



Gardening with hardy perennials

## SOMERSET GROUP

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<http://hps-somerset.btck.co.uk/>

### Chairman's Letter

The two major plant sales at East Lambrook and our own at Monkton Heathfield have been hugely successful. Jane Hunt has written about them on page 10 of this issue and I must add my own thanks to all of you who responded so well to our pleas for plant donations. The combined surplus for the two events was over £700 which reflects great credit on all concerned. Thank you very much.

One or two nurseries were concerned that 31 March might be a little too early for the Lambrook event, but the "summer" we enjoyed in March meant that the plants were sufficiently advanced and in good condition. The nurseries all had a very successful day and have said they hope we will repeat the event next year. I have yet to have a de-briefing meeting with Mike Werkmeister, but I know that he too was very pleased and thinks we should indeed do it again next year. Watch this space! Had the "summer" of March and the "winter" of April been the other way round, it could well have been a different story.

The programme of visits has begun and bookings for the various events are encouraging. For the first visit there was of course a sadness about Woodborough, but Greencombe is always of interest, and Ruth Boundy reviews this on a later page. Accompanying this issue is the booking form for the rest of the season and I hope the remaining events will be equally well supported. Numbers for the plant swap will be limited, so if you want to come, don't leave it too late to book! For those of you who do come, it will ease parking difficulties if you can arrange to travel with friends. Moreover, it'll save a bob or two on expensive petrol! This is in effect our summer social and you do not necessarily have to bring any plants – though it is lovely if you do. Equally if you see anything you fancy among the plants on offer, don't be shy about grabbing them quite regardless of whether you brought any yourself. Either way the aim is to enjoy the social event.

At a meeting earlier this year I referred to the sad death of Jerry Webb and promised a fuller appreciation in the Newsletter of the enormous contribution he made to our Somerset Group and to the Variegated Plant Group. Elaine Steele, who was our Chairman for 7 years, as well as holding the post of Secretary before that,

has written that “ ....there is so much I could say about Jerry and Jean, but it would take too much space. They were my friends and I miss them very much. They were a complete and complementary team.” Elaine’s appreciation on page 4 of this issue is beautifully complemented by the story from Ro FitzGerald which follows it. Both reflect the modesty and the generosity of deed and spirit that was at the heart of both Jerry and Jean. Their stories are prefaced by an amalgam of comments gleaned in conversation with other members.

As the cool (sometimes cold!) wet weather continues from April into May, just occasionally interspersed with a warm sunny period, the landscape and our gardens are certainly looking green and lush, but is it really safe to put out tender plants? And what of those borderline hardy plants that we risked leaving out all winter? The conventional wisdom is that a frost risk remains until the end of May and I certainly don’t expect, for example, to be planting out Dahlias until early June. If you left them in the ground, they may well be starting to sprout and could well be singed a bit if we do have a late frost, but their root systems are well established below ground and they are not emerging from a cosy greenhouse. So they will probably be OK.

But it can be a slightly anxious time as we watch for signs of growth on the Hedychiums, Cannas, Bananas, Salvias etc. What a relief it is when they do re-appear, for as we know, it is not just sub-zero temperatures that are the problem, but a subtle combination of the cold with the structure of the soil and the water it contains. I have learned to my cost this year that lifting and dividing Eucomis in the autumn (to try to get ahead of things in the spring) is not a clever idea. What was a very large and previously hardy clump of Sparkling Burgundy is now brown mush in a dozen pots. So much for planning ahead for plant sales! Spring division is clearly a better bet.

## **Roy Stickland**

### Visit to Greencombe

About thirty of us arrived at Greencombe on a damp Tuesday morning in April to be greeted by Joan Lorraine who very kindly gave a brief resumé of her garden.

The garden has very shallow soil as it is on the northern slopes of Exmoor looking out to the Bristol Channel and Wales and is completely under the canopy of mainly deciduous trees. Although on a steep slope, the paths have been made along the contours so are not too difficult to walk.



Despite Joan's poor health the garden was looking gorgeous and is certainly in good heart. She runs the garden on a totally organic method, using lots of leaf mould produced by all the deciduous trees. The erythroniums, for which the garden is famous and indeed has the National Collection, were looking extremely healthy and I was most impressed by the wonderful markings on the leaves of some varieties. Certainly worth growing for that alone!

Since I last visited Greencombe (many years ago) a wonderful building has been erected next to the house in which a triptych of flowers in the garden has been housed. This is by a local artist and is staggeringly beautiful. The more you looked at it the more things were found!



