



# NORTHERN Leaves

Issue No. 54

November 2024

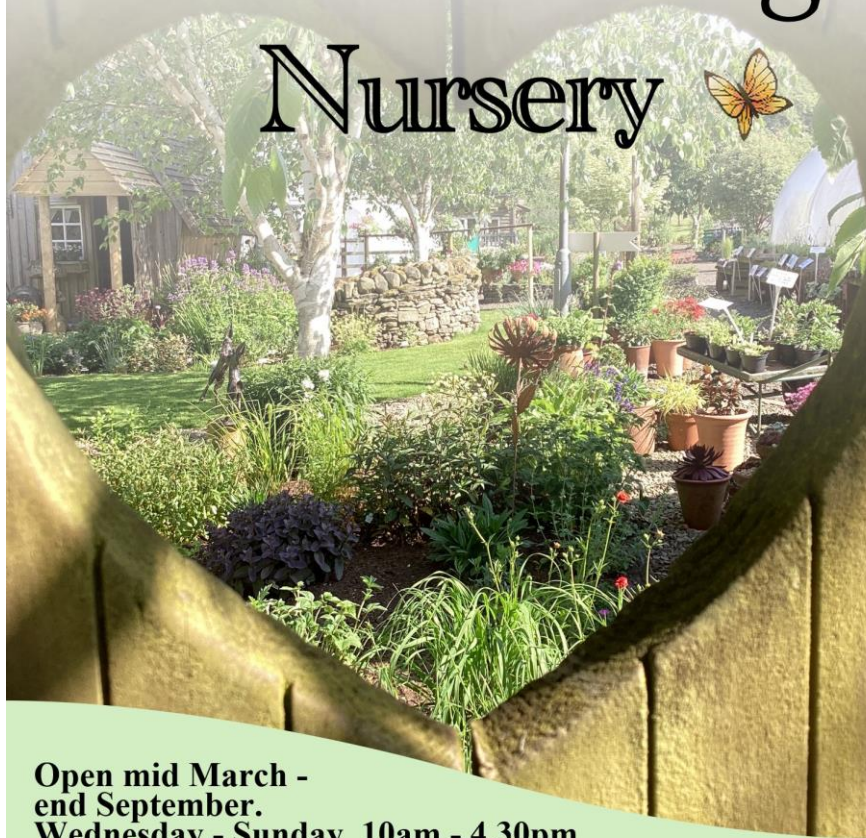
**The Newsletter of the Hardy Plant Society  
Scottish and Northern Borders Group**

[www.hardy-plant.org.uk](http://www.hardy-plant.org.uk)

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## The Hardy Plant Society

**The Hardy Plant Society** was formed to foster interest in hardy herbaceous plants. It aims to give its members information about the wealth of both familiar and less well known plants and to ensure that all garden-worthy perennial plants remain in cultivation and have the widest possible distribution.

**HPS website: [www.hardy-plant.org.uk](http://www.hardy-plant.org.uk)**

**The Scottish and Northern Borders Group** has members all over Scotland and several in the north of England. The group organises garden visits in spring, summer and autumn, with lecture days in the winter, arranged at a variety of locations throughout Scotland. The group produces a magazine *Northern Leaves* in spring and autumn.

**website: [www.scothps.co.uk](http://www.scothps.co.uk)**

The next issue of *Northern Leaves* will be published in May 2025, please send any articles to be included in this issue to **Chris Sanders**, 3 Queen Street, Helensburgh, G84 9QH  
Tel. 01436 678028 e-mail: [chrislinda298@gmail.com](mailto:chrislinda298@gmail.com)

**It would be appreciated if members could set up standing orders or direct debits to pay their annual subscription promptly.**

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We are grateful for the financial support of our advertisers and ask members to mention *Northern Leaves* when replying to advertisers by post or when visiting them to buy plants. Advertisers need to know that they are getting value for money from advertising in *Northern Leaves*.

### **Photographs on the covers**

Front Cover: Sedums and Crocosmia at Tweedhill

*Brenda White*

Back Cover: Korean Fir at Barochreal

*Helen Ostrycharz*

## **From the Convenor**

This is my first Convenor's report since taking over from Andrew Holmes and I would like to take this opportunity to thank Andrew from us all for everything he did for the Group when he was Convenor. I hope that he will be as involved as ever when not in New Zealand or cycling the length and breadth of Britain (and further for all I know). Perhaps when he has the time, we can get him to talk to us about growing lilies from seed!

It has certainly been a summer to remember. In the 'spring' it seemed as though it would never warm up or dry up and then, just when things were beginning to improve, it became very odd with awful days interspersed with lovely days but certainly no consistency and no settled spell of good weather. Most of our hardy plants did not seem to mind – the plants grew like weeds and the weeds grew like Superweeds.

Amazingly our programme of garden visits was unaffected and all went ahead as planned and it did not rain. We had a great tour to Yorkshire with a huge variety of gardens and although it was sometimes a bit cold, it only rained at night. We covered quite a lot of Scotland with two day trips to Argyll, Aberdeenshire and Berwickshire and single day visits to Stirlingshire, Fife, East Lothian and Edinburgh. As I write this, we still have our Perthshire autumn visit to go and I hope that the rain which is forecast does not put a damper on that. Many thanks to those who organised these visits – lovely gardens, faultless planning and a lot of cake – what more could we want?!

A small group has been overhauling our Constitution to make it more up to date, easier to work with and, it is to be hoped, reasonably future proof. The starting point was an amendment of the 2002 version which was carried out by Colin Cutler in 2021. Unfortunately this version did not make it 'onto the books' for a variety of reasons, including Covid and National HPS appearing to have mislaid it. The latest version has fortunately not been lost but has been agreed by National and will be circulated to members in the New Year for approval by the Group at the AGM.

The Group had made an offer to the National HPS to hold their AGM in 2026 but recently we felt it sensible to withdraw our offer as a suitable venue was proving difficult to find at a reasonable cost and the numbers of volunteers required was probably beyond our resources.

Some of you may have heard that Chris Sanders is soon to step down from the editorship of *Northern Leaves*. This is hardly surprising as he has been doing it for nine years with an attention to detail and a good humour which must have been tested often, especially with my hopeless timekeeping over reports! I am sure that you will join with me in thanking Chris for producing such a quality newsletter for all these years.

Obviously this change gives us an opportunity to take stock on the future of *Northern Leaves* and one or two other aspects of the running of the Group and this has led to the committee wanting to consult the membership. I have covered this in more detail in my next article elsewhere. I look forward to seeing you in person or online at our winter events and hope that we can get some of our autumn tasks completed before winter finally sets in.

*Hilary Bailey*



## Quercus Garden Plants

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## **Alistair Johnston**

I don't know exactly when Alistair and his wife Liz joined the Scottish and Northern Borders Group of the HPS, but I don't think he had been with the group for very long before being elected onto the committee, taking minutes, drumming up and managing advertising for *Northern Leaves*, as well as organising garden visits and being involved with some memorable plant sales. In fact, being willing to step up for pretty much anything which needed to be done.

He was, of course, especially, a hard working and able convenor.

Perhaps the highlight of Alistair's years as convenor was the organisation and running of the National Weekend, based in Dunblane in 2012. The hotel booking, catering, coaches and garden routes all ran like clockwork, and whilst the committee and many other members were much involved both in arrangements beforehand and at the event itself, Alistair was very much the leader and motivator. The event was very well attended and enjoyable, showing off the Group and the area to great advantage.

Alistair and Liz were great supporters of the annual Five Day Holiday, and Alistair could be relied upon to drive as many people as were willing out for a walk when dinner was over.

Some of my most pleasant memories of times spent on the committee are not only of Liz and Alistair's cosy home and various friendly dogs, but their very large and interesting garden, complete with enormous pond and attendant wildlife, but also the river running down one side. When I say running, after heavy rain, it was raging!

It was a shock to hear of Alistair's sudden death, but he was with family and Liz had support ready to hand.

We send our condolences to Liz and the family.

*Joan Gilchrist*

## Maggie Sharp

One of the great benefits of belonging to the HPS is the opportunity to meet wonderful, knowledgeable gardeners and when that is combined with a warm, fun filled personality then the benefits become enormous. Maggie Sharp was one of those people and I am so very thankful to have known her, sadly she died in August approaching her 94th birthday.

Maggie and her husband Jock were among the earliest members of the Scottish group of the HPS and her love of plants and enthusiasm shining out from the start. Very soon she was the go-to person when an unidentified plant turned up.

Their house at Ganavan near Oban sat on a level area halfway up a hill looking out to the Sound of Mull and Lismore. The views are spectacular and I always thought it must have taken great strength of character to garden (usually head down) when there was a view like that to distract you. They had a busy family life and the site was not an easy one. Difficulties to be overcome included the very steep slope down from the house, thin soil with bedrock coming up to the surface and, of course, the weather sweeping in from the uninterrupted views.

