



## STAFFORDSHIRE GROUP



Newsletter  
Autumn 2021 No. 50

Front page picture: Some of the Dahlias in the Dahlia Walk at Biddulph Grange Garden (picture by Matt Summers)

Back cover picture: *Colchicum autumnale* or Meadow Saffron is a cormous herbaceous perennial (picture by Ruth Plant)

Two exquisite flowers in Yew Tree Cottage Garden:



*Tropaeolum speciosum* or Flame Nasturtium with fruit and the flowers of *Cyclamen hederaefolium* (pictures by Ruth Plant)

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## Editorial

Welcome to the Autumn 2021 Newsletter

Hope you all had a good summer, with plenty of days to spend in your own garden and/or visited some other gardens for inspiration and contemplation! We had reasonable good summer weather wise to grow our plants, although August felt a bit cool after the hot spell in July. And then of course September and October was most appreciated with a bit of an unexpected late summer!

In this edition you can find a write-up of The Garden of England by Bernie all about the wonders of plants you may find along a tow path. We are blessed with many canals and tow paths in our Midlands, which are exciting places to walk.

During 2021, the Group members haven't been idle and several HPS Plant Sales happened with a write-up by Ruth.

Clive lets us know about the HPS Conservation Scheme and highlights the *Astilbe chinensis* 'Sheila Haxton' He recently sent us the updates of his yearly meeting.

I spent 3 weeks of the September back in my native Netherlands, often called 'Holland', which is only a part of the Netherlands, but in this instance I am actually correct saying this as I was staying in the province of South-Holland and the province I grew up in is North-Holland.

It was good spending some time with family, which seems like a luxury now-adays after all our lives changed with this pandemic!

So in this Newsletter I got to write-up about one of the 9 eldest botanical gardens of the world: Leiden Hortus Botanicus.

I've visited it several times throughout my professional life and am always impressed with their collections, trees and interpretation. Leiden of course is a beautiful, typical Dutch Architecture town as well. I learned from this website about 8 other very old botanical gardens: <https://www.oldest.org/nature/botanical-gardens/> Maybe I will visit them all one day?

Botanical gardens are fascinating places of course!

Another fascinating garden I've visited several times living locally is Biddulph Grange of the National Trust. So a write-up about this with borrowed writings of Wikipedia and Biddulph's leaflet given when visiting in May 2017. The leaflet also has a plant list of interest at that time of the year.

Then, I selected two write-ups of Kenneth Black Bursary reports, which we, as members can all read online on our main HPS website of course but maybe not have enough time for. These are just a very much edited version so as to give you a glimpse!

Visited John Massey's garden last Saturday. He has been opening many Saturdays throughout the year instead of the usual 7 or 8 open days a year, because of the pandemic. The garden was in beautiful shape 'as usual' and Matt took several pictures of some more unusual plants for me. One below here:



Ever since

visiting the Ethnobotanical Gardens in Oaxaca, Southern Mexico, I am intrigued that they have made an educational garden just with their own, native plants and mainly those plants which form a link with us humans. I've written about it in several past Newsletters and also in this edition and would like to spend even more time researching native, useful plants.

So I decided to give up being Editor for our Group's Newsletter and pass on to the next volunteer we all know and respect very much: Clive Plant. So I do hope you can also support him with material to fill this Newsletter! For now I wish you a good read of my last episode and will see you on Zoom or real life!



## Chairman's Letter



As we gradually came out of "lock down" and could meet up with friends in our own gardens and then even go on a garden visit, or to the local garden centre, our new freedom was welcomed by everyone.

The group has been very busy publicizing the Hardy Plant Society, with socially distanced plant stalls, at Sandon Hall, Rode Hall, Staffordshire County Show as well as with a stall each month at Stafford's Farmer's Market. These events have seen a number of new members to join our group. All these events were a chance to meet up with members and friends and talk plants. Although these did not make up for our own Annual Plant Sale and the wonderful array of plants with the anticipation of a great find.

After our winter/spring Zoom meetings, face-to-face meetings for the autumn have seen members and a number of visitors enjoying a rearranged programme of speakers.

As for the weather; what a mixed summer/autumn we had. Too hot, lots of water, not enough water, hot at night, now going dark early so our gardening needed to be planned to take account of all these variables! But now we are all starting to plan next year's garden adventures.

Talking of next year, this will be my last Chairman's letter as at the AGM in January the group will appoint a new Chairman. My thanks go to the committee, and also to you all for your support over the last three, rather challenging, years. Please do think about joining the committee in 2022 as any group is only as good as its committee and we always need new ideas.

My hope is that we all stay safe and well and meet up again regularly,

*Helen*

## 2021 - The Year of the Staffs HPS Plant Sales (by Ruth Plant)

January started on a nervous note—we were waiting to be called for vaccinations and wondering if we would be able to meet again soon in the village hall. We did have some events in the Diary – Sandon Hall Plant Sale, Lichfield Festival of Gardening, Eccleshall Show and of course our own Annual May Plant Sale. As time rolled on our May Sale was cancelled, followed by the cancellations of Lichfield and Eccleshall. This caused a bit of head scratching as our events are our key way of advertising the group to new members and making sure that we pass on plants to gardeners in line with our charitable aims.