*Kurume azalea 'Apple Blossom'*

Joan is certainly one of the many characters in gardening and her whole life has been dedicated to plants. Her garden is a wonderful testament to her knowledge and skill.

**Ruth Boundy**

## Jerry Webb – An Appreciation

Jerry's plantsmanship was legendary. At any Group visit he would be surrounded by a cluster of folk who knew that it paid to be within earshot for you would be sure to learn something. Often the cry would go up, "Where's Jerry?" and a number of us remember looking at a tree with very distinctive foliage, without a clue as to what it was. He paused briefly to examine the foliage before announcing that it was *Broussonetia papyrifera*. Those of us who then looked it up at home were not at all surprised to discover that, as ever, he was precisely right. At a meeting of the Variegated Plant Group I took a plant I had grown from a cutting taken (with permission!) from a garden in Madeira. I showed it to Bob Brown who didn't recognise it at all, but Jerry's answer was, "when I used to grow it, it was *Hebe kirkii variegata*". But it was not just the plants. It was the humanity.

When my own son had a near-fatal motorcycle crash, Jerry and Jean had serious concerns of their own, but they never failed to ask how Iain was getting on. I know that other members have had similar occasions that showed their genuine feeling for the welfare of others. All the people they knew were important to them and it showed. Similarly Jerry's enormous knowledge and experience was modestly but willingly shared, but never flaunted. Your Committee is still pondering the best form of commemoration and having considered a few options are now looking at the possibility of a tree planting. The idea is attractive, but the choice of location is more difficult. Suggestions will be welcome.

**Elaine Steele** remembers him with similar fondness.

"When we 'volunteered' to run the Autumn Week-end for the HPS in 2001 it was a bit of a shock in respect of the admin and organisation needed. Stephen Taffler suggested that Jerry and Jean Webb be asked to assist and that was the best advice Steve ever gave me, and he gave me plenty! Throughout 2001 many happy hours were spent in planning and visiting the gardens and their owners, the hotel and of course the bank. The whole weekend was a great success due to the inspired and tireless work, mainly of Jerry and Jean. During this period I got to know Jerry very well: he was a man of great knowledge in both horticulture and business and was always the quiet man, never pushing his opinions but invariably right when asked. So many members of our Group owe much to Jerry without being aware of it: he taught me a great deal and I was very proud to call him my friend."

## Ro FitzGerald's story:

"Jerry was always extremely generous with his good plants; dozens of members and friends will confirm that, and when Beggars Roost Plants was relatively new he was very kind. We must have talked about *Hesperantha* (then still *Schizostylis*) at one time, and I lamented having very little success with the white one (always a poor doer with miserable little flowers). Jerry of course knew the one white form which is wonderful, *Hesperantha coccinea* 'Snow Maiden', and said that he could give me 'a bit'. Well, a whole carrier bag appeared at the next meeting, and over the years I sold many a beautiful pot full of this generous-flowered cultivar. However with the closing of the nursery labels and plants had strayed and I was afraid that 'Snow Maiden' had been lost: nothing flowered in 2011 and I only seemed to have a few anonymous leaves. But the week of Jerry's death, in the midst of sadness, I saw a white flash in a bed planted up last spring. No *Hesperantha* had been put in intentionally, but I leave things which come up by chance till I can see what they are, and there was a flowering stem of 'Snow Maiden', perfect in mid-winter, my living memory of this very special man. One couldn't ask more!"

As Jean moves to Reading to be close to her family we send her our thanks and every good wish. She and Jerry will be much missed.

## Roy Stickland

### Tips & Techniques – Root Cuttings

Many people take cuttings from stems and even leaves, but there is another way which is successful for some plants, and can be done in the winter, when plants are dormant. Root cuttings can be taken from the following plants: *Acanthus*, *Anchusa*, *Brunnera*, *Catanche*, *Crambe*, *Dicentra*, *Dictamnus*, *Echinacea*, *Eryngium*, *Anemone japonica*, *Nepeta*, *Papaver*, *Phlox*, *Primula*, *Rhus*, *Romneya* and *Verbascum*.

A new page on our website gives illustrated instructions on how to succeed with this technique, courtesy of John Horsey, who runs courses in Horticulture and Garden History based at East Lambrook Manor. For more details, visit:

<http://hps-somerset.btck.co.uk/TipsTechniques/RootCuttings>

## 2012 Programme – Part 2

Please refer to this and future Newsletters or the website <http://hps-somerset.btck.co.uk/> for further details and booking slips. Location maps or directions will be supplied following booking a place on an event.

