Some members accept individual private commissions, and the Society regularly holds exhibitions of their work. In 2009 the Society was invited to exhibit over 60 paintings at the National Botanic Gardens of Ireland at Glasnevin, near Dublin, illustrating plants discovered in China by the great Irish plant hunter, Augustine Henry (See *"In the Footsteps of Augustine Henry"* by Seamus O'Brien



Morus nigra

"Members can take part in day workshops that are arranged three or four times a year with well-known botanical artists"

with foreword by Roy Lancaster, published Antique Collectors' Club. 2012). In 2012 the Society staged an exhibition marking the 125th anniversary of Bath Botanical Gardens exhibiting paintings of plants in the Gardens along with information on its history. The Society is currently working towards an exhibition on all aspects of trees to be held in Bath in October 2017.

The Somerset Gardens Trust



Of particular interest to members of the SGT in view of their imminent visit will be the paintings made at Bowood in 2013 at the invitation of Lord Lansdowne. Bowood is one of Britain's premier privately owned arboretums which has been developed over the last 250 years and includes some very rare species. The gardens won the HHA/Christies' Garden of the Year Award in 2014. Members of the BSBA visited the

gardens throughout 2012 and then painted specimens at their homes and at their weekly class held near Bath. Forty-three of these paintings of plants from the Rhododendron collection, the terraces, the arboretum and the walled garden were subsequently exhibited in the Orangery at Bowood House from March to November 2013.

My Garden - Little Yarford Farmhouse

Dilly and Brian Bradley on their fascinating garden

The garden at Little Yarford has quietly and steadily crept out around this C16th Somerset cross-passage farmhouse which lies on a gentle slope, nestled end-on into the South facing Quantocks Hills on good loam with an acid inclination. Originally reached by way of a high-hedged, deep-rutted lane, it now enjoys its own way in (note the gentle curves of the concrete road) between sloping banks of ornamental trees which are a special feature of the place, numbering some 300 different

"...on a good day [to] the kingfisher perching on the Taxodium 'Cascade Falls' at its edge"

cultivars, now forming the best collection in Taunton Deane.

It has evolved by way of creepers and climbers up the rendered walls of the cob house to surrounding flowers beds devoted to Spring then Summer bedding plants. Rather than developing a series of rooms to echo the footprint of the House it has been an exercise in 'mini-landscaping' becoming a setting for the House itself and such remaining features as the odd wall and the privy now embraced by a bower of *Magnolia grandiflora*. This specimen is counterbalanced by its sibling planted against the House which supports both a *Wisteria* and a *Trachelospermum*.

This East side of the House together with the South facing 'kitchen wing' and the privy form a sheltered sunspot for less hardy plants such as the *Lapageria rosea* and enables the *Campsis* to flower right up to the roof ridge in competition with yet another *Wisteria*, leaving behind the *Clematis armandii* which occludes the windows. It also provides a setting for some of the stone trough collection. The rest lie near the second pond which runs

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from the ‘Jubilee seat 1977’ South for 90° to focus on a heavily pruned larch and contains a wealth of aquatic plants and water lilies.

Beyond the East end of the kitchen is a view over the ‘weetabix pond’ with its raised beds on either side to the main pond and on a good day to the kingfisher perching on the *Taxodium* “Cascade Falls” at its edge. The main pond bends round the ‘tump’ or viewing mound. These were a feature of Elizabethan gardens and provides a viewing point of the orderliness of the whole layout of the 2 ½ acre site. It was formed from the spoil from the pond while the earth from pulling back the high banks of the lane, went into forming an Eastern and a Southern boundary bank and walk. The path is flanked by narrow herbaceous beds and to the South a camellia walk.

From the Southern end of the house, set off by a perfectly flat lawn, the view is



down through the diagonal tree procession to the end of the garden. Throughout the emphasis is on form and colour. Trees have been used time and again for their architectural properties with great emphasis on weeping forms. In particular the versatility of conifers has been exploited to the full.

To the West of the lane there are two paddocks planted up with respect to the views up to the Quantocks. Here there are over 200 cultivars with particular emphasis on beech trees. The serpentine ditch dividing the two plots reflects the serpentine nature of the trees adorning it, while the Western boundary forms a fine horizon for the splendid silhouettes of conifers along its edge. Entering by the front door gate one creeps along a narrow path to be shocked by the vista that opens up to this still evolving garden, characterised by great beauty and tranquility.





New Halswell House chimney pots being examined in the Mansion House, with Edward Strachan, Stuart Senior, Claire Fear of Architectural Thread, Helen Senior, Camilla Carter of the Somerset Gardens Trust and Councillor Ian Dyer of Sedgemoor District Council.



Before



After



The South West Regional Education Conference

Eileen Meiklejohn describes a fascinating day

The Annual Conference was held on Wednesday 2nd March 2016 at Cannington College with delegates from Devon, Hampshire and Wiltshire joining the SGT Education Group and the SGT President, Camilla Carter. We also welcomed RHS Levels 2 and 3 students and a representative from Exeter University. The theme for the day was Secondary Education and the challenge of engaging the interest of Students, and Schools, in horticulture.