Nothing daunted, hedges were planted, compost made to enrich the soil and the planting tailored to fit the situation with woodland plants tucked in at the bottom of the slope and plants that would tolerate the wind and salt spray up nearer the house. I remember magnificent stands of *Cardiocrinum giganteum* and *Lilium nepalense* tucked in among rhododendrons and other trees and shrubs that Maggie thought would be fun to grow in the woodland. Up around the house large slightly tender hydrangeas, dieramas, and choice alpinas in stone troughs faced onto the sea with herbaceous borders in the more sheltered area behind the house. A burn ran down one side of the plot and the banks around it had swathes of candelabra primulas, lysichiton and gunneras.

Jock died a few years ago after a period of ill health and so Maggie could no longer manage to meetings but she loved to have garden visitors and talk plants. She was a member of the HPS, RHS, SRGC and would grow



many plants from seed from all of them. I used to call her my "gardening angel" and reckoned she could get a plank of wood to grow.

Latterly her own health started to fail and gardening was difficult but she invested in what was termed her cart (electric buggy) and went round the more level area of the garden on that, directing her daughter Jane. Left to her own devices she did manage to fall out the cart trying to reach a weed that was just too far away, but she thought this was hilarious even if it did leave her with a black eye.

Maggie had forgotten more about plants than I will ever know, but she never made you feel that and, with her encouragement, she inspired an even greater love for plants in me and many others in the HPS and made us more adventurous in what we would grow. Like most good gardeners she was incredibly generous with plants, cuttings and seed from her garden.



*Dahlia merckii*



*Codonopsis grey-wilsonii*

*Sheena MacGregor*

## Questionnaire

As you know, the task of the committee is to organise the activities of the Group for the benefit of the members. To try to ensure we are doing our best for the members, we have been looking at some trends within the Group and have asked ourselves whether we should go on as usual or consider changes which could benefit our members. What we have looked at include the fact that a third of members do not attend any garden visits or talks, which is a great pity.

Of course our Group's particular problems of a big geographical area and an increasing reluctance to travel long distances as we get older has a considerable impact.

There is also the question of *Northern Leaves* now that Chris Sanders is retiring as editor after the next edition. *Northern Leaves* is a beautifully presented newsletter but it comes at a considerable cost and several members have said that they do not read it.

If there is to be change, we need your thoughts and have drawn up a simple questionnaire with mostly Yes/No answers. A draft copy of this questionnaire is shown in this edition of *Northern Leaves* for you to have a look at. The actual questionnaire will be sent out in the next couple of weeks by email, or post for those without email.

If you would prefer just to jot down your thoughts, then please do so and if you would like to speak to a real person, then please ask Christina for my number, I would be delighted to hear from you!

Please, please help us with this so that we can be comfortable that we are doing everything we can for members to enjoy themselves and get as much as they can from their membership of the Group.

*Hilary Bayley*

# Questionnaire

## A) EVENTS

1. How many HPS-SNBG garden visits or meetings do you attend?

- a) None
- b) Less than 3 a year
- c) More than 3 a year

2. Would you attend more if (more than one option can be chosen)?

- a) Fewer garden visits on each outing ... YES/NO
- b) More car sharing ... YES/NO
- c) More indoor events ... YES/NO
- d) More on-line talks ... YES/NO
- e) More time to meet other members at events ... YES/NO
- f) Fewer overnight visits in a year ... YES/NO
- g) More gardens not otherwise open for visits ... YES/NO

## Comments/Suggestions

## B) *NORTHERN LEAVES*

3. How do you read *Northern Leaves*?

- a) Paper Form ... YES/NO
- b) Online ... YES/NO
- c) I don't read *Northern Leaves* in either format ... YES/NO

4. How interesting do you find content in *Northern Leaves*?

- a) Very interesting
- b) Interesting
- c) Not very interesting

5. How much extra would you pay to continue receiving a hard copy?

a) £10

d) £2.50

b) £7.50

e) Nothing

c) £5.00

6. Would you read illustrated articles about visits and events online if published on the HPS-SNBG website?

... YES/NO

7. Would you remain a member of the Scottish group if publication of *Northern Leaves* ceased?

... YES/NO

### **Comments/Suggestions**

## **C) NEWSLETTER**

8. If *Northern Leaves* publication ceased, would you like to receive a six monthly HPS-SNBG newsletter about forthcoming events in Scotland and Northern Borders area?

... YES/NO

9. Would you like to receive a six monthly HPS-SNBG newsletter drawing your attention to new items of interest on our group website?

... YES/NO

### **Comments/suggestions**

Many thanks for taking the trouble to complete this questionnaire.

## Cuttings from our Gardens

Has anyone else experienced an almighty influx of red lily beetles this year? I have and, as soon as I spotted them, I bought an organic spray which helpfully said to begin applying it before you see them.

I calculate I have killed over 60, the maximum haul in one session was 16. I kept up a regular patrol two or three times a day and, whilst visible on one or two varieties, their favourite lily seemed to be *Lilium pardalinum*. I told our Convenor I was going to write about them and she replied she wanted good news stories. Well the good news is the lilies have survived and are flowering and only one poor lily escaped my attention and was totally ruined.



*Marjorie Allen*



# VISIT TO OBAN AND ARGYLL

## 14th – 15th May 2024

### Barochreal

For our afternoon visit on Tuesday we travelled south of Oban to this varied garden in an amazing setting. We were warmly welcomed by owners Antoinette and Nigel Mitchell as well as Nigel's bees, who had decided to swarm into one of the outhouses in time for our visit. We were warned to stay clear just in case, but they kept themselves to themselves.



Antoinette told us about the history of the house and the land surrounding it. Whilst there had been people living on the site for a very long time and there had once been a 16 dwelling village there, the present house had been built in 1870 as a dwelling for the

chief shepherd for the Kilninver Estate. It had been altered and added to from time to time, most recently by Antoinette and Nigel.

Antoinette told the party that Barochreal meant 'the hill of the kings' and legend had it that the old kings of Argyll had been brought there on their way to burial on an island in the loch, passing between two lofty, rounded hills above and on the Oban side of the garden, and down to the loch side beach on the other side of the road.



Korean Fir

When they arrived, there was little in the way of a garden, and Antoinette and Nigel set to work in 2006, starting with the tiered garden. The lay-out of this large area was dictated by several immense boulders. These areas

had evolved into large beds of shrubs and perennial plants. They had originally been colour themed, but nature had of course had its way and this was not so distinct as it had been originally. Nature being wise in its ways, the effect was very pleasing and varied.

The formal rose garden, planted as a memorial garden for Antoinette's parents, followed. This was looking pretty when we visited, with under planting in flower, but of course it was a little early for the full display of roses to come.



While the alpine/rockery was developing at the northern perimeter, Nigel had been undertaking the formidable task of building/restoring stone walling and fencing – a mammoth task, but necessary to keep livestock in its place.

Views across to the water are really beautiful in this garden, and are framed, as you stand at the top looking downhill, by wide stone walled raised beds, vibrant with low growing planting.

After we had wandered round trying to assimilate everything to be seen, we went into the barn for a wonderful sit-down afternoon tea, with a lovely selection of bakery and a chance for a chat and time to look at development photographs on the walls. The bees formed a peaceful background hum to all the chat.

Time to head back to Oban, after thanks to Antoinette and Nigel who had made us so welcome.

*Joan Gilchrist  
Pictures by Helen Ostrycharz*

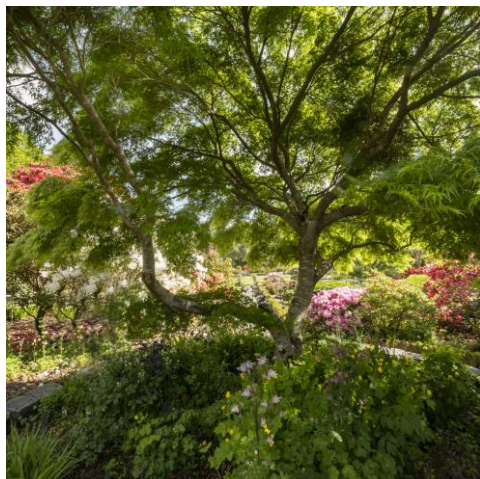
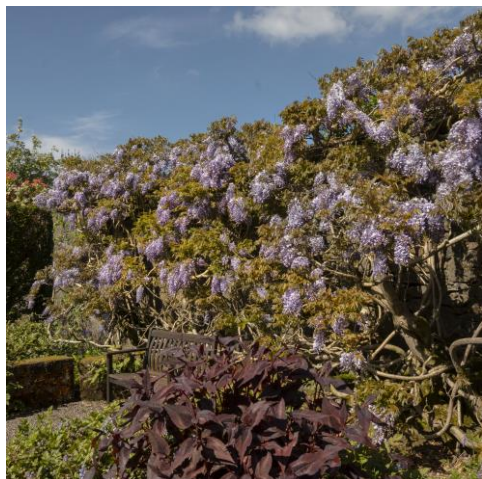
## Ardmaddy Castle

The garden at Ardmaddy was, for me, the highlight of a great two-day visit to the Oban area. We were shown around by the owner, Minette Struthers, who runs the large estate with her husband Charles. We had idyllic weather, and perfect timing to see the extensive rhododendron collection set amid a huge garden offering many horticultural delights.



