

# Somerset Gardens Trust

A member of The Gardens Trust

## Summer 2018

*Issue 67*



*Featuring*

Restoring a lost treasure at Halswell – p.5

# The Somerset Gardens Trust



## From the Editors

Where was Spring? We moved from Winter to Summer with all the Spring flowers arriving at the same time. Primroses, cowslips, daffodils and bluebells. Short but memorable. From floods to watering. A year to remember. And now we are celebrating Summer with its long days in this edition. There are fascinating articles on the remarkable restoration of Halswell and the glories of Blaise Castle with the fun of some members gardens in Somerset and good descriptions of the many activities of the Trust.

We are open to your ideas for articles in future editions

Christopher and Lindsay Bond  
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## From the Chairman

Dear Members,

As I returned from 12 days in Anglesey and Pembrokeshire the whole Country is in joyous mood. The blissful sunshine after a prolonged Winter has cheered both town and country. Castle Cary is decked with bunting and Union Jacks for the Royal wedding and hedges are filled with flowering Hawthorn and Queen Anne's Lace with bluebells here and there. Even my garden looks beautiful with alliums and



the last of the tulips, lilac, wisteria, azaleas, and rhododendrons underplanted with bluebells and the first of the roses. I once looked pityingly at my sister-in-law who looking at my previous garden in Batcombe said "*it must look beautiful when it's all out*". I don't do all out, I do

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timed succession! But this year she is correct.

Final preparations are under way for the Herefordshire visit in July, it has proved popular and we are all greatly looking forward to going. I am now working on a four night visit to Northern Ireland in May 2019. We will probably stay at the Dunadry Hotel near Antrim, which is having a five million pound refit, all the bedrooms are being refurbished and should be very comfortable for us. Members will be able to book their own flights or ferry crossings, extending their visits or not at will or they can join the designated Easy Jet flights from Bristol (the timetable is not

yet out for May 2019). I travel there this August to join a group of Northern Ireland Gardens Trust members for a visit to their choice of top gardens and a recce on the hotel before finalising our programme.

We need to thank Mary ter Braak, firstly for a new membership leaflet which she has designed over the Winter, but also for her Privacy notice that all our members have received. Somerset was the first Gardens Trust to do this and Mary's paper has been used with her permission by several other Counties.

Camilla Carter

*Mill Wood bridge at Halswell: before and after restoration*



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## Restoration at Halswell Park – the Bridge in the Wood

*Edward Strachan on the vision and the achievement*

When I last wrote in November 2016, we were about to start work on the so-called Bath Stone Bridge, which is set in Mill Wood, to give the appearance of a bridge, but is in fact a dam. This reflects a technique in Georgian landscape architecture, notably seen in Charles Bridgeman’s 1730 dam at the end of the Serpentine.

The Bridge was clearly a source of great pride to Sir Charles Kemeys-Tynte (1710-1785), owner of Halswell, and its gentleman landscaper. When he commissioned Hogarth to paint his portrait in 1753, he used the planned Bridge, with masons clambering over the scaffold, as his background.



Carving the shellwork sculpture

According to Estate records, the Bridge was completed in 1755, and the two herms were most likely installed as Mill Wood’s “genius loci” the following year. It was

*“Tom Waugh was working to complete an interpretation of the fine shellwork”*

described by Arthur Young in 1771 in his Tour of the Southern Counties, and in subsequent years, when abandoned as a ruin in Halswell’s battered post-war landscape, it captured the imagination of John Piper, who painted it as “*The Cascade Bridge*”.

Once our architect, Robert Battersby of Architecton, had received planning permission in October 2016, Ann Manders, Mill Wood’s project manager, oversaw the vegetation clearing, pond draining, protective scaffolding and the subsequent archaeology and surveying of the exposed Bridge. Then our talented and industrious stonemason, Mike Orchard, and his team set to work, firstly by carefully dismantling damaged ashlar stone to carry off to his studio and then removing the

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concrete repairs done in the 1970's.

Over the Winter Mike worked diligently in his studio on Architecton's plans to repair the damaged stone, and work new pieces for the missing places, mainly on the pediment, which needed total replacing. Meanwhile, our timetable was thrown out of kilter by the discovery, in the newly-exposed silt of the pond, of the front balustrade, which had, according to old photographs, collapsed at least 50 years ago. Robert Battersby diligently spent many weekends over the Spring, putting it back together again.

