



The HARDY PLANT SOCIETY SOMERSET GROUP

Newsletter No: 47

June 2011

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

As I write the drought and the hottest April for decades have come to an end. Many thanks to those of you who kept up the midnight, naked, rain dances to propitiate the spirits of water!

What all this has meant is that whilst our spring flowering plants have put on wonderful displays (and some have been truly outstanding), none of them has lasted very long. This was true of the snowdrops, narcissi, erythroniums, anemones, dicentra, and tulips. Even the usually robust and adaptable hellebores seem to have passed through with unseemly haste. This makes a powerful case for the benefits of ensuring that the plants we choose will have a natural succession – when the displays are curtailed through weather conditions, there will be gaps but there is always something else to follow. In fact the sustained warm period has simply accelerated the whole cycle.

Now we have the tidying-up to do and as the bulb foliage begins to fade it is a good time for a light dressing of fertiliser such as fish, blood and bone and filling the holes at the surface where the leaves have come through to keep out the narcissus fly. And remember, it is not just the narcissi that are vulnerable. Many of us have lost snowdrops in just the same way – and the narcissus fly has an amazing knack of selecting the most desirable, most expensive or most treasured varieties! I am sometimes guilty of becoming diverted by other tasks and leaving the dead bulb foliage for far too long, only to find that slugs have found it an ideal habitat. It pays to get there first.

By the time this newsletter reaches you, of course, some of these jobs should be completed, but it is not too late to go round checking to be sure it is all under control. A great example of a garden where it was completely under control was John Massey's garden at Ashwood Nursery, and later in this newsletter we have some recollections of our visit there earlier this year.

If any of you have further photographic examples of that visit, do please let Stuart Senior have them to put on the website. We really do want you all to regard it as *your* website and to contribute to its diversity, interest and success. You don't have to worry at all about the technical bit – Stuart will gladly take care of that. The important point is to secure everyone's involvement.

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With more visits coming up through the summer there will be many more opportunities for photographs and written notes of the things that have struck you. Do please let us share your impressions.

My Chairman's Letter at this time last year discussed plant losses and survival during a winter that we then thought had been a particularly hard one. If anything the winter just past was even harder: the period of below-freezing temperatures was a bit longer and it was combined with a higher moisture content in the soil. As we all know it is the combination of cold and wet that is so often a killer. But on top of all that we also had some desiccating winds. One of my lollipop bay trees has died : the other is sprouting beneath the outer sphere of dead leaves and twigs and will certainly survive – but they are only 25 feet apart and share exactly the same aspect.

As last year, I became very apprehensive about the hedychiums and my beloved *Amicia zygomeris* which were again left in the open ground. But lo and behold! All the hedychiums and both amicias are now sprouting boldly, indicating that they are a good deal hardier than we might perhaps have thought. A generous mulch of light porous compost or composted bark seems to pay dividends. A smallish (and therefore vulnerable) plant of *Musa basjoo* has also survived, although when I first removed the covering of sacking and polybubble which covered the top growth and the composted bark around the crown, the old stem was just a brown mushy mess. But encouraged by the advice of Rob Gudge at Desert to Jungle, I left it all in place. As Rob predicted, a couple of shoots have now emerged from the base of the rootstock some inches below the soil surface.

I take a good deal of encouragement from these experiences, and I'm sure I'm not alone. Furthermore, Stuart I know would take great encouragement if we were to start what I believe in the jargon is called a 'thread' on our website. In other words anyone with similar – or indeed different – experiences just sends Stuart a few sentences to add to what others have said, so that we conduct a sort of 'distance conversation'. It will only take one or two people to start the ball rolling and I for one will certainly look forward to all that you have to say. It does of course require all of us to keep an eye on the website, but I hope you are all doing that anyway!

Our programme of talks has now come to an end and I hope you found them stimulating. I now look forward seeing many of you during our summer visits and at the Plant Swap in August – remember this is as much a social event as a horticultural one. You don't even have to bring any plants, just come for the company and the delights of Frederica's garden and her cuisine!

Roy Stickland

Chairman

PLANT SALE 16 APRIL

Once again the plant sale was well attended and there was a wide range of attractive plants for people to buy. It is particularly gratifying to notice people that you may have seen, spoken to and sold plants to in previous years. This really does show that we have a good reputation among the punters.

Because we had fewer stall-holders this year, we were able to give each of them more space and they all appreciated this. The floor plan was changed, with two tables in an 'L' shape so that we maximised the space around the tables for the convenience of customers. It may not be possible to repeat this in future years. If we get back to our usual number of stall-holders there will only be room for one table apiece. For this year however, it worked very well and seemed to ease the flow of people around the hall.

