

June/July News from Avon Gardens Trust

*Promoting and protecting
your local historic
landscapes*



Dear Member

Welcome to our latest News
Unfortunately, I was away during the Platinum Jubilee and so missed the festivities that were taking place all over our area, but the Queen's Jubilee is not the only milestone that is being celebrated this summer as Avon Gardens Trust reaches its Coral, or 35th Anniversary. Over the intervening years the Trust has continued with its core value of promoting and protecting historic landscapes in the local area. In this issue, besides articles on our present activities, we have nostalgically looked back to a summer's evening 35 years ago and why it all began.

Ros Delany - Editor

Unexpected Garden Oases in Dubrovnik

Dubrovnik in southern Croatia is one of those towns that lives up to expectations but it really needs to be visited before the summer hordes descend on the place. The narrow streets and alleys were busy enough in May but at the height of the summer, with as many as five cruise ships a day visiting the town, the magic and spirit of the place would be lost. To add to the numbers, a younger generation is now also visiting Dubrovnik as the town is forever associated as being Kings Landing in the highly successful television series *Game of Thrones* and this has added to the chaos with innumerable Game of Throne tours.

It is easy to forget that within the city walls there are about 3,000 permanent residents who somehow tolerate sharing their home town with thousands of visitors every day. It is perhaps no surprise to discover that any possible bit of outdoor space belonging to these homes is utilised as a garden whether as a small roof terrace, a porch area or, for the lucky few, as a garden.

A walk along the city walls gives tantalising glimpses of some of these domestic outdoor spaces. Vines trained over pergolas provided the dual purpose of welcome shade and grapes while some of the larger spaces had olive, loquat or citrus trees. Elsewhere there was a profusion of hydrangeas, oleanders, palms and lavender either planted in the ground or in pots. Washing lines and outdoor tables and chairs are important parts of these outdoor spaces and must surely make living in such a tourist town bearable.



AVON GARDENS TRUST IS 35 !

Message from the Chair

It is 35 years this month since Avon Gardens Trust came into being, on the 15 July 1987. Avon County Council, formed in 1974, and bodies such as the NHS, were then involved in selling or compulsorily purchasing park and farm land for development. This was at a time when there was no statutory protection for gardens: The Historic England 'Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England' was established in 1983. In 1996, after just 22 years, Avon was abolished and became four new unitary authorities: Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire. Along with the disbanding of Avon, funding became less accessible and various agencies which had helped us preserve local gardens and parkland were also lost.

Our committee is now a shadow of the 16 strong one in 1987, and whilst we are currently unable to provide the same very hands-on help, we still work just as hard to consider and comment on all the planning applications for parks and gardens within the four authorities, to award grants to schools and community gardens and provide visits and talks for members. We endeavour to keep our constantly changing sites up to date on the Parks and Gardens Register and we remain committed to educating primary schools and providing grants for their gardens, something that has never been so crucial in this time of the rising cost of living. This also applies to our community gardens which help locals grow their own food.

In order to do all this we need as many hands on deck as possible and if you have a spare few hours a month to help research local gardens, are involved with a school or community garden which needs funding or can simply recommend speakers or interesting gardens for visits, please do get in touch with us. We would like to be able to reach as many members as possible, from the north of South Gloucestershire to the southern reaches of North East Somerset. We have a plethora of fascinating parks and gardens to discover, research and visit, some well known, others not so well known, including historic gardens and more recent designed landscaped gardens. After a long two years of lockdowns, help us celebrate our four wonderfully diverse counties and spread the word about Avon Gardens Trust and how we can continue to help preserve and promote our wonderful garden legacy.

Kay Ross

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Formation of the Avon Gardens Trust

The Avon Gardens Trust was the third of the County Garden Trusts to be formed after Hampshire and Wiltshire. The launch of the Trust took place in the Gardens of Goldney House, Clifton, Bristol on Wednesday 15 July 1987. The opening address was given by Mavis Batey, MBE, President of the Garden History Society, (and renowned former Bletchley Park Code Breaker!)

The new County of Avon came into being on 1 April 1974, part of a nationwide reorganisation of local government. The Avon County Planning Department was responsible for strategic planning and was set up to work alongside six city and district councils. The Landscape and Conservation Group of the Planning Department, set up in 1976, had little or no information on the landscape and conservation of the county and required information about features and sites of special value. It had few staff (eight in 1976) and no budget other than for staff.