April rolled around and we were delighted that the Sandon Fair was to go ahead and we attended with such pleasure. We started to plan ahead for the August Sandon Fair and decided that it would be worth attending Rode Hall Fair for the first time. As it turned out both events had good weather, good attendance and were very enjoyable for the members. A nice surplus was made for the group also.



With the May Annual Sale cancelled we thought we would have enough plants to try our hand at Stafford Farmers Market. This has been in our sights for a while as a good place geographically to raise awareness of our group and the pitch price is not expensive and so off we went. The first Stafford Farmers Market was early May with very poor weather and we were moved inside the market hall. Customers were few due to the weather but we sold enough to cover the Group costs. We decided that yes, we would come back in June.

The June Farmers Market was a lovely event with brisk business and sunshine, and the Group made a very respectable surplus. It was looking as if we would be able to continue attending! We were in the groove and the markets in July, August and September just got busier and each time the Group made a surplus as well as chatting away to many local people about our group.

For some years we have chatted in committee about attending the Staffordshire County Show. Always before we had worried there wouldn't be enough plants to do this two day event but maybe this year, with the show in August, we would?

We decided to have a go and plans were laid. The Staffordshire County Show arrived and there were still plenty of plants (thank goodness). We were blessed with fine weather and we had plants supplied by 13 members. Business was steady and we really enjoyed chatting to one another and to people about the Hardy Plant Society. The group again made a surplus and we thought this was the event where we had the most interest shown by the public. As I write this we just have the last few Farmers Markets of the year to attend. The group has made an amazing surplus at every event (£1,200 in total so far) and also we have really enjoyed working together, talking to gardeners, and expanding our plant knowledge. 2021 really has been the year of plant sales!

### **At Stafford Farmers Market in October!**





## **About your HPS Staffs Group Subscription** (by Ruth Plant)

Our subscription year runs from January to December each year and we start collecting your New Year subs from October, with renewal requests arriving with you around now. To be a member of our Group you also need to be a National Member. If you wish you can pay your national and local subscription together at the same time to us, and we will pass on your national payment for you. Just ask when you pay your local subs.

There are a number of ways you can pay your subscriptions, and I thought that it would be a good idea to run through them with you.

**On Line Bank Payment** – You can pay direct into the Staffs HPS Bank Account. This is the easiest for us at the Group. Just pay using the bank details in the Useful Information Section below and remember to quote the member surname or I won't know who has paid us!

**Standing Order** - you can set up a standing order either on line, or through your bank. You will find a standing order form on the Group website [www.staffshps.webador.co.uk](http://www.staffshps.webador.co.uk) and one for national subscription on [www.hardy-plant.org.uk/docs/joinus/standing-order-form-2022.pdf](http://www.hardy-plant.org.uk/docs/joinus/standing-order-form-2022.pdf)

**Cheque** – if you still have Cheques you can still pay this way, either at the door or send to the Treasurer in the post. At this time our bank does not charge us for paying in cheques but we can see that this is currently changing with some other banks.

**Cash** – We are happy to still take cash at the door but do remember this causes a bit of a queue! The exact amount in change is helpful!

**Card** – This is a new facility for our group. You can pay your membership using a debit/credit card or even Googlepay but **we do need to pass on to you the 1.75% transaction charge.**

### **Useful Information**

Hardy Plant Society Staffs Group Subscriptions **Single £9 & Joint £18. Hardy Plant Society Staffs Group** National Westminster sort code 010832 Account number 14777827. Please quote member name as the reference.

Hardy Plant Society National Subscriptions **Single £17 & Joint £19 for two at the same address.**

**Local Group Standing Order Form** is on our website [staffshps.webador.co.uk](http://staffshps.webador.co.uk) or can be posted or emailed to you.

**National HPS Standing Order Form** can be found at [www.hardy-plant.org.uk/docs/joinus/standing-order-form-2022.pdf](http://www.hardy-plant.org.uk/docs/joinus/standing-order-form-2022.pdf)

If you pay by card the 1.75% transaction charge makes a single local membership £9.16 and a joint £18.32. The same applies if you are **paying us** this way for your National membership, a single becomes £17.30 and a Joint £19.33.

Any queries please contact Ruth 07591 886925 or email [pottyplantz@aol.com](mailto:pottyplantz@aol.com)

## Our Conservation Group and *Astilbe* 'Sheila Haxton' — (by Clive Plant)

Our Staffordshire Group currently has a membership of 26 propagators, who have 'adopted' a selection of plants from the National Conservation Scheme. The aim being to grow these plants on to a size whereby the plant can provide vegetative cuttings. It is important that all plants in the scheme are propagated by vegetative means to ensure that the correct identity is maintained.