Many thanks to those of you who brought plants for the Group table, helped in the kitchen or on the door, and to those who went home with treasured purchases. The entrance money amounted to £121, table hire £50, proceeds from the Group plant table £59, books £53 and teas/coffees £10. After allowing for the cost of the hall (£29) the event contributed £254 to group funds. All in all, a pretty satisfactory reward for all the work that is put into this annual event.

Roy Stickland

AN EXCELLENT OUTING

The usual suspects were mustered for our visit on March 9th to Ashwood nurseries and Dial Park garden. The weather was kind, cool and mainly dry. We arrived first at Ashwood nursery which John Massey acquired in 1968 as a teenager straight from school with no horticultural training. He says "It was a dilapidated place, bantams scratching about and washing drying in the greenhouse. I started off doing landscaping and grew what plants I could in old paint tins and jam jars" Within a decade it was transformed into a thriving plant nursery and garden centre. Percy Picton of Old Court nurseries was a good friend and mentor and through him John started to collect lewisias and cyclamen, then began to exhibit at RHS shows, getting gold medals every time and now has been awarded 50 consecutive RHS gold medals. On arrival, the locusts descended on the superb nursery and helped to deplete the stands of beautiful hellebores, and then we went on to John's private 3 acre garden.

It is a delight, with island beds and woodland dells and has the Staffordshire and Worcestershire canal as a lovely backdrop. On our early visit the garden was bursting into life with anemone pavonina, lewisia, primula auricula, hepatica, cyclamen, erythronium, galanthus,

narcissus, tulips and, of course, hellebores. A wonderful collection of trees, shrubs and conifers give structure and shelter, and coloured stems of birches, maples, cherries and dogwoods set off some beautiful and interesting statues and sculptures. The soil resembled black breadcrumbs and made this gardener wonder whether to give up the battle right now. We were guided round by knowledgeable Brian and some of us were lucky enough to be taken by him into the glasshouses where there was stock of some special hellebores which we were able to buy. A

new hellebore, 'Ashwood Gold' has been bred which is yellow with yellow nectaries, gorgeous and very expensive, £50.00.

More treats followed with a visit to Dial Park, a half acre garden developed since 1990



Photo courtesy Roy Stickland

by Olive Mason round some converted farm buildings. She confesses that she is a compulsive collector, which is evident from the extensive variety of bulbs, especially galanthus, including the coveted G. 'Primrose Warburg' and G. 'Spindlestone Surprise', both with yellow markings and ovaries. A high bank was created when the drive was excavated, and this curves round two sides of the lawn, providing shelter and creating different aspects for planting. Behind the bank on the south side is a rock garden with many more treasures. A small scale woodland walk has *betula utilis*, *prunus serrula* and *halesia carolina* shading spectacular carpets of wood

anemones, eranthis, snowdrops and small narcissi including N. Albatross and N Seagull, both about 115 years old. A gateway in the hedge on the northwest corner leads



Photo courtesy Sally Gregson

to a box edged parterre which has a green and white theme, in the spring, of daffodils, tulips and honesty.



Photos courtesy Sally Gregson

By this time it had become rather chilly so we were pleased to find tea and cakes ready for us in the barn, and the coach waiting for our journey home. A thoroughly enjoyable day.

Carol Clements

Apologia

The editor would like to tender her apologies to David and Mary Palliser for inadvertently crediting the wrong Palliser as author of the excellent article on the Hardy Plant Society Autumn weekend, which appeared in our January issue. The author was of course Mary Palliser.

Winter 2010/2011 Casualties

Like many people I was caught “on the hop” by the mild and beautiful autumn weather which extended right up until early November. Then the winter struck with a vengeance and I much regretted delaying to pot up those tender plants I’d wanted to keep but which had looked so

good right up until the first and very hard frost. Even then I thought “we’ll have another mild spell in a day or two and I can then prize my frozen plants from the ground and whisk them indoors without too much damage done – with any luck” but that mild spell never came and >

Winter 2010/2011 Casualties

winter was upon us with full force.

Fortunately I had managed to move the smaller potted “treasures” into the greenhouse a week or two before, but gone were the fuchsias, the osteospermums, my ‘Guernsey White’ *Geranium maderense* I had carefully nurtured to flowering size (but which hadn’t quite flowered) and was in a big pot that I hadn’t quite got round to struggling with under cover, my *Echeveria glaucas* expanding nicely across an old wheelbarrow which had come through the previous hard winter with no damage and just a covering of fleece. You’d think that by now I had learnt my lesson but no.

The winter just went on getting relentlessly colder. Nothing tender left outside was protected in time and it seemed pointless covering a plant already frozen solidly into the ground. After temperatures dropped to -15°C at Christmas what would be left?