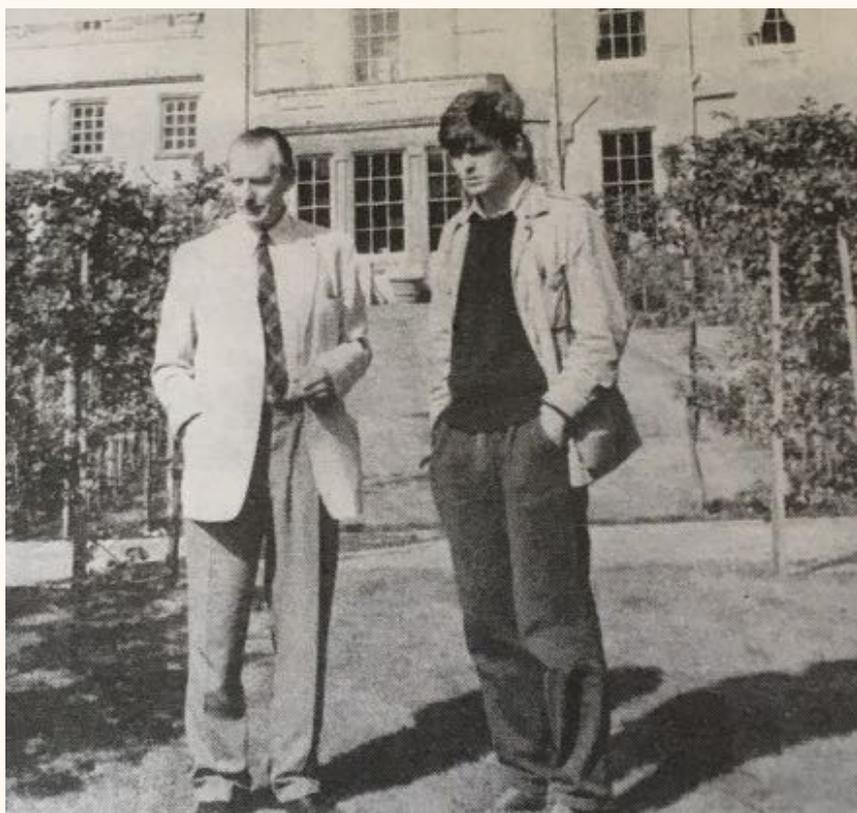
Avon County Community Environment Scheme (ACCES) was a Community Programme Scheme funded by the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) a government agency, responsible for training and job finding set up in 1973. The scheme was sponsored by Avon County Council. Sponsorship means that the programme of work, employment and training complied with MSC policies. ACCES provided part time employment for up to 140 unemployed people of all ages. The work programme was divided into three sectors: Countryside; Community History; and Community Gardens.

Lorna McRobie was appointed to supervise the Community Gardens Project in March 1986. Part of Lorna's job specification was to actively promote the formation of a new gardens trust within the county. Lorna recorded that at the time it seemed a daunting task but that the more contacts she made, the more enthusiasms she received so that within a few months she was able to arrange a meeting of over 30 people eager to give their time and energy to contribute to the formation of the Avon Gardens Trust.

From this, a smaller stalwart group, fuelled only by coffee and biscuits met regularly to discuss such problems as the constitution, aims and objectives, future programme, conservation issues and the public launch. Lorna gained a great deal of support from Mike Dawson, Divisional Planning Officer with Avon County Council – an old hand at new trusts!

The Gardens Project started at ACCES in 1984 as a direct response to the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission's (English Heritage's) decision to compile a 'Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England'. This is now published county by county. It provides a valuable source of information from which further discussions on conservation issues can take place at national level. The survey team then turned its attention to the smaller or less well-known gardens of local interest plus the vast array of important C18 and C19 public parks within the urban and spa localities, many of which provide a valuable landscape or resource.

David McLaughlin



*The first Chairman, Professor Bob Savage
with David Lambert, Secretary*

Yes, Avon Gardens Trust is 35 and it was on a summer's evening in July thirty-five years ago.

Following the Public Launch of Avon Gardens Trust at Goldney House and gardens with the opening address by Mavis Batey.

The emphasis of the evening was on the importance of the preservation of historic gardens which were seen as an integral part of Avon's heritage. The focus for the newly created organisation was to be on the county's gardens, whether in dealing with planning applications, approaching improvements or appreciating them. It was anticipated this would be partly a matter of campaigning on planning and conservation issues, partly of practical assistance to owners whether public or private, and partly of education.