Depending on the plant this could take a year or two.

These plants appear on the National Conservation Scheme list, mainly because they are plants that have fewer than **four** entries in the Plant Finder Book, and indeed may not in the Plant Finder at all.

So many of our HPS Groups around the country have members who are part of the National Conservation Scheme. We look after and help to preserve the plants that are not always available within the nursery trade because they may not be easily propagated or can take time to bulk up. If we can keep them surviving then the future is very bright for some very nice plants that are still worthy of a place in our gardens. There are currently 55 plants on the Conservation List, all in need of adopting to preserve their future.

If you feel like giving Conservation a go, then just contact me, Clive e-mail:

[pottyplantz@aol.com](mailto:pottyplantz@aol.com)



*Astil-*  
*Hax-*  
*ton'* (*chinensis*). A Conservation Scheme Plant.

*be* 'Sheila

This plant was introduced in 2002 by person(s) unknown. It has been included from a selection of a more compact long-flowering plant by Adrian Bloom, named for his wife, Rosemary (previously A. Rosemary Bloom).

It is a clump-forming herbaceous perennial, 30cm x30cms and has loose panicles of pink flowers, with dense, fern-like, dark green leaves with red tints at it's edges.

Flowers July-August time in full or part shade.

Slow growing but very hardy. Likes any moisture-retentive soil and may be affected by powdery mildew in dry weather.

**Propagation:** Can be divided from an established clump.



**These two Chrysanthemums are also in the Conservation Scheme and growing in Yew Tree Cottage Garden. Above: Chrysanthemum 'Picasso' and on the right 'Romantica'**

## **Beth Chatto Symposium on Ecological Planting: HPS Kenneth Black Bursary Report 2019** (by Sophie Walwin)

*Sophie Walwin, in her final year at Kew working to gain a Diploma in Horticulture, attend the Beth Chatto Symposium in August 2018, where she was inspired by talks from Olivier Filippi, Midori Shintani, Peter Korn and Keith Wiley.*

The Beth Chatto Symposium: Ecological Planting in the 21st Century, took place on 30-31 August 2018 at the University of Essex, Colchester. This event might be seen in years to come as the moment a new phase in the ‘New Perennial’ movement began, heralding in the ‘Ecological Planting’ era. Beth Chatto died a few months before the symposium, which was devised to celebrate her work and garden in her 95th year, however her legacy will endure, as was made clear over the twoday series of lectures and discussions. The idea for the symposium was conceived by Amy Sanderson, a Canadian gardener and florist who has spent some time working at the Beth Chatto Gardens in recent years, and was organised by Amy, Garden and Nursery Director, Dave Ward and Head Gardener, Åsa Gregers-Warg. 500 people from 26 countries were present for this seminal event and there was definitely an air of excitement throughout. It was an international line-up of speakers; gardeners, designers, nursery-people and academics presenting their ideas and philosophies, including names you would expect like James Hitchmough, Dan Pearson and Cassian Schmidt and others that were less well-known but equally relevant.

The visit to the Beth Chatto Gardens on the first evening of the event was very special. It was a well-organised affair with lots of fantastic food and drink, enabling new and old connections and the chance to explore the gardens and consider Chatto’s work and life. In the learning centre, the team had set up a public archive of writings and books to peruse, with the chance to add thoughts and thanks to an open book. I have been inspired to carry out further research into the main proponents of this way of thinking about and the aesthetics of ecological planting. I will endeavour to create gardens following the guiding principles of this way of gardening, considering various practitioner’s ideas and methods, and eventually developing my own.

During one of the panel discussions, Filippi and Korn agreed that the horticultural skills necessary to maintain ‘ecological plantings’ are lacking in our industry which was an interesting perspective. These comments have made me consider my skills as a horticulturist and how I could improve them and my understanding of maintenance of naturalistic designs in a sustainable and efficient way. I believe that studying plants in the wild will deepen my knowledge of how plants interact with their environment and the conditions they tolerate. I aim to visit Andalucía in southern Spain this year to research the plant communities there, such as maquis and garigue, to gather ideas and inspiration. This is based on the suggestion by Filippi, to look towards the Mediterranean landscape to develop our gardens in Britain.

For the entire PDF please see the HPS main website:  
<https://www.hardy-plant.org.uk/docs/bursaries/sophie-walwin-beth-chatto.pdf>

At Beth Chatto’s ‘Dry Garden’ with some of the delegates of the Symposium.





## Remembering Yvonne Branson (by Fiona Horwath)

Many of our members will recall Yvonne warmly, and have their own personal memories.

She was often to be found in the kitchen at monthly meetings, preparing and serving tea and coffee! I was fortunate to count her as a friend for several years, and we shared not only a love of gardening but also of the arts in general, being members together of The Arts Society Stafford.

She was a consummate gardener, not only happy with her hands in the soil, but also possessing enviable artistic skill.

