

Somerset Gardens Trust

A member of the Association of Garden Trusts

Issue 64

Summer 2017

Featuring

Restoring Hestercombe's Lost Landscape
Buildings – p.5

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From the Editors

Early Summer is here with its promise of the full glory of the herbaceous border to come. Who could leave Somerset? So the SGT's events calendar is in full swing with visits to Monmouth much enjoyed and future ones to Dorset yet to come. The long evenings both delight us and tempt us to stay out too long in the garden. So when you finally come into the house can you imagine anything more relaxing than to read the articles in this Magazine? They cover a wide range – from some fine Somerset gardens to how Hestercombe's rustic buildings have been restored to their eighteenth century splendour and just how did you cut your lawns then? There is also lots of information about what the Trust's members have been doing – and how you can join in. Education, surveys, garden visits – it is remarkable. Read and enjoy. Christopher and Lindsay Bond
bondchristopher@btconnect.com



From the Chairman

Dear Members,

Several of my neighbours were good enough to join me for Somerset Gardens Day on May 14th. We had to dodge in and out of the house to avoid the sudden rain storms and drank cups of tea with lemon drizzle cake. The organiser Clarisse Coetzee had spent the day whizzing around Somerset and Bristol but ended at my house where we finished the afternoon, drinking wine in the greenhouse.



Somerset's Lord Lieutenant, Annie Maw, wishes to encourage us to support 'The Great Get Together'. The weekend of June 16th-18th is inspired by Jo Cox who in her maiden speech said "we have far more in common than that which divides us". It is too late for many of us this year but



another year we might invite our friends, neighbours or someone lonely to share a moment in our gardens.

Mary and Jorgen Nielsen have kindly invited us to their home, Henley House, Wookey outside Wells for our AGM which is on Tuesday, September 12th at 5pm. Henley House is next door to Sally Gregson's hydrangea nursery, Mill Cottage Plants at Henley Mill and Sally has agreed to be open for anyone who would like to visit before our Meeting. It will be a good time to view hydrangeas or to collect orders.

I have just spent a happy week in Northern Ireland viewing gardens (gorgeous

weather) and planning a visit for us next year. I have more planning to do but a contact who heads the Northern Irish Tourist Board is helping and coming up with some wonderful ideas.

Council decided at their last meeting to increase subscriptions; sadly the present level now no longer covers our costs. For many years our rate has been lower than our neighbouring Trusts so I hope you will understand that this is a necessary decision. There is a more detail on this in an article on page 14.

Camilla Carter

The Trust welcomes the following New Members

Mrs J Bosanko, South Petherton

Mr & Mrs Peter Cowling, Cucklington, Wincanton

Ms E Rutherford, Babcary

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THE SOMERSET GARDENS TRUST

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Restoring the Rustic Seat at Hestercombe

Robert Battersby of Architecton reveals the research behind the building we see today

The drawings were spread over the three tables, and we were asking ourselves if one of these might have been the design for the Rustic Seat at Hestercombe. In 2007, Philip White, Richard Higgs and I had been studying numerous 1750s drawings by Copplestone Ware Bampfylde and his friend Richard Phelps as part of the rejuvenation of the eighteenth century landscape garden at Hestercombe in Somerset.

The Rustic Seat was mentioned in a tour diary by Arthur Young when he visited Hestercombe in 1770. It was one of a series of small buildings that Bampfylde had placed along a walk in a wooded valley near his house. This particular seat faced the Great Cascade in the middle of

the Combe, which is arguably the most picturesque part of the garden.

If we were to develop a design, we had to follow the established vocabulary. Rustic seats belong to a set of garden structures in the landscape tradition that include stone hermitages and root houses. These were modest buildings made with natural

“The waterfall was the most important element, which the Seat should look at and not upstage. So the building needed to be simple and recede into the forest.”

materials from the immediate surroundings like tree branches, bark, turf, stones, clay, lime render and straw.

