

# Amersham Gardening Association

www.amersham-gardening.org.uk

## August 2022 Newsletter

### From the Secretary

As I write this I am looking out at my brown lawn; this does not concern me as I know it will come back and meanwhile I do not have to mow it. Fortunately there was some rain whilst we were away on the AGA holiday so the plants looked OK when we returned. Since then it has been a battle to water the pots, early morning or late evening and my two water butts are almost empty. Speaking of the holiday you will read more about it in

this Newsletter, quite an adventure this year but very enjoyable.

In July we held a summer social which seems to have been very much enjoyed by those who attended. The December social should be another enjoyable occasion so do come, everyone welcome.

Jean Bowling

### Plant sales May 21<sup>st</sup> and June 11<sup>th</sup>

We held our usual plant fare in the forecourt of St Michael's Church on May 21<sup>st</sup>, then also had a stand at the Chesham Bois fete on June 11<sup>th</sup>. The two events combined made a profit of £871; a useful contribution to our running expenses. Perhaps more importantly, these activities raised our profile in the community and the publicity may help to attract new members and spread the love of gardening.

At both events we sold donated sunflower plants (the national flower of Ukraine) in aid of the Ukraine humanitarian appeal, raising an impressive £129. It was not easy to find an address to send a cheque, so to make life simple, the treasurer "pocketed" the cash and made a personal bank transfer to the Disasters Emergency Committee Ukraine appeal – the advantage of this was that he was able to GiftAid the payment, so that it was worth 25% more to the charity.



**On Saturday 3rd September** Prestwood Gardening Society are holding their 43<sup>rd</sup> Annual Show in Prestwood Village Hall. Doors open 2pm and admission only 50p! As well as a fruit and vegetable section there are cakes, preserves and crafts, and tea and cakes being served in the small hall.

**Forthcoming indoor meetings in the Drake Hall starting at 8pm. We do not meet in August.**

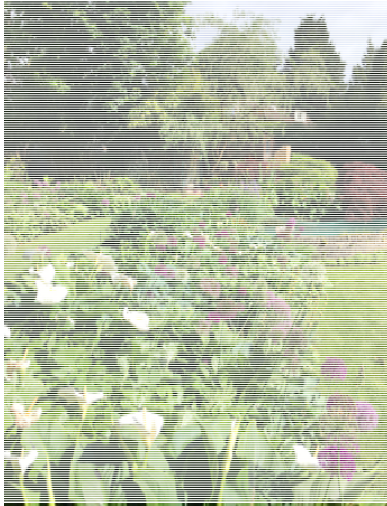
**September 22<sup>nd</sup>** Brian Fisher: Interesting and unusual plants for summer and autumn display. (Note that this is not the talk that was advertised in the programme; the speaker who was booked for this date has had to cancel.)

**October 27<sup>th</sup>** David Hurren (gardening journalist and horticultural consultant): A world of plants in your garden, where they come from and how that helps us grow them better, and a few tips on pruning.

**November 24<sup>th</sup>** Brenda Harold (a well known botany lecturer who has visited us in the past): Flower Power – how plants control animals.

**December 15<sup>th</sup>** (Note this is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday, not the 4<sup>th</sup>). Xmas social – details in the November newsletter.

## Visit to Magnolia House, May 25th

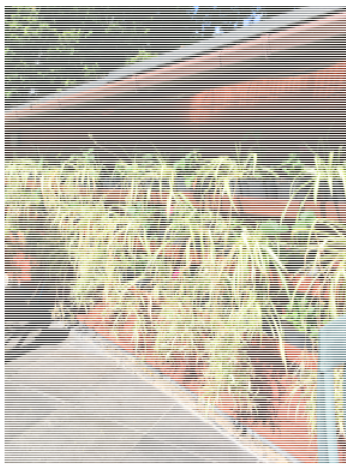


Twenty eight of us visited the half acre garden of Alan and Elaine Ford in Wooburn Green. We were warmly welcomed and had some time to admire the garden at the front of the house which had a very pretty pond. Alan was lamenting the lack of frogs this year, which was also experienced by others. (Editor's note: we only had one clump of frog spawn in our pond this spring, but large frogs have jumped out of the fernery and other areas of the garden when we have used the hose.)