Yvonne was a talented painter, often choosing botanical subjects, and her 'painting shed' in the garden at Coley Cottage was adorned with some of the exquisite results.

As is so often the case, I learned a great deal about Yvonne's life from the eulogy at her funeral. This was given by her daughter Corinne, who has kindly allowed me to share some of it with you all.

Yvonne was born in 1931 in Carrington, Manchester and was adopted as a baby. Her grandparents lived in Salford and owned a wallpaper factory, close to the Manchester Ship Canal. Yvonne could recall as a child seeing huge ocean-going vessels moving along the canal as if they were travelling through the fields! Her girlhood and teenage years were spent in Shrewsbury, following which she pursued a career in radiography, notching up 40 years with the NHS. She lived in Lichfield for 20 years, moving to Coley Cottage, Little Haywood in the late 1990s after the death of her husband, Tony.

Memories of Yvonne's beautiful garden on Coley Lane will still be fresh for many of us - she created it from scratch as a labour of love, and opened for the NGS and as part of the Haywoods' support group for Katharine House Hospice. Yvonne also volunteered for many years at the Dorothy Clive Garden, served as Chairman and President of the Friends there, and is much missed.

Even when she became ill in 2019, Yvonne was not one to take things lying down! Following a period in hospital she moved to The Spires Residential Home in Lichfield, and true to form she was soon teaching the residents the arts of flower arranging and painting, and instructing the young gardener there on plants for shade and other matters horticultural. Yvonne had hoped to move to an assisted living flat in Stafford, but sadly passed away in March this year.

Yvonne Branson: mentor, great gardener, lovely friend 2/9/31 - 17/3/21



**Yvonne and 2 pictures below taken in her garden**



## Biddulph Grange Garden

(with information from Wikipedia and Biddulph's leaflet)

This garden has always fascinated me with the fun and fantasy layout, making you believe to be in different countries and civilisations! And, luckily it is just on our doorstep in North Staffordshire! It is good to visit any time of the year as it has brilliant architecture as well as interesting plant collections. Best though is probably spring with the emerging young foliage as well as autumn with the turning of the colours!

From: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biddulph\\_Grange](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biddulph_Grange)

The gardens are a rare survival of the interim period between the Capability Brown landscape garden and the High Victorian style. The gardens are compartmentalised and divided into themes: Egypt, China, etc.

"Behind a gloomy Victorian shrubbery there's a gloomy Victorian mansion, but behind that lurks one of the most extraordinary gardens in Britain...it contains whole continents, including China and Ancient Egypt – not to mention Italian terraces and a Scottish glen."

The "rhododendrons and azaleas are spectacular in late spring, but the pinetum and the evergreen topiary provide year-round interest. It's a fantastic garden for children, with its tunnels and rockeries, and there is a children's quiz trail."

The true brilliance of Biddulph Grange "lies in the way that Cooke and Bateman hid the different areas of the garden from each other, using heaps of rocks and thickly planted shrubberies. The design locks together as tightly as a jigsaw or a cross-section of the brain." It contains "a series of Italianate terraces, connected by steps and enclosing small flower gardens' at the bottom, long, buttressed hedges enclose a dahlia walk," In the Egyptian part of the garden, "Two sphinxes guard the mastaba-like entrance to a tunnel, whose darkness is an invitation to explore. Deep inside is a bloody chamber (lit by a hidden window of red-coloured glass) in which squats the half-spooky, half-comic figure of the Ape of Thoth."

In 1840 James and Maria Bateman moved to what was then a farm and grounds which were for the most part swampy fields. Bateman was a botanist of considerable note and he was at one time vice-president of the RHS. His great love was orchids and he wrote and published 'Orchidaceae of Mexico and Guatemala' which established him as a botanist of note.

His wife Maria came from a leading Cheshire family, the Egerton-Warburtons, with a tradition of creative gardening and her brother was the creator of the garden at Arley Hall. Maria's interest was in herbaceous plants, particularly fuchsias and lilies.

Together with Edward Cooke who was an architect and maritime painter, the Batemans created Biddulph Grange Garden and the architectural features of the garden were probably the work of Cooke. Each area of the garden has its own microclimate formed by the use of trees as screens and rockwork to protect plants.

The National Trust acquired the garden in 1988 and it was opened to the public following restoration on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1991. Throughout, there are several Coalbrookdale seats, each with a different design and although they are not original, they are Victorian and well worth a look.



Near house  
Fuchsia 'Snowcap' showing off! (by Matt Summers)

the  
with





## Colour in Ruth and Clive's 'Yew Tree Cottage Garden'



*Strobilanthes atropurpurea* here together with *Anemone japonica* cv.

The unusual, exotic flowers of **Large-stalked Toad Lily** or *Tricyrtis macropoda*.







