

Gardens Group Reports - 2023

April - Stonelands



Our first visit of the year was, everyone agreed, very successful. The weather was just fine – not as sunny as the previous day, but – despite forecasts even that morning that there was a high probability of rain, it remained dry and clear, warm enough to eat outside and immeasurably better than the day after!



We gathered outside the gates waiting for the Head Gardener, Saul, to let us in. We walked up the long drive, initially alongside Dawlish Water. On reaching the terrace in front of the house Saul gave us a very full introduction to the history of the house and the various owners. The land is adjacent to The Luscombe Estate. A unique feature is that there is no other building visible from the house yet it is quite literally on the edge of Dawlish. Sir John Nash was the

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architect of the house, Humphry Repton was the landscape architect although apparently they both had views on the other's work!

There have been many owners over the succeeding years so there have been many changes. Lately two tennis courts at the front of the house have been removed and replaced with lawn. A new court has been built behind the house. The land slopes quite steeply at the back so plenty of exercise just getting up there!

ACM



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May - Blundell's Garden

20 of us arrived at Blundell's for our visit - some of us after a much longer journey than usual! After being checked in to conform with Safeguarding requirements we were ushered into their new Cabin. We gathered to hear an introductory talk by Charlie Olive who wears many hats, one of which is Community Engagement. He described all the activities the pupils take part in in the local community many of which involve the garden and cabin. Local schools, both

primary and secondary take part in gardening activities to develop horticultural skills.

The garden has both wildlife and vegetable sections together with areas set aside for the pupils to grow cut flowers which are used to brighten up the Boarding Houses. Vegetables for the School kitchens are increasingly on the

menu.

It was good to see such an interest in growing flowers and vegetables in the younger generation, gardening is often seen as an older person's past time.

A relatively new feature was the pool which the pupils had dug out and planted up. Everything was certainly looking very healthy and added an extra dimension to the garden. Already the aquatic wildlife had made their home there.

We finished our visit with a cream tea sitting round a very solid table and set of chairs!

Really tasty scones ... all bar one put the cream on first, he will be nameless! A very poor example I'm afraid from the Chairman.

ACM



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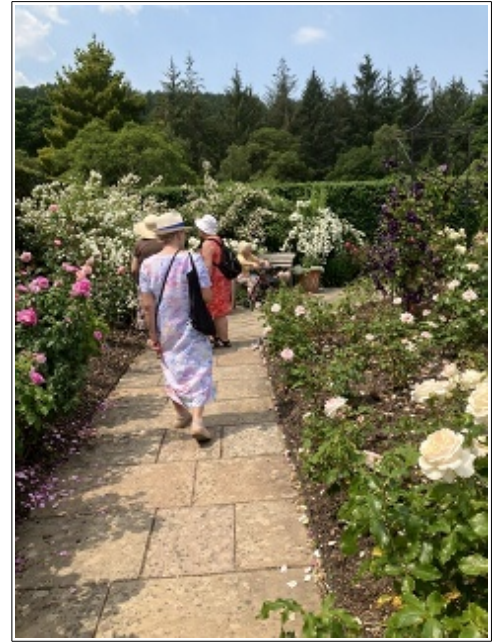
June - Rosemoor



Very few of us (8) for this visit, but it's quality which counts, not quantity!

The car parking areas had changed since I was there last, it's now a much longer walk to the entrance.

I was greeted by members who'd got there before me and had managed to track down a machine dispensing free cold water, a glass from that was a very welcome offering.



We started with a light lunch in the Otter Cafe before heading out to explore. (Bagging a table had involved some pretty nifty footwork working as a team!). The gardens didn't seem to have suffered too badly with the heat and recent lack of rain. The plant of the day was definitely the rose, there was an abundance of different roses all looking magnificent. Some scented, some not. Certainly the right time to visit if you like roses.

In the heat we made it from one, (preferably) shady, seat to the next. Back to the courtyard for an ice cream and a glass of cordial dispensed by Linda from her magical roller box!

