

Gardens Group Reports 2016

March - Rosemoor



This was our first meeting of the year, so naturally it was the best day of the year so far! As usual for this Group we were very lucky with the weather, a brilliantly clear and sunny day without that cold wind we've had so much of.



Rosemoor was looking terribly neat and tidy – hedges neatly clipped, plants pruned, compost, manure and mulch piled high on the beds. Weed free ... Depending on your view either something to strive for (Laurie!) or really rather depressing (the rest of us!). We reminded ourselves that they are very well staffed and equipped and so felt a lot better.

The garden has distinct areas that add to the interest. The main part is a series of rooms with different planting themes, including the Winter Garden. Lady Anne's garden on the other side of the road is very different and at this time of the year had lawns smothered with little yellow flowers – as usual, sadly, we weren't sure what they were. Bulbs yes, daffodils no.

There are lots of benches and places to sit throughout the garden, so affording plenty of opportunity to sit and admire the surroundings.

The restaurant was excellent for both lunch and tea with a good range of interesting, tasty, dishes to choose from. Lastly, but by no means least, it was good to see interest from new members.

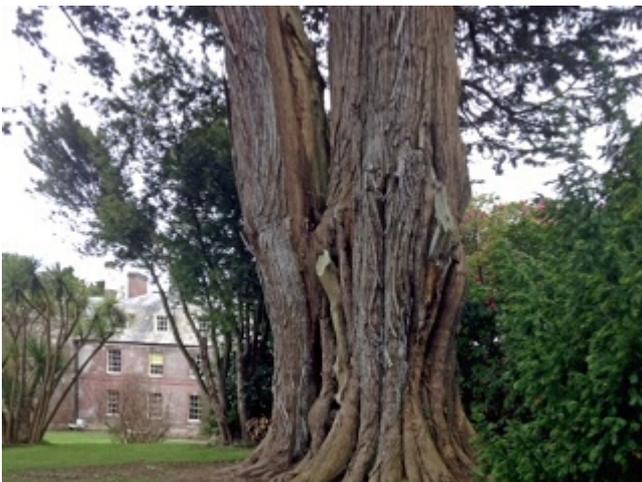
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April - Charlestown and Tregrehan

Sadly a few had to drop out for various reasons, but 30 of us made it to Belgrave Road and set off for Charlestown.

The sun shone and although there was a healthy sea breeze on the shore, the rest of the harbour was



nicely sheltered, so much so that it was possible to do a bit of sun bathing in a few sun traps. However, coffee was the first port of call for most and the Pier Head Hotel did a roaring trade. On Sue Guy's recommendation many of us took the opportunity to book a table (overlooking the sea) for lunch.

We arrived very promptly at 2pm at Tregrehan for our tour of the garden by the Head Gardener. We were all given a leaflet about the garden which was incredibly detailed, packed with information about the estate, the family

and the planting. I must admit that I didn't really read it properly until I got back – an incentive to return? It also has a map of the various paths that can be taken.



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Tregrehan (pronounced Trgrain) has been the home of the Carlyon family since 1565. Since the early 18th century the estate has benefited from family members who have been avid horticulturalists, prizes have been won and there is a formal link with Kew. Originally over 3,000 acres the estate has been reduced over the years to 300, they no longer for example, own all the land down to the coast. There is an amazing collection of trees and shrubs, of worldwide provenance but with an emphasis on New Zealand as several family members have lived there. Many are now huge, some the largest of their type in the country. The list of exceptional trees and shrubs is too long to mention here, there really is no substitute for visiting.

The rain held off until the end when we were either in the greenhouses or having a cup of tea/coffee. This was made individually for us by the lady who took the entrance money. This is not a big commercial concern and really does seem to be Cornwall's best kept secret. We were able to relieve them of a few unusual plants – we do try to be helpful!

I'd like to record my thanks to the Head Gardener who patiently answered all our questions and gave us a very informative and interesting tour.