The first newsletter for the Trust came out that summer and featured articles on the gardens at Goldney House and Barrow Court and the pressures affecting Stoke Park. A programme of visits had been arranged to Barrow Court, Badminton and Prior Park.

Following the Public, by the end of 1987 the Trust had over 100 members, a committee of 16 and had satisfied the requirements of the Charity Commission which meant they would soon achieve charitable status as an Incorporated Trust.

It is good to see that the aims for the Trust are the same today as they were 35 years ago.

Update on Grant to Hanham Abbots School

In the November/December News, we mentioned that Hanham Abbots school in South Gloucestershire had contacted us asking for a grant towards improving the courtyard area at their school. This outdoor area is used on a daily basis during the summer by various groups or classes to care for plants, weed, listen to a story or carry out Art projects linked to growing plants and flowers. Avon Gardens Trust were delighted to award a grant of £200 to the school to help with this project.

The teacher in charge of the project has sent through some 'before' and 'after' pictures which she thought our members would be interested in seeing. Where there was once weeds and a few straggly plants has now been replaced with wooden planters or colourful painted tyres which have been filled with flowers and herbs.



Visit to the Gardens at The American Museum



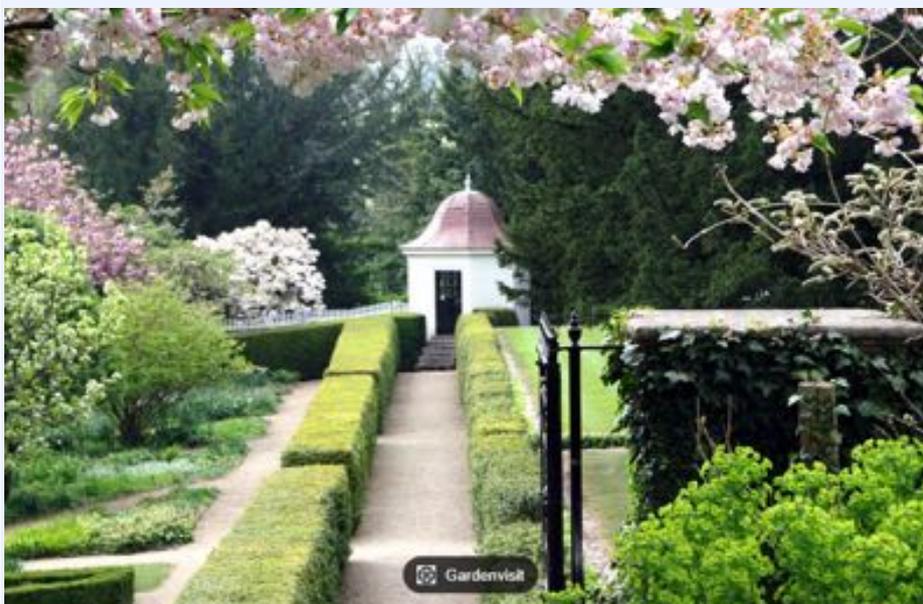
Following our successful garden visits earlier this year, we have arranged a visit to the gardens of the American Museum, Claverton, Bath on Tuesday 19 July at 2 pm. The cost will be £8.00 to include garden entry, tour and refreshments (if you are an American Garden member, then a lower rate will apply)

The visit was arranged following the interesting and informative talk at last year's AGM on the restoration of this garden. On our visit, one of the garden team will lead us on a tour around the renovations of the registered garden and see the planting schemes for ourselves that had been explained at the AGM.

Located in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the hilltop site of the Museum's home, Claverton Manor, takes full advantage of the spectacular views over the Limpley Stoke Valley and River Avon. Remnants of the old Italianate style manorial pleasure ground and parkland dating from the 1820s can be seen within the grounds, including period features such as the grotto, balustrade and curtain walling, as well as ornamental stone work. This work is attributed to George Vivian, son of the original owner of Claverton Manor, John Vivian.

Places can be booked by completing the form on the website <https://www.avongardenstrust.org.uk/events/> or emailing Peter Hills - events@avongardenstrust.org.uk

If you wish to make a day of it the house and museum are open for a morning visit at your own cost. Full cafe facilities are available.



The Elder Tree

English summer begins with elder flowers and ends with elder berries (an old English rhyme)



During the summer, the elder, *Sambucus nigra* is a common sight in woods and hedgerows in the countryside. A native of this country, the elder is a bushy tree, growing to a height of about 5m. From late May, the creamy white flowers with their faint sweet smell, appear in profusion and develop into dark purple clusters of elderberries.

