

Gardens Group Reports - 2021

May - Heathercombe



This was our first meeting since last July and we weren't going to let a bit of rain dampen our spirits. It was unfortunate that this was the last day of rain and that the rain started two hours before it was forecast to but that didn't seem to matter. Eighteen of us gathered at the cabin in the car park to greet each other and to be welcomed by our host who gave us an introduction to Heathercombe and its history, which is a very long one.

We set off on our tour, very kindly guided by John Pike, our host. It was striking to hear all the chatter, people were so glad to be out and to be able to talk to something other than the four walls that has been the norm for so many for so long.

The valley is quite long and the banks were covered in bluebells as indeed was much of the moor on the way there. Big swathes of blue beneath the tors greeted you round every bend. The garden has rhododendrons, azaleas and magnolias in abundance, streams and lakes. There are also various pieces of art, (including a new hippo in the bottom lake.)

They have a new tea room which was large enough to give most of us shelter and the chance to sit down. The chairs were socially distant but close enough to continue the conversations. A very nice gesture, teas and coffee were free but donations invited, I hope everyone did. All self service but a choice of teas and of coffee and either plain or chocolate biscuits. All very welcome.



Gardens Group Reports - 2021



After tea we were offered a chance to see the orchards and the burn garden. Our host really was very helpful, giving up his afternoon to look after us. Many have said that they hope to return in better weather.

Driving back some of us had to wend our way through Dartmoor ponies who were keen on eating the roadside hedges. Black sheep were the next hazard and then the mist came down hiding the tops of the tors, all a bit Hound of the Baskervilles-ish.

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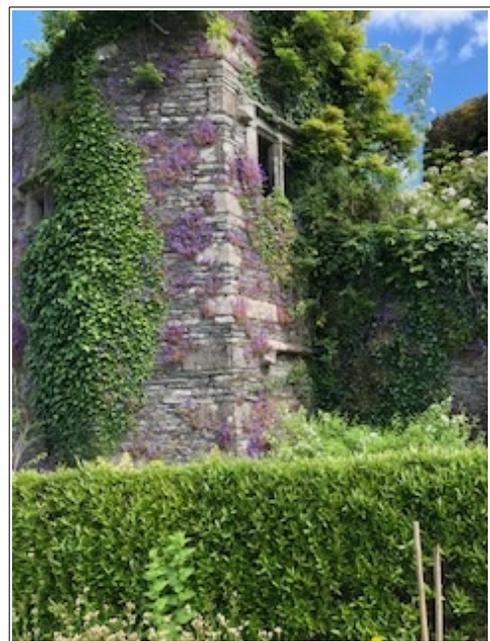
Gardens Group Reports - 2021

June - The Garden House

Unlike our visit last month this one took place in glorious sunshine, so a real pleasure to wander round the garden. Not as many as at Heathercombe but this was quite expensive unless you were a



member of the RHS or had the Gardener's World free entry tickets. Friday traffic might have worried some but going over the moor is never a problem traffic wise, just the sheep, ponies and cattle! Increasingly there are keen cyclists on this



route, brave souls! It was very clear so the views were excellent, could see for miles.

This also meant that the views from the garden were good, one of the features of this garden. Everything was in full bloom giving swathes of colour. There were some big cornus trees, some with white leaves, others white and pink. There used to be one near Lafrowda, but it went with Building One. The garden is 10 acres in size and divided up into different "pockets" - Dell; Summer, Quarry and Cottage Garden; Wildflower Meadow, Bulb Meadow; Rhododendron Walk; Wisteria Bridge; the Walled Garden, open again after restoration; the Tennis Court Lawn and Bowling Green Terrace. You just wander round, taking it all in and occasionally taking advantage of the seats.

It was very nice to be able to welcome a new Member, hope to see you again!

I'd had an early lunch but others used the cafe. The choice was very limited and described as disappointing. We did all go for tea at the end, but, again, not as I remember it. Maybe it's the pandemic affecting the offer. Still it was good to sit, talk and laugh, just like old times!

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Gardens Group Reports - 2021

July - Springfield House



We'd been told that we could park in a field or on the road. Those of us who were early chose the road fearing that the field might be a bit soft- there had been a lot of rain, the roads were wet with run off. However our host came out and shepherded us into the field assuring us that It was fine (it was!) and that it was safer (he was right!).

From the field we gathered in the first of the garden areas, and when everyone had arrived, we were welcomed by Mrs Pountney who told us that they'd developed the gardens over the last twelve years, that the majority of the plants were from cuttings and seeds and the result is a riot of colour from a very wide variety of plants.



After discussing and admiring a cornus, dogwood, in flower for the first time, we moved on to admire the formal lily pond - a beautiful feature at the centre of another garden area with colourful beds all the way round. The gardens behind the house are edged

by a very productive vegetable garden and fruit cage. The latter full of gleaming, fat, black currants, red currants, gooseberries, raspberries and Tay berries. The vegetables were equally prolific- various beans, chards and peas - all looking extremely healthy and quite unlike mine! Moving on you come to another large cage, this time housing chickens and ducks. Not all animals are welcome though, the night before a neighbouring horse had managed to get into the garden and had a good

Gardens Group Reports - 2021

old gallop round. The result was numerous holes in the lawns which our host had been up early to fill with sand - must have been at least 50 of them.