Research on the Seat had started with the archaeologist, James Brigers, excavating the site in Winter 2004. He uncovered a small faceted, three bay building, marked out by angled drip stones in the ground around the

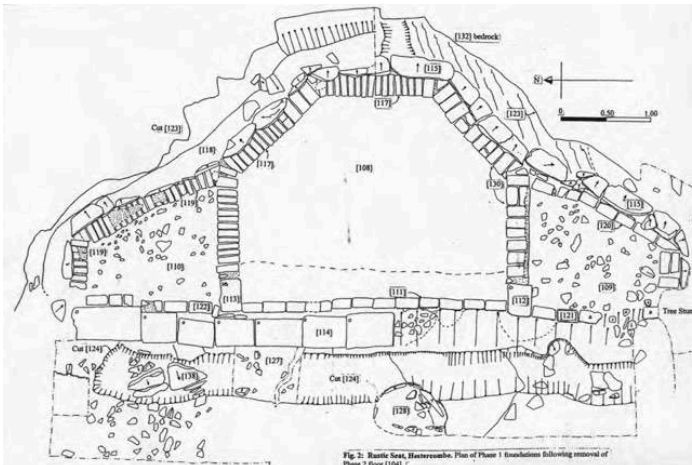


Fig. 2. Rustic Seat, Hestercombe. Plan of Phase 1 foundations following removal of Phase 2 floor [104].

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back. It did not reveal the foundations for a heavy stone structure, which meant that the drawings we were examining could not have been the Rustic Seat.

We returned to the earlier idea of a timber hut. Kate Felus's academic investigation had unearthed drawings of a den like structure at Leasowes near Birmingham. This was by William Shenstone, the poet, whose garden designs influenced Bampfylde. The waterfall was the most important element, which the Seat should look at and not upstage. So the building needed to be simple and recede into the forest.

The surviving materials from the archaeological excavation pointed to a timber building that had rotted away, leaving only the brick and stone pads in the ground, nails and lath and plaster fragments. There was no surviving slate, as elsewhere, so it was deduced that the roof had to have been thatch. The idea was much debated on site and tested with models, but the logic of the construction was starting to generate the design. Its construction had to be with forest materials following the octagonal geometry of the surviving footprint, and heights that framed a view of the waterfall for a seated person.

The following Summer, the Raffles Brothers constructed the Seat seen today. The tree trunks, the earth floor and the



plaster aggregates all came from Hestercombe. The plaster was finished with gravel spar from the stream opposite, and the simple bench was made from planks of sweet chestnut that Philip had stored for years.

The new structure stands above the original archaeology to protect and reveal it. However, academic rigour is all well and good. In reality, the Hestercombe seats need to be experienced as discovered surprises on a woodland walk. The Rustic Seat plays the part of an intimate and calming moment to contemplate the waterfall.

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Mowing the Lawn

The Editors take us into the world of the unexpected

We have just bought a lithium battery powered mower. Very environmentally friendly. This is the latest in a long line of mowers my family has used to cut the grass. It started with a (bad tempered) pony pulling a metal cutter with someone walking beside it where the ground was level, and a scythe for uneven places.



“I can still remember the excitement at my parents’ home when they bought their first ride on mower – and how difficult it was to persuade anyone to use it (now you cannot get them off it – they’re glued to the seat)”

(Petrol was rationed in and immediately after the War). In the 1960s we graduated to a very noisy green ATCO petrol driven monster that threatened to run away with you downhill. The unlucky mower lived in a cloud of fumes. It only went a short distance before you needed to empty it – if you could make it stop! (In London we bought the latest hover mower which mulched the thin grass we had). I can still remember the excitement at my parents’ home when they bought their first ride on mower – and how difficult it was to persuade anyone to use it (now you cannot get them off it – they’re glued to the seat). The scythes went long ago – first replaced by powerful mechanical scythe mowers – which only baulked at cutting down anthills – and now electric or petrol driven trimmers.