The garden at the back of the house had an even larger pond protected by netting from the ever present herons. We strolled around the garden which contained over 60 different species of hostas. There were many mature trees, ferns, cacti and a pretty stream with a water wheel. Near the large "working area" was a bamboo which needed strict control and two greenhouses. We were entertained by a small aviary containing some attractive love birds. There were many pots of hostas, cacti and a wall of spider plants.

As a bonus, Alan and Elaine's neighbours at 'Shades' invited us to look round their garden, which was more formally planted with cottage garden plants and many lovely roses.

Sadly, rain fell for most of the afternoon. Our hosts went out of their way to accommodate us all under cover for a delicious tea with homemade cakes and scones. Elaine showed some of us a book of photos telling the story of the formation of the garden. Apart from opening their garden, between them they have raised over £37,000 for Scanappeal. Amazing!

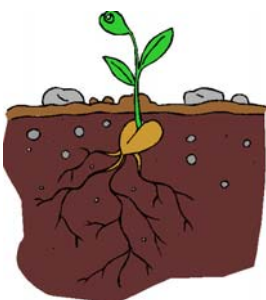


It was a most enjoyable afternoon, despite the rain.



Irene Glyn-Jones and photographs by Frances Billington

## The ignorance of youth?



All too often I am upset by journalists who give garbled versions of events I recall well, but that presumably happened before they were born, and they have relied on folk memory rather than checking the facts. There was an article in *The Guardian* recently about a debate among gardeners as to whether or not runner beans benefit from spraying.

We all know the folklore that beans set seed better when sprayed, although there seems to be little or no evidence – perhaps I could set up an experiment next year and spray the plants on one side of the arch, and not the other. What caught my eye, however, was the journalist's statement that the spraying was to affect **germination!**

# Visit to Ordnance House and Heale House, June 1<sup>st</sup>

## Ordnance House

Ordnance is a modern garden, cleverly designed by the owners to make the best use of the 1 acre space. The layout is formal with the major axis running diagonally across the garden with clipped box hedges shrubs and trees. The beds, however, are filled with flowers and some paths are edged with catmint, Walkers low, which doesn't sprawl. Thousands of alliums were in full flower, together with iris, foxgloves, thalictrum and a limited

range of other flowers to create a harmonious palette of mauves pinks and white. To follow there will be lavender and cosmos.

The garden was shown on *Gardeners' World* two weeks after our visit, but we agreed it did not do the garden justice.



## Heale House

The garden at Heale House was a total contrast and it has been in the same family for generations. There were formal areas near the house and meadows where rattle had been planted to reduce the growth of grasses so wild flowers and orchids thrived. For many, the best

part of the garden lay further on, where a narrow branch of the river Avon meandered through the garden, crossed by several bridges. Much of the lush planting here was more natural, creating a tranquil atmosphere. Another popular area was the nursery.



Our visit was far too short as we had been held up on the way; this is a garden I would love to revisit.

Frances Billington

## Five days in North Somerset and Devon, June 30<sup>th</sup> – July 4<sup>th</sup>

### Day 1, Rooksnest



As we left Amersham, Frances said that all she knew about Rooksnest was from the NGS webpage, and she had selected it because it was just about the right distance along the M4 from Amersham for a morning break. She should not have worried, it is a stunning modern garden covering 10 acres, designed by Arabella Lennox-Boyd. There was plenty to see, including ponds with unusual fountains, a rose garden and herbaceous and shrub borders, as well as a fruit and vegetable and cutting garden. The promised coffee/tea and biscuits turned out to be drinks with excellent home-made cakes. Even disregarding the cakes, this is a garden to remember for any future trips that take us along the M4 and near Lamborne.



### Day 1, Cannington walled garden



Cannington walled garden covers 2 acres in the grounds of what was a medieval priory. It is now one campus of the Bridgewater and Taunton Further Education and 6<sup>th</sup> Form College, teaching a variety of courses in horticulture. Unfortunately, the area nearest the entrance is the least interesting and least well kept. After that we came to a really depressing vegetable garden, thoroughly overgrown with weeds. Cynically, I suggested that weeding was a third year advanced course. In fact, a member of staff told us that “the students don’t do weeding”. It seems that they find it difficult and hard work, and so refuse to take any courses that include weeding. Since the College depends on student fee income, they have bowed to student pressure, and weeding is not taught!