*Chrysanthemum*  
'Cottage Garden Apricot'

*Veronica longifolia*  
'Marietta'



*Morina longifolia*  
or Long-leaved



whorlflower

## **Herbaceous Perennials in Public Displays.**

A Study Tour to Germany and the Netherlands: A much edited Kenneth Black Bursary Report 2017 (by Lucy Bell and Maija Ross)

This is just a taster of a 30 page, beautifully illustrated report. Only one garden in each country will be highlighted in our newsletter. You can find the entire report with this link:

<https://www.hardy-plant.org.uk/docs/bursaries/lucy-bell-maija-ross.pdf>

We set out, on this study tour, to visit gardens and green spaces in Germany and the Netherlands, to research the maintenance and design of herbaceous perennial public displays for the purpose of informing us in our work on the Broad Walk Borders at Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

These gardens are in the temperate region with comparable weather to the UK using similar species of herbaceous perennials found in the Broad Walk at Kew. We sought to meet experts with experience of designing, developing and maintaining large scale herbaceous plantings and observe new and innovative approaches which we could apply to the Broad Walk borders.

### **Aims:**

- To observe working practices relating to the maintenance of large scale herbaceous displays.
- To expand knowledge of a wide range of herbaceous perennials used in herbaceous borders and how to care for them.
- To gain knowledge of innovative ideas in maintenance, plant combinations and design.
- To build relationships with gardens in Germany and the Netherlands in a professional capacity.
- To produce a good photographic record to support findings of this project.

### **Objectives:**

- To observe and record approaches to successful management of staking, maintenance, irrigation, pests and diseases, plant choices and combinations in large scale herbaceous plantings.
- To visit Hermannshof, Westpark, Weihenstephen in Germany and Hummelo, Jac.P. Thyse and De Braak parks and Mien Ruys in the Netherlands, all of which contain plantings and employ approaches to maintenance and development of great interest and usefulness to the applicants in relation to Kew's Broad Walk Borders.
- To talk with horticulturists in these gardens, observe and record new and innovative ideas in the care, development and design of herbaceous plantings and how to apply them to the Broad Walk borders.
- To discuss with horticultural staff at the gardens visited, methods of keeping records of performance, longevity, plant combinations and maintenance issues.
- To research how the displays are managed to achieve maximum seasonal interest. To establish and build on links between RBG Kew and other centres of horticultural excellence which have a specific expertise in herbaceous perennials.

To observe and record approaches to interpretation and management of the relationship with the public at the gardens visited.

To write a report on the project including photographs.

## **A garden in Germany:**

Hermannshof is a demonstration and trials garden, on the site of a former private family house and garden, showcasing plants from temperate areas in habitat-based groupings founded between 1981- 1983.

There are more than 2,500 species and cultivars of herbaceous plants, 400 species of trees and shrubs across an area of 5.7 acres. There has been a park in this location for over 200 years so there are also examples of mature trees on the site.

The garden is overseen by the Director Cassian Schmidt and maintained by a small team including Ulli Battmer the Head Gardener. We were very fortunate to meet Cassian, Ulli and another member of the gardening team and given a lengthy tour around the garden.

We saw some of our favourite species of plants, many north American prairie plants, that are so spectacular in early autumn such as *Helenium* 'Rubinzweg', *Heliopsis* 'Summer Nights' and *Rudbeckia nitida* 'Herbstsonne', an unusual cultivar we had not seen before.

The ecological and geographic groupings of plants in the gardens are grouped in eight main habitats including dry steppe, North American prairie, water margin and woodland margin. These areas contain plants that have been observed in the wild and then applied in a design, but do not slavishly try to recreate the wild environment. How plants interact in the wild gives the gardener and designer a wealth of information to create attractive public designs.

### **In a well functioning ecological grouping of plants no one plant outcompetes the other.**

As at Weihenstephan we were really impressed with the under tree planting. There are no obvious bare spaces and in one area of the woodland garden there was a trial of three different planting schemes that were being demonstrated, each containing approximately 12 different species. The interpretation board explained that the Federation of Perennial Gardeners had chosen the plants and it was planted in 2010.

The Federation also produce many leaflets with planting combinations for traditionally difficult areas. Cassian gave us some of these of which 'Schattenzauber', or shade magic, is for light shade and woodland edge. The leaflet explains the concept behind the plant choices: the aim is to create a self-regulating system where perennials are distributed randomly and a planting plan is not required. Only the percentages of plants, for instance ground cover, are stipulated and the public can choose their own combinations within these parameters. Learning about how the gardens were maintained was of huge interest to us.

## A Dutch Garden:

Dedemsvaart, the Netherlands. The area has a similar climate to the UK, classed as maritime temperate, and has little variation throughout the country also owing to the fact that it has a flat landscape.

Mien Ruys was the daughter of a nurseryman, Bonne Ruys, who ran a nursery known for perennials and new exciting cultivars that he created. The nursery was called Moerheim which translates as 'the house on peat'.

Her father saw early on Mien's talent for putting plants together and gave her areas of surrounding land to develop as she wanted to experiment with design and the planting of perennials together. There were virtually no publications or written horticultural advice in Holland at the time.