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Intrigued by these developments, we were glad to find that there are museums that hold hundreds of models since the first mower was developed as long ago as 1830 by Edwin Beard Budding of Gloucester. Its original purpose was to trim the knap off cloth for Guardsmens' uniforms. His brainwave was to use the machine to cut grass. Concerned to be thought mad by his neighbours, he carried out the first trials at dead of night. The rapid spread of Victorian and Edwardian suburbs with lawns strongly encouraged its popularity – other manufacturers such as Perkins and Shanks (remember 'Shanks' Pony'?) rapidly joined in but - amazingly - the original design from 1830 still forms the basis (see picture p.7).

The crossover with car and plane engines continues in both directions. Rolls Royce and Hawker Siddley adapted car and even plane engines for mowing – lawnmower engines have powered motor cycles and even cars. Who can forget the film in which a US veteran drove his ride on mower 400 miles on freeways? Looking into the future we are promised that we can sleep soundly at night while our robot mower cuts the grass for us to admire at breakfast – neighbours willing.

As the machines have developed time taken to cut grass has dramatically reduced - but the therapeutic satisfaction of producing a well cut lawn – with or without stripes – remains a constant.

The Gardens Trusts Education Groups South West Regional Conference

Sheila Rabson reports on an inspiring day

We met at the Castle Garden Centre, Sherborne whose owner, Mike Burks, talked about their involvement in many community ventures; Garden clubs, Wildlife Trust, local charities and schools; a group of adults with learning difficulties meets at the centre to recycle old pallets into kindling to sell. Their latest school initiative is to provide schools with pots, compost and seeds to grow plants and show at the local Flower Show.

A teacher at Damers First School in Dorchester, finding no gardening activities when he arrived, established gardening

throughout the school. Now there are thirteen raised beds, funded by the PTA, and one raised bed with wheelchair access funded by Dorset Gardens Trust. They have a sensory garden, a weather station, an eco garden and a garden for the youngest children.

“Entrepreneurial links include recycling paper with water and free seeds to make seed grenades; which are then sold.”

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Curriculum links include focusing on a country, and growing produce to make a traditional meal. Entrepreneurial links include recycling paper with water and free seeds to make seed grenades; which are then sold.

They are quick to take advantage of opportunities to recycle and to find free materials; tyres, pots, pallets, any



receptacle that could support plant growth. A local secondary school helped with the woodwork for bird boxes. They made a major collection of plastic bottles to make a greenhouse calling in a lot of volunteer labour to assemble it.

Elaine Cole, from Dorset Gardens Trust, spoke of her career in education and the continued need to promote outdoor education. The appreciation of the value of this has fluctuated with the years and much depends on the level of commitment of head teachers and governors.

Christine Stones, also from Dorset Gardens Trust, spoke of the history of gardening in schools. In the 1800s it tended to be gardening for boys and needlework for girls. In the 1900s Nature Study was on the Elementary School Curriculum and the two World Wars brought great emphasis on digging for victory.

In our final session we all had a chance to compare notes and share experiences; gaining both new ideas and feeling part of a cohesive South West whole; and were reassured that we are all working in similar fashion to achieve the same objectives.

We are grateful to the Education Group of Dorset Gardens Trust who organised the day.

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Members Forum – Garden Disasters!

The Elephant In the Garden (*Jeremy Gibson*)

We'd opened our previous garden in Cornwall for the NGS for four years, but when we bought The Old Vicarage here in Somerset, although we liked its mature, secluded garden, there was so much to do in the house that any thought of opening here was right out of our minds. And besides which, it had one big elephant in the room - or I should perhaps say one big elephant in the garden - the ugly old-hard surfaced tennis court, fenced in with an even uglier high chainlink fence. One day, transforming that into a garden would be a very big job.

Two years later though, as the house was nearing completion, our urge towards garden openings returned. We thought we might just about have done enough to the garden by then to - very cheekily - get our local NGS organiser around to listen to our probably over-ambitious plans for turning that tennis court into a contemporary garden.

But, as luck would have it, the day when she was eventually able to come coincided absolutely with the day the digger arrived and started very very noisily ripping up the tennis court surface right before her eyes. Disaster.

Her verdict, then, was a big surprise. She took a huge gamble and said yes, trusting in our previous experience.