All meetings at West Monkton Village Hall are free to members (except Saturday 28th April), but there is a modest levy of £2.00 for each visitor/guest. The Group will have a plant stall and a book stall at most of the lecture meetings listed.

All coach trips and garden visits must be pre-booked with Janet Murley:

Tel: 01884 820840 or email: [janet.murley@btinternet.com](mailto:janet.murley@btinternet.com).

### SUN 12 AUGUST

### PLANT SWAP & LUNCH

At Shipham

### TUE 11 SEPTEMBER

### COACH TRIP

The Garden House & Wildside, Devon

### SAT 22 SEPTEMBER

### LECTURE & 50/50 PLANT SALE

At West Monkton Village Hall, Monkton Heathfield 10.30am for 11.00am.

**Roy Stickland** (*our illustrious Chairman and Dahlia prize winner*) – **“Dahlias and Other Tuberous Plants”**

### SAT 20 OCTOBER

### LECTURE

At West Monkton Village Hall, Monkton Heathfield, 10.30am for 11.00am.

**John Sutton** – **“Salvias”** (*John is the author of the “The Gardener’s Guide to Growing Salvias”*)

### SAT 17 NOVEMBER

### AGM & LECTURE

At West Monkton Village Hall, Monkton Heathfield 10.00am for 10.30am AGM and 11.15am lecture. **Speaker & subject t.b.c.**

*At The Five Dials Inn, Horton (the same venue as last year)*

## **All events must be pre-booked**

If you would like to book places on any of these events, complete and return the entire enclosed Booking Sheet. As you will see from the Booking Sheet, you can receive the Joining Instructions for each event either by email or by post. To receive these details by email, simply fill in your email address on the Booking Sheet **even if you believe I already have a note of it**. If you choose this option, not only will I email your Joining Instructions prior to each event, but I will also send you an email confirming your booking. If you prefer this option **PLEASE** print your name clearly and remember to advise me of any change to your email address. Should you wish to receive this information by post, **PLEASE** remember to send me **TWO** SAE for **EACH** event you wish to attend.

**Janet Murley**

## **Trips & Visits Questionnaire**

A big “thank you” to the forty members who found time to complete and submit the recent Trips & Visits Questionnaire. Your feedback is currently being collated and will be reviewed at the next Committee meeting where it will inform next year’s programme. Overall, most members feel very positive about the breadth and depth of our programmes over the past few years. But Somerset is a very big county and travel times, costs and general logistics are increasingly important considerations in members’ decisions to participate or not, particularly when trips are made outside the county. We have to balance this with other feedback which suggests that we may have exhausted local gardens and nurseries of interest and will therefore have to look farther afield.

But the current number of trips and visits seems to be about right with strong support for extending the season, certainly into the autumn and possibly earlier in the spring. A more detailed summary of the feedback will be provided in due course.

**Janet Murley**

## Visit Notes

### September 11 - Coach Trip to The Garden House and Wildside in Devon. Bring a picnic or eat at The Garden House!

**The Garden House**, [www.thegardenhouse.org.uk](http://www.thegardenhouse.org.uk), is the elegant former home of the vicars of Buckland Monachorum. The present building dates from the early 19th century and now accommodates the tearooms and conference centre.

A modern vicarage was built in the 1920s and The Garden House was sold as a private dwelling. The house came onto the market again just after the Second World War and was purchased and given its present name by Lionel Fortescue, a former master at Eton, and his wife Katharine.



*Photo courtesy of [www.thegardenhouse.org.uk](http://www.thegardenhouse.org.uk)*

Over nearly 40 years, the Fortescues created a garden viewed as one of the finest in Britain. By 1961, they had established the Fortescue Garden Trust, an independent registered charity to which they bequeathed the house and garden to ensure the survival of this beautiful place for future generations. After their deaths in the early 1980s, ownership passed to the charity which to this day maintains the Fortescue's lovely legacy.

The second phase of development took place under Keith Wiley who was appointed by Lionel and spent 25 years as Head Gardener. Keith took the 6 acres of paddocks to the far side of the road into cultivation from 1990, creating a series of gardens that take their inspiration from the natural world. Keith left in 2003 to concentrate on writing and creating his own nursery, Wildside Plants (see below).

