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Paul Cumbleton*

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# Somerset Gardens Trust

A member of The Gardens Trust

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## SUMMER 2020

*Featuring*

A Professional Guide to Garden Design – p.5



# The Somerset Gardens Trust



## From the Editors

What a surreal time – normal life in the house and garden, but locked down from meeting people and the hectic social whirl of Summer. At the time of writing, we have enjoyed the sunniest driest Spring in recent memory – some comfort for the Covid 19 depression. The primroses, cowslips and narcissi had wonderful but brief glory, and we can look forward to the first rose season. Your gardens will never be so well tended again!

This bumper issue is designed to cheer – so many interesting and varied articles by twenty contributors from lovely gardens to whet the appetite for visits next year and to no less than four plant articles to encourage catalogue and internet browsing. There's weeks of reading ahead of you; if you're inspired to contribute an article, please let us know.

Christopher and Lindsay Bond

[bondchristopher@btconnect.com](mailto:bondchristopher@btconnect.com)



## From the Chairman

Dear Members,

Little did we know when we were reading in the last magazine on how gardening can bring great benefits (the Wild Roots project), how much we were going to need our gardens such a short time later. There is no doubt it is a difficult time and there is sadness and stress a plenty. However, those of us who are lucky enough to have a garden, a balcony or a window box, can derive pleasure from them. I do hope that without our lectures and garden visits for the time being, you will be able to sit and enjoy your patch, ignoring the weeds (if you have any).

We surely all have things we would like to see in the future which are better than before this pandemic. I have always valued food and knowing where it came from. I do hope those who are new to the magic of seeds will continue to appreciate growing food however little it may be. I also value local suppliers and have always supported my local nurseries and growers. I hope to see them survive and continue to buy from them in the future.

To you, our new members, having welcomed you and asked you to make yourselves known to the organiser on your first events, I do hope you will be able to meet and join in with our activities when they resume. We hope to have as our first event our planned plant sale. This will be a good opportunity to get together with a picnic and plants.

In the meantime, best wishes to all and take care and stay safe.

Diana Hebditch

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## THE SOMERSET GARDENS TRUST

### President

Lady Elizabeth Gass

### Chairman

Diana Hebditch  
Lillesdon Court,  
Lillesdon,  
Taunton, TA3 6BU  
01823 490654

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

### Hon. Treasurer and Trust Secretary

Stuart Senior  
Court Barton,  
Bull Street  
Creech St Michael  
Taunton, TA3 5PW  
01823 442344

[stuart\\_senior@msn.com](mailto:stuart_senior@msn.com)

### Minutes Secretary

Susan Thorne  
Barton House  
Kingston St Mary  
Taunton, TA2 8HH  
01823 451693

[STBartonHouse@gmail.com](mailto:STBartonHouse@gmail.com)

### Membership Secretary

Mary ter Braak  
Harcombes  
Trendle Lane  
Bicknoller, TA4 4EG  
01984 656633

[info@somersetgardenstrust.org.uk](mailto:info@somersetgardenstrust.org.uk)

## Impact of Covid 19 on nurseries

Due to the coronavirus outbreak, it's estimated that the value of lost plant sales in the UK will be £687m by the end of June and if it continues, £1.2bn by the end of December.

As plants are perishable, it also means many growers are facing a major stock write off, that comes with a huge loss of income.

Chairman of the Horticultural Trades Association (HTA) James Barnes told the *'Independent'*: "This crisis puts around 650 businesses across the UK at risk. These businesses contribute £1.4bn to the

*country's GDP and employ tens of thousands of people. Many of these are family businesses at the heart of rural and remote communities."*

The HTA is calling on the government to support UK growers with a financial support scheme to help businesses who will be affected. "For those that can stay in business, there are also significantly longer-term issues as growers may not have time to plant next year's crop, leading to a two year supply hit on the whole industry including retail, which will severely impact the availability of British grown seasonal plants and flowers," says Barnes.

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## The Secrets of Good Garden Design

*Libby Russell, co-owner of Marzzullo + Russell Landscape Designers, gives us her striking personal view*

When the Somerset Gardens Trust asked me to write about garden design, I had something of a dilemma. Designing a garden is a bit like piecing together a 3D puzzle over time, space, colour and form which needs to be blended seamlessly with place, climate, soil, the client's wishes – and a touch of magic.

When I was at landscape school at the University of Greenwich years ago, we made land art in the Forest of Grizedale in Yorkshire.

Here we were taught to lie on the ground, look at the sky and absorb the 'place'. We learnt that the natural beauty is everywhere – in the sky, the hills, branch forms

*“We learnt that the natural beauty is everywhere – in the sky, the hills, branch forms and fallen leaves, in the shadows of the trees”*

and fallen leaves, in the shadows of the trees, in a puddle – the skill is to capture and enhance it.

Dreaming is important – that essential alchemy that is the creative process – but garden design is also about graft, using



*Photo © Eva Nemeth*

honed skills and professional processes learnt over years. The masterplan, the blueprint for the space, is essential if one is not going to make mistakes down the line. Like all good essays, it provides structure which guides everything – how the walls work, where the slopes lie, what trees will frame a view, which glimpses to create – and where to breakfast in the morning sun.

Every designer has different processes but for me, I see interlocking spaces of different

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‘characters’, often created by blending the colour, form and texture of planting. Light is essential both for creating different atmospheres, but also for understanding colour and how to plant. And for me it is always the plants, the stars of my show.



Photo © Eva Nemeth

One of my favourite books when I was learning my trade was Nori and Sandra Pope’s *‘Colour by Design’* (Conran Octopus 1998), written about the sublime garden they planted at Hadspen House, Somerset. Here they explored the mood – altering effects of colour to create perfect harmony, whether it be of the calm blues and whites or stronger orange, red and magenta hues, an

unforgettable, living colour wheel of perfectly gardened plants.

As with painting, one needs to know what effect one wants to create before one begins, harmonious, clashing, wild or calm, bold or tranquil. Unlike painting, however, plants take years to mature so one should be really clear what the design intent is before starting.

At home I’m experimenting with a more ‘pointillist’ type of contemporary planting where plants weave through each other in a succession of colours, shapes and calculated clashes. Plants are ruthlessly edited. Out have gone the *Salvia verticillata* ‘Purple Rain’ with heavy lower leaves, and in has come *Verbena hasta* in pink, white and blue for airy mid-Summer colour and long-lasting Winter structure. In too have come annuals such as *Linaria maroccana* in purples, pink and a new multicoloured one called ‘Sweeties’, so useful for early colour before the *Salvias*, *Burkeya purpurea*, *Eryngiums* and many others start.

My garden flows up two asymmetric rectangles on the side of a valley – just about as hard a site as one can have with

*“what effect one wants to create before one begins, harmonious, clashing, wild or calm, bold or tranquil”*

everything visible at once. No garden rooms for me with different colour themes – my palette plays out on a large scale with colour themes separated only by one

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*“As with the Impressionists, that touch of red or bright pink, a little orange or chartreuse, adds depth and zest to carefully planned harmonious perennial colour schemes.”*

large wall. On one side, colour runs riot through borders, herb gardens, kitchen and cutting gardens where vegetables and flowering plants happily combine. Here the early Summer is coloured in paler hues deepening as the season progresses – pinks, purples, chartreuse and burgundy are set off by the silvers of *Artemisia*, *Pyrus salicifolia* ‘Pendula’, *Elaeagnus* ‘Quicksilver’ and *Nepetas* and lavenders.