On the day that we eventually opened, one year later, it must have been with some trepidation that she came to see it completed for the very first time, alongside a huge number of visitors.

She came right up to Trish, and warmly hugged her, and confided in us then that, in all her years of organising, she had never ever taken such a risk before, and was mighty, mighty, relieved.

The Old Vicarage in Weare (BS26 2LE) opens for the National Garden Scheme again this year on 24 and 25 June, 2-5.30pm.

This is the old tennis court, the day the digger moved in. Note the tall conifer hedge in the background.

“... confided in us that, in all her years of organising, she had never ever taken such a risk before, and was mighty, mighty, relieved.”

What is a ‘disaster’? (*Susan Hatherell*)

With a heading “Garden Disasters” it is difficult not to bring to mind real disasters such as tsunamis and earthquakes, putting into perspective our own. These should really be thought of as disappointments or

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mistakes not to be repeated and important lessons to be learnt.

My own include cutting back to ground level summer fruiting raspberries as I do for the autumn ones or unwittingly packing willy nilly into an already bulging car Neale's neatly arranged in marked rows courgettes, cucumber and trailing marrow seedlings so we now don't know which is which. The idea was to keep a close eye on them while we were away – they still got frosted.

Invasive bamboo was a mistake in our garden. We inherited a very large clump which loved spreading into the lawn and flowerbeds. It took enormous efforts to cut down (saving some for bean poles), burn and dig up the heavily compacted roots. It is now replaced by a bank of snowdrops - and a view.

Other 'disasters' include the death of a newly-planted half-standard plum tree stripped by escaped sheep and a failed *Gunnera* which should have loved an island position surrounded by water, but.....

Glass houses? (*Jane Donoghue*)

Where shall I begin.....mistakes, I've made a few, but then again enough to get a mention (apologies to old blue eyes). People in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.... more puns.....sorry. On the subject of glass houses my husband couldn't bear to prune or thin out ANYTHING, you entered our greenhouse at your peril with a machete to get to the tomato plants, courgettes and grapevine running rampant like triffids with tendrils desperately seeking the ever decreasing light source through the roof vents. We planted *Acers* in totally unsuitable soil just

because we liked them. Trees and shrubs far too close together that grew like topsy and smothered everything in their wake. The worst was bamboo, it started off looking very decorative until we noticed shoots popping up everywhere which required a hacksaw to try and keep it under control, turn your back for a second and there's more and more and more..... call yourself a gardener I hear you say! People in glass houses.....?'



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Some events so far

Our first garden visit of 2017, was when we saw the garden which Jenny Langford talked to us about in November. Our enthusiastic guide gave us an interesting insight into Montacute house, its history and its owners. As there was a chill in the air, most of us also sampled the delights of the National Trust café for soup or coffee.



Munstead Wood. Iconic Gertrude Jekyll plants, white foxglove and an edging of lamb's ears



We had a warm welcome at Veddw House from Anne Wareham and Charles Hawes and were amazed at the amount of gardening they did. The reflective pool in the centre of the garden encouraged us to sit by it – so many at a time that someone quipped it looked like we were waiting for a bus.





Some Future Visits

**Tuesday 27 June
Mells Manor, Mells**

The recently restored C16th gardens at Mells Manor are Grade 1 listed on the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens with additions by Lutyens in the early 1900's of a loggia and single storey orangery or summerhouse.

**Tuesday 4 July
Hazleby House and Earlstone
Manor Burghclere, near
Newbury**

Two wonderful but contrasting gardens. Hazelbury House was once owned and designed by Martin Lane Fox, but in the past 16 years Patrick Hungerford has developed the gardens. There are sweeping borders, roses, vegetables, lakes, streams, terraces, and structures. Earlstone Manor is topiary heaven. Bruce Ginsberg has created formal parterres and knots with fountains and pools, an Italianate theatre garden, silver garden and a more informal area with water.

**Wednesday, 19 July
South Wood Farm, Ottery St
Mary, Devon**

Cadhay has regrettably had to cancel our visit; so now we an afternoon visit to South Wood Farm. Gardener Will Smithson will give us a guided tour. Featured in Country Life recently, this enchanting garden has been created by Dr Stephen Potter.