The estate has changed hands countless times since its existence was first recorded as a medieval tower house in the 15th century. The previous owner was reputedly a keen and successful breeder of rhododendrons, but she died without successors in 1938. Rumour has it that her gardener removed 2000 potted specimens before the handover of the property. What happened to them is a mystery. Lost in the mists of World War II presumably.

However, the array of rhododendrons, trees, woodland plants and herbaceous borders was still an assault on the senses. The colour palette was intense, but my favourite was an enormous white rhododendron – the biggest I have ever seen. Minette was a charming and knowledgeable hostess, who praised the hard work of her one and only gardener.



At the end of the visit, we were treated to a fine spread of tea and cake, whilst Charles gave us a short but very amusing history of the estate and his family's time there since 1938. I would go back to Ardmaddy at this time of year in a heartbeat.

*Julie Young*  
*Pictures by Julie Young and Helen Ostrycharz*

## **Eas Mhòr**

We arrived at this garden on a very sunny warm afternoon to encounter a tropical paradise on the west coast of Scotland. The entrance to the garden was filled by beautiful rhododendrons in full bloom, a typical west-coast garden, but as we moved into the main part of the garden we were confronted by some delightful surprises.

The garden lies on a slope with very little soil. Deep borders around the lawn create a sense of something hidden behind the beds. The deck outside the house offers a commanding view from above. From the ground level looking up, the curved white walls of the pond provide a contemporary feel to the house and garden. Kimbra designed and planted the garden herself. This was a mammoth task.





Blue Bamboo

Kimbra Barrett and her husband moved to the house from Derbyshire just over 10 years ago. The couple arrived with one van of furniture and two of plants. Kimbra brought tree ferns, rare bamboos and acers with her. The garden has free draining soil. The wind carries salt from the sea, challenging conditions for gardening.

The hardy banana plants which Kimbra collects gives the garden an exotic feel. There are “Red Tiger” banana from India, African “Maurelli” and banana plants from Yunnan in China. The bananas flower but do not produce fruit; they give the garden a very exotic look. The plants are protected over winter by a covering of straw and bubble wrap; they were still in their winter coats when we visited.

We were shown the new 20-foot citrus house and introduced to the different perfumes from the leaves of the lemons, limes and grapefruit. There is a Chinese pergola and peony border in a shady area at the top of the garden.

The garden is a sanctuary. It has provided a healing place for Kimbra and her regular garden visitors. After the garden tour we were invited to sit on the sunny terrace and Kimbra provided us with refreshments. She had made delicious savoury and sweet scones. It was hard to leave this stunning garden and the sunny terrace. Kimbra was the perfect garden host.



*Marjorie Anderson*  
*Pictures by Helen Ostrycharz*



## ROWAN TREE

Listen --- the rustling  
leaves in the breeze ---  
soft subtle sounds of  
the 'whispering tree'.

Saving protecting  
Celtic communities  
against evil forces ---  
magical properties.

Many strange stories  
of ancient ancestry ---  
vast brooding hillsides  
high rocky places.  
Yet quite ubiquitous  
throughout suburbia ---  
'very low maintenance'  
neat ornamental.

A tree for all seasons ---  
bright clustered berries  
finches' and blackbirds'  
lusty dawn chorus.

Gracing the garden  
guarding the family  
throughout generations ---  
peaceful security.

*May Howie*  
*October 2024*

Oh! Rowan Tree! Oh! Rowan Tree!  
Thou'lt aye be dear tae me,  
Entwined thou art wi' mony ties  
O' hame and infancy.

*Old folk ballad*

# GARDEN TOUR TO YORKSHIRE

## 10th – 14th June 2024

### Dalemain House

As the coach parked at Dalemain, near Penrith, the scene resembled a Primary 3 school outing such was the excitement as everyone hurried off the coach eager to see the first garden of the holiday. We were warmly welcomed and shown across a large cobbled courtyard to the garden entrance which is through the tearoom situated in a beautiful old barn. The main house is Georgian, but the surrounding buildings are much older and give a clue to how long there has been a settlement here; however, it is not a garden stuck in time with new planting and ideas throughout.



You exit the tearoom and follow the path bordered by a very pretty mix of cow parsley, campion and sprinkled with the tougher geraniums. Then across the front of the house, turn the corner and suddenly there is the most stunning rose bordered terrace backed by a beautiful herbaceous border. The stars of the show, when we were there, were magnificent plants of *Crambe cordifolia* repeated along the border but the supporting cast of *Phlomis russeliana*, delphiniums and *Silene fimbriata* with lots to follow on through the season meant every square metre had much to

drool over. The end of the terrace is marked by a large, handsome silver fir which has taken some damage since it was planted in the early 19th century but it still covers a huge area and is certified as the biggest of its type in Great Britain.

The rest of the formal garden rises up a slope and is divided into smaller sections using a lot of newer varieties mixed in with old favourites. Some of the smaller gardens are colour themed, the black and white garden, while others have a dominant plant, the rose walk, but they are all enclosed by walls covered in fruit trees, wisteria, a vast array of climbing roses and various other climbers as well. Coloured foliage features strongly throughout this area to provide striking backdrops for the herbaceous planting. The other feature I particularly noticed was how many benches and seats there were to give you time to sit and enjoy the views and the fragrance from the roses.



There are also two less formal areas, the low garden and Lob's wood, where the planting is much freer. Hellebores for winter into spring and foxgloves for early summer, plus a stumpery, feature in Lob's Wood while the low garden had a huge expanse of *Meconopsis grandis* 'Dalemain'. As you walk on down to Dacre Beck there were groups of *Lilium martagon* amongst the trees and shrubs and eventually a tree house.

Dalemain was an excellent start to our holiday with a fine balance between old and new, formal and relaxed and while there was plenty to keep you interested it was a very peaceful garden which I would be happy to visit again.

*Sheena MacGregor*  
*Pictures by Anthony Birch*

## RHS Harlow Carr

We left the hotel on our first day at a civilised 9.40. All present and cheerful despite the cold! Entering through the main building above the gardens gives visitors their first view of the colourful garden. Grass, shrubs, flowers, trees and a big pond. A lovely orange rose called ‘Lady of Shallot’ and herbaceous goodies in curvy beds.

Round the big pond are lots of candelabra primulas in all shades of pink, yellow and orange and *Iris sibirica*, one a lovely one called ‘Silver Kant’, a good strong blue with a white fringe. Lots of day lilies but they appeared to have big bud virus so not flowering. The paths composite gravel and bonded with resin, non-slip, non-weedy and hopefully porous, looking just like peanut brittle.



We found another smaller, shaded pool full of water soldiers surrounded by big boulders and overlooked by two majestic *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*. Looking back up the slope a bright golden catalpa is a prominent feature, not everyone felt it was needed!

At the bottom of the garden is the stream, a feature much talked about over the years. An artful stone bridge lets you look up stream at the lantings and little waterfalls. All along the stream are primulas, mostly alpicola and candelabra, some meconopsis, ferns and huge hostas. Across the stream is a wild flower meadow with deer fence made of heavy wire. The meadow has lots of yellow rattle and wild flowers. Cleverly, they are using hay donated from other meadows to bring in the seeds.

We passed a venerable catalpa tree with last year's seed pods hanging on it, no seeds left! The new growth is a deep purple. We came upon Bettys food stand so had to stop for coffee. Oliver shared a small iced cake he was given. He had to tell them it was his birthday!



Up towards the alpine house, past vegetable beds with lots of birch branches used to support sweet peas and beans. Hedges of apple and pear trees and woven willow tunnels. The alpine garden is newly made so only a few small plants but on an impressive scale. The house has some lovely specimens. A campanula called 'E.K. Toogood' was clinging to the walls in places.

The tufa walls behind the alpine house are reminiscent of mouldy jam apparently but had some nice plants growing in them. We were envious of the many big stone troughs round the house. One had a dwarf *Ginkgo biloba* 'Mariken' and a dwarf elm in it.

The tropical garden has all sorts of big leaved plants, tender to us but fine down there. Some aeoniums and banana plants had a sunny sheltered spot. We passed some 8ft high metal domes supporting brambles in full flower. They certainly contained the bramble, looked good and would make harvesting easier but I would not want to do the pruning or training!