Writing this now in early May I seem to have lost a small number of plants – some surprising, some not so. *Daphne bholuas* growing in pots (even those in the coldframe) have

all perished but the large one in the garden seemed totally unscathed. *Rubus spectabilis* ‘Olympic Double’, both in pots and in the ground appear to have died. The one in the ground was very vigorous and a bit of a pest - although a very beautiful one - so its demise is somewhat surprising. I am hoping that it may yet appear from below ground as it has a suckering habit. All my pot-grown phormiums and cordylines have gone, despite being positioned under the eaves of the house – not a total surprise really. *Phlomis italica* has also yet to reappear.

And the survivors? Well, *Zantedeschia aetiopica* ‘Green Goddess’ which some say is a bit tender, was cut to the ground but is now making a reappearance. I also lost a number of my agapanthus plants, grown in pots and left outside, but lots have survived, although not supposed to be reliably hardy. As did an asparagus fern that my husband put outside when clearing up after our burst pipe incident at Christmas. Its soil was very dry but it quickly sprouted again on being rescued (and watered!) despite being left outside in minus temperatures for a couple of weeks.

I was also pleased to find that all my shrubby salvias, growing in pots, have come through looking better than ever! In fact, the garden has pretty much survived unscathed except for the loss of plants you wouldn't have hoped to overwinter in a normal winter, let alone such an extremely cold and prolonged one. Even plants growing in small pots standing in the open that must have been frozen solid for weeks have survived. My "frost free" greenhouse can't have stayed above freezing all the time (I couldn't get inside to find out as the door had

frozen up) as my heater isn't designed to cope with much below - 10, but almost everything came through OK. Maybe the thick covering of snow helped to act like a blanket? I agree with Bob Brown who has said that the wet is more of a killer than "dry" cold temperatures. Perhaps if we continue to enjoy alpine weather conditions in the future we might find some more interesting survivors.

Jane Hunt

The Andrew Chatto Project

Two years ago the Hardy Plant Society asked for volunteers to type up the notes Andrew Chatto made on his travels around the world and the plants he found there. I was lucky enough to take part and found his document extremely interesting. I also had a personal note of thanks from Beth Chatto which meant a great deal. I understand from Noel Kingsbury, who was coordinating the project, that the notes will soon be available on the Beth Chatto website.

Jenny Hawksley

There is more information from Noel Kingsbury on the following link:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/3458335/The-Andrew-Chatto-papers.html>

Visit to The Laskett



Sir Roy Strong's garden at Much Birch Herefordshire

June 2011



Are gardens like buses? – I asked myself - when two unexpected opportunities came up recently to visit gardens near to the top of my 'must visit' list. I had dismissed the possibility of going to either in the foreseeable future. Then, thanks to the thoughtful network of Hardy Planters and a timely email from Roy Stickland, I found myself visiting both within six weeks of each other. The visit to The Laskett was organized by Winscombe RNLi and included a three-hour stop in Hereford and a beautiful journey back through the Wye Valley. Tina Joyce, our group leader for the day, added an extra dimension to the visit by announcing upon our arrival at The Laskett that Sir Roy himself would be there to welcome us.

I had read a lot about The Laskett, and wondered for some time how it had fared since the untimely death of Sir Roy Strong's wife, Julia Oman,

in 2003. After all, the garden had been their joint and devoted labour of love for over thirty years. It reflected their mutual interest in art, theatre, design, gardens and, memorably, theatricality (much in evidence throughout the garden). Julia Oman, in particular, had not wanted her garden, a surprisingly intimate place notwithstanding its four acres, to be open to the public during her lifetime. Sir Roy, however, takes a different view, as he charmingly told us in his impromptu introduction to the origin and development of the garden. The Laskett is not a plantsman's garden. It is lovingly tended and nurtured as a creative space, for the imagination and (as Sir Roy has said himself in his writings) for the soul, rather than the beauty of the plants.

We were encouraged by Sir Roy to wander through the garden at will, guided by a beautifully drawn map that keyed us into the 'pictorial

sequence which moves from large to small, from wide to narrow, from light to dark, from formal to informal, from loose to tight' (from "Garden Tour" in *The Laskett, The Story of a Garden*, Roy Strong, Bantam Press 2003). The garden is famous for its individual 'rooms', sculptures and artful vistas and its grandly named avenues and walks. But the word I heard used frequently during our visit was 'atmospheric'. It is a little untidy in parts; some trees and plants now obscure the original design and sculptures and memorials are not all made from the finest materials. I think the Strong-Oman partnership developed their own take on 'English vernacular'. Nevertheless, the transformation from field to intimate space, so obviously influenced by Roy Strong's acknowledged love of Hidcote Manor garden, is triumphantly achieved.