It is thought the word 'Elder' comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *aeld* which meant fire and refers to the fact in the hollow stem of the young branches were used as

bellows to encourage a fire to light. Conversely, over the centuries, elder wood was never used as firewood as it was thought that if you burnt it, you would see the devil which would lead to death and disaster. Superstition has always been associated with the elder as it was thought witches could turn into an elder tree, but an elder tree planted by a house was meant to protect the inhabitants from lightning and evil spirits. The elder was also known as the 'Judas Tree' as Judas Iscariot is said to have hanged himself from such a tree.

The flowers and the berries have always been collected and used for medicinal and culinary purposes. Elderflower tea was a traditional remedy for colds while elderberry drinks have long been prescribed for coughs and sore throats. Elderflower and sparkling wine continues to be a summer favourite, whether home-made or purchased in shops. Elderberry wine has long been a firm favourite for homemade wine.



The soft pith of the elder branch is easy to push out and the hollow tubes this formed were traditionally made into whistles and pipes.

Elder is also a great source for a variety of coloured dyes and historically it was used to make patterned Harris Tweed. For the colour blue, the purple dye was obtained from the berries, yellow and green from the leaves, and grey and black dye was made from the bark.

In *Sylvan Tales*, 1826, Elizabeth Kent extols the virtue of the elder for keeping insects away from vegetable crops and fruit trees. She does on to describe how the *flowers are considered poisonous to turkeys, and the berries to poultry in general.*

Ros Delany

Each year, garden organisations remember eminent and well-known garden designers, plant hunters or landscape architects who have a significant anniversary of their birth or death. This year is no exception as Humphry Repton was born 270 years ago in 1752 and Gertrude Jekyll died 90 years ago this year. I thought it may be interesting for our members to mention other people who are less well known but have played their part in giving us the plant and design heritage we have today.

Patrick Syngé

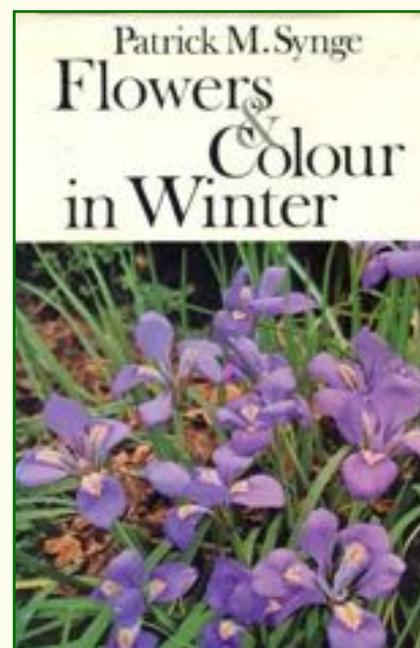
Many of us will have the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) *Gardeners' Encyclopedia of Plants and Flowers* in our bookcases. Over the years this book has become established as the standard reference book for all gardening enthusiasts. The current editor-in-chief is Christopher Brickell who has been in the role for over 20 years.

One of the previous editors-in-chief was Patrick Millington Syngé who died thirty years ago in 1982. Born in 1910, he became a botanist, writer and plant hunter whose greatest legacy in the gardening world is probably for being editor of the *Horticultural Journal* of the RHS for 25 years until 1970. He was also editor of many of the RHS books which have become classic reference books for all keen gardeners including the *Dictionary of Gardening* and the *Dictionary of Roses in Colour*.

A graduate of the University of Cambridge, Syngé's first book *Mountains of the Moon* was published in 1938 and documented a British Museum Natural History expedition to East Africa. Following military service during the Second World War, Syngé was appointed editor of the *Horticultural Journal*.

Syngé led several plant expeditions, including those to Nepal and Turkey which he documented in his 1973 book *In Search of Flowers*. In all, he was responsible for over ten books and dictionaries of plants, many as a co-author, on a range of plant subjects. His book *The Dictionary of Garden Plants in Colour* is perhaps his best known book.