As we progressed further round, the gardens improved considerably, with a well-designed and well-maintained Mediterranean garden, the “obligatory” Jubilee garden with red, white and blue flowers, and a large glasshouse with some excellent cacti in bloom. The glasshouse was especially welcome as most of us had reached it when the rain came down!



## Day 2, Elworthy Cottage Garden and Nursery



Elworthy Cottage Garden is a delightful acre of cottage garden planting created by Mike and Jenny Spiller, some 600 ft above sea level on a north facing slope. Despite consisting mainly of well-stocked herbaceous borders of various shapes, the garden has a good structure of trees, shrubs and perennials, suggesting that it has all-year round interest. We enjoyed our visit (and filled much of the luggage space of the coach with plants). Afterwards we received a complimentary email from Mike Spiller saying “Thanks very much for coming to visit us on 1<sup>st</sup> July. We really enjoyed having you here. We found the members of your group to be very friendly, and also both interested and knowledgeable.”



## Day 2, Dunster Castle



Dunster Castle sits above the picturesque Dunster Village; the coach had to park at the beginning of the village, in the car park, and we had to walk through the village (rather steep, but interesting) then on to the National Trust entrance. There was supposed to be an NT shuttle from the entrance up to the Castle, but this was not working (although a few people did manage to secure rides in one that was supposed to be being used for staff training). The walk from the entrance up to the castle is steep – indeed, it was excellent cardiovascular exercise, and I wondered if this is how it would feel if I took the wrong turning going into the new Chilterns Lifestyle Centre and wound up in the gym rather than the Community Centre. There was some interesting planting along the way up to the castle, and a few areas of planting around the castle itself, but the main attraction was the castle itself, and the views over the village.



## Day 3, No gardens!

Day 3 started well, then just above Lynmouth the coach became stranded on a tight and steep hairpin bend on the main A39. The front wheels were off the ground and the rear of the coach was gouged into the tarmac. We blocked the road for some 4 hours altogether. One local passerby told us that some 20 coaches a year get stranded there; another, walking past, just said "Not again!"

The local police were extremely helpful, ferrying those who needed facilities to a café at Watersmeet National Trust property some distance along the road back to Lynmouth, and attempting to call taxis or an alternative

coach to get us away. All to no avail; it was the last day of the Somerset county show, and all coaches and taxis were fully booked. The police also took Irene to the café, where she bought their entire stock of sandwiches, so that at least we had something to eat. We were good and did not photograph fellow AGA members being taken into the back of a police car.

Eventually the breakdown lorry arrived from Ilfracombe, and managed to get the coach back on the road, and we went to Lynmouth for a short break before returning to our hotel.



Richard Wright, from the West Somerset Free Press had obviously heard the police radio calls about our plight and came along to interview us. His report was on-line by the time we were back in our hotel for pre-dinner drinks.

With his permission, this is what he wrote:

### Garden club stranded on Exmoor after tour bus gets stuck, by Richard Wright Saturday 2nd July 2022 5:05 pm

A gardening club of nearly 50 pensioners from Buckinghamshire spent several hours out in the rain after their sightseeing bus got stuck on a notorious hairpin bend on Exmoor. The Amersham Gardening Association, who are staying at hotels in Minehead, were on their way to Marwood Hill Gardens, near Barnstaple, when the coach grounded negotiating the sharp bend on the A39 near Hillsford Bridge on the road out of Lynmouth.

The incident happened at about 10.30am today (Saturday) and the club, on a five-day trip to see some of the most picturesque gardens in Somerset and Devon, were evacuated from the coach after the driver was unable to free it.

The stoic pensioners then huddled under umbrellas while recovery men from Horne Park garage in Ilfracombe were called to release the coach.

Richard Jones, who donned a yellow fluorescent jacket to take on traffic management duties, said: "There was a terrible grinding noise as the rear of the coach

churned up the tarmac and everyone gave a sharp intake of breath."

The driver of the Crusader Holidays coach said the vehicle was fitted with air suspension, but he said: "The road is newly tarmacked, and it was wet and I went out as far as I could to take the turn but once the front end has grounded there's no recovery then."

The 48 members of the gardening club were told to evacuate the coach. One of them, retired policeman Mike Hall swung into action and told oncoming vehicles to turn around and then went further up the hill to Barbrook to stop anymore coming down.

