



Newsletter



Seasonal display in the Orangery, Tyntesfield

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Message From The Chairman

We hear and read a lot about the garden in winter but, speaking for myself, it gives me little actual pleasure.

These are not my sentiments but those of Christopher Lloyd in his book *The Well Tempered Garden* although I suspect many of you will agree with him. We all miss having less opportunity to get out into the garden during these months, but on the positive side it does allow us to catch up on our reading. With this in mind, I hope you will find enough time to read through and enjoy the latest edition of our newsletter.

It does appear as though there is a distinct bias towards Tyntesfield as we have three articles about this wonderful site. One is a report about our recent AGM and tour which was held there. The tour was led by Paul Evans, the Head Gardener, and reprinting a revised version of one of his earlier articles for the Trust about Victorian plant labels will be especially appreciated by those who were on the visit. For those of you who were unable to join us on that sunny afternoon at Tyntesfield, I am sure you will enjoy Paul's article. Our final experiment, with more than a passing nod to Tyntesfield, is from one of our members – but I'll leave you to find out more about his most interesting article.

To try and redress the balance, there is a piece by member Kay Ross who is doing a great job at setting up a Friends of Warmley Group. The plight of this historic landscape continues to be of concern to the Trust. Lack of funding and mixed site use has meant this important industrial pleasure garden with its workers housing, water features, grotto and giant has been largely neglected. By establishing a Friends Group it will raise awareness of this site and hopefully may halt any further degradation of the landscape there.

Over the winter, the committee will be planning our visits for 2020 and I hope you will be able to join us on at least one visit.

Ros Delany

Invitation to Blaise Castle estate Kusoo Dhawaada



An invitation to the community at Barton Hill Settlement, Bristol from Avon Gardens Trust to visit Blaise Castle estate for a day out.
See page 3.

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A Fun Day At Blaise

*ardiinka quruxda badan oo la sameyey 200 sano ka hor
(Beautiful garden set 200 years ago)*



Throughout the year, the Avon Gardens Trust has been working with the Gardens Trust, Friends of Blaise Community Garden and the Friends of Blaise to organise a Sharing Repton Fun Day in an historic landscape for new audiences.

This project, part of the ‘Accessible Repton’ programme, was held at the end of July in Blaise Community Garden and was the culmination of the Trust’s community activities this year. Strategic Development Officer, Linden Groves, at the Gardens Trust, had successfully applied for a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund which involved running five pilot projects over a two-year period across the country. The aim of these pilot projects was to attract new audiences to historic parks and gardens and also to show other county gardens trusts and similar organisations how to reach new volunteers and supporters. The Trust’s project was aimed at the Somali community as it is estimated up to 20,000 people of Somali heritage live in Bristol resulting in Somali being the third most commonly spoken language in the city. The aim of the day was for our visitors to visit and enjoy an historic landscape.

The Blaise estate was selected for the venue as it has so much to offer as a surviving Repton landscape. Along with the other groups mentioned above, the Trust delivered a ‘Fun Day’ for the predominantly Somali members of the Barton Hill Activity Club, part of the Barton Hill Community Group.

On a sunny day and with all the preparations sorted out, volunteers anxiously waited for the coach bringing our guests to arrive. Many of us were concerned that there would only be a few people turning up but our fears were soon allayed when 20 adults and 50 very excited children under the age of 12 stepped out of the coach, all dressed in their best clothes.



After refreshments and a quick explore of the walled garden, we all went to look at Blaise Castle, even those mothers with toddlers in pushchairs. The older children were especially excited as they thought it was going to be a real castle and some were rather disappointed when they realised there was not a moat or drawbridge in sight. Spirits were raised though when they entered and climbed the stairs as they could pretend to be soldiers on the ramparts of a castle. The adults meanwhile enjoyed hearing about ‘eye-catchers’ and how this was a sham castle that had been incorporated into the landscape by Humphry Repton.



Back in the walled garden, there was a very welcome buffet lunch augmented by an outdoor pizza oven which proved a huge success with the youngsters. Lunch over; it was time for a proper exploration of the walled garden which included the children helping some of the volunteers with gardening activities. Then it was time for a second organised walk to the Dairy Garden which was once the site of the original manor house. The adults were captivated by this thatched building and were fascinated that its decorative appearance probably meant it was intended more as an amusement for the Harford family than as a working dairy.