Mike did not blanch at the extra work, and during the Summer and Autumn, fixed the repaired and new ashlar stone to the Bridge. Simultaneously, Halswell's favourite sculptor, Tom Waugh, was working to complete an interpretation of

the fine shellwork, which flank the apse, one side of which had been completely lost. Tom completed his work and installed the sculpture last October.

By the end of November, we were ready to fill the pond, and although we cannot fill it completely as we need to finalise details for the water management over the next month or so, we can gain a strong impression of how the Bridge should always have looked, a classically-inspired work of art in its landscape.

All that remains now is for Tom Waugh to repair the remaining herm and sculpt a copy for the missing partner. We will do this over the Summer, and once we have planted background, we will consider the restoration of the Bridge complete.

*Editors' Note: The resulting restoration is breathtaking.*

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## My Garden

*Pauline Clark enjoys her new garden*

I live in the middle of Somerton where, on my side of the road, the houses face West and have high blue lias walls surrounding them. My house is L-shaped - blue lias slabs on two sides and with the lawn spreading across. The many previous owners planted a silver birch, yew tree, holly, roses and many other plants. The lawn has a wonderful old Apple Tree with its branches stretching widely linking house and garden. As I write in Spring, under the tree are a mass of Tenby daffodils flowering.

Behind the tree a large curved greenhouse/conservatory is attached to my neighbours'



walls. It must have been part of a much larger structure. Inside I found a large rosemary bush, and some rhubarb, which I quickly replaced with lavenders! Facing



*“the largest, ‘Shadow Dancer’, draws the eye from the end of the garden”*

South, it is where I sit and relax without sound of phone or doorbell. Further down the terrace, an old painted garden seat is matched by the *Rosa mutabilis* climbing alongside. When I moved, I wanted some plants from ‘home’ and in one corner I planted the red leaved hazel. It has quickly filled the space. One of the pleasures of this garden is the way plants seem to want to grow - unlike my previous garden which was on heavy clay.

The sloping bed facing North was easy to fill. There is a garden shed with *Mahonias*, *Hypericums* and *Epimediums* planted below. On the other side of the path are

## Schools and the plant history curriculum

*Sheila Rabson looks at Roman gardening*

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

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

*Eleagnus 'Limelight', Hellebores and a weeping Cotoneaster.*

There are so many plants one wants to have...I have added three beds in the lawn. *Pyrus salicifolia argentea* with silvery plants and Sarah Raven blue rose, and *Prunus serrula* which dominates a bed of orange/tan plants...*Heucheras* and the rose ‘Lady of Shallot’ which seems to flower for months. With hindsight these beds should have been placed further into the lawn, sadly too late now.

The third bed which I am now planting is for my sculpture ‘Oscar’, an “*ancient bronze fish*”. I am planning reeds/rushes/grasses (to make him feel at home). I have three other sculptures of Portland stone - the largest, ‘Shadow Dancer’, draws the eye from the end of the garden – and two small owls guard the steps to the terrace.

The Romans brought olives with them to eat but found our climate too cold and wet for them to grow successfully and fruit. Climate change does now allow us to grow modern varieties although we do not have many olive processing plants as yet. We are much better suited to growing cherries and plums which they also brought. Clearing out Roman wells shows that they also brought box trees with them and it is thought that they had some sort of religious purpose. Box trees were also used to surround growing areas – much as in a potager today.

Our vegetable range was considerably increased by the seeds they must have brought. It is known that they gave us onions, shallots, garlic, leeks, cabbages,



Detail of Roman garden wallpainting from the House of the Golden Bracelets, Pompeii

peas, celery, turnips, radishes and asparagus. Wild fennel was known to grow in Britain but the Romans used the seeds, along with celery and dill, in preparing and flavouring their food.

The Romans brought apothecaries with their armies as they went on their travels. Evidence has been found of phials and curative potions to help deal with medical problems. There is also some written evidence to show how they used some of the plants they had brought with them and those they were now growing. Fennel seeds are recorded as being good to sweeten the breath and would also aid one's digestion; greater celandine, much less common than the lesser form, was used to cure warts and corns on the foot (the latter would have been a real problem

for a marching soldier).