Merryn Preece, the SW Community Outreach Adviser for the RHS, works with Schools. Her own school experience gives her good insight into the challenge of improving the perceived status of horticulture in Schools. She, very realistically, cited the problems of teacher stress, narrow careers advice, horticultural courses not being officially recognised or allowed to count in school results and tables and, lastly, the common misconception of gardening being for old people. An RHS survey showed that 70% of 18-year-olds thought that horticulture was for 'academic failures' a point the RHS Level 3 students were able, very vocally, to refute! They highlighted in particular the high science content and research projects in their course. The need to improve the perception of horticulture, to have it included in the National



Curriculum and to promote it at the Higher Education level, is clear; but work is happening. Twelve Schools are working at RHS Wisley to design gardens, make models of them and to submit them to assessors. The response of the Students involved has been very positive and the intention is now to extend this to other parts of the Country, including the South West.

The RHS runs a scheme for volunteers to work with garden clubs in Schools. They also have rocket seeds that have been in Space with Tim Peake and will be distributed to Schools; growth of the seeds from Space will be compared with that of Terrestrial ones, which makes for a very interesting experiment. The RHS also provides teacher training and this is

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especially designed to give confidence in what is still not a fully-established part of the curriculum.

Nigel Cox, course director at Cannington, then spoke about our own local

“An RHS survey showed that 70% of 18 year-olds thought that horticulture was for ‘academic failures’”

horticultural studies. (Nigel is another late transfer to a career in horticulture and is now very involved with RHS courses at

Cannington and the career prospects of Students). He emphasised the wide range of work in the courses including plant/soil science, garden design, horticultural technology, aquaponics, sustainable/organic horticulture, working with the Soil Association and plant selection and identification. They also cover horticulture as therapy and, with BIBIC, produced a healing garden at this year’s RB&W Show. Nigel is very positive about employment prospects for Students all of whom do work placements. A student spoke who made the progression from NT volunteer, to a seasonal NT job and, finally, to a permanent position at Knightshayes.

Cannington Walled Garden, opened in 2009, was established both as a local



Cannington Walled Garden



attraction and a resource for Students; as such it provides an interesting combination of historic garden and student experiment. Commendably, all plants sold are produced there. In the aquaponics centre, fish tanks provide water used to grow plants without the use of soil.

Our day gave us much food for thought and ideas for future work. As Gardens

Trusts we are all working in similar ways and our Annual Conference provides a welcome exchange of ideas and leaves us all feeling very positive. We are very grateful to Cannington for their support and hospitality, both of which were vital to the success of our day so ably organised by Sheila Rabson.

Book Review - Highlights from Newsletters of Wells Old Deanery Garden Project 2005-2015

Mervyn Wilson looks at an ever progressing restoration

Members may remember that SGT made a grant to this garden which was used to pay for a notice board there. It is still in good condition near the entrance. The garden has been achieved as planned; it is open every Wednesday in June, July and August, 10.30-12.30. There are also three open days, the next in September, when this publication is available (£5). More details may be found on the website.

The booklet ('News from the Garden') is a record of the project from the beginning (2003), but only opened in 2005, after the neglected garden had been transformed into more or less what we see today. It is a record year by year of what the Friends and volunteers have achieved, and all their activities, with many photos of the garden, individual plants and activities within it.

There are many other interesting details, including a resume of the life and achievements of Thomas Turner, Dean 1557-68, but ejected in the reign of Queen Mary, and often living in London or on the Continent. There is also an account of "The New Herbal" he published. As far as possible all the planting in the garden is of trees and plants he would have known, and of herbs described in his herbal; *Elecampane*, *Arum*, Germander, Thyme, Horehound and Feverfew, names that the tongue savours, and many more.

"I particularly liked the way the herb bed was set out."

It is well worth a visit. I particularly liked the way the herb bed was set out. The information, labelling and on the sheet, is good. It is well looked after by volunteers, who are friendly and generous with their time, even for the occasional visitor.

Events for Summer and Autumn 2016

**Wednesday
6th July**

Arundel Castle & Heale House

Regrettably there were insufficient numbers for this trip.

**Friday
22nd July**

Burton Pynsent Garden and Monument - *fully booked*

In the year of the 300th Anniversary of the birth of Lancelot "Capability" Brown, a visit to the Pynsent Column and the recently been restored early 20th century formal gardens were designed by Harold Peto. This will be more a country walk than a garden stroll.

**Wednesday
14th September**

AGM at Yarlington House, Yarlington

Following the meeting we will be able to walk in the wonderful garden. It has pleached limes, a laburnum walk, sunken garden, fern garden and a vegetable garden.

**Tuesday
20th September**

Bowood House

A special guided tour of the magnificent four acre walled gardens and terraces and hear how the landscape, borders, grounds and house itself has changed over time. Again there is a Capability Brown connection in the landscape.

Bowood has a beautifully kept sixty acre arboretum.

**Thursday
3rd November**

Making an Elizabethan Garden at Montacute House

Jennie Langford, a SGT member, will share her research on this local garden: full of history and a few surprises.

*Back Cover: **Encombe House**
(courtesy of Susie Thorne)*

*Front Cover: **Heligan Gardens**
(courtesy of the editors)*

www.somersetgardenstrust.org.uk