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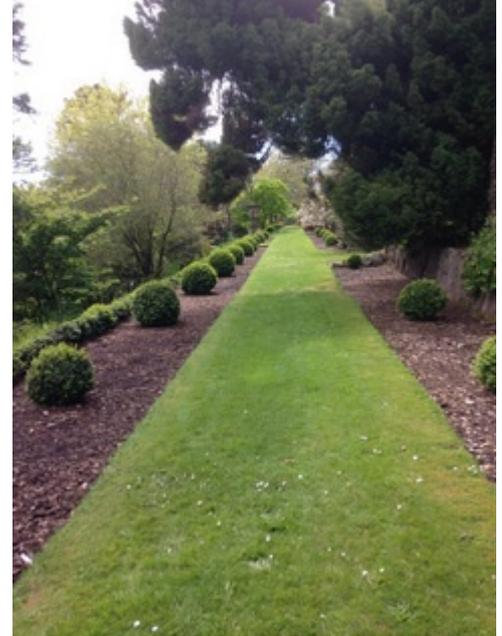
May - Thorn

We did it again! Some very heavy showers on the way there but from 2pm dry and sunny. Thorn, hard to find (if you miss the turn to Wembury!) was an absolute delight, definitely one of our



best gardens. It was a cornucopia of delights, starting with the rare *Abies Alba f. Pendula* in the front courtyard and going through to the view of Newton Ferrers and the Yealm at the far end of the garden.

We were given a guided tour by the owner, Dr Eva Gibson, a real



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plantaholic and extremely knowledgable. She has lived there for 35 years and has travelled to countries such as Nepal and Bhutan to collect her beloved plants.

You enter the garden at the side of the house, passing a glorious wisteria on the house wall.

Immediately you see the Long Walk leading you away from the house. This is the only flat area as the garden slopes down to the Yealm on the east side and up into natural woodland to the west. The long walk is punctuated by four magnificent Italianate urns - they are huge and take their colour from the pollen of the neighbouring trees and shrubs. Part way along is a rose garden.

Many of the trees are Champion Trees and many of the plants are rare and unusual, thriving in this micro climate.

We didn't investigate the part of the garden which slopes down to the river, but did admire the wild spring flowers, azaleas, camellias and rhododendrons that grew there.

When we did get to the far end of the garden we were able to admire the views of Newton Ferrers and all the boats/yachts on the Yealm through the decorative iron gate. The land beyond is owned by the NT so hopefully, that wonderful view will be safe.

We did climb up to the path above the garden, this affords an overall view of the garden and also to admire the latest development - the South African plants and succulents.

At the end we were taken into the kitchen where tables were set for a very welcome cream tea. Our hostess is not only an outstanding gardener and plants woman but also an excellent cook. The scones were hers as was the marmalade and chutney which you could buy. The kitchen was equipped with an organ but as her husband was out we didn't get a recital!

Everyone was full of praise for Eva and the garden and thoroughly enjoyed the visit.

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June - Hestercombe

We ended up with a lively group of twelve as there was some last minute movement in and out. We met, not at the entrance, but more sensibly, in the cafe over coffee. Some, in pure innocence, had somehow managed to get that far without paying (but they did go back after their coffee).



It was then off to the Georgian Landscape Garden at the rear of the house. This is quite extensive and some strode off to the far reaches in search of some "proper" exercise, others ambled round the lakes following shorter routes, stopping occasionally to admire the views. You are given a very good map/guide with all the paths marked so it's quite easy to find your way round.

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The Watermill and Dynamo House is newly restored and quite noisy! Then it was on to explore the Edwardian Formal Garden situated in front of the house. This was looking very striking - the hard landscaping and the Pergola being very impressive.

Back to the Stables Kitchen Cafe for lunch. Recommendations were made by those already tucking in and choices made. The pork stuffed with black pudding was much praised - by some! The food there was excellent and if you resisted the array of cakes you deserved a medal.