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

Some of the villas in both Italy and Great Britain had floors and frescoes which showed gardens of the time. Certain exotic plants were left behind in Italy and yet they appear in local villa floors e.g. pomegranates. Was this an artist thinking of home (or his stomach) as he did the floor design? Looking at frescoes allows us to see how some of the gardens may have looked on the ground. Dining rooms were often painted with edible fruits and vegetables on the walls. It is somewhat ironic that most of the dye stuff would have come from the same fruits and vegetables they were depicting.

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

*“Ground elder is one plant I can imagine that most of us would have wished they had left at home!”*

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## The Lure of Japanese Gardens

*Caroline Lee explains why the ideas behind them are so powerful*

On a cold wet January Tuesday we went to Cerne Abbas Village Hall to a very interesting lecture on Japanese gardens organised by the Dorset Gardens Trust. Our lecturer was Yoko Kawaguchi, who was an extremely knowledgeable and a very good speaker. She brought to life the sometimes rather puzzling aspects of Japanese gardens with some amazing photographs of the many different forms of garden including the popular 'stroll' garden (influential in the modern Western 'meander' garden).

Gardens were designed as places of peace and contemplation with the spirit of Buddhism. Japan is a collection of many islands and has mountains and craggy shorelines and the gardens depict this in their design and shape. They are all meant to be viewed from a particular place from which they must have perspective; this is done by the placing of a lake or pond with rocks in the foreground disappearing to a waterfall with planting going up distant hills. In the foreground pebbles for a shoreline or a path or a bridge connecting the island rocks, which are usually placed in threes, but pebbles can also be used for streams. All must be in

harmony with the planting of trees and shrubs and the placing of a Temple, ornamental bird or shaped rocks. In dry or Zen gardens raked pebbles represent water or the sea and any rocks in the middle, islands. These gardens are for viewing only not for walking around.

The original gardens were influenced by the Court and aristocracy and date back to the 11th century. As time went on the Chinese influence of their art and literature began to bring in more flowering shrubs and cherries, the forerunner of our modern ornamental cherry. Pines became important in design and by the mid 19th century Japan opened up to the West so designs began to change with more flowering shrubs, grasses and bamboo. Despite this the same themes remain of perspective, harmony and the shapes of rocks, pebbles and planting, keeping to the original representation of the islands of the Sea of Japan.



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It was a most enjoyable day with a delicious light lunch supplied by Myra's' Karseki in Dorchester. It certainly made you want to learn more about this fascinating subject.

*“In dry or Zen gardens raked pebbles represent water or the sea and any rocks in the middle”*

Editors' Note: We shared Caroline's fascination at the Talk; indeed we went further and commissioned a dry garden

ourselves (see picture attached). Our design uses the principles Caroline well describes such as sea cliffs on one side and low coast on the other. Our gardener had never built one before but enjoyed (?) the challenge including hunting out 'dragon' rocks in Somerset Quarries. The greatest difficulty was in getting the proportions right for the plants and trees around it. Cloud pruned trees are surprisingly expensive but they and the bamboo fence catch the spirit of our design. Contrary to our fears the pebbles do not need to be raked daily – unless the dog plays games there! The build process is exciting but requires full commitment to the underlying ideas.

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## Humphry Repton and the Blaise Castle Estate

*Hilary and Austin Little celebrate his vision and courage at Blaise Castle*

Humphry Repton (1752-1818) was the last of the great national garden designers of the Georgian era. He moved away from Lancelot (Capability) Brown's style of landscape design with its open parklands surrounding a house and introduced the terrace as a base upon which to site a house with small specialized flower gardens around it.

Repton was associated with over 400 gardens in the UK including several in the South-West, producing a 'Red Book' for each of the gardens he designed. He was particularly proud of his design for the carriage drive for the Blaise Castle estate

to the North-West of Bristol which, he later described as *“one of the finest approaches in the kingdom; altho' for many hundred yards the sides of the hills were so steep, that I had to be let down by ropes to mark the line of the road”*.

When John Scandrett Harford commissioned Repton in 1795, the site presented a considerable challenge. It comprised the old manor house, which Harford was to replace; Blaise Hill, upon which a castellated folly had earlier been built as a summerhouse and to which Repton created a scenic walk; the land between the hill and Henbury Village; the Hazel Brook in its spectacular limestone gorge, the cliffs of which rise almost vertically above the valley floor; and land to the East of the gorge.