**Tuesday 12 September
AGM**

Our AGM will be held at Henley House, Wookey, outside Wells by kind permission of Mary and Jorgen Nielsen. Henley House is next door to Sally Gregson's hydrangea nursery, Mill Cottage Plants at Henley Mill and we will be able to visit her before the AGM.

We are working on the plans for 2018 and would welcome ideas for gardens to visit and topics for lectures. As ever volunteers to help with events, bake cakes etc. are always welcome. Please contact dianahebditch@myfwi.co.uk or 01823 490654

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Why is the SGT increasing membership subscriptions?

Christopher Bond

The Chairman has referred to these in her message to members, so we thought we should give members a more detailed explanation of the reasons for it. I am doing so on behalf of her and the Council.



When the Trust was established nearly 30 years ago subscriptions were set at £10 per year for individual members, £17 for two joint members, with a discount for longer term membership. Inflation over the past 30 years has eroded the value of this amount to very little so that now it only just covers the few expenses the Trust has, including the printing of this Magazine (the Trust is supported by a large number of members who give of their time freely which enables it to be so active in all our varied areas). We will also start paying a fee for the audit of our Accounts for the first time. The operating loss did not matter so long as the plant sales and overseas tours provided additional income; recently however we have not had plant sales, and overseas tours are organized only on a periodic basis – both involve a huge amount of work by volunteers. This causes a serious financial difficulty to the Trust, because it directly affects our ability to give grants for the restoration of historic gardens, and to schools to build and maintain gardens (last year grants to both were for £5469). Such grants enable us to meet the key Trust objectives of recording and maintaining

historic gardens and landscapes, and encouraging the next generation of gardeners in schools.

Doubling the subscription may seem steep, but it is from a very low base. What other

“This causes a serious financial difficulty to the Trust, because it directly affects our ability to give grants for the restoration of historic gardens, and to schools”

active societies have such a low annual subscription as £20? It will enable us to cover our operating expenses so we can use our reserves to make grants. The amount was fixed taking into account the subscription levels of other County Garden Trusts.

Towards the end of this year, Mary ter Braak, the Trust's Membership Secretary, will be writing to all those members who pay by Standing Order/Direct Debit to ask them to increase the amount paid. We would be grateful if you would do so promptly. Those members who pay by cheque will receive the usual Membership Renewal form either in January 2018 or July 2018 depending on the date of their renewal.



Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Crevice Gardening

Paul Cumbleton explains how nature loves vertical rock planting

Naturalists of the 19th century observed that in mountainous areas where rock had been upheaved to create vertical strata, many more alpine plants grew in the vertical crevices than in the horizontal crevices of undisturbed rocks. This observation has been put to good effect in the creation of crevice gardens. While traceable back over 150 years, the real development of this form of alpine gardening started in the 1930's by growers in the Czech Republic. The Czechs have earned a well-deserved reputation as being the masters of rock work, and none more so than Zdenek Zvolanek ("ZZ" to his friends) who has built and promoted crevice gardens around the World. This form of alpine gardening has become extremely popular and in 2010, we decided to build one at RHS Wisley where I worked. ZZ kindly offered to design, then

"About 40 tonnes of stone slabs were used, placed on their edges close together to create narrow crevices in which alpines could be grown"

come and build it. About 40 tonnes of stone slabs were used, placed on their edges close together to create narrow crevices in which alpines could be grown. Planted in the Spring of 2011, by June 2013, it was beginning to be a colourful and fascinating feature. However, in September that year I took early retirement, so never got to steer the crevice garden to greater maturity.



So on moving to Somerset, building a crevice garden of my own was a priority. Using the local Blue Lias limestone, my Civil Partner Colin and I have built a crevice garden about a fifth of the size of the large one at Wisley. Our native soil is a heavy clay-loam with poor drainage - not at all what alpines want, so we first built a small raised bed and then constructed the crevice garden on top. The final result looks rather less "naturalistic" than I would like due to the very regular edges of the stone - but this is just the way it comes out of the ground, so we have had to work with it. Developing and maturing the planting over the next few years will I hope bring much joy and satisfaction.