As with the Impressionists, that touch of red or bright pink, a little orange or chartreuse, adds depth and zest to carefully planned harmonious perennial colour schemes. I use small flowered plants such as *Dianthus carthusianorum* or flashes of annuals – *Cosmos*, *Dahlias*, *Gladioli papilio* ‘Ruby’, tulips and *Zinnias* add zest to what could otherwise be rather too much good taste. The other side of the garden is a calmer amphitheatre surrounded with woodland borders with curving banks punctuated by

the beautiful *Malus transitoria* for blossom, its delicacy of foliage and great autumn colour. Texture, leaf colour and seasonality are as important as the calmer colour palette. Every six weeks or so another flush of colour delineates the bowl, *Magnolias* and *Narcissi* in April, roses in June and July, *Hydrangeas* and autumn shrubs to follow, leading the

eye to the large herbaceous contemporary borders at the top of the garden where grasses and verticals, green, white and soft blues, seed heads and autumn colour keep going long after Christmas.



Photo © Eva Nemeth

Sometimes I feel a little like a conductor at the bottom of my amphitheatre, waiting to bring in the different seasons and the eternal beauty that is a garden – maybe that is who a garden designer is.

[www.mazzullorusselllandscapedesign.com](http://www.mazzullorusselllandscapedesign.com)

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## 'The Gathering Grounds' ... towards Summer 2020

*Selena Mitford charts hard work (and satisfaction) in restoring a wildlife haven*

My Mother is a wonderful gardener. She paints with flowers, the colours and textures playing out through the year as an orchestra must play a symphony. I am not that kind of gardener, much as I'd like to be. My gardening involves the use of a slash hook, a chainsaw and good wellies. I do have company: 3 Riggitt Galloway Cattle, who help me with 13 acres of land formerly managed by Somerset Wildlife. Its name, 'The Gathering Grounds', comes from its purchase in the '50's by the Waterboard for the thousands of litres of water that spring from every part of the land all year round. Sadly, even after putting in a sewage works for the surrounding farms, the water could not be purified sufficiently, both waterworks were



*Photo © Selena Mitford*

abandoned, and the land began to reclaim itself. With steep flintstone and greensand banks; silty; welly deep bogs; crack willow that marches tirelessly across any open ground; fens full of tussocks that are

like some mad maze to navigate through – this land is a challenge to manage. But oh-my-goodness it is beautiful. The bluebells will carpet every dappled spot, now leaving their slippery leaves to catch out the unwary; early dog violets, cuckoo spit flowers and kingcups will soon give way to cut-leaved cranesbill, bird's-foot-trefoil

*“this land is a challenge to manage. But oh-my-goodness it is beautiful”*

and orchids. All these in large part due to the gentle grazing of the Riggits, who keep the grasses from felting an impenetrable layer of thatch.

That said, I have much to learn about the balance between all things. Where I seem to gain in one part, I then realise I've let slip in another. It can be hard to maintain a long-term goal, when your bullock has just strolled through a fence to reach your neighbour's garden, or the Himalayan Balsam is launching a full scale attack on the western boundary. Just as the brambles are herded back to the margins in one glade, so the gorse fills another.

When I first walked the land it was July, alive with a kaleidoscope of butterflies. In the past, Marsh Fritillaries and Pearl Bordered Fritillaries were recorded here. If I have a goal, I think it would be to provide a habitat where this can happen again and to enjoy it; enjoy the learning; the time it takes to see the results of your work. Enjoy the evidence of the characters that cross the land; the hazelnut shells,

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Photo © Selena Mitford

with a neat round hole in the side that the dormice have cast aside; the trails leading

from badger bank through to their latrine in the fen; the gargling call of the ravens overhead. Finally, enjoy sharing the space with good friends who help me so much, and the company of my fine hound, Jelly the lurcher, alternately hooning around in large loops at extraordinary speed or sound asleep on a nearby sunny bank.

These uncertain times are enough to make the head spin and the stomach lurch, so whether you've a window box, garden or land by the acre, perhaps turning to and tending it can help mend our fractured days and unsettled minds.

## Alluring Alpines

*Paul Cumbleton explains why gardeners should think Alpine.....*

What do you do if you are a 'plants person', wanting to grow a huge range of plants, but only have a small plot? Grow alpines of course! The picture on the next page shows a demonstration raised bed created by an alpine nursery. It is less than 3 metres square but contains over 50 different alpines. If you grew shrubs you might only get two in that space!

Often wrongly portrayed as "*finicky plants for specialists*", the vast majority

*“For most alpines, this will mean a sunny spot and ground that is very free-draining”*

of alpines are like any other type of plants in our gardens – give them suitable conditions and they will thrive. For most alpines, this will mean a sunny spot and ground that is very free-draining. If you have unsuitable, poorly drained soil, try making raised beds filled with a more suitable medium such as a 50/50 mix of soil and coarse grit. Here are four of my favourite alpines – chosen because they are all easy, rewarding to grow and easily available:

### ***Phlox subulata***

A creeping *Phlox*, good as ground cover. In April or May, it will be smothered in flowers making a wonderful splash of late Spring colour. There are lots of different cultivars such as 'Bavaria' (white with a purple eye), 'Red Wings' (pinkish-crimson flowers with a darker red centre), 'Emerald Cushion Blue' (soft lavender-blue) or 'Tamaongalei' (pink with a white edge, often sold as 'Candy Stripe'). A quick

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trim immediately after flowering will ensure growth stays compact and floriferous.

## ***Pulsatilla caucasica***

*Pulsatilla vulgaris*, the pasqueflower, is well known, rightly loved and well worth growing. But the genus has many other species such as *Pulsatilla caucasica* (see front cover). The flower is a lovely soft yellow and the very finely dissected fresh green foliage is also attractive.

## ***Sempervivum calcareum* ‘Extra’**

The House Leeks are indispensable, tough and easy to grow and available in a myriad of forms, sizes and colours. I particularly like the cultivar of *S. calcareum* known as ‘Extra’.

## ***Campanula chamissonis***

*Campanula* is a huge genus of over 500

*“Pulsatilla vulgaris, the pasqueflower, is well known, rightly loved and well worth growing”*

species. Many are alpine. *Campanula chamissonis* is a particularly fine, dwarf plant with large upturned flowers of two-tone mauve. A real charmer!



## **The Gardens Trust: 5 years on**

*Camilla Carter explains about our national umbrella organization*

The Gardens Trust is the only national charity dedicated to research and conservation of historic parks, gardens and designed landscapes. It is run by a large group of volunteers and a small number of part time staff. It was formed in 2015 by joining The Garden History Society with The Association of Garden Trusts and at the time was considered by its members to be an odd mixing. Many of the Garden

History members were not gardeners, but historians, not for them the constant chore of mowing, hedge cutting and weeding; Garden Trust members were just like you and me, interested in both gardening, and historic gardens.

On formation, The Gardens Trust was confirmed by Government to be the statutory consultee; meaning that local authorities have to consult the Trust on any planning application that affects gardens and landscapes listed on Historic England’s Register of Parks and Gardens. This duty is dealt with by a conservation

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team working closely with volunteers in the County Garden Trusts. It is growing in confidence and respect from our national institutions such as the National Trust and English Heritage. Ian Clark, Chairman of our Environmental & Research Group, together with Diana Hebditch, receive a weekly list of national applications and help Margie Hoffnung, the National Conservation Officer, with local knowledge on issues affecting Somerset's listed gardens. Margie, who has built a network of expertise, can now call upon top lawyers and conservationists to support her excellent reports, which go to County Councils all over the Country to help them with their planning decisions.