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*The Woodmans Cottage before and after renovation*

Repton decided to bypass the village of Henbury and take the carriage drive through a castellated gate-house from the main road. Entering by that route today, you still follow a deep, wooded ravine where, just as Repton intended, *“ivy and creeping plants’ have now obliterated ‘the rawness of new walls and fresh hewn rocks’ and the approach is indeed, ‘in strict character with the wildness of the scenery’”*.

He said the carriage drive should *‘excite admiration and surprize without any mixture of that terror which...is very apt to destroy the delights of romantic scenery’*. Since 1820 when the drive was altered, there have been precipitous drops from some of the hairpin bends, but as Repton designed the drive, it followed a gentler route along the line of the footpath which leaves the drive about 200m from the entrance gate and rejoins it just past and to the right of the ‘Woodmans Cottage’. Repton designed this as a thatched dwelling with a *“covered seat at the gable*

*end”* suggesting that the smoke from the chimney would produce a pleasing artistic effect, particularly on a summer’s evening. From here, a long hairpin bend leads you to an ornamental bridge over the Hazel Brook.

Walks between the house and the castle already existed but Repton was concerned that they could only be enjoyed by the fit and able-bodied. He, therefore, took his carriage drive along a route from which passengers could enjoy the vista through the woods to the river, then considered one of the most *“striking features of the place”*.

Finally, as the trees disappear, the carriage drive reaches its climax as the road climbs to an open expanse of grassland. There the visitor sees, for the first time, the elegant Georgian mansion on its terrace together with the curved orangery, situated as recommended by Repton and built in 1806 by John Nash, with whom Repton often collaborated.

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*SGT at Mill Wood*



*SGT at Kiftsgate*

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## Further Events for 2018

### Autumn Lecture

Tony Kirkham, Head of Arboretum at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

*“Following in the Footsteps of Wilson in China”*

### Thursday 15 November

Stoke St Gregory Village Hall 6pm

Tickets £15 for members and for guests

We look forward to an exceptional evening with renowned tree expert, Tony Kirkham. Tony went to China with Mark Flanagan to follow in the footsteps of E H Wilson. Following this they wrote a book. Sadly, Mark who was the Assistant Ranger at Savill Gardens, died suddenly and tragically at a young age. E H ‘Chinese’ Wilson who was a notable English plant collector and explorer who introduced a large range of about 2000 of Asian plant species to the West; some sixty bear his name.

Working at Kew is the top job in arboriculture. Tony and his team manage some 14,000 trees and share their passion for trees with the visitors to Kew. He has been on several plant collecting expeditions in East Asia, including South Korea, Taiwan, the Russian Far East and Sakhalin, China and Japan to add to Kew’s collection and replace trees lost in the Great Storm of 1987.

Recently, you may have seen him talking trees with Dame Judi Dench.

Tony sits on many professional committees including on The International Dendrology Society, Science and Education Committee, RHS Awards and is a vice chair of the RHS Woody Plant Committee. He is a Trustee of the Tree Register of Britain and Ireland and also of the Chelsea Physic Garden.

## Our Events So Far

### Camerton Court

*“Just to let you know that the visit to Camerton Court was AMAZING. It is a huge place and masses of snowdrops.”*

### Halswell House and Mill Wood

*“We really enjoyed the visit, far more informative and extensive than we anticipated – and a roof tour as a bonus. The work Edward Strachan has done there since our AGM in 2015 is quite extraordinary and a delight to see.”*

*“Tony and his team manage some 14,000 trees and share their passion for trees with the visitors to Kew”*



## Beautiful Hydrangeas

*Sally Gregson of Mill Cottage Plants explains how to choose and prune them*

Hydrangeas! Those bright blue ice-cream cones that are often sold on short, 60cm stalks. We take them home triumphantly, plant them at the front of the border in our alkaline soil, and are taken aback when the next year they produce pink or red flowers atop 2m stems. We prune them back only to find they refuse to flower again. And at that stage we often grumpily discard them.

But, *Hydrangea macrophylla* with large, shiny leaves that flower best by the seaside, flower only at the end of their stalks. Pruning them back like any other shrub removes the flower buds. So ask about the flowering height when you buy. And take into account the pH of the soil: pink flowers on alkaline soil, blue on acid.

White flowered varieties always fade to pink or red. With the notable exception of *H. arborescens* ‘Annabelle’ and her sisters, who fade to light brown.