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An unexpected garden find in Rabat (Morocco)

The Editors are surprised – and delighted

Visiting yet another Mosque or ruined Palace – our expectations were low. But a beneficent magician waved his wand when we walked through the ruined entrance in the surrounding mud wall around the Chellah, a green oasis in the middle of a sprawling suburb of dusty modern concrete houses in Rabat.

The Chellah has an extraordinary history. Originally a Phoenician Port then a Roman town alongside a tidal river – covered up long ago with mud from a tsunami from the Lisbon Earthquake of 1755. You can walk along its streets and shops and imagine the lively port of Roman Sala. Loved by the Moors, there is an atmospheric Madrassa where Mediaeval students studied, an Emir is

buried and storks nest on deserted towers (see picture). And for spice – in sight of the Pirate stronghold from which corsairs terrorized the Mediterranean and raided Europe.

“a botanical garden within the ruined walls bringing plants from Polynesia and Africa to grow in the fertile sub tropical ‘jungle’ they created”

The French loved it too – under their early twentieth century protectorate they made a botanical garden within the ruined walls bringing plants from Polynesia and Africa to grow in the fertile sub tropical ‘jungle’

they created. After the French left in the 1950s (remember the exile and triumphant return of the Moroccan King Mohammed V), an Islamic garden was planted there too – fruit trees of every description – Islam promotes productive orchards of citrus and other fruits, with grain growing in between the trees. The orange and lemon blossom smells are out of this world.

Don’t miss it if you’re anywhere near.





What happened at Council?

Council met at the end of April with a full agenda to discuss.

Key points were –

- *Membership of The Gardens Trust.* After a full discussion it was decided that the benefits of the SGT being a member including useful conferences outweighed the costs of membership; however we would encourage the TGT to provide relevant services to the County Trusts.
- *Accounts.* The Treasurer, Stuart Senior, explained that the Trust made a surplus of £2670 for the last year; however the Trust actually made an operating loss – only the gain from investments prevented this. Next year the loss would increase because – for the first time – we would need to pay for the independent examination of our Accounts. This should concern all members.
- *Subscription Increase.* We need to raise these to cover our operating costs. As to the amount of the increase, research among other County Garden Trusts showed we are well behind what they charge. Changing rates is time consuming for members and for the Membership Secretary so should not be done often. The new rates are described separately in this Magazine.
- *Events.* Well booked and attended showing members' enthusiasm for the events arranged by the Committee. Some good reports from visitors.

“The Editors have commissioned some interesting articles for the Summer issue. They have also created some slides which any member can use with local Garden Clubs describing what the SGT does”

- *Membership.* The number of new members broadly balanced those ceasing to be Members.
- *Education.* An active time of school visits and support. (See also separate article by Sheila Rabson).
- *Magazine and Publicity.* The Spring issue of the Magazine was well received. The Editors have commissioned some interesting articles for the Summer issue. They have also created some slides which any member can use with local Garden Clubs describing what the SGT does (contact the Editors). Possible stand at the Taunton Flower Show being considered, if it proceeds, we will need volunteers to man it.



Our second visit was to the magical garden of Arne Maynard at Allt-y-Bela near Usk. Enthusiastic head gardener, Steve Lannin, showed us around.

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My Garden

Mary ter Braak describes her favourite places

We bought our cottage about 16 years ago and I remember seeing the garden for the first time on a lovely, sunny day in May. It had obviously been neglected for years and I was a bit apprehensive at the amount of work that would be needed, but also rather excited at the prospect of restoring it to something resembling a garden and not a wilderness.



go, except the *Cornus controversa variegata* which makes a wonderful centrepiece in the middle of the garden.

“I soon discovered that I really enjoyed planning the different types of flowerbeds”

Where to start? We decided on drastic action in the back garden (approx. one tenth of an acre) – a total redesign to make it less cluttered and more easily maintained, bearing in mind that we were not getting any younger. Everything had to

We also kept an *Acer pseudoplatanus* 'Brilliantissimum' and a mature *Photinia x fraseri* 'Red Robin' tree.