Everyone ended up in the sales areas, of course! Lots of nice plants but as usual not what we saw growing in the gardens. It is a lovely garden, big, well maintained and lots of ideas and features to give gardeners inspiration for their own plots. A good day out!

*Judy Jones*

*Pictures by Anthony Birch*

## **Pilmoor Cottages**

The ‘Cottages’ are listed 19th century railwaymen’s cottages, which the current owners bought some 40 years ago and have restored, whilst creating a garden around them on what was a railway yard. The railway theme is ever-present, as the garden is separated from the East Coast main line only by a wire fence and trains hurtle



past at frequent intervals. In addition, the owners have built a 7¼ inch narrow gauge railway which snakes through the grounds, giving passengers a very different perspective on the garden itself. At one point the narrow gauge railway crosses water on a bridge with guard rails made of red painted scaffold poles, echoing the design of the Forth Bridge. Rides on the train proved very popular with the group, evoking childhood memories.



The garden itself extends over two acres which include a Japanese style raked gravel garden, acers, densely planted island beds, old apple trees, woodland with mown areas, a nicely shaped pond with stepping stones, and Japanese style wooden structures, providing seating for leisurely garden viewing. There is even a water cascade which runs from a rockery across the roof of the tunnel housing the train before it descends. Attached to the house is a conservatory, within which very

impressive strelitzia and brugmansia grow.



As part of the National Garden Scheme, the garden raises money for nursing and health care charities. The owners are welcoming, enthusiastic and provided superb home-made baking!

*Patrick Callaghan*

*Pictures by Patrick Callaghan and Anthony Birch*

## **York Gate**

York Gate, a one-acre garden in a rural setting at Adel, four miles north of Leeds, was visited on June 12th as part of the Hardy Plant Society's tour of Yorkshire gardens. Frederick and Sybil Spencer bought the house in 1951; they and their son Robin devised and developed the garden over subsequent decades. On Sybil Spencer's death in 1994 the garden was bequeathed to the Gardeners' Royal Benevolent Society, now known as Perennial, who currently maintain and manage the garden.

The garden at York Gate consists of a series of rooms, enclosures or spaces, each functioning as a distinct element, but borrowing from adjacent areas. For example, Sybil's Garden is an entirely satisfying design, an immaculately laid circular path surrounding bold planting, but benefits from the view out over the Canal to the Pinetum beyond.



Frederick Spencer was a surveyor, with the knowledge, and perhaps courage, to break into a culvert under the old orchard to establish a pond, and his wife was a knowledgeable and enthusiastic plantswoman. Their son Robin evidently had a superb eye for the use of hard landscaping material and the development of vistas from one area in the garden to another. Even the circular window in the potting shed neatly frames a view to the Folly and Dell beyond.

Highlights include the long rectangular raised Canal, with its dolphin statue at one end, on whose back wall, part of the adjacent Pinetum, a *Cedrus atlantica* 'Glaucu', usually a large tree, is grown as a wide espalier, only a metre high. A row of six yew trees is dramatically shaped as pyramidal spires, or "sails." The herb garden, ornamented with topiary spirals and enclosed by high hedges, is best viewed from the pillared summerhouse at one end. Robin Spencer's final project, completed in 1980, the year before his early death, was a circular pavement maze or

labyrinth. The garden has several other examples of his successful use of reclaimed granite setts, old millstones, large pebbles and gravel, and oak roof beams, rescued from a fire-damaged former chapel in Leeds.

New plants have replaced some of those planted by Sybil Spencer, while remaining true to her vision and the style of the garden. York Gate was not fully planned at the outset, but grew, developed and changed during the lifetimes of its original owners. Perennial's staff and volunteers continue to maintain the garden, adding a wildflower meadow and a projected woodland walk. It has featured on BBC Gardener's World, which has apparently led to a marked increase in visitor numbers. Car parking for fifty cars was full an hour and a half after opening, and our coach party was considered by some staff a potential strain on the café's resources. York Gate staff and volunteers face a challenge in maintaining the atmosphere of a welcoming private garden while managing the larger footfall of those who wish to see, enjoy and learn from this enchanting place.

*Mary Birch*

*Pictures by Anthony Birch*

## **Stillingfleet Lodge**

Our Wednesday afternoon visit was to Stillingfleet Lodge Gardens sited at the end of a meandering path which our driver, Dave, managed to negotiate saving us a hundred yard walk.

We were greeted by Vanessa who welcomed us to her family home and garden in which they have lived for almost fifty years. The four-acre ground was farmland which was worked to be self-sufficient with cows, sheep, pigs, poultry and vegetable growing.

We are now seeing the result of forty years designing, development and incredible planting.

We entered the courtyard which was a pleasant area where the white doves flew from the loft of the climber clad building, which served delicious home baking and refreshments. There was an opportunity to see the work of a local artist whose floral prints and cards were tempting.





The path led through to the area in front of the house, which had a lovely, curved bed with campanulas, several geraniums and fringed white campion, *Silene fimbriata* and many more perennials backed with climbing roses, a silver leafed tree and a *Physocarpus diablolo* in flower.



The gable end of the house was densely covered in *Hydrangea petiolaris* and other climbing plants. There was a brightness from the golden hop, *Humulus lupulus* climbing up a few of the clipped evergreen trees. The paths lead to different ‘rooms’ giving great interest and variety. I loved the Avenue, neatly clipped trees under planted with silvery blue hosta. The planting and the side borders included *Persicaria* ‘Red

Dragon', geranium and lysimachia. There was a group of prunella, in pink, white and purple. I had never seen this plant before, and it would be good at the front of a border. Peonies were beginning to flower and there was a lot of taller planting which will flower in summer.

I was delighted to find a Rill Garden which was calming and restful with the sound of water. A fine, white rose grew high on the hedge. The path led to the pond garden, which was a secluded and secret corner.

The meadow had paths cut through the long grass and meadow flowers. Most noticeable were the white camassias. This space created the feeling of being miles into a rural area. There was a very striking white hawthorn in the woodland area, also a white *Cornus kousa* in full flower.

In the walnut garden was the magnificent cut leafed walnut tree which is about twenty five years old. Not yet mature enough to fruit, this tree was most sought after and was only acquired after several years of waiting, so it is greatly treasured.

The planting was mainly blue geraniums and low growing lime coloured orange and yellow plants with small gravel paths weaving through. The sounds of the bantams, hens and guinea fowl made the garden a joy to walk around. At the end of our visit, we had an opportunity to visit the Nursery which resulted in a happy group of Hardy Plant hunters.

*Isobel Morris*

*Pictures by Isobel Morris*

## **Bridge House**

The garden of Bridge House in Elvington near York is in an area which is fascinating geographically. It is in the River Derwent flood plain and York had been historically subject to frequent floods from the Derwent and other nearby rivers. To reduce the flood burden on York, it was decided to allow the Derwent to flood low lying land around Elvington and allow this water to drain slowly away at the end of winter. Bridge House itself and the garden immediately surrounding it is elevated but an area of two acres below the house is subject to flooding which last winter started



earlier than usual in October and continued until March. It has the advantage of being still water without the damaging effect of a swift flowing torrent but it is still under several feet of water. The owners pointed out that anything growing there had to have most of the qualities of **real** hardy plants and it was necessary to work with nature rather than try to tame it.



The house has a lovely garden immediately surrounding it with masses of roses including glorious *Rosa Mundi* and also many *Iris sibirica*, ‘Harpwell Happiness’ and ‘Snowcrest’, both white and particularly eye catching.

There is a paved seating area with lovely views over the lower garden and the surrounding countryside. There are also more choice plants which do not relish being drowned for months and lots of pots some with the very jolly *Bidens* ‘Hot and Spicy’.

Crossing the bridge into the lower garden over one of the drainage ditches we came to the winter flooded area. This part of the garden is so beautiful that it is hard to believe that these plants are subject to such stress.

There are trees, shrubs, roses and perennials, hostas and ferns – none of them particularly unusual, what is unusual is that they survive! There is a large pond with willows and waterlilies and a peaceful seating area from which to enjoy the garden.

Further along the bank where the ground rises slightly and is drier, there is an orchard with healthy fruit trees and an enormous *Rosa* ‘Paul’s Himalayan Musk’ which was used as a background for the trip’s group photograph. This area has plenty of evidence of wildlife activity. Apparently as the water rises, so too do the worms, followed by the moles so that the slightly higher ground is where all the molehills are to be found

in the spring. The whole area has numerous young purple hazel (*Corylus maxima* ‘Purpurea’), helpfully planted by the local squirrels.



We ended our trip sitting on the terrace in the sun enjoying coffee and cake and the view. Our hostess had mistaken the date and so we were apparently tucking in to the baking for the visitors expected later in the day. Hasty baking being carried out as we left, I suspect, and our apologies to the afternoon visitors!

