

Gardens Group Reports - 2018

Caerhays Castle - March

Travel proved a much more dominant feature of this visit than we would have wished. Starting with getting to Middlemoor, Exeter was full of queues - more so than usual - and many of us didn't arrive as early as we had expected to.

The journey down also took longer than expected as the coach-specific sat nav was very optimistic about the route to be taken. I don't think many of us expected to get round the last bend which was a very narrow, right angled one. The tension was palpable and we all broke into applause when the driver finally inched his way round it.

Unfortunately, despite following the approved coach route back, we encountered another tight bend and so another 15 mins of "excitement" before we cleared that. Then we had to come back via the A38, slower than the A30 but that had been closed because of a fatal accident.

We arrived at the beach entrance but the driver missed the vehicular drive to the Castle so we walked up but it was rather a long walk for some. The much longed for morning coffee had to wait as we were already quite late for the house tour. The staff were very understanding and welcomed us warmly. After the introduction to the whole group we were divided into two each with a guide. Both were very informative going through the history of the building and its contents, telling us what the various owners had done, demonstrating the changes which John Nash had made when he was employed to make substantial alterations and additions. We weren't hurried round and there were many offers to sit on the chairs. Some members were very pleased to be able to recognise some of the artists before they were revealed.



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Lunch was next and The Magnolia Cafe soon filled up but fortunately there was plenty of room outside. Service was quick and friendly.

Then to the gardens. There are different coloured routes according to length.

Unfortunately because of the recent weather many of the paths were roped off which made for some interesting backtracking. The many camellias were fine but two visits from the Beast from the East caught the National Collection of Magnolias at exactly the wrong

time. A great pity as, in full bloom, these gardens are magnificent. Caerhays is on the coast, is sheltered and has its own micro climate, it is very rare for them to be affected by bad weather. We had to look at the Guide and Burncoose Nursery catalogue to see what we'd missed.



However, it was an enjoyable day, everyone we came across was very helpful and made us feel welcome and our driver was very skilled and patient in dealing with the narrow lanes. The coach too was very comfortable and had a loo and USB charging points! Memo to self, next time, take a cable.

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Hotel Endsleigh Gardens - April



What a difference a day would have made! Our day was one which confused even the forecasters - it was much wetter, windier and mistier than forecast. Seventeen of us though made our way through the weather buoyed up by the promise of a drier afternoon- it didn't materialise. The drive to the Hotel was a mile long but was flanked by huge, colourful rhododendrons, a good start. We were greeted in the hall of the hotel and were warmed both by a reduction in the admittance price to £3 and by a roaring fire. Thus fortified we set off following the signs to the garden. The gardens are either side of the house and are very different. Unfortunately those to the west had many steps down to the stream at the bottom but they were wet and there were no handrails. This made it a little tricky for some. It was very beautiful, even in the rain. There were numerous gunnera just breaking into growth with bright green leaves.



The gardens to the east were easier with a large lawn and very long border - the longest continuous herbaceous border in England. It does eventually drop down to the River Tamar and, on a fine day, has a glorious view. The trouble here was that it was very exposed to the strong gusts of wind and near horizontal rain which didn't make it very inviting. The grounds are the home to many Champion trees too. Three brave souls did complete that but the rest of us either retired soaked or dried out in the hotel with either the afternoon tea or a cup of tea. Four headed off to Tavistock for tea at The Bedford, muddy shoes and all. Driving back was through thick mist in places, a real pity, this would be a great garden to see in good weather.

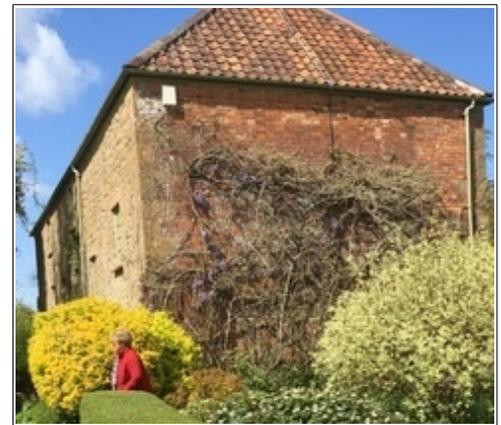
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East Lambrook Manor Gardens - May



Normal service was fortunately resumed and there wasn't a drop of rain all day, in fact we all sat outside to eat our tea - in the sunshine- it was warmer out than in. Traffic was light so we all made good time. This meant that some headed into the Rose and Crown for lunch, others sat in the car park eating their sandwiches. At 2pm we headed over to the garden to a very friendly and informal reception. There was a pile of Country Garden magazines, very helpful as the current issue had a coupon for tea and cake at the Garden.



