

Sherwood, March 2008

The group visited Sherwood on Sunday, 9th March, and, as always, the garden was a delight with lots of magnolias and camellias in full flower and many more to come. The huge swathe of Narcissus made the spirits soar!

This was our first meeting of the year, a month earlier than usual, we're struggling to keep up with the growing season which seems to be earlier and earlier – the Head Gardener at Marwood Hill was saying that some plants were 2 months early this year, most a mere 6 weeks. It rained as we arrived but stopped on cue and we were able to tour the garden in the dry, albeit it was a bit damp under foot. We admired the drifts of narcissi, the hellebores, magnolias, azaleas, camellias and many others we weren't too sure about! Some of us were fortunate enough to bump into Sir John and Lady Quicke who revealed the provenance of some of the hellebores we were admiring. The 16 of us who went were well rewarded by venturing out so early in the year.

Trewithen House and Gardens, April 2008

29 of us gathered bright and early for the coach to Trewithen. The sun was shining and, unbelievably, it continued all day with brilliant blue skies to admire as a backdrop to the magnolias and camellias which towered up to the sky. We were extremely lucky given the snow the day before and heavy hail the next day.

We had a good journey down with a coffee stop on the way. Arriving at Trewithen we found they were suffering from electricity supply problems so the lunch options were a little curtailed. We were relieved to see a Western Power van arrive, but he just turned it off completely so our tour of the house was by a guide with a torch. Despite this – and the power was fully restored later – the house was delightful and full of fascinating items and so clearly lived in, a real gem. The garden was equally delightful and we ambled round quite contentedly, climbing up the observation platforms and playing with the camera obscura. A cream tea was a popular option mid afternoon, well, we'd done a lot of walking!

The coach returned with the luggage bay loaded with plants – just hope everyone can find room for them!

Taikoo, April 2008

Once again, we found a window of dryness on our last visit, to Taikoo at Belstone. It was a bit fresh - it is 1000' up to be fair, but the low cloud cleared and allowed us to see the magnificent panorama across Belstone Common and across to Exmoor. A bit worried to begin with, there were lots of vehicles parked in the village and I feared the garden might be overcrowded, but it turned out they were connected with Ten Tors training and a bicycle event. We were very kindly taken round by the owner who explained the history of the garden and told us all about the planting schemes and answered all our questions. We saw the new moorland garden - just a year old and greatly admired the water feature. Everyone was quite sure it would fit very well into their own garden! The afternoon finished with tea and meeting an old colleague who now lives there. Twelve of us came to this and really enjoyed the garden.

East Lambrook, May 2008

It was a very hot day but we drove on buoyed up by the promise of an award winning café in which to quench our thirst. Sadly we found that this had clearly only just shut, as, rather like the Marie Celeste, all the equipment was there still, even the menu boards. However as special arrangements for coffee seem to have been made for a coach party some of our members somehow found themselves with permission to take advantage of the leftovers – initiative!

The garden was looking just a little unloved and we discovered that it is all up for sale, the remaining staff were desperate for a new owner to come forward and restore it to its former glory. There were few plants to buy, a pity, as there was a very fine tree peony that would have tempted several of us.

PS I'm so late in writing this up that I can now reveal that new owners are taking over in August and are going to expand the famous Margery Fish plant nursery, great news!

Killerton, July 2008

Another day when left to one's own devices, we probably wouldn't have ventured to an outside venue, but again, the rain did stop and so we were able to get round the gardens in the dry. Our fame had spread and we were pleased to be joined by two Australian academics. The gardens were looking good and we also took advantage of the tour of the house. Afterwards we repaired to the refreshment area to enjoy a light lunch and a catch up on the news.

Yonder Hill, August 2008

August 2008 is now acknowledged to be one of the wettest/most miserable on record, so it was with some trepidation that our visit was approached. However, about two dozen hardy souls made the journey and were rewarded with a dry, and even rather hot, afternoon. This is a large garden which unfolds as you follow the arrows through it. There are a series of 'rooms' each with a planting theme, so there was much of interest and hunting for labels to identify unusual plants. Fortunately, or not, depending on your view, the owner, who had greeted us on arrival and told us of the background to the garden, had a vast array of extremely tempting plants for sale. Many of us succumbed, well they were very good value! I think several people will be returning now they've found it, to see it at different times of the year.

The Rock Gardens, Chudleigh September 2008

The Gardens Group quite literally ended on a "high" with some more agile members reaching the top of the famous Chudleigh Rock. This was one of most unusual gardens which we've visited where we were able to admire not just some magnificent trees such as the Ginkgo Biloba, unusual plants and a bank of cyclamen in full bloom, but also – after much peering – a Stromatopora (a 400 million year old fossil sponge). This garden proved to be an Aladdin's cave of unexpected treats, waterfalls, ponds, Burmese figures, Little Africa, the Bishop's Palace Quarry, lichens, ferns, mosses, the Rift Cave, the lit Chudleigh Cavern and back via the climbing area. Unfortunately not even the tallest could reach the bottom of the ropes so no rock face climbing!

This is a vast area, both above and below ground, and I'm sure most of us didn't see it all. I do know that some went round and round passing the same place more than once. I also know that some were a bit stiff the next day and that some were hobbling for a bit, but that many were going to return in the future - possibly with boots, torch and walking pole!