*Hilary Bayley*  
*Pictures by Hilary Bayley*

## **Breezy Knees**

The group visited Breezy Knees as part of the Harrogate Tour. It was certainly breezy but the only one set of bare knees seen were not in the group.

Breezy Knees has a five star Trip Advisor rating and has been described by Mony Don as ‘a beautiful modern garden created on the grandest possible scale’.

On entry into the garden we came across a sparsely planted part of a field. This was Plan C the previous ones having failed due to soil problems.



There was a dearth of maps available and those unable to get one or photograph one were amazed when the route opened up to about 20 'rooms', each loosely assigned to a plant theme. There was a plethora of plant labels, but those wanting to impress others with their knowledge had to beware that

the label was not, in essence, a tombstone to a plant long gone.

The grass in those sections was cut and neatly edged. The windbreak hedging certainly protected the plants within, and ourselves, from the breeze! The plants were well displayed and, generally, a riot of colour.

Other features such as a fountain, a large trowel, a picture frame, empty but purporting to show a Van Gogh view and a Welly Boot dog punctuated the trail.



The Tea Room, with outside and inside seating, was well stocked and sandwiches were made up on demand.

The Nursery was extensive and laid out in strictly alphabetical order. The plants were of good quality and condition. Most seemed cheaper than would be found in comparable outlets.

*John Thomson*  
*Pictures by John Thomson*

## Bramleys – a hillside garden

The village of Oswaldkirk, on the edge of the North York Moors, is the location of Bramleys, a half-acre cottage garden on a hillside. It has been developed by the owner, Brigit Hannigan, a professional gardener, over the past eight years. When she bought the property, its steep rear garden was merely an inaccessible and empty field, with just fruit trees, (particularly two Bramley apples), and masses of brambles.



Brigit had the slope levelled-out into south-facing terraces with retaining walls. Despite the very thin soil, she then undertook imaginative planting which has resulted in a glorious oasis, with surprises at every turn of the winding, climbing paths.

At the bottom of the slope, beside the golden stone cottage, a lawn sits above the lane,

surrounded by colourful herbaceous plants such as penstemons, astringias and sanguisorbas.

Steps then ascend beneath an arch, clad in a pink climbing rose, to the next level. Here, a small water-feature, complete with water lilies, creates an attractive focal point.

The path climbs up and up through dense plantings of roses, paeonies, sedums and geraniums, to name a few. Stand-out shrubs such as philadelphus, weigela and cotinus add to the mix, and a curving copper beech hedge and clumps of *Euphorbia mellifera* separate the groupings.





Seats at strategic points of the ascent provide opportunities to catch one's breath and admire the scene! At the very top of the slope, next to an enormous old walnut tree, is a summer house or "gin palace". From here, a magnificent view opens up, down the garden, across the pantile roofs of the village, to the Howardian Hills beyond – a true "borrowed landscape".

Unfortunately, a heavy shower coincided with the visit, but our spirits were not dampened! Indeed, we all took great delight in such an extraordinary and beautiful garden, and had huge admiration for Brigit's achievements on such a challenging site.

*Vivienne Marshall  
Pictures by Vivienne Marshall*

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## Langton Farm

Annabel and Richard Fife welcomed us in the small brick courtyard at Langton Farm near Northallerton. Already we were inundated with roses on every wall, and pots of *Geranium maderense* waist high.



We walked around to the front of the old brick farmhouse: another picture perfect profusion of white roses in clipped box parterres, and a well filled border in a cool palette of eryngium, geranium, white *Chamaenerion angustifolium* (rosebay willow herb), and more white roses on pillars, against a pale blue-grey cast iron fence that matched the paintwork of the window frames.

Walking around the house to the gable end, we came to a broad circular lawn with a perimeter of wide borders, and a simple large mill stone with a low fountain as a centre piece. The borders were packed with perennials in harmonious pinks, crimsons and magentas, roses of all shades. Ivory and pastel foxgloves emerged from the colourful billowing planting. Touches of blue delphiniums and iris, a few sparkles of yellow and orange. Select tall shrubs supported and sheltered the display.



Leading away from the house, ten-foot tall alleys of pleached lime and clipped beech led variously to seats, a view of the meadow, a greenhouse, raised veg beds, a hen run where the bantams had their own *Cornus controversa* 'Variegata' in each corner and a crab apple in the centre. Altogether the perfect country garden.

*Clare Melinsky*  
*Pictures by Anthony Birch*

## Eggleston Hall Gardens

This was the last stop on our very successful, but cold, trip to North Yorkshire. The garden is several miles off the A66 via winding lanes up hill and down dale, we got there in the end. The plant nursery is in a large sloping walled garden with the potting sheds being the "shop". It's certainly not a Dobbies: all it sells is plants. There is a huge selection of herbaceous plants, shrubs and trees, much of which is propagated on site. As the site is inland, in hills, in North of England, the plants should be hardy and do well with us ( rather than the stuff brought from polytunnels in Holland). I believe there is a display garden but we were somewhat pushed for time and there were plants to buy. The old head gardener Malcolm does seasonal YouTube videos of what is looking good in the garden and gives insight into the behind the scenes workings of a traditional nursery. Apparently the big house, Eggleston Hall is up for sale I do hope the new owners will allow this unique nursery to continue.

*Oliver Miller*



*Picture by Colin Cutler*

# VISIT TO EAST LOTHIAN

## 26th June 2024

### Humbie Dean



Our day started out at Humble Hub, the recommended coffee stop, and we quickly reserved a table for lunch as it was such an amazing and popular centre.

We then travelled on to Frank's garden at Humble Dean, described as a two acre ornamental and wooded garden on a variety of levels sandwiched between two burns at 600 feet. I have long wanted to visit this garden since I saw Frank being interviewed on Beechgrove Garden and it was well worth the wait.

Walking up the drive, the house came in to view, part of it clad with black board and this set off the planting to great effect – a narrow border to the front door had box, *Allium christophii* and actaea of the atropurpurea group. Much admired by us all. Opposite a garage also clad in black board showed off another small border with at least four types of clematis climbing up through a selection of herbaceous plants that flower throughout the season, as was much of the garden. Beyond the garage and in to the start of the main garden was a productive vegetable bed and beyond a bluebell meadow with rhododendrons, azaleas and other small trees. At the far end a border planted with shade loving plants. It was there I realised I should not have offered to write this report as my knees would not countenance attempting the steep steps that threaded down to the burn and back up in to another section of the garden but I could see the area was also planted in keeping with the woodland setting.

The herbaceous borders were breathtaking. They just swallowed you up as you wandered the paths between them and enjoyed being so close up.





The garden was a joy to visit, many ideas to take home and more than well worth the journey from Cumbria.

*Marjorie Allen*  
*Pictures by Marjorie Allen*

## **Stobshiel House**

After lunch at the Humble Hub (highly recommended), we visited Stobshiel House on a beautiful June day.

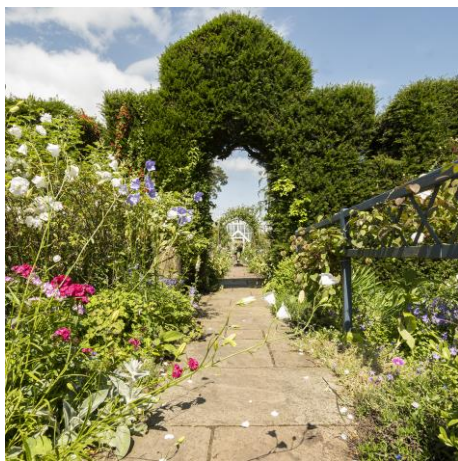
Scotland's Gardens Yellow book tells us "The garden at Stobshiel House is effectively split into four main parts viz., the walled garden, the shrubbery, the pond and lawns and the woodland areas. Each area is laid out and planted to provide the visitor with all year round interest from swathes of aconites, snowdrops, narcissi in spring to a vast array of perennials, roses, clematis and annuals throughout summer and autumn. The extensive collection of shrubs and mature trees offer a fantastic backdrop during all seasons."



This gives an outline of Stobshiel but as is often the case, the details are what make a garden special. When we were there the glorious herbaceous

borders on either side of the long terrace were overflowing with colour from perennials, clematis and roses, punctuated by clouds of crambe.

More roses filled the beds in front of the house with the close packed buds on many bushes and climbers promising an abundance of flowering yet to come.



Other beds in front of the house had lovely colour combinations such as a charming partnership of magenta Sweet William with white foxgloves. (White foxgloves were everywhere, almost the motif of the garden.) Moving away from the more formal garden there is a shaded, peaceful walkway beside a stream.

Stobshiel garden is beautiful in itself but is further enhanced by its woodland setting with mature trees and grassland clearings inhabited by several rather shy ‘animals’. Stobshiel is a lovely garden, well worth a visit on a Wednesday in the summer (and with a very nice owner, last seen digging up a plant for a visitor!).