The Gardens Trust publishes a journal, *Garden History*, regular newsletters, leaflets, specialist publications and has a busy programme of events for members such as this year, a six week course in garden history, study visits to Ireland, France, Palermo and West Sicily, an AGM and Conference in Yorkshire, day visits, and lectures up and down the Country. There was to have been a Bicentenary lecture in Bath this July on Joseph Banks, which would have been open to any

*“a busy programme of events for members such as this year, a six week course in garden history, study visits to Ireland, France, Palermo and West Sicily”*

County member. This sadly has had to be cancelled due to the virus. There is an excellent website, well worth visiting, notice of all the events and an online blog of written papers on such subjects as Carters Seeds, Sir John Soane and gardens, Anglesey Abbey, and miniature gardens – enough to keep anyone interested busy for hours.

This excellent charity does need more individual members; it has proved to be easier for people to join a county rather than a national group but I have had enjoyable times all over the Country. Other members, many of them academics, have always been friendly. Our Northern Ireland visit was partially planned during a visit, organised by Gardens Trust



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Northern Ireland members, two years ago. There is a special membership price at present for County Garden Trust members, £25 reduced from £35 for single

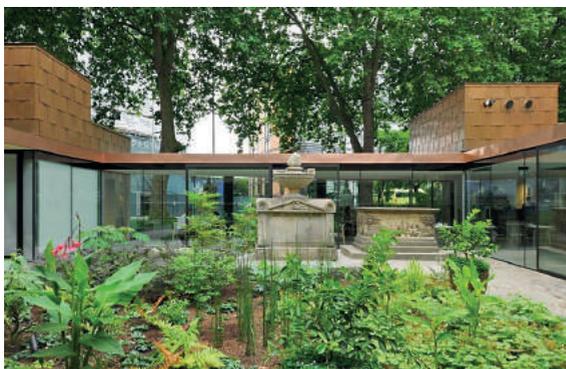
membership, and I would urge members to give a thought as to whether they might join and support the work of The Gardens Trust.

## The Garden Museum, London

*The Editors encourage you to visit*

A confession. We have never visited the Museum; however we were encouraged to see what is there by looking at its website, and now we are determined to go! Here is what we found online.....

### The Tradescants



Without two remarkable seventeenth century garden pioneers, John Tradescant the Elder (and his son) John Tradescant the Younger, being buried in the now deconsecrated Church (St Mary's, Lambeth which is the Museum), there would be nothing there. The Younger's elaborate tomb is carved with scenes from his plant collecting travels. The two were pioneers

in many ways – as plant collectors in many countries such as Arctic Russia and Algeria (gladioli and lilac are examples); for opening the first public museum (sixpence to see the 'Cabinet of Curiosities' (which led to the Natural History Museum, and the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford). One visitor said "*where a Man might in one day behold and collecte into one*

*place more curiosities than hee should see if hee spent all his life in Travell*". And, of course, as gardeners to powerful aristocrats such as Robert Cecil – and to Henrietta Maria, King Charles 1's Queen, (both Tradescants were Keepers of His Master's Gardens, Vines and Silkworms at Oatlands Palace), so putting into practice the many styles of gardening they had found in Europe (they also brought tulips, anemones, irises and clematis to the UK from France, Belgium and the

Netherlands).

*"as plant collectors in many countries such as Arctic Russia and Algeria (gladioli, and lilac are examples)"*

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## St Mary-at-Lambeth

John Tradescant the Younger's extraordinary tomb inspired two energetic modern gardeners, Rosemary and John Nicholson, to campaign successfully for the rescue of the Church which was in bad repair, deconsecrated and about to be demolished, in the 1970s. They filled the empty repaired Church with many garden-related tools and pictures donated, or later bought, such as the only known seventeenth century watering pot. It has expanded in buildings and gardens since, the latest development making a space for the recreation of the Tradescants' 'Cabinet of Curiosities'. It

has also pioneered a travelling exhibition of garden tools through the ages to be displayed in commercial garden centres.

## Today

Sadly, the Museum is closed for Covid 19; however, it has big plans for the Autumn and next year. These include Exhibitions (now closed prematurely) of the paintings of 'Artist-Gardeners 1919-1931', events such as 'Oudolf v. Robinson', and visits such as walking tours of London's hidden community spaces. But best of all it is a haven of calm in the normal bustle of central London. Join us in visiting when we can!

## Triscombe Nursery, near Taunton

*Jenny Hawksley enjoys meeting Stuart Parkman from this interesting Somerset Nursery*

sold in Bradburys Garden Shop in Taunton (opposite Debenham's).

The walled garden was laid out with hedges of *Viola* 'Maggie Mott' and the frames

## History of the Nursery

In 1956 the property at Triscombe was bought by Mrs Attwell, including the walled garden and a large glasshouse, with her friends Miss Whitehead and Miss Attwell, to start a nursery. They had intended to grow soft fruit and *Chrysanthemums* but the squirrels were too numerous to make a success of soft fruit! One of their first crops was Cabbage 'January King',



*Stuart Parkman at Triscombe Nursery*

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which faced south-east were turned into hot beds (manure was used to heat crops). There was a greenhouse at the far end, and a fernery with water from a tap which never freezes. Triscombe Nursery is 600 ft above sea level. Miss Attwell added two glasshouses on the site for bedding plants. Stuart Parkman worked at Warren's Garden Shop in Taunton (which is now the

*“What a joy it is to find such a gem of a nursery still in existence in such a beautiful setting in the Quantock Hills”*

Wetherspoons' *Coal Orchard*); at the age of 19 he joined Triscombe Nursery to deal with the customers. If any arrived, the bell was rung to summon him from wherever he was in the Nursery.

Miss Attwell wanted to increase sales and asked Stuart to give talks to local clubs, round tables etc all over the area from Bristol to Exeter and to Sidmouth. Stuart soon overcame his nerves and enjoyed giving popular talks on many different subjects including trees, shrubs, climbers, alpines etc. In 1971 Mary came to work at the Nursery, and eventually she and Stuart married.

The day after the last survivor of the three owners died, Stuart was summoned to a reading of the Will in Williton and discovered that the land had been left to the National Trust with the proviso that Stuart could have the land rent free for the rest of his life. He returned to Triscombe, spoke to the staff and decided to carry on. A big decision.

Stuart bought the attached house from the National Trust and rebuilt. It. Since then, a borehole has been sunk; three polytunnels and a large greenhouse erected; his wife Mary started an arboretum; a new car park created; trees are now grown in the field where chickens keep down the mice, while bantams roam the Nursery.

## **Today**

Stuart describes the Nursery as selling all hardy stock and specialising in fruit trees. Plants are sent out by mail order, very useful during the lockdown. It has a remarkably wide plant list that goes far beyond fruit trees with some hard-to-find plants on it. It is well worth browsing. The Nursery also sells bulbs in season.

In 2020 Stuart Parkman will celebrate 50 years at the Nursery.

What a joy it is to find such a gem of a nursery still in existence in such a beautiful setting in the Quantock Hills. Stuart hopes the Nursery will continue with his son and daughter-in-law. He doesn't envisage ever leaving it, and it is very easy to understand why.

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## Agapanthus – The Flower of Love

*Chris Ireland-Jones of Avon Bulbs describes how we should grow them*

These South African plants were recently trialled at RHS Wisley, the first such trial for 40 years since many of the named forms of seedlings, raised at Headbourne, underwent their first garden-worthy trial. Then there were relatively few cultivars, but since then their popularity has grown,

*“Time to take action – it may seem brutal, but repotting with the aid of a sharp knife or saw to reduce and break up the mass of roots will help when refreshed into new compost”*

and there are now over a thousand ‘different’ forms available for the gardener.