After a look at the amphitheatre, it was back to the walled garden to bid fond farewells and get back onto the coach to return to Barton Hill. It had been a noisy, hectic day much enjoyed by all present and the feeling among volunteers was that our visitors had thoroughly enjoyed their ‘Fun Day’ in an historic landscape.

Ros Delany



A New Friends Group for William Champion's Garden, Warmley

...The Garden remains largely unknown by the local and wider community...



The C18 garden created by industrialist William Champion in Warmley, South Gloucestershire, is a rare and virtually hidden treasure house. It retains a number of Grade II listed features, some in better condition than others: a subterranean Grotto, Statue of Neptune, rare Snail Viewing Mound, Boat House, possibly once a Fishing Lodge, Echo Pond, Summer House and huge Ice House. The garden is designated Grade II on the UK Parks & Gardens Register and forms part a Scheduled Ancient Monument with Champion's brass mill (Kingswood Heritage Museum) and his pin factory, the Clock Tower. Together with Champion's Grade II* house, now a residential home, they all form a Conservation Area which is on the Historic England At Risk Register and described as in a 'very bad' condition and deteriorating.

Despite a Conservation Management Plan carried out in 2007 by Atkins, who described the garden as '*a rare survivor of a mid-18th century designed landscape garden, encroached upon but largely unaltered since 1769*', their recommendations were never followed up and maintenance of the garden has been impacted by Local Authority spending cuts over the last 10 years. The Grotto has been largely conserved and maintained by the Museum, who periodically opens it to the public. The many local people who visit on open days invariably say they had no idea the garden existed, or that it was a public Green Space.

The Garden's historic structures include a number of stone walls with Champion's trademark dark slag blocks, made in moulds from the copper making process overspill. Many have been inundated by encroaching trees and other vegetation. Saplings, including holly and sycamore, have taken root on the Snail Viewing Mound, which already has a crown of established oak trees, presumably planted during the C19. The Grotto is similarly inundated, a large yew tree growing on the roof. Other structures are covered with ivy and in some cases tree roots are causing stonework to crack. The undergrowth in the Echo Pond, no longer fed by the brook, is full of weeds, cut back by the Council once or twice a year. Earlier repairs to walls carried out by the now defunct Manpower Services in the 1970s invariably used materials since deemed inappropriate, in particular concrete mortar which is now failing and presenting safety issues.



The Garden remains largely unknown by the local and wider community. This is due both to the lack of any obvious entrance, other than on open days, and its concealment on all sides by post-war commercial development, not least a large 1960s park home on part of the former 13 acre (5ha) lake, stranding the 23ft (7m) high Statue of Neptune which once stood on an island in the centre of the lake, as well as neglected areas such as the site of Champion's Home Close which has been encroached by the gardens which back onto it and of his rank of 1740s workers' housing, demolished in the 1960s for road widening.

Kingswood Heritage Museum, established by volunteers during the 1980s, has ensured that the Grotto is maintained and open to visitors, although the garden is owned by South Gloucestershire Council rather than the museum itself. A Friends of Warmley Museum & Gardens group was also established but for the last few years the group has concentrated solely on the Museum, which does not have the resources to carry out large scale conservation project on the Garden. This is why a new Friends of William Champion's Garden is being established as an affiliated group of volunteers. This will help ensure that the garden is restored and maintained and the C18 structures conserved and repaired by a team of dedicated volunteers, and where necessary by heritage and landscape professionals who, it is envisaged, will carry out hands on training for volunteers and anyone else interested in learning a new skill. The goal is to open the garden to the local and wider community as both a place to come and help maintain and as a place to enjoy a wonderful, unique garden.

If you are interested in learning more or joining the Friends of William Champion's Garden, please contact Kay Ross at kay@mclross.co.uk or phone 0789 0267845 or visit the Museum website <http://www.kingswoodmuseum.org.uk>

Understanding Tyntesfield

...the most exciting classroom exercise was the Guano experiment...

Ashton Gate is a very large primary school on the south-western side of Bristol, six miles from Tyntesfield. When the 10 year-old pupils at the school studied Victorian Times in the summer of 2019, it was natural that the story of the Gibbs and their great Victorian mansion should play a major part in their learning.