Garden visiting is a very personal activity. I can only offer my own thoughts and memories of this place. It is a garden that draws you in at several points, but once 'in', via the Yew Garden, the 'Elizabeth Tudor Avenue' or 'Die Fledermaus Walk', it tantalizes the

senses and tickles the humour. I was prepared to suspend doubt and disbelief as I looked at the V&A Museum Temple (incorporating Sir Roy's silhouette between the images of Victoria and Albert) and Howdah Court, where blue painted spiral staircases combine with old radiators and other 'found objects' to offer the perfect viewing platform across the Herefordshire landscape. Doubtless, this box of garden delights does not impress everyone (I overheard the odd exclamation: 'Well, what do you make of that', or 'what folly!') but I also caught sounds, and many a sigh, of pleasure and admiration. As for cat lovers, the memorials to much loved cats (amongst them, Lady Torte-de-Shell and Reverend Sir Wenceslas Muff) are just

enchanting.

Though Sir Roy is associated (through his scholarship and writing) with grand country houses, it is not grandness so much as quirkiness that for me best sums up the garden and its owner. Not only did Sir Roy greet us, but towards the end of our visit he drove off (chauffeur-ing one of his two gardeners) and thanked us cheerily for taking the trouble to visit.

Carole Webb

50/50 Plant Sale

We will once again be holding the popular 50/50 Plant Sale prior to the lecture at our September meeting. The Group keeps half the money taken and returns the other half to the seller. The hall will be open from 9.40 am to 10.10 am to receive your plants to sell. Please ensure that each one has two identical labels bearing the name of the plant, your name and the price. One will be removed so that the amount you are owed can be totted up and given to you at the end of the meeting, when you can also remove any unsold plants and your labels (tip: use pencil on labels then these can be reused). Selling will begin at 10.20am and finish at 11.00am. Offers of help with selling on the day will be most welcome. The Committee reserves the right to restrict the number of plants accepted for sale if demand and space so require. However this has not been necessary at our previous two sales.

Jane Hunt

A HORTICULTURAL MYSTERY

Some years ago I decided to pay more than I usually do (being a Yorkshire girl) for a *Paeonia cambessedesii*, the Majorcan paeony. Knowing it was half-hardy I planted it in my most favourable warm sheltered place, gave it all care and attention so in no time it disappeared from view never to reappear. This spring, after two exceptionally cold winters in my very cold garden, I noticed what I thought was a salvia, of which I have several in this same warm bed, lurking against the wall behind a *Rhododendron fragrantissimum*. I thought it was odd that it had wandered along to this spot, and then later noticed it had two fat pink flower buds. On a closer look the veins on the leaves and the stems were a dark red and I realised that it was a *Paeonia cambessedesii*.

I would never have planted it jammed hard against the wall, and certainly not behind the rhododendron which had been there since the bed was made. I don't remember a flower on the original plant, although with my advanced years my memory could well be failing, but had it seeded it seems impossible that it could appear as a flowering plant this season without the smallest evidence of its presence last year, and especially after two winters that denuded my garden of all my borderline hardy treasures. To quote Yul Brynner in 'The King and I'; "it is a puzzlement". The rhododendron will now be moved to a gap in the bed where I have lost an iochroma and a coronilla, and I will cosset my beautiful paeony and keep the seeds.

Carol Clements

Membership News

A warm welcome to the following new members of our Somerset Group:

Jean Burgess	Sue Firminger	Mary Reynolds
Shirley Davis	Wendy Gyles	Val Vernon
Kate Engel	Malcom Lane	David & Jane Yates

Stuart Senior
Membership Secretary

Plant Swap and Lunch



This year we will again be using the Plant Swap and Lunch event to support the charity “Thrive”. Thrive helps people of all ages with a disability to improve their physical and psychological health. This includes people recovering from a stroke or accident, people with dementia, the learning disabled and autistic.

Thrive supplies plant boxes (full of ready-to-plant veg and ornamentals) to such people which cost £35 each. They are asking local gardening & horticultural groups to organise plant swaps and ask for a donation for each swap to go to Thrive to help fund this work. If you want to know more go to www.thrive.org.uk.

We hope that members coming to our plant swap will again be prepared to make a small donation for each plant they acquire to this very worthy cause. Let’s face it, if you were to go to buy plants and only pay, say, 50p for a plant you are really getting a bargain so don’t forget to bring your cash to the event!

Accompanying this Newsletter is a booking form for the remaining events for 2011. For further information, visit our website at <http://hps-somerset.btck.co.uk/>.

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