Originally introduced as being tender, the large-leaved semi-evergreen species were grown as pot plants, kept inside during the Winter, and stood outside once the danger of frosts had passed in May. This probably gave birth to the idea that they like being pot-bound, one of the biggest myths in gardening!

If anyone has ever grown *Agapanthus* in a pot, they very soon realise how large and vigorous are the roots which fill almost any container with strong, thick white roots within a season or two. After a few flowering years, depending on the size of the pot, the soil

becomes tired and congested and the number of blooms slowly deteriorates.

Time to take action – it may seem brutal, but repotting with the aid of a sharp knife or saw to reduce and break up the mass of roots will help when refreshed into new compost. Ideally this can be done in the Spring, but I know of friends who do this after flowering in late Summer with no ill effects to the plants.

As nice as *Agapanthus* are in pots, they really do as well or even better in the

ground. Full sun, or as much sun as possible, is all that is required.

They are said to like well-drained soils, but here in Somerset we have heavy clay in an open nursery field and they thrive – flowering well every year for many years before

needing splitting, which we do in the Spring. An advantage of growing in the ground is that unlike pots/containers, they



*Agapanthus ‘Arctic Star’*

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do not require constant watering during the longer hotter Summers we now seem to be getting. In very exposed or cold gardens/frost pockets, it is advisable to mulch before Christmas with straw or leaves to protect against severe frost. Remember

the Winter of 2009/10 with lows of minus 14°C!

The trial at RHS Wisley was much admired and resulted in a large number of AGM plants, the highest award from the RHS. The cut flower is also popular and lasts well when picked.

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## 2020 Events

*Diana Hebditch, Chair of the Events Committee, writes*

With our events programme suspended for the present we thought you might like a taster of what we could have enjoyed this year and may indeed enjoy next year. You can find a flavour of Burrow Hill Gardens in the later article.

We were due to start with a talk on the gardens at Iford and its Italianate terraces giving the feeling that you could be in Italy. Harold Peto was of an earlier generation and it made me think of the gardeners who have influenced me. John Brookes and his garden design books started my interest in the shape of a garden together with the writings of Great Dixter's Christopher Lloyd with his plant combinations. However, sadly I did not meet either of these two gentlemen, but I did meet these two ladies. On an early visit to the Chelsea Flower show I met Beth Chatto on her stand with I recall, plants that had been in the Country at the time of the Domesday survey in 1086. This led me to visit

her garden at Elmstead Market. It showed how plants could be put together – almost as a flower arranger places plants in a decoration.

A visit to Barnsley House inspired with both its more formal layout and architectural pieces. It was planted to give maximum effect during the whole season even if it meant replanting a border as they were doing that day. There I met Rosemary Verey potting in her potting shed and she gave me a good piece of advice: "*Never ask for the name of a plant unless you are*



*Iford Manor*

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*going to write it down*". You will have seen on SGT garden visits that I took that advice to heart and always write down

*“Never ask for the name of a plant unless you are going to write it down”*

a name or take a picture of the label and then the plant. Just when full of ideas – the knot garden and the *Laburnum* walk underplanted with *Alliums* – I crossed the lane to the potager. An inspiration with

its artistic beds and little arbours, but so much work. This means I do have my moments in the vegetable patch when rows of lettuce have alternative red and green ones and I do have an arbour. When I came to take over my current garden, I turned to our very own Penelope Hobhouse and her book *Colour in your Garden*, which guided me in my choice of plants and how to get maximum effect from them throughout the whole year. We were both on the SGT trip to The Hillier Gardens and as we got off the coach she had her reference book and I my notebook.

## The Gardens I would like to revisit...

### Susie Thorne

With little prospect of garden visiting this year, we can all dream of those gardens we would most like to return to. There are several on my list, gardens which take a little effort to get to – it is so easy to let the Summer slip past without visiting them. The garden at Mottisfont, for example; surely, we all ought to go every year – Graham Stuart Thomas' walled garden is

*“an amazing old stone house, with wonderful exuberant planting contrasting with calm simple green spaces”*

old rose heaven and certainly worth that trip up the A303. Another garden would be Rofford Manor near Little Milton in Oxfordshire; an amazing old stone house, with wonderful exuberant planting contrasting with calm simple green spaces. I certainly would love to go back there and perhaps combine it with Haseley Court, not far away, which is another idyllic garden.



*Mottisfont Abbey gardens*

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We are so lucky now to be able to conjure up pictures of gardens on our laptops. I love to look at Marianne Majerus' photographs of Stone House at Kidderminster when I am feeling in need of some inspiration. This is a real plantswoman's garden with a nursery alongside and a treat to visit. Travelling there would get me closer to the top of my list. The Dower House at Morville Hall epitomises everything a dream garden should be. Created from scratch by Dr Katherine Swift, it has yew hedges, a turf maze, a canal garden, fruit trees, foxgloves, cardoons, old roses and above all romance. You may have read her book *'The Morville Hours'*. I really must go back.

## Sally Twiss

My first (and last) visit to Rodmarton Manor was more than thirty years ago. I especially remember the double herbaceous borders full of butterflies and the pleached limes around the Arts-and-Crafts house. We were the only people there and were fortunate to meet Mrs Mary Biddulph, the daughter-in-law of the garden's creators. I wonder if a second visit could recapture the charm of the first.

If we are ever able to return to Italy, Villa Lante near Viterbo is a cool garden on a hot day. It's an ingenious feat of hydraulic engineering constructed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, where the water cascades down through a series of terraces in rills, fountains and spouts. One of the



many impressive features is a sculpture of the river gods Tiber and Arno flanking a waterfall and looking down over a large stone table through which runs a central channel and bubbling jets of water, an ancient version of a wine cooler. The final part of the garden is the Quadrato, a parterre of box hedges forming patterns around small fountains and sculptures and surrounding a large fountain at the centre of four basins of water.

The place I always long to visit in Spring is the orchard at Lytes Cary, when the fruit trees are blossoming and, amongst the grass below, cowslip, *Camassia*, daisy and buttercup are in flower. It's an idyllic English scene, reminiscent of a painting by a Pre-Raphaelite, but without the swooning women.

*"The place I always long to visit in Spring is the orchard at Lytes Cary, when the fruit trees are blossoming and, amongst the grass below, cowslip, camassia, daisy and buttercup are in flower"*

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## Burrow Farm Gardens, near Axminster

*East Devon's Secret Garden*

Burrow Farm Gardens has been lovingly created and developed over the last 60 years through the determination and vision of local celebrity gardener, Mary Bengier.

John and Mary Bengier have lived at Burrow Farm Gardens (originally just Burrow Farm) since 1959.

Originally a traditional working farm with a dairy herd, Mary had other plans for its future. As an active farm and with a herd of cows to feed, every bit of land was invaluable. The old Roman clay pit, now the woodland garden, was covered in brambles and deemed unsuitable for farming, so

this is where Mary first started making a garden with the help of her 4 young children in 1966. John remained a dairy farmer until 1983; however, Mary had been

stealing bits of field to turn into garden for several years previously.

The gardens now cover over thirteen acres of sweeping lawns and colour themed planting. There is always something to delight you, the lawn stretches down past an ancient oak to a small lake. From the summer house, the vista stretches beyond the gardens over the wider landscape. The colours change throughout the year culminating in a blaze of Autumn splendour.