Matt Bishop is the present Head Gardener and he is particularly well-known for his expertise on snowdrops and bulbs. Matt's brief is to care for and respect the legacies of his predecessors whilst ensuring, just as they did, that The Garden House remains a crucible of new ideas and new plants, at the cutting edge of horticultural excellence and innovation. He has undertaken a major refurbishment of the original Fortescue garden as well as ongoing maintenance in other areas to ensure a long opening season of glorious colour and variety. This has been an excellent opportunity to introduce many new plants whilst continuing Lionel's principle of using only the best forms and cultivars available.

There are areas pioneering a "new naturalism" style inspired by great natural landscapes, a South African garden, a quarry garden, cottage garden and an acer glade. There are stunning views and more than 6000 plant varieties.

Food is available at The Garden House or bring your own picnic.

**Wildside**, <http://www.wileyatwildside.com/>. This is a return visit to Keith Wiley, formerly Head Gardener at the Garden House above. The first visit was in the early days of the garden and many members found it inspirational. It will be good to see how it has developed. There has been a great deal going on there since our last visit. There is an excellent Nursery.

Keith says: "Look at the treasure trove of gardening ideas to be found in nature, from under our noses to far flung corners of the globe. By allowing our observations of natural landscapes to inform our plantings, I believe that we can loosen the strait jacket that long established horticultural practices impose, allowing the enormous creative potential, latent in most of us, the freedom to express itself."

We depart from Sainsbury's car park bus stop at Hankridge Farm (M5 J25) at 9:00am with a pickup at J27. The cost of the trip is £21 per person.

## Plant Sales

I'd like to say "thank you" to those members who have regularly brought plants to be sold on the Group's plant sales table at our indoor meetings. You know who you are and this is very much appreciated as the revenue from the plant and book sales tables is vital if we are to keep down the cost of membership. Sadly plant donations have dropped a lot in recent years and the Committee wonders if this is because you have other outlets for your produce.

We really need a regular supply of interesting and more common plants to sell to and share amongst our members as this is a great way of trying something different in the garden at reasonable cost and learning about plants, thus helping to fulfil the HPS's educational remit. Please think about bringing along a plant or two when you come to our next indoor meeting.

By contrast, we received some fantastic plants from a number of members to sell at our "big" plant sales this year so thanks again to those who donated. The results can be seen in the excellent profits we made at these events. Thank you also to those of you who manned the sales tables at East Lambrook Manor in March and at the Group Sale at West Monkton Village Hall in April.

The 50/50 Plant Sale prior to the lecture at our September meeting proved popular again last year so we intend to repeat it in 2012. The Group keeps half the money taken and returns the other half to the seller. The hall will be open from 9.40am to 10.10am 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 sales.

We hope that we might encourage members to bring more plants for us to sell from October to March by offering a financial inducement of 50p per plant sold at our lecture meetings, regardless of plant price (minimum sale price of £1). If you'd like to receive a payment for your plants please ensure that they have two labels (as per the September plant sale), each with the plant name and your name. You may price the plant or leave it to the person manning the stall. You may then collect any money owing to you at the end of the meeting, plus any labels and unsold plants. If you still wish to donate your plants so that all of the sales value goes to Group funds we would be very pleased to receive them.

Finally, don't forget that if you have a lot of plants or other items you'd like to sell to members you are welcome to book the members' sale table at any of our monthly meetings. The charge is £5. Please contact me if you wish to book this table.

**Jane Hunt**

## *Acer pseudoplatanus* 'Brilliantissimum'



*Photo courtesy of [www.rhs.org.uk](http://www.rhs.org.uk)*

This sycamore is not strictly a Hardy Plant as we think of them, but...

After the cold start to the year, the whiteness of the snowdrops, to give us hope, followed by the cheerful nodding of the daffodils, I have been delighted to see this tree come into its own, once again, outside and below my bedroom window. It is a slow growing deciduous tree enjoying the full sun of my south facing garden slope, so well drained on my otherwise well-watered Devon garden. Looking down on its beautiful umbrella of bright salmon pink buds, the next few weeks will see it gradually change to a golden pink, lighting up that corner before changing to a more subdued gold. In my naivety I planted it in what was a much smaller garden, where it has flourished with little or no attention or pruning. I felt I would gain pleasure from below, but not only from above does it show off, but in coming down the hill towards the house, it shines out like a welcoming beacon against the green of the hedges and other trees .

**Janet Murley**

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