*Hilary Bayley  
Pictures by Hilary Bayley*



# VISIT TO ABERDEENSHIRE

## 25th – 26th July 2024

### Middle Cairncrake

The two-day visit to Aberdeenshire gardens began at the furthest point north, at Middle Cairncrake just outside Cuminestown.

Owned by Penny and Nick Orpwood, the garden wraps around the farmhouse and steading. We started with refreshments in one of the renovated outbuildings now known as the Winter Garden.

Penny houses a large and varied collection of tender species in here, including begonias, brugmansias and passion flowers.



The main garden has a number of interlinked but very different areas, including ones devoted to roses, hostas, dahlias, and heathers. A wild area, with breathtaking views over the surrounding countryside, was unusually tranquil, given Penny’s description of it being almost always windswept. There was also a pond and lots of annuals to brighten every corner. Finally a vegetable garden with an impressive, long row of sweet peas in full bloom.

None of us could take our eyes off the lemon tree visible inside the kitchen window. It had the biggest fruit any of us had ever seen. I am sure Penny said the variety was “Eureka”, which was very apt. We went on our merry way full of cake and good cheer.

*Julie Young*  
*Pictures by Julie Young*

## Airdlin Croft

The second garden on the visit was Airdlin Croft, the garden of Richard and Ellen Firmin. Trained horticulturists, they have developed this stunning woodland garden in stages since the late 1980s and it now extends to five acres. A former croft the starting point was land well



cleared by pigs and fertilised by cattle! Early developments involved shelter plantings incorporating existing sycamores including a splendid ancient specimen at the boundary. As the garden has developed there are different stages wrapped around the central house incorporating a huge range of woodland plant species, trees, shrubs and herbaceous interplanted, and much of it propagated by the Firmins. An intriguing feature was reached following a sign “Hollywood” to reach just what you would expect, an attractive planting incorporating that genus.



The planting includes over 200 species of rhododendron, alas seen outside the flowering season but chosen for shape and complementing the other woodlanders and a wide range of viburnum species. Your correspondent found the most fascinating area was the most recent project from around five years ago, the creation of a new arboretum. This was a truly amazing collection of shrubs and trees, conifers and deciduous around open green spaces, mostly northern hemisphere although I did spot a chiliostrichum from southern Patagonia. The whole effect was such to wish an annual visit to see it develop. Included in the green space was a simple wildflower area, primarily made up of native

knapweed and marguerites stunning in its simplicity. At the edge of all this

was a beautiful maroon calycanthus in full flower, especially striking against the range of foliage on the trees and shrubs around it.



Throughout the garden were hostas, some 500 varieties in all and ranging from tiny dwarfs in pots to the mighty 'Empress Wu' in the older woodland. Hostas were around the house in pots, on display shelves and happily in the plant sales area. Here we were offered a range of plants,

hostas in number but other herbaceous and some interesting trees and shrubs propagated by the Firmans including some sorbus not usually seen on nursery lists.

Rounding off the visit was the vegetable garden and polytunnel with impressive amounts of vegetables, all seemingly benefiting from the general aura of Airdlin in their size and profusion. An impressive garden and well worth a visit.

*Andrew Holmes*

*Pictures by Andrew Holmes*

## **Pitmedden**

This enclosed seventeenth century garden, set in a large estate, contains a beautifully restored parterre garden, herbaceous beds, splendid clipped yews, fountains, miles of box hedges, rolling lawns and wonderful espaliered apple trees, all completely laden with healthy organic apples. There is also a small Museum of Farming Life.

Our group was fortunate enough to have a beautiful afternoon for our visit and the garden was certainly looking at its best.

We make annual visits to the area and usually manage to visit Pitmedden. This time the herbaceous beds were as always full of colour and so closely planted that there was little space for weeds. But despite the abundance of flower, we saw only one butterfly – usually the yellow inula amongst other

perennials are full of them. This does seem sadly to be the same story all over Scotland.



Of particular interest for us were the herbaceous beds on the upper level of the garden, planted three years ago by Chris Beardshaw. These were set out in the prairie style that we had previously seen used at Scampston Garden by Piet Oudolf. We were informed by the Pitmedden gardeners when we first saw the planting that the beds were going to be “completely labour-free”. (We did reserve judgement on this.)



But last year the beds were starting to come away, so we were more optimistic. This year however there are definitely large gaps in the beds. Most plants have done pretty well though, some more so than others. The



colourful orange *Euphorbia griffithii* is striding very happily across the centre of the beds – and some of the very healthy yellow verbascum is almost twice the height of other plants. Personally I would rip it all out, as it reminds me so much of the yellow verbascum that sprang up everywhere in the forests devastated by forest fires in Greece. The white variety in the garden beds was much better behaved.

There was a very effective tall dark grass, which had dutifully remained where it was meant to be. The tall pink fronds of filipendula and a huge eupatorium filled the centre of the beds – and an absolutely enormous lilac veronicastrum. *Geranium* 'Rozanne' romped happily around the margins of the beds, while an assortment of allium popped up all over the place. The effect was certainly very colourful – though it did seem to us that some plants might need a bit of restraining. And it would seem prudent always to have a retinue of well-grown plants sitting in the background ready to replace any that might have fallen victim to the vagaries of the north-east Scottish climate.

The parterre, a clever reconstruction of what a garden of that period would have looked like, was looking stunning. The beds were all filled with a very pretty deep pink low-growing plant. We did go over to investigate what the flower was, as we didn't recognise it. But we never got that far: the garden now sadly closes an hour earlier than in past years – and we got charmingly but firmly escorted to the exit!

*Fran Scott  
Pictures by Fran Scott*

## **Chaplains' Court**

The second morning of our visit to gardens around Aberdeen took us into the ancient district of Old Aberdeen and the historic walled garden of Chaplains' Court situated, for obvious reasons, close to the Cathedral. The house and garden are what remains of the old Chaplains' Court buildings, built between 1519 and





1547. It contained the chambers of the twenty vicars or chaplains who served the Cathedral. After the Reformation, many of the buildings fell into ruin and have subsequently been demolished.

Irene and Claude Wischik bought this amazing house and garden in 1999. Before they knew anything about the house, Irene had dreamt about it and so went in search of the property. Having found it was actually up for sale, and after some careful negotiations, they completed the sale within six weeks. It was obviously destined to be their home and fulfilled the Bishop's motto, engraved on the crest on the front of the house, – "Under Hope"!

The walled garden extends to more than one acre. Spring sees a wealth of snowdrops, tulips, scilla and crocuses but in summer, the main feature is its magnificent long border of colourful perennials, still in bloom when we visited in late July. It was a wonderful blend of eryngium, geranium, crocosmia, sedum, lavender, rudbeckia, achillea, eupatorium, acanthus and so much more. All this was backed by espaliered apple trees on the back wall and, to encourage relaxation, an ornamental pergola shelters a very comfortable "sitootery" at the halfway mark.



The back of the house opens onto the garden with a shady terrace. Here we were treated to tea and cakes while we enjoyed the sun. There were several other extensive flower beds around the garden as well as a vegetable patch and interesting trees.

There was also a small courtyard garden accessible from the side of the house and providing pedestrian access from the road. Here we could see the front face of the house, where Irene gave us some fascinating insight into its history and development over the years.

Thank you to Irene and Claude for maintaining this important historic house and garden, and for letting us visit it. It was an excellent choice, Julie.

*Pam Wortley  
Pictures by Pam Wortley*

## **Pinetrees Cottage**

Set on a windy hillside overlooking Aberdeen, owner Angela Townsley has created and developed this beautiful and surprising three-quarter acre garden over the last 30 years. When she and her husband bought the land in 1994 there was nothing here except a large hedge and the shell of a bothy. Today, they have a fascinating series of garden rooms separated by high hedges with narrow paths which lead you into the next, unseen room. Each room has its own character and a wide range of hardy perennials, but linked with topiary and cloud pruned trees and shrubs.



The path to the front door is lined with a series of box topiary balls and topiary continues throughout the garden, neatly trimmed into a variety of shapes. The garden in front of the house, which is lined with borders full of an interesting and colourful mix of hardy plants, shrubs and alpine troughs, leads through the hedge to the first room. This has dense planting of shrubs such as hydrangea and philadelphus on both sides of the path to provide a backdrop and shelter for the large pond with water lilies. Numerous acers and cloud and pillow pruned shrubs and trees surround you and strategically placed bird themed garden statuary and seating enhance the relaxing atmosphere.

The next room is a courtyard garden with a sunken, sheltered seating area around a large pond with water lilies and a rock garden. More water lilies are displayed in large tubs around the pond. From here, you can look up the slope to the large greenhouse, separated from the lower garden by a low fence covered with roses and clematis and colourful borders with herbaceous perennials.