*“The old Roman clay pit, now the woodland garden, was covered in brambles and deemed unsuitable for farming, so this is where Mary first started making a garden with the help of her 4 young children”*

The Gardens are a treat to visit in Spring with mature *Magnolias*, *Rhododendrons* and *Azaleas* all combined with wild daffodils, bluebells, *Fritillaria*, *Erythroniums* and other spring bulbs, and down in the Roman clay quarry, the *Lysichitum americanum*, candelabra *Primulas*, *Hostas*, *Ferns* and *Acers* abound throughout.

The Gardens also have a tearoom, a gift shop and a plant nursery. The Tearoom offers a selection of light lunches, delicious cakes or an afternoon tea, whilst the Gift Shop is stocked with lovely gifts and cards for all occasions and the Nursery is full of many of the plants that can be seen



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in the Gardens. Mary is always on hand to advise about the plants, planting instructions and good plant combinations.

The Gardens are closed at present due to Covid-19 but there is a skeleton staff still working to maintain the Gardens in readiness for when they are able to re-open.

Please check the website for updates.

We wish you all well and hope it won't be too long before we are able to welcome you to Burrow Farm Gardens.

[www.burrowfarmgardens.co.uk](http://www.burrowfarmgardens.co.uk)

## Members Forum – What do you do during lockdown?

### Dilly Bradley

Lockdown! What Lockdown?! In this glorious sunshine and drying wind, it is ideal weeding weather. What more could we ask for to get us up to speed with the garden season ahead. The soil crumbles off those tiresome grassroots. So, we are out every hour of the daylight, energy permitting. What's not to like?

*“The weeds here never give up whatever the season, perhaps an example to us all?”*

Two months of garden help, my arms and legs when it comes to the heavy work, so soil has been turned, compost dug in and bare surfaces mulched, reducing the later weeding. The fruit cage is almost (forever almost) under control with those yellow raspberry thugs pulled out. We used to mulch with straw once a year, less than a week's work in the Spring (the rosy past).



Then through the vegetable patch to the neglected nursery area and the decision to throw out that almost indestructible *Ligularia dentata*. But it makes such a feature plant at a critical point in a border!

Next come the main flower beds mercifully clean when planted up. The weeds here never give up whatever the season, perhaps an example to us all? That done, now is the time for re-thinking and re-design. Abandon the furthest shade to shrubs. In return lay the Northern most part of the garden which enjoys the evening sun to an extended lawn and beyond a sunny array of herbaceous plants (a second bed too far?)

We are prisoners to and in our garden for the foreseeable future. What's new?

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## Jenny Hawksley

What a strange time this is! Nothing like it in living memory. We cannot go out except for essential supplies or an hour of exercise daily. No meeting of friends for coffee or lunch, no shopping expeditions or visits to gardens, no meetings or talks to attend. Most distressing of all – no visits to plant fairs, a highlight of the new gardening year. What shall I do? Fortunately, it is Spring and there is plenty to do in the garden. We were blessed with warm sunshine the first week, so cutting back plants, pruning shrubs, weeding and edging the borders kept me very busy. I even managed to sort out the potting shed and wash my flower pots and seed trays. My compost bins and green waste bins are full. Collections have been suspended. I shall store the excess in compost bags until I can find a home for it.

*“One rabbit is determined to dig large holes in the borders to rear her young”*

I have been able to monitor the activities of the local wildlife. One rabbit is determined to dig large holes in the borders to rear her young.

Aside from the garden, I have washed curtains and coats. There are many jobs in the house awaiting attention. Turning out is not something I am good at but excess clothes and books can be stored awaiting a

charity shop or book stall. Spring cleaning and decorating will reap its rewards.

This will be a time of reflection and, although devastating for many, hopefully, some good will come of it too.

## Cicely Taylor

While I’ve been down on my creaky knees, pulling out ivy from under bushes, I’ve been meditating on whether I’d rather be in London during this isolation period.

We have a flat on a busy road in North Kensington, but opposite is a glorious seven-acre garden, where in better times we play tennis, have garden parties, concerts and family picnics. Quiet for the time being, but still a good place to walk and admire the blossom and spring flowers and to think thank goodness we don’t have to pull out the ivy, rampant in the shrubberies.

I haven’t seen anyone down here for weeks – just occasionally the postman, but in London I could meet friends and chat at a distance, go for walks in the parks and bike rides along the empty streets.

Every evening our local vicar goes to a different street in the parish. He has a loud-speaker in the boot of his car and invites the neighbours to come to their doors or windows and join in a hymn and the Lord’s Prayer. It is a tremendous success – more the sort of thing you might expect in a village, but it doesn’t happen here.

Our flat is small and doesn’t need much attention so I could watch films, operas and tour art galleries online and do neglected needlework, jigsaw puzzles and learn my music for the choir. All the sort

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*“Our flat is small and doesn’t need much attention so I could watch films, operas and tour art galleries online and do neglected needlework, jigsaw puzzles”*

of things London friends are doing which I don’t have time for because I am battling with the garden. On the other hand, it is a real squash for the two of us in our small space and I can’t bear to think of what state the garden would be in if we weren’t in Somerset. I think on that score I am probably better off down here.

## Ruskin on Gardening

Ruskin loathed ‘showy’ flowers such as dahlias and tulips which he said should be avoided like garlic, and he saw some Victorian flower gardens as *“an assembly of unfortunate beings, pampered and bloated above their natural size, stewed and heated into diseased growth, corrupted by evil communication into speckled*

*and inharmonious colours; torn from the soil which they loved, and of which they were the spirit and glory, to glare away this term of tormented life among the mixed and incongruous essences of each other, in earth they know not, and in air that is poison to them”*.

He might have been writing about some of the modern excrescences produced by present-day plant breeders.

## The Veitch Nursery

*Anthony Pugh-Thomas on an astonishingly influential Family*

The Veitch group of Nurseries was the largest of the family-run plant Nurseries in Europe during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and was hugely important as during their existence they employed twenty-two recognised plant hunters, including three members of their own family.

John Veitch (1752-1839) was a gardener at Killerton in Devon who, in

1809, aged 56, established a small nursery nearby where, in 1832, he was joined by his son James (1791-1863) and later by his two grandsons, James (1815-69) and Robert (1823-85). Robert transferred the

*“Ernest Wilson twice journeyed to China and was probably the most influential and successful of the Veitch collectors”*

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*Sir Harry Veitch (1840-1924)*

business to Exeter and later the family also opened a nursery in London, taking over the business of Knight and Perry in Chelsea and establishing specialist sites in Feltham where seeds and vines were grown; Langley for fruit trees; and Combe Wood, near Kingston-upon-Thames, for shrubs, trees and rhododendrons.

In 1863 the Exeter and London Nurseries became separate companies, with James Veitch & Sons in London and Robert Veitch & Son in Exeter. The former closed in 1914 but the family maintained a nursery in Exeter until the 1960s on land that is now part of the grounds of Exeter University when it was bought by St Bridget Nurseries but is now one of their non-functioning subsidiaries.

The firm started sponsoring plant collectors during the 1840s: the most prominent were the brothers William and Thomas Lobb, Ernest 'Chinese' Wilson and Charles Maries. William Lobb travelled

throughout the South Americas for eight years and in California and Oregon from 1849-1857; his brother in the Far East where he specialised in collecting orchids (one of William's introductions was the Monkey Puzzle tree (*Araucaria araucana*); Ernest Wilson twice journeyed to China and was probably the most influential and successful of the Veitch collectors, his best known introductions being *Lilium regale*, the handkerchief tree *Davidia involucrate*, *Clematis armandii* and *Acer griseum* together with varieties of *Magnolia* and *Berberis* to which he gave his name; Charles Maries, a foreman of the Nursery, collected in China and Japan and sent back *Daphne genkwa*, *Hamamelis mollis* (the familiar winter flowering Witch Hazel) and the first Lacecap *Hydrangeas*; the family members included John Gould Veitch who visited Japan, the South Sea Islands and Australia from 1860-1870 and brought home a huge range of glass-house plants such as *Acalypha*, *Cordylines* and *Dracaenas*; Peter Veitch who went to Australia, the South Sea Islands and Borneo from 1875-1878 and James H Veitch who collected in India, Malaysia, Japan, Korea and the Antipodes from 1891 to 1893.