The gardens were a delight, full of colour and naturalness. We were amazed to find so many plants in flower, it must be very sheltered. The tulips were a particular delight, gorgeous colours and shapes and I think we saw them at exactly the right time, another day or two and they'd have blown. The bluebells above the stream added colour to the bank and the wisteria was in flower on the end wall.

After an amble round the various parts of the garden we spent some time admiring, pondering and then buying plants. There was a good selection.

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Suitably exhausted we collected our teas/coffee/drinking chocolate and cake and took it up to the higher terrace to sit in the sun.

A couple of us took a wrong turn on the way back - why do places have ample signage to get you there, but nothing to get you out?! We were fine until the one way system!

All in all a very enjoyable visit.

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Hole's Meadow - June



Our visit took place on the hottest day of the year so it was no surprise to find 10 of us taking shelter in the shade of the bar at the Oxenham Arms. I stress that this was for lunch and an appreciation of a fascinating and historic building!

We made our way to Hole's Meadow following the excellent directions which Fi had given us. The garden is 2 acres of surprise reached by zigzagging between and behind other houses until you come to a five bar gate and a garden room where Fi was waiting to greet all 16 of us.



She gave us a description of the garden and the ideas and history behind it. It was formed from two medieval burgage plots and slopes down to a stream. It has the backdrop of the towering and magnificent Cawsand Beacon.

We were left to wander round at our own pace, finding shade and seats!

Fi has the National Collections of Monarda and Nepeta which are

planted around the garden but the Monarda are also potted up in huge pots in their own area and clearly labelled. Prize specimens!

The garden has herbs, a wild flower area, fruit and chickens sharing a protective cage, likewise an immaculate, weed free vegetable plot. The flower beds



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are a wonderful mixture of dierama, verbascum, alliums, rudbeckia, fennel etc. There are seats around the garden and a converted piggery with settees and a kitchen where we had a lovely cream tea and cakes. It was very obvious that Fi works very hard in this garden and is completely dedicated to its development and to welcoming visitors to her little bit of heaven. What I hadn't realised is that she's suffered from ME and at times cannot do anything. She should be very proud of her achievements here.

ACM



Squirrels - July

17 of us enjoyed our visit to this truly unique garden. It is a town garden so very different from our usual garden visits. This one has featured on Gardeners' World, Gardeners' Question Time, Devon Life and Britain in Bloom (who were visiting again the next day).

This garden has been totally transformed and it was fascinating to look at the photos of the original, conventional layout. So much has been packed in - a Spanish Courtyard garden, Moroccan area, a Moongate, a 7' waterfall and ponds. There's a wide variety of fruit - peaches, figs, kiwi fruit, plums, pears and 12 varieties of apples. The whole is packed with a range of flowers - fuchsias, Abutilons, Pelargoniums, Bougainvilleas, Streptocarpus, Salvias,



roses, Lantanas, etc. There is a wide variety of geraniums, climbers and bedding plants. Don't forget the two ducks!

Around the garden there are, unbelievably, 27 hidden rain water storage containers. At the moment all household water is going out to the garden.

Graham guided us round the intricate paths telling us what he'd done and what everything was.



His wife, Carol, looked after us very well producing cups of tea and putting up with us stipulating weak, medium or strong, with/without sugar, milk/no milk. She produced plenty of really tasty cream teas and a mouth watering coffee and walnut cake - one of the best I've had! To keep us on the straight and narrow, Graham produced bowls of his plums which were absolutely delicious. This was a really enjoyable visit giving us a wonderful insight into what can be achieved in a small town garden.

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Great Ambrook - August

Nineteen of us enjoyed a unique visit to this garden and we're most unlikely to ever find a similar one. Our numbers were boosted by five from my local Group to ensure that the visit took place - we had a minimum and a maximum to meet, a limit on the number of cars and a 20 minute window to arrive using a stipulated route.

This is a 4 acre garden which was lost and is being reclaimed but it will never be another Heligan. Access is via a single track, private road and there is only room for seven cars. There are no facilities.

We were welcomed by the garden historian, Angela Dodd-Crompton, who has been fully involved for 12 years and is utterly dedicated to it. She was very generous with her time and gave us a tour packed with facts, descriptions and history. She'd kindly given us a history of the garden to read before we went, but even with this I don't think any of us were prepared for what we saw.



The original entrance to the Garden



The Observatory



The octagonal pool from the tennis court



Some of the party standing on a water tank in front of the Observatory

The garden was developed just before WW1 for the owner of the estate, an Arthur Smith Graham. It was designed by the architect T.H.Lyon who lived at Haytor and one of the intriguing facts are the

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sight-lines between various parts of the garden and the rocks at Haytor.