As usual we knew the names of some of the plants - I was very good on diaramas and pentstemons, fortunately others could fill in the gaps.

The views from the garden were breathtaking, a real feature looking out over the Axe valley, the bird sanctuary and down towards Seaton.



After our tour of the garden we relaxed in one of the many areas set aside for seating for us to enjoy our cup of tea and choice of cakes together with a good chat and catch up. The

weather was idyllic, the company great and our hosts were extremely kind and welcoming, guiding us round the garden and answering all our questions. It was good too to welcome new members to the Group. An excellent and very enjoyable visit.

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Gardens Group Reports - 2021

August - Little Ash Bungalow



The forecast was good but there was a shower before lunch but that didn't put anyone off and, in fact, more turned up than I expected. A point made by our hostess who counted us all up right at the start. Numbers are cake critical! Helen is well organised though having been opening her garden for



many years. At 20 this was our largest group this year and it was good to be able to welcome some members back to their first meeting since before the pandemic.

Helen gave us an introduction to the garden and the time line of the changes she'd made over the years - generally expansion! She kindly accompanied us round and was on hand to answer our questions about the different plants. It's a big garden, 1.5 acres, so we soon spread out with different groups discussing particular plants. There are some unusual trees, shrubs and herbaceous

Gardens Group Reports - 2021

perennials. Striking metal sculptures enhance and add interest to the various beds. There is a stream at the bottom of the garden bordering a hedge - cutting it could be interesting! There's a damp woodland area - roped off as it was a bit soft to walk in. Helen left us to prepare the tea and we slowly walked back to collect our cake and tea/coffee from the conservatory and then choose one of the many tables outside, most near the alpine/gravel garden. Time then for the all important chats over tea.

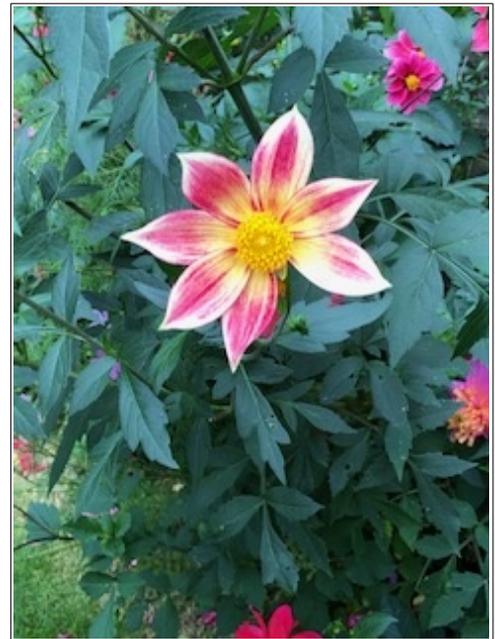
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September - Cadhay Manor



I'd quite deliberately avoided arranging anything on a Friday given how blessed we are here with traffic this summer, however Cadhay was only open on Fridays – their changeover day for the holiday lets – and this was their last Open Day of the year. This, unfortunately, was one of the worst



Fridays and at 14.00 hrs nine members were still missing. The 8 vehicle crash on the A30 between Alphington and the M5 affected not only those of us coming that way but the knock on effect from those diverting off and trying to come through Exeter, caused delays for those starting in Exeter. The two coming up from Okehampton eventually gave up altogether at Exeter and went to Killerton.

The guide came out to greet us and was very helpful and understanding and while the rest of us started the tour 20 mins late, one member of staff kindly stayed to look out for any late comers. In view of the delays our guide thoughtfully



pointed out the toilets in case anyone delayed was in need. We were



handed over to the Head Gardener, Dave, who gave us a very comprehensive tour of all the gardens, starting with the Community Allotments and the Manor Allotments and fruit garden, all in this magnificent walled garden. It was on to the Stew Pond and the history of that. We walked all the way round that and then on to the newest addition – another garden area.

Dave wore two hats - 6 months as Head Gardener and 6 as buildings renovator and maintenance of all the buildings on site. He'd been doing this for 20 years and had converted all the outbuildings into holiday lets. The Manor itself is now holiday lets, sleeping 22.

Gardens Group Reports - 2021



We were particularly impressed by the borders filled with dahlias and the revelation that they are all grown from seeds collected by him at the end of the season and all looking their best. This seems to produce some very unique varieties and unusual blooms.

Another Dave, this one a retired nuclear physicist, then guided us into the Courtyard and gave us a very informative talk on the history of the building and the families who, over the centuries, had owned it and the changes they'd made.

Finally, our cream tea eaten outside in the sun, in groups of 7 so lots of chat! The teas were very good, lovely cream, jam and scones, a choice of tea or coffee and top ups offered.

A really enjoyable visit, made even better as I was approached by another two Uersa members who hadn't said

that they were coming as they weren't sure that they would be able to.

On this visit we were also joined by two new members, one of whom walked from the nearest bus – quite a distance - and the other cycled. We look forward to seeing them again.

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