*Hydrangea serrata*, on the other hand, are smaller. Most flower earlier, from the beginning of

July at about 60cm, some at 1m, and a few at 45cm. And then often the leaves, white flowers and all, mature rich crimson. They all prefer light shade and a little moisture in the soil. And they are delicate, pretty, and eminently suitable for today’s smaller modern gardens. They come from the wooded hillsides of central Honshu, Japan, as do *Acers* and *H. paniculata*, and have been grown there for centuries in temple gardens.

*“Those bright blue ice-cream cones that are often sold on short, 60cm stalks”*



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*Hydrangea paniculata* has tall, pointed flowers that are cream or white, and fade to glorious shades of coral pink to red. But their most useful quality for cold gardens is that they can be pruned down to a matter of a few centimetres from the ground in April and then flower on the current season's wood.

'Annabelle' and her sisters similarly flower on new wood, and look splendid in groups where their big, floppy heads can lean into their neighbours like tipsy showgirls. Their flowers stay green and cream longer without any direct sunlight on their flowers.

*Hydrangea petiolaris* is a lovely subject for a shady wall or scrambling through trees, but there is also *H. seemanii* with elegant evergreen leaves, and flowers like mounds of clotted cream. It should be more widely grown.

And there are many other species of this lovely shrub to fill a late Summer garden in style: *H. quercifolia* with its red leaves in a little sun, and *H. involucrata* with cream and apricot flowers from nut-shaped buds is rare, but quite the most beautiful of all.

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## Research and Recording Workshop at Sidholme

*Jenny Hawksley reports*

By kind invitation of the Devon Gardens Trust, some members of our own Research and Recording Committee attended a workshop at Sidholme in February. This was a very interesting and informative day. Highlights included Dianne Long, Chair of the DGT, explaining the setting up of an historical register. Records need reviving and sites at risk identifying urgently. Claire Greener reported on the Devon Gardens Trust's library and filing system.

A historical landscape consultant, Simon Bonvoisin, gave a valuable talk on useful sources including first edition maps, tithe maps, national catalogues of archives, books including *'Bibliography of British Gardens'* by Ray Desmond and the use of

search engines for images.

The Exeter City Council Conservation Officer, John Clark, explained the planning process. All Local Planning Authorities should consult The Gardens Trust where appropriate. An important word is *'Significance'* (see Helen Senior's article on these in the online version of the Summer 2014 edition of the Magazine.) The onus is on the applicant to describe any assets which would be affected.

The former Curator of the National Trust, Jeremy Pearson, then described how to

*"All Local Planning Authorities should consult The Gardens Trust where appropriate"*

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assess a site and local sites of interest with valuable tips for architectural photography. He also detailed work by Historic England and English Heritage. Members were reminded of the need to give credits for any photographs used. Consider the heritage passport and copyright where charges may be payable if used for commercial purposes.

Our thanks to the Devon Gardens Trust for this opportunity.

*Ian Clark, Chairman of Research and Conservation Committee adds:*

The Parks and Gardens have done a considerable amount of work in updating the data that they currently hold on historic gardens. The data will soon be re-launched, but, before doing so they will be circulating a list of features that they wish to include within their database. I will be circulating the list to our research team but if anyone else is interested please contact me by email ([oliveleafdesign@yahoo.com](mailto:oliveleafdesign@yahoo.com)).

For anyone interested in understanding historic parks and gardens better there is a new online study course that has just been

launched. It goes under the heading 'learning with the experts' see link. <https://www.learningwithexperts.com/gardening/courses/conservation-of-historic-gardens>

Planning applications are being monitored by the Research and Conservation Committee to make sure that historic parklands are not being adversely affected. Currently applications at Ston Easton and Marston are causing concern but hopefully with the help of The Gardens Trust the SGT can make sure that the applications are dealt with proportionately.

Hopefully the above, along with the short report from Jenny, will be of some interest to our readers.

*“The Parks and Gardens have done a considerable amount of work in updating the data that they currently hold on historic gardens”*

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## Aswan Botanical Gardens, Egypt

*Mervyn and Margaret Wilson find an enchanted garden in an unlikely place*

In 1898 General Kitchener was given an island in the Nile - just to the west of Elephantine Island and much smaller – about ⅓ mile long, and not much over 100 yards wide. He had, we were told, great

knowledge and interest in tropical trees and plants, and here began a collection. After he departed, the island passed in 1928 to the Ministry of Agriculture as a garden of exotic and tropical plants.