The result was a 'blank canvass' and several new, empty flowerbeds! Although I was a very inexperienced gardener, I soon discovered that I really enjoyed planning the different types of flowerbeds. I wanted to achieve year-round interest, including different leaf colours - and I am still trying! I have always loved ornamental grasses so one bed was set aside for these and the other beds were gradually filled with herbaceous perennials, foliage plants and shrubs, including three different wonderfully scented *Daphnes*.

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Autumn colour in the garden was also important, so we planted a *Parrotia persica* 'Pendula' which has wonderful orange/red autumn colour, as well as two acers - *Acer palmatum* 'Osakazuki' and *Acer palmatum* 'Sango-kaku', the Autumn colours of which look lovely against the green *Lonicera* hedge.

I love roses and in the back garden we planted a rambling rose over the new pergola. The front garden already had several roses, so we just added to these and also planted two *Rosa Banksiae* 'Lutea', one either side of the front door, allowing

them to be trained along the front of the cottage amongst the existing *Wisteria*.

Over the years our new back garden has slowly taken shape as the plants, shrubs and trees have matured. Of course, having started off as such inexperienced gardeners, there were several disasters, mainly caused by planting in the wrong place or too close together. However, I also remember losing a row of *Persicarias* in a ball of flame when my husband was over-enthusiastic using his flame thrower to kill weeds on the path. He is now using other, safer, methods to rid ourselves of those weeds!

Could you help train a gardener of the future?

Sue Davies, Regional Manager – South Somerset & Devon, Women's Farm & Garden Association

The WFGA is a small national charity that runs a unique practical horticultural training scheme. The WFGA was founded in 1899 to promote training and employment opportunities for women. In 1993, we set up the Work and Retrain as a Gardener Scheme

(WRAGS) in response to the lack of practical horticultural training open to mature students – both men and women. We now have over 100 gardens offering this opportunity.



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“I have WFGA members in Somerset wishing to undertake their WRAGS training and am in need of gardens for them to train in”

The training covers a range of practical gardening skills, under the guidance of an experienced Garden Owner or Head Gardener. During the year long placement, the trainee spends two days per week in the placement garden. The National Living Wage is paid directly to the trainee by the garden owner. A WRAGS trainee differs from a school or college leaver, in that they bring life experience, useful skills from past jobs, are highly motivated and able to use their initiative.

The local WFGA Regional Manager would recommend suitable trainees. They are interviewed by the garden owner / head gardener who makes the final appointment. The training is monitored by the Regional Manager during the placement year.

This year we are pleased to be working with the National Garden Scheme which is funding traineeships across the UK.

I have WFGA members in Somerset wishing to undertake their WRAGS training and am in need of gardens for them to train in. If you feel you may be able to provide a placement, I would love to hear from you – my contact details are listed below. Full details of the WFGA and the scheme can be found on our website www.wfga.org.uk.

01823 432509 / 07745747703.

sue.wfga@gmail.com

The art of Bonsai

The Editors investigate

What is bonsai? Is it developing the miniature versions of normal plants, and putting them in attractive pots? Definitely not! That is ‘dwarfing’. Bonsai, with its thousand year old Japanese history, is the art of using regular cuttings or seeds to make small trees or plants in pots. So how do you do it?

Most woody stemmed plants or trees can be used. Some popular ones are lime, pine and oak. The key is to prune the crown and

roots of the bonsai during their development, and to confine the roots in pots to inhibit growth when it has reached maturity. Then - as with any container gardening – the gardener (or artist) can shape the bonsai to please his or her design.

Why do some gardeners like bonsai? Some enjoy creating a whole miniature landscape with everything in scale, or alternatively a plant or tree to make a striking picture – even a sculpture. They can be a remarkable sight in flower or even in leaf. Kept indoors, they can bring the garden

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permanently into the house. In quantity the display of different types of tree bonsai is impressive.

