

Avon Gardens Trust

Newsletter



Humphry to Hobhouse

As members of Avon Gardens Trust went through the grand entrance gates and up the sweeping drive towards Ston Easton House, it gave us all a real sense of what Humphry Repton had set out to achieve. Repton's Red Book of 1793 for Ston Easton was commissioned by Henry Hippisley-Coxe who wished to give his Palladian mansion the appropriate parkland setting.

The current house was built around 1750 on the site of a Tudor building and was occupied by the Hippisley-Coxe family for over two hundred years. Around 1960, the mansion was purchased by William Rees-Mogg who saved the house from demolition and he set about restoring it. It was later sold to Peter Smedley whose wife called in Penelope Hobhouse to design the walled kitchen garden. For nearly twenty years the Smedleys ran the house as a luxury hotel and this luxurious approach is continued by the current hotel owners.

On a grey afternoon in February, Trust members assembled in the main lobby area of the house where there was the opportunity to admire the oil paintings, the antique furniture and look at a copy of the Red Book whilst waiting for Dale Toten, the Head Gardener, to take us on the guided walk. Dale explained how the owners of the hotel were keen to restore as many of the Repton

features as possible. To illustrate this, Dale took us around the house to where a north-facing slope drops to the river Norr which has been cleaned out, artificially widened and enlivened by a series of shallow cascades. Recent removal of brambles and other invasive undergrowth has led to the appearance of spring flowering bulbs which feature as a backdrop to the river. Snowdrops lined the paths as we headed towards the walled kitchen garden.

The entrance to the walled garden is reached via a bridge across the river and through an archway in the screen wall which hides it from the rest of the pleasure grounds. A late C18 gardener's cottage which adjoins this wall is now part of the hotel. The present internal layout of the garden dates from the late C20 and the design is attributed to Penelope Hobhouse who was living about 25 miles away at Tintinhull House. One section of the garden has beech hedges enclosing small 'rooms', many of which contain hellebores. The rest of the walled garden is laid out with a series of box-edged vegetable beds, an orchard area, an avenue of mulberry trees and a series of glasshouses.

Returning to the hotel, we were invited to explore the public rooms. One room contains one of England's earliest surviving Print Rooms in which prints are stuck directly to the walls. A stone staircase took us down to the servants' quarters and the Edwardian kitchen. Afternoon tea was served in one of the lounges with its extensive views across the pleasure grounds; this was a fitting end to a very enjoyable visit.

Ros Delany



Message from the Chairman

Thank you, Martin



In November last year, Martin Burnham, lost his brave battle against cancer. For over twenty years he had been a loyal and hardworking friend of Avon Gardens Trust helping us with our publications and the design and setting up of the website.

Trained as a graphic designer, Martin joined Avon County Council in 1982 as an architectural model maker and exhibition designer. Whilst at Avon he met his future wife, Sandra Weeks, who was employed as a graphic designer and they worked together on many interesting projects such as the Archaeology of Avon and The Royal Victoria Park exhibitions. In 1996, Martin moved to the new unitary authority of B&NES where he concentrated on design work. A year later, he decided to go freelance and both Avon and Wiltshire Gardens Trusts became clients.

Martin's first publication for the Trust was the 2001 Spring Newsletter when he introduced some changes in

the layout including having a picture and the name of the Trust on the front cover as well as successfully persuading the Editor at the time, Peggy Stembridge, of adopting the double column text. Always keen to work for the good of the Trust, Martin soon introduced colour for the covers and by 2006, we were setting further example to other Trusts with a very professionally produced Journal and an Annual Review, replacing the Newsletters.

Behind the scenes, Martin's work included improved revisions of the original Gazetteer, and compiling the Index of Articles and Contributors in Newsletters. He was also involved with general publicity for the Trust and for helping with the design of the booklets and maps created for the Trust's various study days and seminars. Always patient, Martin was good to work with and he appreciated other people's contributions, especially of photographs. One of his main aims was to ensure the printed material was as high quality, colourful and economical as possible.

Martin was a staunch supporter of the Trust, nothing was too much trouble and every request was met with good humour and delivered to the highest standard. He will be sorely missed by all.

The 2019 Committee

For those of us on the committee, our first meeting of the year got off to a good start as we welcomed two new members to the committee, June and Peter Shannon. June is our Membership Secretary and Peter's area of expertise is with websites and databases. Their joint knowledge and enthusiasm will be a tremendous boost for the Trust.

For many years, the committee has worked hard establishing contact with many heritage organisations. This has meant we have started 2019 with three projects where the Trust has been called in for advice. At Oaklands in Almondsbury, we are working closely with landscape architects to retain as much as possible of the garden Hiatt Baker created. At Prior Park, we met with the National Trust to discuss renovation work there (see short article later in the newsletter). Finally, in Nailsea, The Elms (Middle Engine) Pit site is an ongoing project with the Heritage team at North Somerset Council and Nailsea Town Council. It is an industrial heritage site which will be restored along with the later Edwardian garden of a large house called The Elms which incorporated the ruined and disused pit buildings into its garden. The Trust is currently researching this site and there will be an article about The Elms in the next Journal.

The Trust has organized its visits for 2019 and I hope that all of you will be able to join us on at least one visit as we do enjoy meeting up with our members. Some of our visits this year are to extra special private gardens which only open during the week for pre-booked groups. If we had the choice the Trust would have opted for a weekend visit but this was not an option.

If you would like to get in touch about any Trust matter, please contact Ros Delany at chairman@avongardenstrust.org.uk.