She eventually set up a design bureau in Amsterdam where she established her business, but she always kept her connection with Dedemsvaart where she continued to experiment and design new gardens. Mien Ruys created 30 gardens over approximately 15 acres of land. As well as showing the evolution of her style it also shows garden history over 90 years and is special for this reason and nine of the gardens have been designated National Monuments. She was hugely influential to the luminaries of the Dutch new perennials style such as Piet Oudolf. A garden designer all her life she also wrote a number of books.

It was another erratic weather day when we visited and early into the tour, given by British native Christine Bruinsma-Spiller, we were presented with a torrential downpour and luckily also umbrellas. Christine led us through the 30 gardens chronologically giving a detailed and engaging description of each.

The Wilderness garden created in 1924 was her first experiment and highlights an enduring style; hard landscaping and straight lines contrasted against the wild growth of the plants. The plant choices became as important to her as the landscaping. A damp and shady area she inevitably made mistakes and this lesson taught her the importance of soil type as well as light and the important mantra '**right plant, right place**'.

The peat soil favoured acidic loving plants rather than the chalky loving ones she had chosen such as *Acquilegia* spp. and *Dicentra* spp. This garden eventually needed little maintenance but when trees were uprooted in a storm later on flooding the area with light which changed the dynamic, a new balance between the plants was needed.

Christine talked us through the standard perennial borders which were designed in the 1960s with the concept of ready made or 'off the peg' gardens. Mien wanted to design a series of gardens for specific conditions such as shady and sunny areas and for different soil types. She would design a palate of plants in different colour schemes that people could then re-create for themselves.

The idea of a menu of plants seems to be a recurrent theme particularly in Germany where seed and planting menus have been made available to the public so they know exactly which combination of plants will be suitable for particular conditions. She also considered the maintenance needs of each plan and chose groupings that would need minimal maintenance or at least would be easy for the average person to carry out. The nursery would sell the gardens which would then be delivered to the customer with planting and maintenance instructions included. Clipped hedges, flowering shrubs and a greater use of herbaceous perennials was her style.

It was in the perennial borders that Mien Ruys used railway sleepers as bed edges, this trend subsequently becoming extremely popular and ubiquitous with European garden designers. Christine said she became known as ‘sleeper Mien’. She also innovated the use of washed gravel paving stones in her designs. She would always leave gaps in between all paving to encourage the growth of moss and grass. She liked to integrate hard landscaping with surrounding lawn which is beautifully illustrated in the area leading to the Garden of squares.

Mien Ruys died in 1999 at the age of 94. Between 2004 -2014 nine gardens were declared national monuments. Some of these gardens remain unchanged to act as historical examples of garden design styles. In the spirit of experimentation that Mien Ruys was famous for, since 2010 new gardens have been developed including the *He-lenium* border and the Autumn border, which show how to extend the season with late flowering plants and autumn colours and shapes such as Aster spp. and grasses.

It was fascinating to see the transition not only of Mien Ruys personal style but also garden design through time with her innovative use of hard landscaping and plant choices. We ended the tour, with umbrellas down, in the herb garden. A small area with a formal feel. There are areas of low clipped decorative hedges of *Buxus sempervirens* and soft edged Box spirals.

### **An early example of a Prairie Border; Mien Ruys style!**





# My dream for an Ethnobotanical Garden

(by Yoke van der Meer)

Several of you may already know my love for weeds or native plants I like to call them! It is just a plant in the wrong place they say. But I say that is not correct as the weed grows in the best place for itself. Well: it often flourishes there! While some expensive, ornamental herbaceous perennial might just die where it has been most carefully planted!

But, of course I know exactly what is meant as it is in the wrong place for 'us'! I love all plants as they do have my respect for all the work they do to make this earth work. It is good to start with the humble weeds or native trees and shrubs and wild flowers though as anybody can always find them nearby and in the most unexpected places.

The dream for an Ethnobotanical Garden began in 2004 when I went for the first time to Mexico in order to see their native plants in the wild. The main reason for going was to study the salvias for the National Collection of New World Salvias which we held at Rodbaston College, near Penkridge. Our guide on the trip showed us round the southern State of Oaxaca mainly which is a highly bio- diverse state as it combines plants from South & Central America as well as the more dessert like plants from the Northern site.

He also brought us to the Ethnobotanical Gardens of Oaxaca.

*'Jardín Etnobotánico de Oaxaca' is a botanical garden in the old Oaxaca-City, Mexico. It occupies 2.32 acres of land adjacent to the Church of Santo Domingo. It is administered by the state government of Oaxaca. (Wikipedia).*

This is a beautiful architectural designed garden where all the main plants are useful to the citizens in one way or the other.

Many large plants have been rescued in the wild due to building new roads, etc.

It is a bit like rescuing plants for our new HSL; which sadly won't happen!