Maintaining bonsais requires some adaptations from other indoor plants. Their needs will depend on the species but common features include accepting that they may dry out in pots more quickly than the same plants outside, the need for regular pruning and perhaps less fertilizer.

Somerset is lucky to have a leading bonsai nursery (Mendip Bonsai Studio). This was founded by and is run by John Trott. John is passionate about bonsai. What started as a hobby while working for Clarks,

“The key is to prune the crown and roots of the bonsai during their development, and to confine the roots in pots to inhibit growth when it has reached maturity”

developed into a commercial venture when the factory closed. From amateur

beginnings, John has won no less than 80 Gold Medals over the past 25 years at RHS Shows including of course at Chelsea. He has a very large collection of English and imported grown bonsai which he has propagated. He also holds workshops for all levels of knowledge.

Have you thought about bonsai?





The Cruel Plant, the Sausage Plant and two Surprising Seed Pods.

Anthony Pugh-Thomas' last words for the SGT before moving

Part of the charm of gardening is coming across the unexpected.

Araujia sericifera, a semi-tender climbing plant is named after Antonia de Araujo e Azevedo, Count of Barca (1754-1817). The twining stems each year bear many small fragrant, chalice-shaped bi-sexual flowers that are usually pollinated by months as its sticky pollen temporarily



traps visiting moths over-night; hence one of its common names "the Cruel Plant". I grew my plant from seed, attracted by its common name, and it flowers profusely

from mid-Summer to late Autumn on a south-facing wall.

I was taken by surprise once the plant was well established by its huge seed pods some 3 to 4 inches in length, pear shaped and ribbed, that remain from Autumn to Spring. They later burst to reveal a mass of silky floss and tiny seeds. The pods can be opened and put on bird tables from late Winter for birds to use their fluffy contents for nest building. The flowers provide food for caterpillars and for the Monarch butterfly, the largest and amongst the rarest to visit this Country.

There are conflicting views on whether the seed pods are edible – so better not try - but if you are a home weaver, then a strong fibre obtained from the stems of the plant has been used in making textiles. In temperate countries, *Araujia* can become invasive, but in this Country the seeds need to be propagated under glass and they rarely self-seed outside.

But my surprise was mild compared with the first time I found a seed pod of *Holboellia latifolia*. I first saw this climber, named after Frederick Louis Holboell,

Superintendent of Copenhagen

Botanic Gardens, on an SGT visit to the wonderful garden at Shobrooke near Crediton where it was growing on a house wall with its perfumes pervading the garden, and I quickly bought one for

The Somerset Gardens Trust



myself. It is a vigorous climber that requires plenty of room but can be kept under control by carefully cutting back new growths to just 2 or 3 leaves in the Winter – rather like pruning *Wisteria*.



The flowers are quite small but borne in racemes. Until this year I had never found any seeds but when grubbing around at root level I came across what can best be described as a very large sausage. By dint of trial and error I identified it as the seed pod of the *Holboellia*, hence the common name, “*the Sausage Plant*” and I found, on cutting one open, that it was very

full of dark seeds surrounded by a pulpy flesh.

Robbie Blackhall-Miles, writing in *The Guardian* in 2014, recorded that he liked to eat the insides fresh “*spitting out the dark seeds as I go*”, and added that the “*thick rind of the fruit can then be stuffed with lentils or minced turkey, mixed with fresh coriander, sweet chilli dipping sauce, soy sauce and lime juice and baked in tin foil*” when “*its slightly bitter taste is reminiscent of aubergine, complementing the oriental sweet and sour of its contents just nicely*”.

And good luck to you, if you try.

“The flowers provide food for caterpillars and for the Monarch butterfly, the largest and amongst the rarest to visit this Country.”

Events for Summer 2017



Tuesday
27th June

Mells Manor, Mells

Tuesday
4th July

Hazleby House and
Earlstone Manor,
Burghclere, Nr Newbury

Wednesday
19th July

Cadhay and South Wood
Farm, Ottery St Mary.

Tuesday
12th September

South Wood Farm, Ottery St
Mary.

Front Cover: courtesy of Robert Battersby

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