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Avon Gardens Trust Visits for 2019



Wednesday 19 June at 1 pm **Visit to Halswell Park, Goathurst, Near** **Bridgwater, Somerset TA5 2DH**

Members £20, Guests £22 to include lunch, refreshments and fully guided tour of the estate.

Halswell Park is a Grade I listed country house in Somerset described by Sir Nikolaus Pevsner as 'the most important house of its date in the county'. First recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086, the manor house that endures today dates mainly from the Tudor period with additions and changes carried out at regular intervals to suit the changing needs of the Halswell Tynte family.

The story of the destruction of Halswell is typical of many great houses in the C20 but recent single ownership has meant the C18 pleasure garden, Mill Wood, is back into estate ownership and the full restoration of all the buildings with their fascinating history is now well underway.

The visit will commence with lunch, followed by going onto the roof of Halswell House to view the parkland and the restored Tudor buildings before walking around the park to the temple.

Wednesday 17 July at 2 pm **Private visit to Eastleach House, Eastleach** **Martin, Cirencester GL7 3NW**

Covering 14 acres, the various areas of the extensive garden include the South Lawn, Park, Rill Garden and Walled Garden. Many features have been restored and, in the park, over five hundred trees have been planted while nearer the house, a small arboretum of unusual trees has become well established.

There is still time to book for our visit to **Goldney House and Clifton Hill House** **Bristol BS8 1BH on Thursday 11 April at 2 pm**

In Goldney we will view the recently restored rotunda followed by visiting the renovated garden at Clifton Hill House where we will be able to see the new planting scheme.

Full details of all visits may be found on our website www.avongardenstrust.org.uk/events where a booking form can also be found. If you have any ideas for a visit, or any comments about our programme, please contact Peter Hills on events@avongardenstrust.org.uk or telephone 01275 858809

The Dams Project at Prior Park Landscape Garden

Members of the Trust's Planning Sub Committee met with Tom Boden, the General Manager at Prior Park, to discuss the National Trust's proposed restoration work there. Since taking over the site in 1993, the NT has been working to restore a former overgrown garden to the landscaped vision of its creator, Ralph Allen.

This year, the NT will embark on the restoration of the C18 dams. Both time and the destructive American signal crayfish have taken their toll on these structures. The crayfish have burrowed into the banks of the lakes and dams causing severe erosion and the appearance of sink holes.

The middle lake has already been emptied to relieve further pressure and the work here will focus on protecting this dam and its banks from the crayfish. The restoration work will also enable the small cascade between the middle and lower lakes to be re-instated.

The second phase of the work will see the future-proofing of the lower dam, as well as re-enforcing the lower lake's damaged banks.



Ros Delany

A Green Plan It Challenge For Schools

Look back to our Spring 2018 Bulletin and our support for Downend School Garden Project. Audrey Gerber gives us an account of being a Mentor for their entry in the 2017 RHS Green Plan It Challenge. The Scheme which challenges twelve to fourteen year olds to uncover the power of plants and the role they play in our lives.

Move on to Autumn 2018 and I was delighted to be invited to act as an Assessor at the 2018 celebration event in Bristol for schools in the South West where, at the end of the ten weeks, teams compete against each other to see who is to be crowned the winner. This is a desk top exercise. The scheme is designed to be pupil led with advice from their teacher and their mentor. As assessors we were divided into groups of three. Our allotted three schools were different in ethos, catchment demographic and geographical location.

Each team gave a five minute presentation after which we had ten minutes to engage them with questions. The children were delightful and articulate giving it their all for their presentations and presenting their models.

However we came to an agreement that one of the Bristol schools had overall top marks from our group. Their presentation was focused and they gave an excellent and friendly resumé of the aims of their project with the team leader keeping every team member equally included in the presentation. Their theme had been the stresses and challenges experienced by students and the emphasis on

admitting to, and seeking help for, mental health problems.

They had designed a sensory garden in which students and staff could relax and experience the senses of sight, smell, touch, taste and sound by means of the planting choices. Their model had a clear visual impact. The Welsh Community School had gone for Incredible Edibles as their theme plus a quiet seating area. The other Bristol school had Project Echo with an emphasis on recyclable materials and using native planting where possible..



Sensory Garden

There were four prizes, a prize for the overall winner, one for the most innovative design, one for best teamwork and then all the pupils voted for their choice. Whilst none of our three schools were among the prize winners there was a special announcement. Our Community School had a commendation for actually building, planting and looking after their productive garden, including hens.

Wendy Pollard

A Message from our New Membership Secretary, June Shannon

Hello

I am pleased to say that I have taken over the role of Membership Secretary and will be dealing with all renewals this year. Subscriptions are due on 1 July. I have been passed comprehensive details and will interpret them as I understand them, so if anything goes wrong, blame me and let me know. I will put it right!

About half of our members pay by cheque and half by standing order. Both are completely acceptable although a standing order is administratively a bit easier for us. If you would like to change to standing order, please let me know. The annual subscription remains the same as in recent years

at £15 for one member, £20 for two adults at the same address and £5 for Under 25s. I will be writing at the beginning of June to all who pay by cheque and will do a follow up reminder in July.

We hope that you will all sign up again as we rely on your enthusiasm and interest to help us with our campaigns and for raising the profile of many of the wonderful gardens we have in the area.

Perhaps you could take the opportunity to make suggestions about anything else that you would like to see from us. All the best and let's hope for a warm, sunny gardens' year!

June Shannon
Membership Secretary
membership@avongardenstrust.org.uk

The Gardens Trust

Gardens Trust Annual Conference and AGM to be held in Oxford.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2019
The Queen's College, Oxford.
Friday 6 to Sunday 8 September

Booking now open. See
www.thegardenstrust.org

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