The family's ability to introduce and grow exotic plants fed the insatiable appetite of the wealthy horticultural elite for new plants and 400 were illustrated in contemporary issues of Curtis's Botanical Magazine. By the outbreak of the First World War, Veitches had introduced 1281 plants into cultivation which were either previously unknown or newly-bred varieties. These included 498 greenhouse



plants, 232 orchids, and 153 deciduous trees as well as shrubs, herbaceous and climbing plants, exotic ferns, conifers and ornamental bulbous plants. Many more followed to add glory to British gardens before the Nurseries closed.



Photo © Alan Balding

*“I made a series of small draped figures leaving war torn places, seeking new lives and hope for the future, the culmination being ‘Pilgrim’ in the Bishop’s Palace Gardens”*

## What is a Pilgrim?

*David Backhouse reflects on his sculpture in the Bishops Palace Gardens in Wells*

I have given this much thought over my many years as a sculptor. It has influenced much of my work. My ‘Cloaked Horseman’ in Bristol is a traveller poised to cross the river into the heart of the City. Is he a messenger? What is he seeking?

I made a series of small draped figures leaving war torn places, seeking new lives and hope for the future, the culmination being ‘Pilgrim’ in the Bishop’s Palace Gardens, Wells.

I would hope that in the tranquillity of these beautiful gardens he found what he was seeking and can impart that peace to all who see him.

As to the origins of where ‘Pilgrim’ resides, there lies a story. Many years ago, Bishop Jim Thompson was visiting my studio near Orchard Leigh, Frome, where

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he saw ‘Pilgrim’ and expressed a wish that the statue should make his home in Wells. I had recently brought the sculpture home from my studio in Perigord Verte, where he was created. The studio had within its garden a small chapel and cemetery dedicated to St. Fiacre, patron saint of gardeners. The meditative and spiritual atmosphere certainly permeated my work and my life. I have wonderful memories of the sight of thousands of migrating cranes heading North in Spring and South in Autumn, changing direction over the

escarpment in which my studio was set. They were on their own journey.

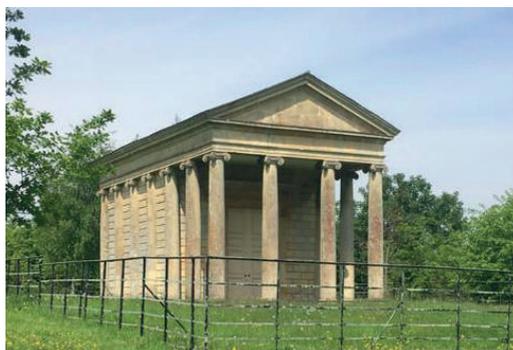
Bishop Jim had hoped that ‘Pilgrim’ could be sited in the Cathedral’s Camry Garden but this was not to be. This garden is where all the previous ecclesiastical buildings existed before the building of Wells Cathedral and where the springs of the wells of Wells rise.

It was decided that ‘Pilgrim’ should reside in the Bishop’s Palace Gardens where I hope that his gentle and spiritual demeanour will give a sense of hope and peace to all who visit the Garden.

## Restoration at Halswell Park

*Edward Strachan on a magical transformation of the eighteenth century landscape*

May 4<sup>th</sup> was another landmark day in the slow but determined process of re-uniting the estate of Halswell Park. The Somerset Buildings Preservation Trust agreed to sell the back to the Estate, after a separation of almost 70 years, when it was sold within Mill Wood in the break-up of the Estate. The SBPT had acquired the Temple in 1993, in order to save it from the ravages



*Temple of Harmony*

of agricultural usage, and it has stood proudly restored, within an unsightly enclosure. We will look forward to removing the enclosure as soon as lockdown ends, and letting

*“The Somerset Buildings Preservation Trust agreed to sell the Temple of Harmony back to the Estate, after a separation of almost 70 years”*

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the Temple stand once more united with its landscape. Under the SBPT and its lessee, the Halswell Park Trust, the Temple has been looked after well, and has been open to the public 28 days a year. This wonderful gift of the SPBT will now be extended to include the whole of Mill Wood.

And in September, to launch the Heritage Open Days Weekend for Goathurst, which opens the House, Mill Wood, King Edward Church, Robin Hood Hut, to the public simultaneously, we look forward to welcoming the local community and of course members of the SGT to the Temple, to enjoy a celebration of the reunion.

Visitors will enjoy the revival of Mill Wood. The 4,500 trees planted in February 2015, including the SGT's kind gift of an *Acer Trauvetteri* are thriving. At this stage we have lost only a handful, and the result is very promising. Already the historic pathways are clearly visible, and a small meadow is flourishing in the emerging canopy. Here is a view of the SGT's Acer:

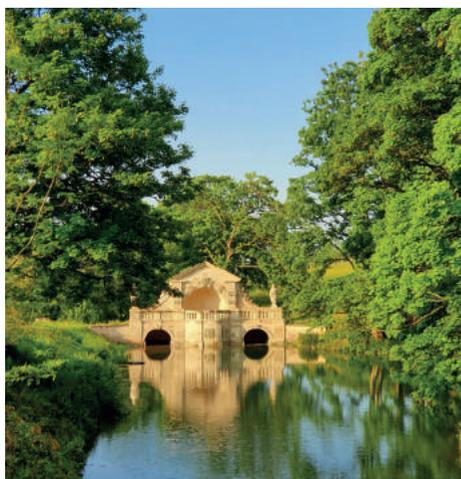


On their tour, visitors will be able to view the fully restored Bathstone Bridge, our new source of pride. This lovely Georgian folly, in fact a dam rather than a Bridge, like Bridgeman's Bridge on

*“Already the historic pathways are clearly visible, and a small meadow is flourishing in the emerging canopy”*

the Serpentine, stands gloriously in the emerging woodland. We pay tribute to the work of our sculptor Tom Waugh, stonemason Mike Orchard, under architect Robert Battersby and project leader Ann Manders' management. We had a difficult year, as the restored pond which the Bridge faces, continued to leak, which hindered the pond filling up to its true level. But our resolute team under Chris Stones persevered, and we hope that the problem has been solved. We are discovering that the unique skills of 18<sup>th</sup> Century in managing water in a landscape are much lost, and it has been our greatest challenge so far. We are continuing the work at the House. Much work has been done on putting the final touches to the Walled Garden. All sides are now restored, including the facades of

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*Bathstone Bridge*

the Manor House and its 17<sup>th</sup> Century wing, although a final wall needs to be completed. Last year was spent tortuously redirecting utilities and installing drainage in the garden. The releveling has settled now, so as soon as lockdown ends, we start on the structure of the planned

knot garden, installing steps and the terrace, paths. Covid has put paid to plans for planting this year, but the garden will benefit from another year of waiting.

Halswell continues to inspire us, and every day seems to bring more life to the project. A perfect Spring morning like today reminds us of our purpose, and we look forward to sharing its gifts, once we are all able to enjoy the wonderful open spaces and gardens of the South-West again.