**Cacti and 'useful' trees of Oaxaca: short and tall in an**

**aesthetic pleasing setting!**



***Ethno*-botany (from *ethnology*, study of culture, and botany, study of plants) is the scientific study of the relationships that exist between people and plants.**

In 2008, with my last visit to Mexico I volunteered for 2 months at the Ethnobotanic Garden, in order to help them with propagation of some of their endangered plants as well as for myself to learn more about this idea and study the salvias of the state. At the end of my stay I gave a presentation all about the useful salvias in Mexico of which Oaxaca got several including the nutritious Chia or *Salvia hispanica*. *Salvia cinnabarina*, which we met frequently during my 3 visits, in Oaxaca is used for the treatment of colic and rheumatism in the neighbouring state of Chiapas and *Salvia divinorum* ((Latin for ‘sage of the diviners) has become a popular ‘recreational drug’ in western culture. This plant has transient psychoactive properties when its leaves are consumed by chewing, smoking, or as a tea.

The leaves contain opioid-like compounds that induce hallucinations. Its native habitat is cloud forest in the isolated Sierra Mazateca of Oaxaca, Mazatec shamans have a long and continuous tradition of religious use of *Salvia divinorum* to facilitate visionary states of consciousness during spiritual healing sessions.

All the plants at the Jardin Etnobotanico are beautifully grown and displayed and visitors to the gardens can be guided by well trained guides in several languages to tell them about their uses and stories in Oaxacan culture.

No scientific labels or interpretation are given as the Director thinks it spoils the look of the garden so it is difficult to find out about their uses unless you are told or have witnessed it for yourself, such as for example the Agave, which makes the famous Tequila –like alcoholic drink called Mezcal.

We visited a small producer of Mezcal on our second trip to the state of Oaxaca in 2006.

So when I came back from my ‘sabbatical’ to California and Oaxaca in 2008 I started to look into the concept of Ethnobotanic gardens and if there were any similar ones in our western world or even in Britain. Well, as you may know there are Physic gardens, of which Chelsea Physic Garden in London is the best known and The National Botanic Garden of Wales has an exhibit based around apothecaries of Wales. There is one ethnobotanic garden apparently at the University of Kent too, but these grow useful plants originating from all parts in the world and not just native ones.

All the information can be found in books or online of course but I think it would be so nice to highlight the uses of our native plants in a garden so people can learn about those and appreciate them.

As starting a real Ethnobotanical Garden somewhere is going to be difficult I started to write a blog since 2018 and went through the main, 'New' Flora of the British Isles by Clive Stace, to list all native plant families and individual species. From these I write about all those plants which have some sort of use for us 'humans'. It is a huge task, as you can imagine but it is very enjoyable to learn about them, through various websites I find and books I have.

Some examples of our 'weeds' and a few of their uses (most weeds have many uses)

**Dandelion:** medicinal and tonic as a salad leaf early in the year or later of plants grown in the shade as these are less hard and bitter! It is the bitter substance, which is lacking in western diets, that is the health benefit! The roots can be made into coffee and the flowers can be eaten as 'fritters'.

**Nettle:** The obvious use due to its high nutrient contents is to eat the young tips as a spring tonic. I use them fresh, chopped up into a large mug with added hot water and stock (granular Swiss Vegetable Bouillon from Mari Gold-health foods). It can also be made into a hearty, earthy (!) soup, adding onion, potato & cream for example. The less obvious use for nettle is as a strong fibre! My friend Sally has made string and even clothes can be made of nettle!

### Dandelion fritters and Nettle jeans!



**Common Club-rush** (*Schoenoplectus lacustris*): Can be made into baskets and were traditionally used for seating and chair-backs as well as mats!



basket made by friend Sally



Small

Chair & Stool made with Club-rush

**Field Horsetail** (*Equisetum arvense*)

The plant contains several substances that can be used medicinally. It strengthens fingernails. The stem contains 10% silica and is used for polishing pewter and wood (gaining the name pewterwort)

**Weld and Dyer's Rocket** (*Reseda luteola*): The plant is rich in luteolin, which produces a bright yellow



dye.



## Leiden Botanical Garden or '*Hortus Botanicus*' of Leiden

(Edited by Yoke from [https://www.gardenvisit.com/gardens/leiden\\_botanical\\_garden](https://www.gardenvisit.com/gardens/leiden_botanical_garden) pictures by Albert Wijnkoop)

With my recent family visit to 'Holland' we visited the Botanical gardens in Leiden. It wasn't my first time as I've visited several times before. It is an interesting historic garden and Leiden is a beautiful old town to visit! Below a 'borrowed' account of what you may see:

### Head Gardener's Comment

The Hortus Botanicus is the oldest botanical garden in the Netherlands and located in the historical centre of Leiden. Behind the academy building of the University of Leiden you will discover a green oasis with a large collection of plants native to South-east and East Asia, Southern Europe and South Africa. The Hortus is a haven within the city centre, a historical monument and a meeting place full of character. People come here to relax, enjoy the seasons or to learn more about the diversity of plants.