The last room has a large polytunnel which houses a pool full of koi carp, surrounded by climbers and numerous tender plants. There are open vistas to the wider countryside, and the garden slopes down a steep path past a very tall hedge with red *Tropaeolum speciosum* growing through it. With borders full of shrubs and climbers on each side, the stepped path leads past the orchard to the pony paddock at the bottom of the hill. Arriving back at the house, there was still more to explore as the cottage garden style borders wrap around the house with more interesting planting and topiary.



A beautiful garden on a challenging sloping, windy site, which has been created by Angela with imagination, care and lots of hard work.

*Lesley Reid*

## Whin Cottage

The last visit of our two-day trip was to Whin Cottage at Banchory Devenick, owned by Jane O’Kelly and her husband. They have been there for 27 years, and once their children had grown up and no longer needed a lawn on which to play football, the garden had slowly been developed into a very colourful and varied half-acre.

Some of the beds were colour-themed, pink, blue and purple often forming a basis for other plants, with a yellow and orange bed providing a bright contrast. Roses abounded. One with a red flower caught my eye due to its glossy dark brown/purple foliage. Jane told me that it had been a Cocker’s rose originally named ‘Robert Gordon’s’, but as it was not selling well Cocker’s renamed it ‘Braveheart’. Sales promptly took off! Another prolific rose with masses of pink flowers clambered over a black metal arch, intertwined with a purple clematis. This led to the back of the garden where there were four raised beds with vegetables and herbs. There was also a large pond, almost hidden by the surrounding foliage.

Delphiniums soared to eight to nine feet high, one particular bright blue one being called ‘Excalibur’. Next to it and at the same height was an almost black lily. Tubs added to the colour, and on the front patio two huge grey and white patterned urns contained white cosmos, grey cineraria and purple violas to match the urns.

Tables and chairs with crockery had been set out in various parts of the garden ready for our afternoon tea but just as we were finishing looking at the garden – guess what! The first rain of our trip arrived. So then it was a mad rush to get everything indoors. Eventually we all squeezed in and were given a most welcome tea with home-made cakes. A great end to a most enjoyable and varied trip. Thank you Julie.

*Sheila Phillips*



# VISIT TO BERWICKSHIRE

## 28th – 29th August 2024

### Tweedhill

Coming towards the end of a month of non-summer weather that was supposed to be “August”, the prospect of a trip south of the Border (if only just) was attractive, and an encouraging number of members travelled many miles and survived the Edinburgh bypass to assemble in the Berwick Garden Centre. Suitably fortified, we set off for Tweedhill Garden, where we parked our various vehicles on the grass verge beside the road and wondered if we should retrieve waterproofs: we did! But happily, the rain was not serious.

Tweedhill is the home of David Warden, who holds the National Collection of heleniums and who welcomed us to his garden in which he grows the whole collection containing 92 cultivars within the single species of helenium. Anyone who, like me, thought that one of these collections would be a somewhat academic ranging of flowers in serried monochrome ranks, was wrong. I was rapidly, and happily, disabused. David’s garden is a place of real beauty, of great variety of colour, of size and shape, and it’s full of interest. There are flowers from many species, grasses, trees large and small – and David knows the name of every one of them! It is by no means restricted to heleniums!



After an introductory chat, David led us on a detailed journey through his acre of garden from the top of the side border and through the rest of his garden, laid out in many beds and borders to front, sides and back of their home, and demonstrating their wonderful array of different species, sizes, shapes and textures. Anything less like an orderly monochrome arrangement would be hard to imagine! As well as heleniums glowing in colours from yellow through many shades of orange, russet and brown through pink to rich red, there are old friends such as asters, bistorta, monarda, crocosmia, *Verbena bonariensis*, *Sedum* 'Aubergine', and salvia – even the odd clump of catmint (in the right place!). And in between all these colourful flowers, are grasses of many descriptions from small and interesting to tall and graceful such as *Miscanthus* 'Flamingo'. The whole is a most beautiful garden for living in as well as for studying plant performance.



When David and his wife, who came round with us, came to live here nine years ago, they took it over as a wilderness with a sea of poppies! They are still making changes – but with the emphasis always on colours and colour combinations. It is very much a garden to be enjoyed.

While we spent a lot of time being conducted round the beds and borders at the sides and back of the house, in which the bulk of the collection is housed, and indeed that is where much of the interest lies, there are other areas to which the same discipline of layout is not applied and it is equally pleasing to see them. The front garden is laid out more “conventionally” than at the back and sides, with lawn and flower beds and small trees –

someone commented “just like an ordinary garden”! We also admired rows of prolific apples of different varieties and colours – far more of them than David and family and friends could consume so they share them with the blackbirds that come from Sweden to stay with them over winter.

David’s knowledge as he led us round impressed his audience greatly – all the names of so many different species and all the cultivar names within them. He knows them all! He is generous in sharing this knowledge and the tips that he has learned about the best to try within any species. And not by any means only helenium! Other species have attracted his attention as subjects for national collections, and also simply because he likes them: *bistorta* is one of his favourites, and he cultivates many sizeable clumps of them. Other favourites are *salvia* and *solidago*, among others! He recommends *Artemisia* ‘Eldorado’ as the best of all that species which will flower until November; and *Crococsmia* ‘Hellfire’ as superior to ‘Lucifer’.



I confess my memory doesn’t retain as much nowadays so I can’t remember all the details (just as well, I would fill pages!). Not many of us, whatever the age, have memories to compare with David Warden’s! But I like to think that there’s still something there! And the pleasant memories of that day, along with all the photos, will serve to keep it alive!

*Brenda White*  
*Pictures by Brenda White*

## Netherbyres

We met at Netherbyres, Eyemouth at the home of Colonel Furnace who at aged 88 claimed to be a Hardy Plant. We gathered round him as he stood on the central mound to give us a brief history of the property and his own input.

The big house was built in 1740 with an unusual elliptical walled garden. In 1991 he built a house in the walled garden and donated the big house to Perennial - Gardeners' Royal Benevolent Society. The ownership changed and is now a wedding venue and the bridal pair come in to the garden for photographs and a donation to SGS.

It was a superb decision to live within the garden and to enjoy it to the full. Colonel Furnace had laid out photographs in the conservatory showing the development in the garden and I took a photo of the aerial photo taken in 2001 which helps understand the lay out.





The border around the mound was planted with viper's bugloss backed by *Rosa* 'Bonita' chosen for its complementing colour. These borders were backed by dwarf apple trees acting as sentinels. The paths leaving the mound were packed with plants: roses, dahlias and many herbaceous plants. The back border was filled with large shrubs and to the side of the conservatory was a large box parterre filled with herbs.



As you entered the garden a large yew hedge split the ornamental garden from the fruit/vegetable growing area. Here a huge amount of fruit and vegetables is grown, including large marrows for entering in the local horticultural show. There was also a pear tree dating from the 18th century.



A wonderful garden to visit and a pleasure to be shown round by a gardener who loves his garden.

*Marjorie Allen*  
*Pictures by Marjorie Allen*

## Amisfield

Amisfield Garden near Haddington is a community garden, but a quite exceptional community garden. First of all it is huge, eight acres, and then it is surrounded by a 16 foot wall with circular domed pavilions built into each corner. Time has led to the pavilions becoming unsafe but plans for the future of the garden include their restoration.

The garden was constructed around 1783 as part of Amisfield House estate and wide paths were laid diagonally and straight across to a central circle containing a sundial. There were glasshouses built against the north wall where pineapples and grapes were grown, heated by hot air flues which required constant stoking of furnaces with coal. In 1880, records show that the head gardener was responsible for 35 men.



During the First World War, Amisfield House was requisitioned and in 1926 the garden was rented out and developed as a market garden, then in the Second World War it was ploughed up and used to grow grain until the 1980s when it was planted up as a tree nursery. The trees were never used and the garden fell into a state of neglect. In 1999 the Amisfield Preservation Trust was set up and from 2006 the Trust focused on the walled garden. By this time East Lothian Council owned the park and volunteers began to restore the garden as a resource for the local community. Over the next two years, over 1000 trees were cut down and their roots removed. Excavations were carried out to establish the original layout and new paths laid to restore the original garden plan.

The garden is now a thriving community garden. Volunteers work regularly throughout the week and the garden is open to the public all the

year round. Various local groups and schools use the garden for educational purposes.

The day we were there the weather was beautiful and the garden amazing. The well maintained paths and adherence to the original planting have resulted in lovely vistas across this enormous space to the sundial in the centre and the garden beyond.

There were apples everywhere, in the form of well-trimmed, freestanding avenues of trees and also those planted to benefit from the warmth of the enormous walls.

There is a youthful maze looking like a typical teenager, half grown and a bit scruffy but with the future promise showing through. Generations of children yet to come will have lots of fun here.



Throughout the garden there were drifts of perennial and annual planting interspersed with healthy looking vegetables. There were attractive combinations such as perovskia with grasses and also a distinct thistly theme, as befits an old Scottish garden.