*“We are discovering that the unique skills of 18th Century in managing water in a landscape are much lost, and it has been our greatest challenge so far”*

## Fuchsias

*Derek Luther, President of the British Fuchsia Society, explains how to look after this key garden plant*

What a difficult time to be a gardener with the lockdown and garden outlets all being closed. It is a bit late to increase your stock by taking cuttings for this year, but cuttings would make good plants for 2021. I think it will be unlikely for most of us to be able to exhibit our *Fuchsias* this year, so it would be better to enjoy them, and if

possible, have them arranged in your garden, so that a passer-by can also share the delight.

*Fuchsias* planted directly into the ground will not need too much attention other than a dose of fertilizer and a watering when needed and a balanced feed would be ideal. If you are growing in pots or baskets more attention is needed on watering as they can dry out very quickly. I like to add a quarter strength feed at every watering. It is best to give them a good soak, and let them nearly dry out, before watering



## Local delivery service for Choice and Unusual Salvias

Since retiring from their nursery business, Ian and Teresa Moss have built up a large collection of over 180 varieties of choice and unusual salvias. They propagate from their collection every year primarily as an insurance policy, and to refresh their collection, but offer surplus plants for sale during the season. Normally they are sold at Rare Plant Fairs (which they also organise), but during the current COVID-19 lockdown they are offering a local Somerset delivery service for their spare overwintered plants. They don't propagate in commercial quantities, and often there are only 1 or 2 plants of each variety for sale, but there are a lot of varieties to choose from, and all the plants are large, mature specimens.

Full details of the service, which operates within a 30-mile radius of Bridgwater, together with an up to date availability list, can be found at their website at:

<https://hardyandunusualplants.wordpress.com/>



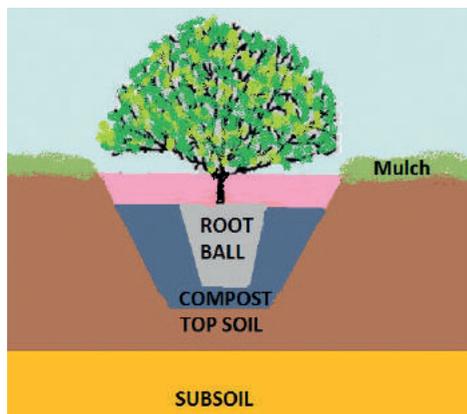
*Salvia aurea*

again. It is better to water first thing in the morning so that any splashes of water evaporate before the sun gets too hot which can cause scorching on the leaves.

If you are still pinching out your *Fuchsias* at the end of April to maintain shape and to increase the number of side shoots to give more flowers, be aware that it will take to the end of July for the plants to be in full flower. There is no need to pinch out those planted directly into the ground, just remove spent flowers and berries to encourage a longer flowering period which should continue until the first frosts.

*“Fuchsias planted directly into the ground will not need too much attention other than a dose of fertilizer and a watering when needed, a balanced feed would be ideal”*

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Please check over your *Fuchsias* for pests and diseases regularly because the sooner the pest or disease is dealt with the lesser the problem. Please identify the pest and choose a spray that is suitable for spraying on *Fuchsias* and getting rid of the pest.

In October you can increase your stock by taking hardwood cuttings – pieces of *Fuchsia*, four leaf nodes long, cut just below a node and trim just above the top one. The pieces are inserted into a mix of 50/50 peat and perlite to the depth of two of the nodes around the edge of a pot. Rooting powder is optional, and the pot is placed in a frost-free place and out of direct sunlight. In the Spring fresh growth should appear indicating that the cuttings have rooted. These can then be potted up singly or planted as one to make a *fuchsia* shrub.

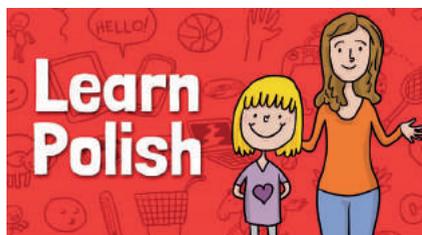
I have noticed that adverts for nurseries who are going to do online orders for home delivery are appearing on Facebook, so if you need horticultural items it would be worth investigating this resource.

## A Memorable School Visit

*Sheila Rabson, chair of the Education Group, looks back with pleasure*

Every term the Education Group advertises on the Somerset County Council Education website to invite schools to apply for one of our grants. Having studied each, we arrange to visit the schools. Some applications are extremely well thought out and full of detail, so we are fairly sure of what we are going to see, but others make for an interesting visit.

Last year we had an application from a school in an extremely deprived area of Yeovil. The pupils were 90% using English as a second language – even the



staff had been having lessons in Polish so that they could welcome the children in their native tongue. The grounds were behind the School, at the side of the staff car park and were some ten feet above the level of the playground. It did not look promising, particularly as it had a block of flats on even higher ground, with a public

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*“the staff had been having lessons in Polish so that they could welcome the children in their native tongue”*

footpath running alongside. However, appearances were deceptive.

An enthusiastic head of the Governors greeted us and led us to the garden. We found some lovely plants, albeit overgrown, a superb pond, several orchard trees and a shrubbery. The shrubbery was essential as the block of flats were mainly used by drug abusers and the footpath was used to throw syringes into the grounds. The garden had been laid out when money was far more plentiful than at present. The pond was a reasonable size with proper

safety features. Not only was the pond surrounded by a well fixed set of bars, but it had a proper metal fixture (parallel to the ground) attached to the uprights, so no child could ever fall in.

The School was told that they were responsible for clearing the syringes but we disputed this and asked them to go back to the County Council. We then thought that everything should be in place to get gardening. There was a nice level lawn at the end of the garden that would be good to use for story time or some other quiet activity. Sadly, this hid some huge red ants' nests and, until these had been dealt with, the garden was considered unusable. We contributed to the removal of the ants to another place, where they would not cause a problem and the School got on with some gardening!

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## Spreaders

*Annabelle Chisholm chooses her favourite flowers*

I have to confess to a partiality for 'spreaders' – notably my white hyacinths by the back door, up to 40 or 50 from an original 3 (more every year, never touch them!).

Just going over now (early April), but there is *Ipheion alberto castillo* up to 30 or 40 from 3 in 2 years. Now that the gloriously scented *Daphne Jaqueline Postill* is fading, the baton of 'favourite flower' is passed to *Hebe hulkeana* with its sprays of exquisite milky blue/mauve flowers – yes it is a joy!

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## My Garden

*Anne Garrard packs a lot into her garden*

I have a very small walled garden, South facing and my main interests are shrubs and shapes. I therefore tend to grow

my shrubs as half standards – *Senecio*, *Exochorda*, *Cornus* etc. I have a very old apple tree, hollow all the way through, which I shape into clouds as I do with a tall, well branched, *Rhus cotinus*. This system of growing and pruning allows me

# The Somerset Gardens Trust



to grow *Peonies*, *Agapanthus*, dwarf irises etc, beneath the shrubs, giving me interest most of the year.

I am also a lover of raised beds and, as my lawn and borders are on a higher level than the house, I have a border of interesting plants at the edge of the sustaining wall, which gives me a close up while sitting at my window. These are miniature daffodils, *Helianthemum*, *Anaphalis*, *Cyclamen* etc. Finally, I have pots of tulips and polyanthus in the Winter and *Geraniums* and *Fuschias* in the Summer.

## Henry Lyte (of Lytes Cary) 1529-1607 and his *Niewe Herball* 1578

*Mervyn Wilson on his famous Herball*

This is the first of two articles. Here I pass on what we know about the man, his Herball, and the story of herbals in his day. The second draws on *The Knot* by Jane Borodale, a book of faction published in 2010, to fill out his story.