Today it is that still, and many of the original trees have reached maturity and are well labelled. It has been laid out on a grid, with a central paved alley lined by



oil (4), aromatics (5), medicinal (21), fibrous (5), climbing (10), shrubs (16), palms (16). Some were familiar, others not. I noted, as we looked around: *Albizzia* sp. *labbek* ‘Woman’s tongue tree’, *Artocarpus integrifolia* ‘Jack fruit’ (which can grow up to 2kg), *Bassia latifolia* ‘Mowra butter’, *Bauhinia hookerii* ‘camel foot’ with rather beautiful flowers out in March, *Bombax malabaricum*, widely planted in Aswan, with bright red flowers similar to a magnolia on a tall tree carried before the leaves (in February they were falling to make a scarlet carpet); capok, sago palm, *Ficus sycomorus*, a beautiful fruit and a light tough wood used for making sarcophagi; *Persicaria americana* giving vitamins A,B,C,D,E; *Roystonea regia*, the white trunked palm, *Saraca indica*, a tree with balls of showy orange flowers in the middle; *Tectonia grandis*, teak; and *Vitex agnus castus* ‘the chaste tree’, so called because the leaflets shrink when touched.

white barked palms. There is also a small Herbarium; somewhat faded specimens of leaves and fruit displayed, together with descriptions, indicating where the tree is from and its uses.

We were given a printed guide (Italian), illustrated with faded colour photos, but with a complete alphabetical list giving name, family, and provenance. It also gave them in categories: Timber (23), fruit (23),

*“Bombax malabaricum, widely planted in Aswan, with bright red flowers similar to a magnolia”*

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We saw mahogany, Ebony, Sandalwood, Cinnamon, the pudding pipe tree, Baobabs and bottle trees, Tamarind, Avocado, Guava, Mango, to name but a few.

The overall presentation is impressive and attractive. Many of the trees are full grown and lightened by *Bourgainvillea*,

knowledge derived from them with the growing trees. I would reckon about two hours is needed for a thorough visit. The approach has to be made by boat and that adds to the charm, only lessened by the crowd of importunate sellers at the entry and departure points.

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## Benter Gardens, Radstock

*Alex Crossman describes two exciting gardens*

Benter Gardens are opening to the public again in 2018, under the National Garden Scheme, after a successful first year in 2017 that raised over £1,500 for charity. The gardens have been much acclaimed with several gardening groups requesting private viewings later this Summer.

Benter Gardens are two contrasting and adjacent gardens belonging to Fire Engine

*“The gardens sit in a beautiful, secluded valley, among species-rich pastures, hedgerows and woodland”*

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House and College Barn. The gardens sit in a beautiful, secluded valley, among species-rich pastures, hedgerows and woodland. A trip to the gardens takes you along labyrinthine lanes with tall hedge-banks, woods and wildflowers.

Fire Engine House dates from the 1700's when the property supplied water to the local colliery, later becoming an inn (the old skittle alley still occupies a stone barn at the edge of the garden) before conversion into a house in the 1960's. The garden is established and has evolved over 25 years, with characterful stone walls and hedgerows framing mature borders, shrubs and lawns. A lower garden

is sloped and intimate, enclosed by pretty borders. Narrow paths and old stone steps invite you to the upper garden, which opens into a large lawn with pergola, trees, interesting shrubs and deep borders. A doorway in a garden wall leads under ivy and clematis, through a tumbledown shelter and into a small arboretum with fruit trees, native cultivars and exotics.

College Barn was a hay-barn and animal shelter in the grounds of Fire Engine House before conversion to a dwelling ten years ago. The garden here was started from scratch in 2013, and most of it is

constructed on thin soil or made up ground. The planting includes swathes of perennial plants and grasses in tribute to the surrounding meadows; native hornbeam and hazel hedgerows create structure, inspired by local field boundaries and copses. The garden uses steel sheets to



edge borders and create dramatic structure. An archway of hops leads you to a cottage-style garden packed with productive vegetable beds, herbs, flowers, gravel plantings and a small woodland garden.

The two gardens are joined by a short grass path and for the more adventurous there's a winding woodland walk through oak, ash and alder woodland with a boardwalk, waterfall and steep steps opening into a fen meadow.