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July - Willowrey



We've visited many wonderful gardens over the years and this was definitely one of the best. 15 of us were given a warm welcome by the owner, Fiona, who revealed that she had graduated from Law at Exeter. Then followed two further coincidences - the granite cross passage house was built in 1604 the year that Blundell's, last month's visit, was founded and then it transpired that Fiona had been to the same school in Cheshire that my best friend had been to.



There was so much to see and such variety, lawned areas with ericaceous shrubs and trees enhanced by interlinking ponds with crystal clear water, formal granite walled gardens and



woodland. Despite the exceptional dry spell everything was lush helped by all the water. Some of the trees here had wooden sculptures carved into them - a voyage of discovery round the trees!



We divided into two groups with the more active/mobile taking the walk along the River Wrey, across an old granite bridge and on along the other bank. The amusement here were seven very large Dartmoor boulders by the side of the path, the first labelled "Grumpy" ... when you reached the last you found "Happy".

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It was then back to admire the kitchen gardens, the fruit cages and the chickens. A chance to admire the formal, walled gardens and then to tea taken in a lovely open sided wooden hut with a green



roof. Tea matched the garden and grounds and was delicious. As usual, the time to have a really good catch up. The mirrors opposite the drive proved essential in ensuring a safe exit given the bend to the right.

A really good visit, our thanks to Fiona.

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August - Middlewood



A small group of ladies met their hosts in a courtyard surrounded by herbs and more exotic plants such as fig, avocado, lemon, lime and orange in pots. A walk up a shady, slightly overgrown pathway brought us past the chicken run to the main garden. This was absolutely crammed



with edibles of all sorts, everything grown organically. Every inch of the polytunnel was filled with vegetables and the Victorian-style greenhouse was home to a good crop of nectarines and grapes. The fish pond is now only for more decorative purposes, not to provide food for the table but the organic beehive was obviously a magnet for the local bees. Walnuts, mulberries, medlar, pineapples in the conservatory, the garden was full of the unexpected or unusual. Cliff and his wife, Chris, have every right to be proud of what they have created out of the wilderness they inherited when they bought the cottage. There was even room for a few flowers on the grounds that these are necessary to attract pollinators! Our visit was rounded off by tea and home-made cake back in the courtyard with time for further questions and discussions. I'm sure I speak for us all when I say we thoroughly enjoyed our visit, huge thanks to Cliff and Chris for hosting.



JW

September - Whiddon Goyle

(This event was cancelled)

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October - Dunley House



A group of 15 of us - down by 5 on the day unfortunately - found our way to Dunley House looking for the gate with the golden squirrel on it. Slightly fooled because they'd kindly left it open for us.

We were welcomed by our hosts and there followed a discussion on suitable footwear.



Although it had been sunny and dry for a few days the dew had been quite heavy and areas with long grass were wellington territory. The route decided our host stood on a top step and introduced himself - he'd been a Judge and Recorder in Plymouth and Exeter - and told us his family history and the history of the house which dated back to the mid nineteenth century. He told us what land they'd been able to add to the grounds and the very impressive number of trees (well over two thousand) which they'd planted.

They'd been very fortunate in acquiring the services of the retired Head Gardener at Greenway.



Added to which he had won many rare trees and shrubs in gardening competitions and, with a much smaller garden himself, had kindly planted them at Dunley.

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We'd hoped to see more autumn colour given it was an October visit but, although there was some, the weather ensured that roses and salvias for example, were still flourishing. Our host was impressively knowledgeable over the names of plants and, if we immediately forgot, most had plant labels. Very organised!

We admired the pond with the barley bags in - to keep the water clear - and the lake with a little boat moored on the edge, an attempt to replace the yacht which they'd moored at Dartmouth.

After touring the vegetable, fruit and chicken areas it was time for tea. We fared extremely well as our host had catered for the higher numbers. I regret to tell you that we succumbed to two slices of delicious cake and two scones with cream and jam ... As usual, tea was accompanied by lots of chat.

Another good year, all in good weather too!

ACM