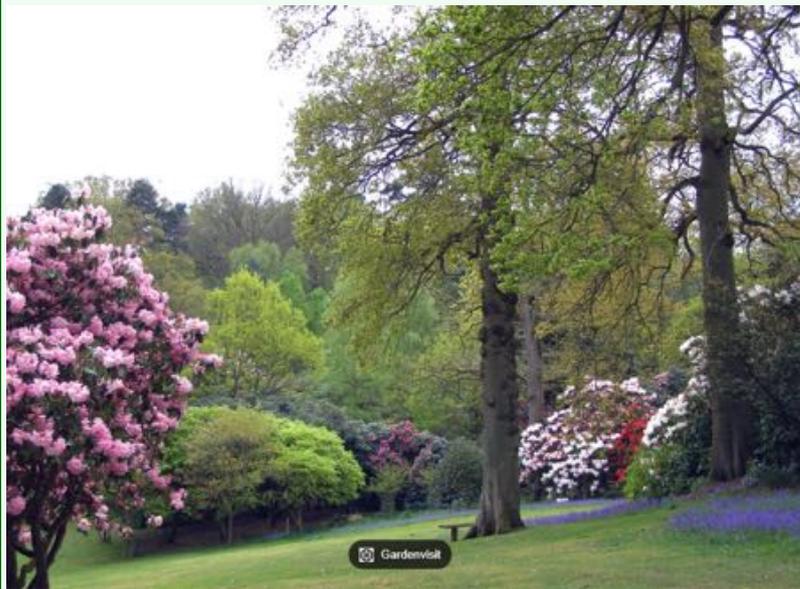
In 1971, he was awarded the Victoria Medal of Honour of the RHS. This medal is awarded to British horticulturists resident in the UK whom the RHS Council considers deserving of special honour by the Society. The award was established in 1897, and only 63 medals may be held at any one time, in recognition of the duration in years of Victoria's reign.



An abutilon (*Abutilon* Patrick Syngé) is named after him. It is a half hardy evergreen shrub with maple-like foliage and pendant deep orange bell-shaped flowers in spring, summer and autumn. It is hardy to around -5C and benefits from being grown against a sheltered wall or fence.

Ros Delany

AGT visit to Bowood House and Gardens



A small but dedicated band of Avon Gardens Trust members arrived on a gloomy day to visit the gardens of Bowood House near Chippenham, along with a guided tour of the private walled garden and grounds. That was the end of gloom!

Following our warming coffee, our guide, Jane Milligan, gave us an introduction to the history of the estate and family before we gathered on the Italian-inspired terraces overlooking the fine landscape. Jane informed us of the various stages of development of the terraces, house and grounds before we were escorted to the four-acre private walled garden of the Lansdowne family. The walled garden is made up of four different one-

acre squares and the colour and fragrance in this area was a delight to see in May. These four areas of the gardens were such a distinct contrast and included long borders, rose beds and wisteria arches to vegetables, fruits and glass houses.



We then were taken on a special tour of the Capability Brown landscape to view the cascade, grotto and hermit's cave – all designed for the family

by Charles Hamilton of Painshill fame. The day was concluded with a visit to explore the Georgian house, museum - and then the essential tea and cakes!

Many thanks to Jane who had not only diligently researched the history of the parkland and the works of Brown and his successors but also gave us such an inspiration tour.

Peter Hills

Visit to Great Chalfield

On a sunny day in June, members gathered in a courtyard at the entrance to a fine C15 building - Great Chalfield Manor House, near Bradford upon Avon. We were greeted by our hosts and residents, Robert and Patsy Floyd, whose family had owned the manor for centuries. The property is now under the protection of the National Trust,



but it is evident that Robert and Patsy have hands on expertise to maintain the manor and its wonderful gardens.

Robert led us on a tour of the house with the added interest of family insight into various aspects of the property. Great Chalfield Manor was built in 1467 and the entrance has changed little. At the heart of the house lies the hall, flanked by unusually symmetrical gable cross wings and oriel windows. Over the years, the different owners adapted and changed the manor, with the Great Hall being turned into a farm house. In 1905, Major Robert Fuller restored and reburnished the house to its former glory using local stone as well as adding sympathetic outbuildings that serve as a kitchen, accommodation, stables and service areas. In recent years the house

has been the setting for many films and television series. Robert was able to give an insight to life on a film set!

Patsy then led us on a tour of the gardens, originally laid out by Alfred Parsons from 1907. The garden that surrounds the house present vistas, beautiful lawns and yew topiary as well as an orchard where the grass stays long. Waterfalls of pink roses adorn the walls of the medieval manor, and the spring-fed ponds are surrounded by magnificent trees. Patsy and her gardener, Neil, have brought the garden to life with year-round interest in the borders and gardens beyond. We were particularly impressed with Patsy's style of gardening – a stick was placed where Neil was to plant any specimen – and the garden looked all the better for it!

An informative and enjoyable afternoon was capped by home-baked cake and cups of tea in the Great Hall served by Patsy – where more stories were unfurled!

Peter Hills



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