Henry Lyte inherited an estate owned by his family since 1268. He was sent to Oxford to be educated as a gentleman. He then travelled in Europe, meeting scholars and broadening his education. He returned to Somerset to take over the management of the family estate. He married three times, and had thirteen children. The family continued there until 1765, when it was sold to the Dickinsons of King Weston. The house remains, but the gardens have disappeared. Henry Lyte certainly had one.



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He became a most excellent scholar, with a good foundation in several sorts of learning, made in the university and abroad and was caught up in the new interest in botany and plants, and their medicinal uses. He probably visited the new Physic Garden at Padua (est. 1545) and made important contacts, was a contemporary of, and almost certainly knew well, Dr Turner, the famous Dean of Wells, who had published a number of Herbals himself (the first while at Cambridge (1538), and more substantial volumes in the 1550s and 60s, some compiled while in exile on the Continent during the religious see saw of the Edward and Mary years, and some based on his field studies round Wells). This interest was a part of the new learning, more scientific, and concerned to improve medicine and make it more widely available. Here we have a scholar with international connections, tied to managing a country estate. How shall he be true to larger hopes and make a contribution to the World? A new herbal is needed. Rembert Dodoens, a Dutch scholar had published

his *Cruydeboedcke*, with woodcut illustrations, in 1554; translated into French by Charles de L'eclose 1557 (*Histoire des Plantes*). This, Lyte set about translating into English, completing it in 1578, when it went to Antwerp to be published, including the original woodcuts. The folio volumes were shipped back to England, where it became the standard work on plants and their medicinal uses.

*“Here we have a scholar with international connections, tied to managing a country estate. How shall he be true to larger hopes and make a contribution to the World?”*

To put Lyte's work in context, there were other later Herbals – among them one by John Gerard published in 1597, descriptive of plants from his large garden in London and drawing on his medical experience as a barber surgeon, which had more up to date knowledge. There were further editions of Henry Lyte's Herbal without woodcuts after 1578; the last in 1619.

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## The SGT Gardens Competition 2020

*Christopher Bond reports*

You will know that we launched the Somerset Gardens Trust Gardens

Competition 2020 towards the end of last year. This is a new Competition so we needed to set up the organization through the team of Sheila Rabson (focusing on the Schools category), Mary ter Braak (website) and myself (overall and marketing). We also needed to establish the

# The Somerset Gardens Trust



*“This is a new Competition so we needed to set up the organization through the team of Sheila Rabson (focusing on the Schools category), Mary ter Braak (website) and myself (overall and marketing)”*

infrastructure (judges and selectors) and decide the criteria for winning. We received a few entries for both categories (schools and individually owned gardens) but sadly Coronavirus struck before we got close to the end date, and we were all locked down. Maddening timing because of the wonderful gardening weather. So, we consulted our selectors, and, unsurprisingly, Council accepted our recommendation to cancel the 2020 Competition, and to reconsider in the Autumn of this year holding a 2021 Competition using the knowledge we had built up this year.

In more detail –

- We have found two high powered judges (Alan Power of NT Stourhead and Alan Ketley of Cornwall Horticultural College) for the 2 competitions (individuals/schools)
- We have four distinguished and professional garden selectors (Nigel Cox of Cannington, Paul Cumbleton (ex-Wisley), Lucy Nelson (Deputy Lord Lieutenant responsible for mental health and philanthropy), and Libby Russell (Professional garden designer)). I hope they will all be willing to do the same role next year.
- Libby Russell (RHS Judge) has designed a modified scoring system for assessing gardens which can be reused.
- Mary ter Braak has done an amazing job on setting up and updating a new section of the SGT website with the rules and entry forms which will require little adaption to be used next year.
- We have a social media champion (Trish Gibson) who is ready and primed to publicise the competition on Instagram etc



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- We have had strong editorial articles in *Somerset Life* and *The Country Gardener* which mean that it is no longer an unknown competition
- I have contacted the members of many Somerset Gardening Clubs so memories can be stirred
- Sadly, the near 1000 leaflets I have had printed and distributed will need to be binned; however, the contents

will not require much updating for future use.

- Finally, the core team of Sheila, Mary and myself have learnt how to work together well.

We would gladly receive any comments or suggestions you have on any aspect of the Competition including its aims, rules, promotion or organization. It involves all SGT members.

## Weird Plants by Chris Thorogood (Kew Publishing.

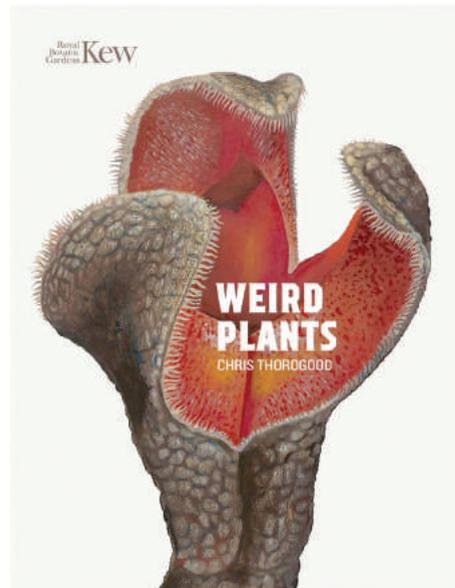
Royal Botanic Garden, Kew.

ISBN 978 1 84246 662 9 - £18)

*Anthony Pugh-Thomas enjoys an unusual plant analysis*

Dr Chris Thorogood is the Deputy Director & Head of Science, Oxford University Botanic Gardens, with a particular interest in the formation of plants in the course of evolution. In this book, finely illustrated with his own paintings, he describes a wide range of plants, many of dramatic appearance, that often grow in vulnerable habitats and have developed unusual ways of surviving in often hostile environments; they trick, dupe, steal and even kill; those attributes are described in separate chapters.

**'Vampires'** describe, for example the *Rafflesia*, the World's largest flower, whose strong smell attracts pollinating flies from far and wide. Under **'Killers'** a giant Venus Fly trap known as the 'King Pitcher Plant', has a pitcher so large as to



hold several litres of fluid: when shrews slip into it they drown.

**'Fraudsters'** opens with an illustration of *Psychotria elata*, whose flower looks very like the sofa designed by Dali (now in the V & A) who was fascinated by the lips of

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*“whose flower looks very like the sofa designed by Dali (now in the V & A) who was fascinated by the lips of Mae West”*

Mae West, and the Monkey-Face Orchid indeed lives up to its name.

**‘Jailers’** takes us to the *Arum* family with such oddities as the ‘Dead Horse Arum’ whose blooms, resembling animals’ corpses can be 16 inches long; flies looking for a place to lay their eggs crawl into a hollow chamber where they become trapped by backward-pointing slippery spines and are showered in pollen, to be released the following day when the spines wither.

**‘Accomplices’** are those that have devised surprising schemes to encourage pollination. ‘Bat Pitcher Plants’ provide daytime roosting sites for woolly bats in their long slender pitchers and their droppings provide nourishment in the otherwise nutrient poor heath where they grow.

**‘Survivors’** flourish in some of the most hostile places on earth – The ‘Desert Pea’ of Australia has seeds that can remain viable in the barren desert sands for

years awaiting a rainstorm when they quickly grow long roots so that they can flower and set seed before the return of unfavourable hot, dry spells.

The book describes many more plants in each category. Some are beautiful. Some are macabre. All have devised incredible strategies of survival. Fascinating.



*Dead Horse Arum*