Please visit the National Garden Scheme website for further details: <https://www.ngs.org.uk/?bf-garden=34029>

# The Somerset Gardens Trust



## Financial Report

*The Hon. Treasurer, Stuart Senior, reviews the last year*

For the financial year which ended on 31 March 2018 the Trust recorded a loss of £2,433 compared with the surplus of £2,670 in the previous year. Members may recall that last year's surplus was in part due to the rise in the value of our investment of just over £3,000, without which we would have shown a loss. The financial markets underwent a correction at the beginning of 2018 so our Accounts will show a more modest rise in value this year of £55! However, the investment continues to generate dividends at a rate of about 4%.

So the 2018 outcome was pretty much in line with expectations. The lack of a multi-day tour, a plant sale and evening lectures within the financial year all contributed to

a more modest fund-raising outcome than in previous years. On a more positive note the Education Committee awarded grants to 13 schools. The total sum 'invested' in future generations of gardeners was £3,826, up 23% on the previous year

*“On a more positive note the Education Committee awarded grants to 13 schools”*

(£3,100). However, other than supporting a gardener at Hestercombe in pursuit of her RHS qualification, we received no requests for restoration grants or other bursaries.

I've made the point at many AGMs that we are not in the business of creating a large cash pile: we should be spending our funds on our charitable objects and members are encouraged to spread the word that monies are available.

As regards subscription income, a mixed picture emerges. As a result of the increase in subscription rates, subscription income rose by 29%.

However, the increase prompted a number of members to reconsider their membership of



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the Trust and so numbers have fallen by 12%. At the end of March 2018, the Trust had 294 members of whom 73 were Life Members. This compares with 331 members, of whom 75 were Life Members, at the end of March 2017. One unintended beneficial consequence of the fall in the number of members is that the waiting lists for oversubscribed visits and trips are shorter!

The net result is that the Trust's total funds at 31 March 2018 were £53,671 (2017: £56,104). Looking ahead to the current year, the Herefordshire tour plus the Tony

Kirkham lecture in November should, with all the other events, lead to a satisfactory outcome, Brexit, Trump and Putin notwithstanding!

The Accounts are now with A C Mole, our independent examiner, to scrutinise and will be signed and circulated prior to the AGM at Stoberry House at Wells in September.

PS If any members are minded to organise an SGT plant sale (which used to generate in the region of £3,000) please let the Events Committee know.

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## Members Forum – My favourite Gardening implement

### *Lucy Nelson .... my watering can*

It is the 1st of May tomorrow and has been the longest and dreariest Winter that I can remember. With two lots of snow and that terrible freezing rain, I am amazed that every bud hasn't shrivelled. But, suddenly we are approaching the moment in the year when we do have to water. I love those evenings when I can wander onto the terrace and spend an hour watering. It is a moment when you can look at the combinations in the border and in the pots and remind oneself of those totally magnificent ideas one had in September in the company of the bulb magazine. Did I mean to plant those magenta tulips with the burnt umber ones? Yet how happy the sweet peas look despite it being on 3 degrees this morning. The miraculous renewal of our Spring deserves contemplation. It

is my idea of Mindfulness; watering can in hand and spending an hour of immense gratitude that the Spring has arrived, at last!

### *Robin Ray ..... my swoe*

As a carpenter may speak affectionately about a favourite plane or chisel, so I, a gardener, feel free to wax lyrical about my swoe. This is a wondrous tool - a type of hoe. Its business end is set at right angles to the handle and has three cutting edges and is as effective when pushed as when pulled. Although full-size it is lightweight and surprisingly delicate and so ideal for use between growing plants and in similarly restricted spaces. It is also my go-to implement when it comes to the final preparation of a seed



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bed, creating a fine tilth, making a drill and covering the seeds; actually, whatever the task my swoe is always close to hand. I have two but my favourite is the original Wilkinsons Sword Edge. Dr Doolittle like, I have taken to calling it my pushmi-pullyu which probably explains the strange look I got when I asked if anyone knew where I had left it.

## **Dilly Bradley ..... that fork**

This is the sorry tale of what was rather than is my favourite garden tool. Marriage to a bachelor of 37 devoted to his garden brought with it a number of gardening gifts. Best among these was a set of garden hand fork and trowel but with a difference; lovely quality wooden handles but half width blade to the trowel and only two prongs to the fork.



It was the fork that was my joy – the tines were long and the angle of the handle just right for leverage. It fitted in so nicely to get out those deep rooted weeds that sneakily lurk so close to our most precious plants.