By 1963 the estate was overgrown and it was split up and sold off, the garden becoming completely separate from the house. Nothing happened for the next 25 years and, in fact no one knew it was there which is quite remarkable when you see the size of some of the buildings. Clearance was started but the owner died and probate took three years in which time the brambles and nature took over yet again.



A garden path



The first uncovered path



A pool



Another pool

The photos show the paths, the Observatory and the swimming pools. Water storage was well catered for, there being several tanks along the paths. Depending on whether the water was being used for garden watering or filling one or other of the two swimming pools, the runnels at the side of the paths were either stone or clay pipes - the latter being cleaner.

There was a carriageway looping up outside the walls of the garden to deliver guests to the

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Observatory at the top of it. This went past a temple built against the outside of the walls but this area is now owned by someone else. The walls to the garden are very high, probably 12', which made it very private and very sheltered. The shelter enabled some specimen trees to be grown, some of which survive today. Amazingly the walls were horizontally wired, both sides, at one foot gaps, and it's all still there over a hundred years later! They've found evidence of planting plans for flower beds. It seems that vast quantities of plants were bought, many from the Exeter nursery Veitch's. They've uncovered a group of seven trees recently and are trying to decipher the significance of their positioning. It's all a bit of a mammoth jigsaw puzzle. This is a work in progress and features are still being uncovered, an incredible place!

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Sedgewell Coach House - September



In the end eleven of us found our way to Sedgewell Coach House situated on the A380. We even followed the signs for the parking! There was then a walk down to the venue. Several ladies welcomed us and explained that the owner, Heather Jansch, world famous sculptor, was being interviewed in Plymouth but would be back shortly. They explained the layout of the grounds and the possible routes round.



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The sculptures are on the level by the house, the rest of the 14 acres drop quite steeply down to the bottom of the heavily wooded valley with a stream at the bottom.

The sculptures are life size and are extremely good. The bodies are made from driftwood and the hooves fashioned from recycled metal such as old water cylinders. Most were of horses, they were a couple of stags with magnificent antlers.

A local artist was also exhibiting, and selling, her pottery.

Having admired the art work we set off round the grounds some venturing further than others. Some of the paths were a bit hazardous and quite a scramble. There was no colour here but I understand that there are bluebells in spring.

A sign propped up at the house declared that Heather is selling her house so I guess we made our visit just in time.

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Plaz Metaxu - September



Every single one of us was blown away by this garden. Granted we chose the best day in September with brilliant sunshine and clear blue skies, but this garden would take your breath away whatever the weather.

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Our host was there to greet us, his gardener having guided us to park. Alasdair was a very generous host who gave us three hours of his time guiding us round some of the 32 acres and then providing a very welcome tea with delicious cakes - coffee and walnut, lemon drizzle, carrot cake and biscuits!



Alasdair, an art historian, moved here in 1992 and has been the designer, creator and gardener converting fields into gardens, parkland and ‘rooms’ depicting Greek myths. Hades for example, is represented by a circle of beech, pruned to let light through and with a very narrow “pedestrian” entrance.

We started in a huge conventional garden filled with colour. Thousands of trees have been planted, some very rare and the autumn colours were beginning to show on some. We moved on to the “canal” in front of the house, the orchard and then into the walled garden and on to an enclosed courtyard dedicated to another Greek God. This was a very calming place, I’m afraid that I didn’t take notes - too busy listening and admiring the features.



On then to admire some of the architectural features - all depicted by hedges and bushes. The hedge cutting was extremely impressive, all done by the gardener, he’s clearly an expert with some interesting methods of reaching the tops of some! One of the most impressive Yew hedges was grown and cut to form the backdrop to an auditorium. We continued on and round the lake which had been dug out in seven days but which now looked as if it had always been there, fitting seamlessly into the landscape. The final part of the tour took us through the wood.

I’m afraid I can’t do justice to this garden, it really is beyond description. We all left knowing that we had been very fortunate to be able to see it.

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Lukesland - October



Numbers oscillated a bit for this, our last visit of the season, but in the end nine of us gathered at Lukesland. Although it had rained in the morning, it was dry at 2 o'clock and remained dry, with even a bit of sunshine, for the rest of our visit.

This is a 24 acre site nestling on the southern edge of Dartmoor. There is such a wide variety of trees here that the autumn colours differ greatly. There are cornus, acers, enkianthus and ginkgo, with their autumn colours reflected in the pools fed by the Addicombe Brook. Lukesland is a garden which offers the chance to see how very different trees are - shape, size, colour, leaf shape and bark. With such a wide variety of trees, they colour at different times making it hard to guess peak colour.



We had a gentle amble round and then headed indoors to the tea room. This is a family run business and we had a warm welcome to accompany our tea and cakes. The cakes were, as usual, delicious and generous helpings were served by a family friend. We had a good chat over tea sitting round a large table and then departed for home.

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