The house has an interesting history dating from 1200 and owned at one time by the MP for Exeter. It still has an institutional air stemming from its recent lengthy period as the Somerset Fire Service HQ. The ground floor has some grand, wood panelled rooms and the Column Room Restaurant at the south end benefits from the far reaching views that the whole site has. There was an art exhibition in the house which, it is fair to say, left us all bemused. What we did enthuse over though was the second hand bookshop. Beautifully displayed and much, much cheaper than, say, Oxfam! All monies go to the Hestercombe Trust which is restoring and running the whole site.

At this point some left, but some, I hear crept back to the cafe for tea. All in all a very successful visit which everyone enjoyed.

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July - The Garden House and Wildside

I'm drawing on reports from some who went as I was unable to. It sounds as if The Garden House, was, as usual, a great delight, especially the Fortescue Garden. The group ate at the cafe here and I'm told that that was very enjoyable. After that they went on down the road to Wild Side, some for the first time, some - as below- to see what progress had been made. The garden seemed to meet with approval, apart from some lilies (don't ask!). This is very much a garden for the owner, no tea room, no shop and very limited opening times. It is a real project by an enthusiast who is, apparently now extending the area under cultivation.

"The last visit was great, especially Wildside, and John and I remember going 14? years ago when he'd just started making the garden, and he's still taking in more land and going on now. I love the flowing lines of the banks of flowers, and the seeming randomness of it all." (From Celia.)

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August - Byes Reach

This was a very well supported visit - 18 of us on the day itself - and unfortunately, one the next day, don't ask!



Our hosts were very welcoming and gave us a full description of all the many interesting and unusual plants. All questions, however daft, were answered patiently.

The front and back gardens are not large, but both have been cleverly designed to squeeze the most



out of every square inch. The rear garden has areas for vegetables, a wide variety of fruit, flowers, shrubs and a water feature built by Peter. Lynette is the plantswoman, Peter does all the structural work. Lynette is a talented artist as well as an exceptional gardener and her studio is also in the garden. It is from the studio that the teas are served and this reveals yet another of her talents - delicious cakes and scones. Many of us felt obliged to "help" out by going back for seconds.

Peter then offered to take us for a walk in The Byes at the back of their property (to counter all that cake?!) to see some of the work being done by the community and to walk along the River Sid. He explained how they were trying to eradicate Himalayan Balsam from The Byes, starting at the

top of the valley as the seeds tend to explode into the river and get washed down germinating new plants on the way. We returned to the house via the Millennium Wood which had been planted by local schoolchildren. Lynette and Peter are very involved in Sidmouth in



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Bloom, so with garden openings and attacking Himalayan Balsam, they are certainly fully occupied. I guess the art work is a spare time activity! Anyway, everyone thoroughly enjoyed themselves, got plenty of inspiration and would like to thank our hosts for providing us with such a worthwhile visit.

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September - Burrow Farm

I think we got in just in time weather wise, this was the first day where, although warm and dry, it was not wall to wall sunshine but it hadn't become wet or misty so the views were excellent.



The owner, Mary Benger, greeted all 16 of us and kindly offered to give us a guided tour of this 13 acre garden. This has been a labour of love, started in 1959 with four children in between!



We were given an informative map and description but really benefited from being shown round and getting the background information as to what was done when and what all the plants were. As you can imagine in a garden of this size, it is very varied, ranging from formal 'rooms', e.g. the Rose or Millennium Gardens, to the Woodland Pond and Wildlife Meadow, to name but a few. There is also a Roman clay pit which Helen offered to try and research the history of. This area had a wonderfully gnarled and twisted field maple and some enormous gunnera.

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Angela put Flora and me to shame by unhesitatingly picking up a koi carp which had been fished out by a heron and putting it back in the lake. We watched it swim away. (We'd been squeamishly trying to push it back in with sticks.)

We rounded off the visit with tea and cakes. They'd kindly baked fresh scones for us and I can vouch that the cream and jam portions were very generous. I'm told the cakes were delicious. There is also a little gift shop with tempting stock as well as an even more tempting plant nursery. I think several of us made notes to return to this.

A very enjoyable and successful visit and nice to welcome some new members.

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