The people of Haddington have created something marvellous here at Amisfield to benefit the whole community and one thing is for sure, they will not be short of apples!

*Hilary Bayley  
Pictures by Hilary Bayley*



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# VISIT TO THE ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS EDINBURGH 19th September 2024

The Royal Botanic Gardens of Edinburgh was founded in 1670 as a physic garden, and 350 years later remains a global leader in horticultural excellence, science and education. It is one of the few botanic gardens of its kind which is free to the general public, and its proximity to the centre of Edinburgh creates the feeling of entering another world as you cross the garden gates; a green oasis near the heart of the bustling capital.

Our guide Shiona greets us at the state-of-the-art John Hope Building, an innovative model of sustainable architecture boasting intriguing exhibitions, a well-stocked gift shop, and a lavish yet light and airy café.



Kniphofia



*Roscoeae* 'Red Gurkha'

As we embark on our tour it becomes clear that we will only scratch the surface of the extensive (70 acre!) landscape, which includes a rock garden, woodland garden, pond, Chinese hillside, as well as an extensive

tree collection, rhododendron collection, and glasshouse range (currently closed for redevelopment).

Autumn interest included colchicums in the lawns, red and gold autumn leaf colour such as *Euonymus alatus*, and a range of red, pink, yellow and white berries from the diverse sorbus collection. More unusual and colourful flowers to be seen included *Roscoea* 'Red Gurkha'.



Japanese wingnut



Wollemi pine

The arboretum holds a *Pyrus* collection, as well as an impressive number of veteran trees, for example a champion sweet chestnut, dawn redwoods,



*Gentiana x Macaulayi*

*Cedrus atlantica* Glauca, and a *Ginkgo biloba* specimen which survived the Hiroshima bombings. There are also Wollemi pines – an ancient species native to Australasia.

As well as historic plantings there were also newly developed areas including an avenue of Yoshino cherries (*Prunus x yedoensis*) linking to the Japanese garden.

Shiona shared some of the scientific research currently happening at RBGE including a phenology project, tracking the flowering times of plants over time, an indicator of climate change. She also showed us how different coloured labels throughout the gardens indicated which plants were involved in such projects, conservation, rare species, or those at risk of key pests and diseases (such as phytophthora – this is particularly relevant to their collection of 700+ rhododendrons).



The Rain Garden

Ongoing research informs new planting projects like the newly planted Rain Garden in collaboration with hydrologists from Herriot-Watt University. An area of the gardens that typically flooded now consists of a bioswale of plants which do not mind having very wet feet such as gunnera, and resilient native plants such as birch. RBGE collaborates internationally with organisations in

over 50 countries, on everything from conservation and biodiversity to education.

Unfortunately we were unable to view the famous glasshouses, which are under a dramatic restoration plan which may take at least the next four years to complete. However, the weather was kind to us most of the day and the warmth and hospitality shown to us at RBGE was so welcome that the visit was undeniably a triumph. Personally, it held a special place in my heart as RBGE is where I undertook my RHS Horticulture exams. And although I had walked around the gardens many times alone, the insight, passion and stories shared with us by Shiona on this occasion painted the gardens in a colourful light in which I had not seen them before.

*Rebecca Gregson*  
*Pictures by Rebecca Gregson*

## Douneside House and Gardens

We spent the three days of summer at the end of July at Douneside House, in a lovely location, with a fascinating history and, a beautiful garden.



Douneside, which is run by the MacRobert Trust is on the northern edge of the Howe of Cromar, a bowl in the hills to the north of Aboyne. It is run by the MacRobert Trust. The gardens, which extend to 17 acres, are an RHS Qualifications Approved Centre.



The most obvious feature of the gardens at Douneside is the Infinity Lawn, which stretches out in front of the house to a viewpoint. To the side of the lawn, a stream runs down through a series of small waterfalls in a woodland garden.

*Chris Sanders*



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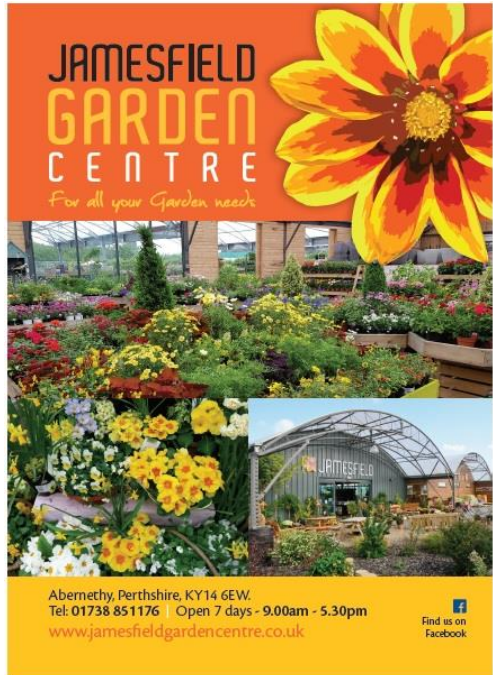


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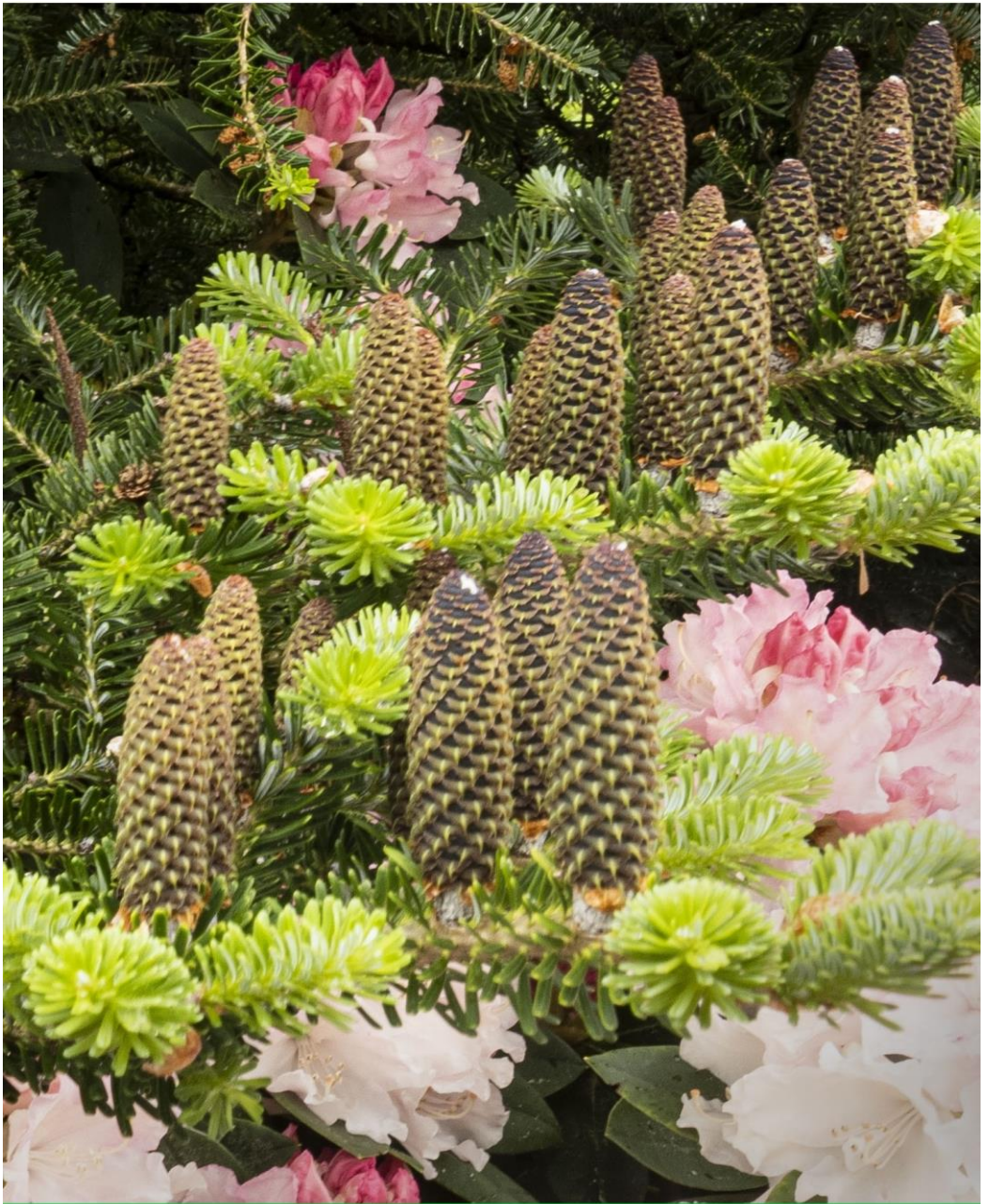
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