### History

In 1590 the Hortus was founded by the University of Leiden. In 1594 Carolus Clusius (1526 - 1609) turned it into a medicinal herb garden. Clusius introduced the tulip and many other plants to the Hortus. These flowers and plants became then known throughout Western Europe.

### A living museum

There are more than ten thousand botanical species growing and dozens of bird species living in the Hortus. For more than four centuries and to this day plants from all corners of the world are collected and cultivated in the garden and greenhouses for research, education and exhibition purposes.

The current Front Garden is the oldest part of the Hortus. It was founded in 1590 and houses the Clusius garden which is a reconstruction of the garden of 1594. The Hortus also has a monumental Orangery dating from 1744 and extensive tropical greenhouses, many old trees, a beautiful Fern Garden, Rosarium, Japanese Garden, Herb Garden, Nut Field and Systematic bed Garden.

Many famous international scientists such as Clusius, Boerhaave, Linnaeus and Einstein were connected to the Hortus Botanicus in Leiden. In the 19th century the German physician Philipp Franz von Siebold (1796 - 1866) brought hundreds of plant species with him from Japan to the Netherlands and 15 of these original introductions can still be found in the Hortus today.



## Research and education

The Hortus Botanicus in Leiden has always been a garden where students come to study plants. Scientists of the Hortus are cooperating with NCB Naturalis (Netherlands Centre for Biodiversity Naturalis) to write research on plant species. The Hortus also plays an important role in the cultivation and preservation of endangered species. Dutch and foreign botanical gardens are cooperating and exchanging material in order to preserve these threatened species.

## Plants of note

Carnivorous plants, orchids, *Ginkgo biloba*, *Amorphophallus titanum*, *Victoria amazonica* etc.



In one of the several Tropi-

cal houses is *Victoria amazonica*



## The Garden of England (by Bernie Norbury)

Many of us have taken to walking the streets during our sequence of lockdowns. It's been wonderful to watch the changes in other gardens as well as our own. Some of you may be fortuitous in having access to more open countryside, or even a canal, for your daily sojourn.

My family has been lucky enough to take to the water, appreciating the scenery from a narrowboat rather than the towpath. With no school commitments, we were able to be aboard throughout June this year.

Just as in a garden, the flora was very different from the species we see in August. We marvelled at the flag iris and the thousands of buttercups spanning field after field earlier in the month. Some fields were filled with poppies, an unusual thing to be thankful for HS2. Flowering stonecrops smothered old ruins. A field of flax spectacularly matched the sky later in the month.



Two plants were particular delights.

A tall plant with insignificant flowers was buzzing with a multitude of bees later identified as water figwort or *Scrophularia auriculata*. (picture left)

The second, with unmistakably orchid flowers, the early flowering orchid or *Orchis mascula* (picture page 29) was found beside several of the locks along our route to Oxford.

How long is it since you wandered along a towpath? Better still, book onto one of the many trip boats for an enjoyable cruise and the opportunity of seeing plants from a different perspective

# Speakers for December 2021 until April 2022

(by Carol Galley)

December 10th: Advolly Richmond 'Percy Throver: 'A Man For all Seasons.'

January 21st 2022: Samantha Hopes '*Roscoea*: A Guide to the Genus and its Cultivation.'

February 18th: Alan & Jill Whitehead 'Fish and Chatto – Garden Heroes'.

March 18th: Duncan Coombs: Flowers of the Steppes of Central Asia.

April 8th: (note the early date due to Easter) Razvan Chisu; Confessions of a Plantaholic, Plants I Wouldn't be without.



or early flower-

*Orchis mascula*  
ing orchid



# Interesting plants in John's Garden on 6th November!



*Carex oshiemensis* 'Everest' with  
*Cornus* 'Kesselringi':  
*Cornus* 'Anny's Winter Orange' +  
*Hesperantha* 'Mollie Gould'



Ser-

*ratula tinctoria* subsp. *seoanei* &  
*Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola' below  
 Compact *Ginkgo biloba* 'Blagon' on right.



John loves all plants and conifers  
 too!

## Staffs. Group 2021/2022 Picture Competition (by Clive Plant)

The Autumn reminder that the 2021 Picture Competition closes at the end of the year, December 31<sup>st</sup>. It's a good idea then, to sit down with your computer and sift through those snapshots you took during the year. It is usual from the past competitions that most of the entries land on my desk during December. In fact Christmas week seems to be the week to sort those 'winners' out! Just don't leave it too close to the deadline as the pictures are quickly sorted and passed to our judge.

There are **three** categories for Members to enter into:

- A Garden Landscape
- Flower Portrait
- Wildlife in the Garden

There will be prizes in each category.

Don't forget you can only submit **one** picture in each category...so send your pictures to me, Clive...at **Pottyplantz@aol.com**

The results will be announced in February 2022 at our usual Friday meeting, or by e-mail. Not forgetting that your pictures are used in next year's group publicity.





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