I was a volunteer helping with three Year 5 classes. We did some preparatory work with a box of Victorian everyday objects I had acquired over long years as a secondary school teacher. The children examined the objects, asked questions about them and drew conclusions which led to some brilliant thinking about Victorian people's lives and the differences between then and now. It was good preparation for the day we spent at Tyntesfield, looking and learning on site with the excellent Education team.

However, the most exciting classroom exercise was the Guano experiment. The class teachers, Tom Hughes, Alex Hawkins and Sarah Huxley prepared for the visit with work on the Gibbs family and the people who lived both upstairs and downstairs in the great mansion. But we wanted to show where the money came from to build such an enormous house in 1863.

William Gibbs (1790-1875), merchant, philanthropist and church builder became *'the richest commoner in England'* between the 1840s and the 1870s. His fortune was built on the sale of guano from Peru to the farmers of Europe. Guano is a fertiliser that suddenly changes poor or mediocre harvests into bumper crops.

Could we show in the classroom exactly how guano works? The science is easy. Ordinary soil is low in nitrogen and phosphate which are essential for plant growth. Farm yard manure makes some improvement but not much. Guano, on the other hand, has 20 times more nitrogen and 10 times more phosphate than ordinary soil. In the days before chemical fertilisers, guano was gold.

The plan: take three large pots and fill each with local Ashton Gate soil; leave one untouched; mix the second with farm manure and leave the third untouched also but add guano at regular intervals. We decided to plant two broad beans in each pot; an unwise choice because the time from germination to bean harvest is too long.

But where to obtain guano? We tried all the local Garden Centres. Never heard of it, we were told. The internet had plenty of bat guano but we wanted the Gibbs variety from Peru. At last, a firm in Barcelona (surely that would have pleased the Gibbs family with their Spanish connections) said they imported *'real, genuine organic bird guano from Peru'*. They could supply it in small packets. We ordered some. The instructions were all in Spanish so needed translating: *'make a guano tea by dissolving a quantity in 2 litres of water and give a cupful to the plants once a week'*.

The experiment started rather late. Tension rose as the shoots appeared. Water and guano were administered regularly by the children. By the end of term there was no doubt that the guano-fed seeds were the winners. They were strong, tall sturdy plants with healthy leaves. But something went wrong with the other two pots. The ordinary soil produced good, moderate growth; the manured soil had only one shoot and that was small and stunted.

Resolutions for next year: start early; plant seedlings which are the same size and not seeds which take too long to germinate. The children must be able to measure the results quickly. Our guano-fed beans will take too long to produce those pods full of large, tender beans that would have made

Mr Gibbs proud. Would carrot seedlings or radish be better? Whatever our failings, there is no doubt that our children will never forget: *'Mr Gibbs made his dibs, selling the turds of foreign birds'*.

Barry Williamson



Dreaming of Labels at Tyntesfield

...The labels give us a valuable insight into what was in the garden and this will inform us for the future planting plans...



Since Tyntesfield became a National Trust property in June 2002 volunteers and employees have had great fun discovering what may be the largest collection of historic plant labels in a National Trust garden (if you know otherwise let me know!). At Heligan they found their labels using a metal detector; at Tyntesfield we found them stored in boxes in the potting shed, the machinery shed and even in a box under a pile of logs! Others have also been found in the gardens in their original positions.

Two volunteers, Tony Titchen and John Everard carried out a tree survey in 2003 and 2004 identifying all the trees and shrubs in the formal gardens. Since then, over 700 historic plant labels from the C19 and C20 have been photographed and entered onto a database. There are two main types; the first comprising 30 terracotta labels or 'tallies' made by the Bourne factory which have a white enamel face with the Latin name hand-painted on it. Then there are cast metal labels with raised letters and are fixed to a short stake, and smaller fruit labels. Several terracotta examples have a planting date ranging from 1850 to 1871; one example is 'Picea pinsapo Mountains of Grenada Planted 1856'. One of the most significant metal labels bears the inscription 'Cedar of Lebanon Raised from Seed brought from Lebanon by JL Gibbs in 1858'.