Married life brought not only babies but poultry and these bred profusely; one year the Muscovies exploded and some interbred with the Khaki Campbells whose

eggs I never found (if indeed they ever laid them). As you may well know the drakes are most active and vigorous in proving their masculinity and I must have been exercising a little women's liberation. I threw that precious fork at the offending bird. My aim has never been good. I neither hit the drake nor did I ever find the fork. Nor has it ever re-appeared out of the long grass. I have never found a replacement and I still mourn its loss.

## **John Cryer ..... another swoe**

Many garden tools such as hoes, spades and forks have evolved over the ages and their design reflects centuries of use and experience, modified sometimes by varying soil conditions and crop requirements. It is rare, therefore, for an entirely new tool design to appear on the market and to be so relevant as to be immediately emulated by other manufacturers sensing an immediate success.

So it was when Wilkinson's introduced the Swoe, a two edged weeding hoe with its sharp blade set at an angle to the handle and designed to glide over the soil both when pushed forward and then retracted, severing unwanted weeds on each stroke.

Made in stainless steel, the blade retained its edge and was an easy to use, easy to clean addition to the garden shed. Other manufacturers quickly followed, but the Wilkinson's Swoe swiftly became the generic name for this welcome new type of garden tool now popular throughout the World.

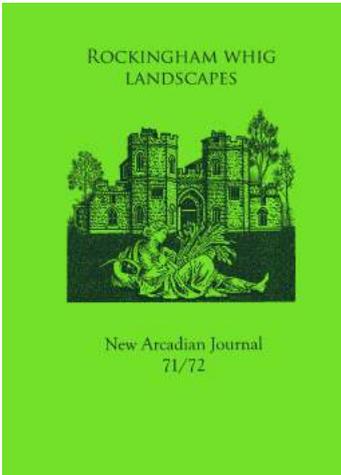
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## The New Arcadian Press

Antony Pugh-Thomas

The New Arcadian Press was formed in 1981 by Patrick Eyres, Ian Gardner and Grahame Jones and between 1981 and 1986 it published a quarterly journal and



broadsheets and a wide range of other works such as cards, small books print folios and exhibition posters.

The Press now concentrates on issuing the New Arcadian Journals dealing primarily in detail with the 18<sup>th</sup> century landscape garden. They make fascinating readings as each issue combines original scholarship with vivid illustrations and closely examines the architecture, the monuments and the sculpture of historic landscape.

You will find expertly written articles on such gardens as Rousham and the impact

of William Kent; on the political temples at Stowe and the rise and fall of the Temple-Grenville dynasty; on the on-going restoration of Painshill Park - how easy it was to face ruin by indulging in “improvements”!; -on the rivalry between the creators of Wentworth Castle and Wentworth Woodhouse; on the contrasting aims of William Shenstone, Lord Lyttleton and Lord Stamford at the Leasowes, Hagley and Enville, and many more.

There are issues devoted to Lancelot “Capability” Brown –such as on his work at Wotton House where the gardens are “*a triumph of water engineering*”; and this year the Press will be issuing “*On the Spot: the Yorkshire Red Books of Humphry Repton, landscape gardener*”.

By way of variety, a special issue was devoted to Naumachia or “Naval Warfare”, the annual battle at Peasholm Park, Scarborough.

Dr Eyres has also written many works about that puzzling but rewarding creation of Ian Hamilton Finlay at Little Sparta.

Prices vary and not all issues are still in print but details are available from the Press at 13 Graham Grove, Burley, Leeds LS4 2NF.01113 230 4608 or [www.NewArcadianPress.co.uk](http://www.NewArcadianPress.co.uk)

And if you are ever looking for a charismatic speaker, try Dr Eyres: some years ago he spoke at the AGM of the AGT at Harrogate and at the end of an hour it was clear that the audience would have been glad if his talk had been double its appointed length.

# Events for the second half of 2018

Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> June

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

Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> June

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

Monday 9<sup>th</sup> to Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> July

A tour of some of the wonderful Herefordshire Gardens

Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> September

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

Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> November

A talk by Tony Kirkham, Head of Arboretum at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew on "*Following in the Footsteps of Wilson in China*"

Front Cover: *Halswell* - courtesy of Ann Cook

Back Cover: "*My Rose*" - courtesy of Diana Hebditch

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