So what do they tell us? As the majority are for trees (the rest being for shrubs), then we can assume that Tyntesfield's owners, the Gibbs family, were tree people, and this is still evident in the gardens today. We have nine champion trees and a diverse collection of Victorian and early C20 trees in the garden and on the drives. The labels give us a valuable insight into what was in the garden and this will inform us for the future planting plans. The collection also demonstrates that the gardeners and the family obviously valued their labels as they were stored and packed away so carefully, much the same as with the contents of the house. There, when a room was redecorated the old fixtures and fittings were not discarded but simply stored in spare rooms and in the basement.



The exciting thing for me is that they are still turning up! The following may sound weird – back in February, I had a dream that I found a quantity of old plant labels at work, very sad I know! Then about two days later I was admiring the spring bulbs in Paradise (the Arboretum) when I saw two labels next to a sizeable Yew tree. After further investigation with a trowel, I unearthed 14 in total. I think they had been placed next to the tree by a predecessor to prevent them damaging the blades of the lawnmower, then gradually the tree enveloped them with its roots and leaf mould and there they waited for a sunny day. Since then we have found dozens more when removing tree stumps or cultivating ground.

If you are interested in viewing the labels or any other collection items at Tyntesfield this can be done by visiting the National Trust Collections website, enter 'plant label' in the search box and labels from Tyntesfield and other properties should turn up!

<http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/results?SearchTerms=plant+label>

*Paul Evans
Head Gardener
Tyntesfield*

Tyntesfield in Autumn

Our Final Visit of 2019



On a sunny afternoon in mid-October, members of the Trust assembled at The Sawmill on the Tyntesfield estate, the venue for our Annual General Meeting. The Sawmill was formerly a complex of buildings above the house that contained steam engines and banks of lead acid batteries that relayed electric power to Tyntesfield House. Anthony Gibbs, upon inheriting Tyntesfield from his mother in 1887, decided the house should be lit by this ‘*new-fangled electricity*’ as he referred to it. There was no National Grid then – power had to be generated on site, and so the Engine House and Accumulator Room were purpose-built in 1889 alongside the sawmill. Tyntesfield was the only the second private house in England to have electricity installed.

We met in the Engine House where the formal business of the AGM was conducted before enjoying tea, sandwiches and cakes which fortified us ahead of the guided tour of the gardens by Head Gardener, Paul Evans. Throughout the walk, Paul related the current scene to how it was when the Trust took over the property and what was here in the heyday of the Gibbs residency. Much work to restore the gardens and parkland has been undertaken by the National Trust to present the visitor with an experience of a late Victorian garden and arboretum.

Trust members met at the front of the house where Paul outlined the transformation of what had been a typical Georgian landscape into the terracing and formal planting seen today with three distinct pathways leading to the lake and Paradise beyond. The formal bedding and urns around the house set a vista for the landscaped trees and pasture land in the distance. We walked to the Rose Garden, passing the beautifully trimmed formal holly bushes that are such a feature at the rear of the house. At the Rose Garden, we were transported back by Paul to 20 years ago when the NT purchased the property and when the formal gazebos were in a state of disrepair and on the point of collapse. Looking at them now one would never know – even the Minton floor and wall tiles look like they have been there forever. The rose urn and rose arch have been totally transformed with tender care by the garden team.

Paul took us down past the drained lake and under the magnificent keaki (*Zelkova serrata*) which was in full autumn colour, through the ha ha, and we arrived at the kitchen garden, a perfect model of Victorian gardening. In the Orangery Garden, Paul explained how the beautifully restored seating had been recreated from an old photograph and painting. Here oak barrel tubs were placed as planters for exotic plants in this weather protected and warm garden. The hazards of gardening alone were revealed in another part of the kitchen garden complex when Paul talked of the tragic fate of a former head gardener who, whilst pruning the rose arch, fell from his ladder into the small pond and drowned. The restoration in this part of the gardens is remarkable; the Orangery – once near collapse - now looks stunning, the walled garden is restored, glasshouses reinstated and the kitchen garden is full of produce for the restaurant and visitors. Whilst much more still needs to be re-established, the progress has been astounding. We rounded off the walk by looking at the impressive pumpkin and gourds display in the Orangery.



Thank you Paul for such an informative walk and talk.

Peter Hills

Please contact Peter Hills at events@avongardenstrust.org.uk or phone 01275 858 809 for further information or if you have suggestions for any AGT events in 2020.