Club president Tim Hillier said: "It is disappointing, but I'm pleased to say nobody was hurt and the police have been very good to us."

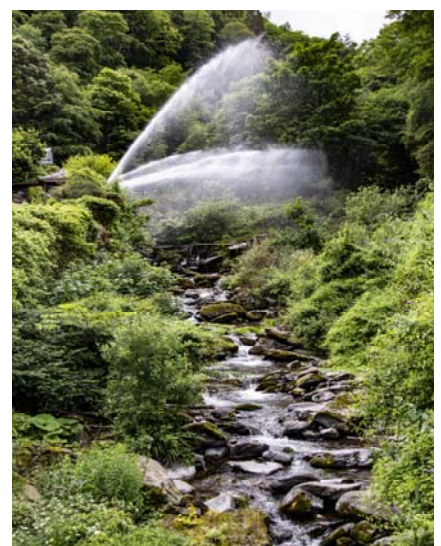
Sgt Nella Barker, of Devon and Cornwall police, said: "Our priority is the welfare of everybody here and getting the vehicle unstuck. "They are the happiest, most upbeat group of people I have had to deal with and there's a lot of them."

Police helped get desperate pensioners ferried to the loo and also took one of the organisers to the nearby café at Watersmeet National Trust property to buy a hundred pounds worth of sandwiches. The keen gardeners are used to all kinds of weather, but usually it's for geraniums and garden peas.

Irene Glyn-Jones, one of the trip organisers, said: "We were all very calm and nobody was worried. But since then, we've been standing in the rain."

Tim Hillier said: "It was an adventure but one we would rather not repeat."

### At least we got to see something of Lynmouth:



### GQT – our Sunday ritual

When we are at home on Sunday afternoon we record Gardeners' Question Time on Radio 4, to listen over dinner that evening (and perhaps with some left over for Monday evening). We often disagree with the experts on the panel, something that is easy to do in the privacy of our dining room. On July 31<sup>st</sup>, one question was about sparrows eating the questioner's lettuce plants. After some discussion, the panel members agreed that it was probably because the birds were thirsty, and they noted that lettuce is some 90+% water. They made various suggestions, including netting the lettuce, or planting more to share with the sparrows. No-one made the obvious (to us) suggestion – provide a bird bath for them to drink from.

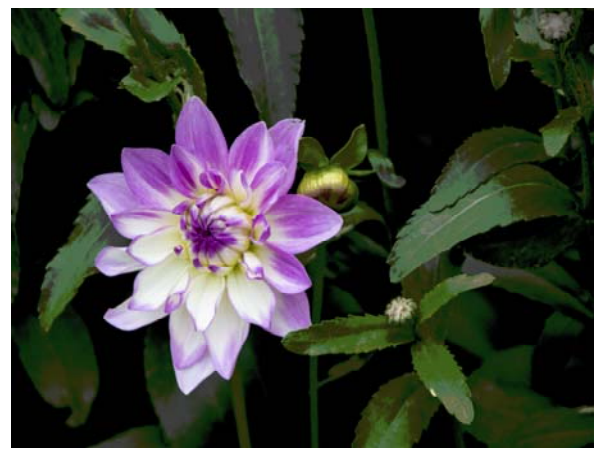
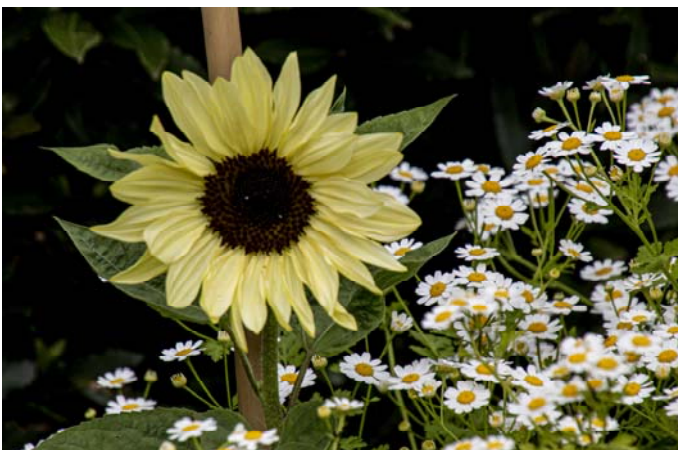
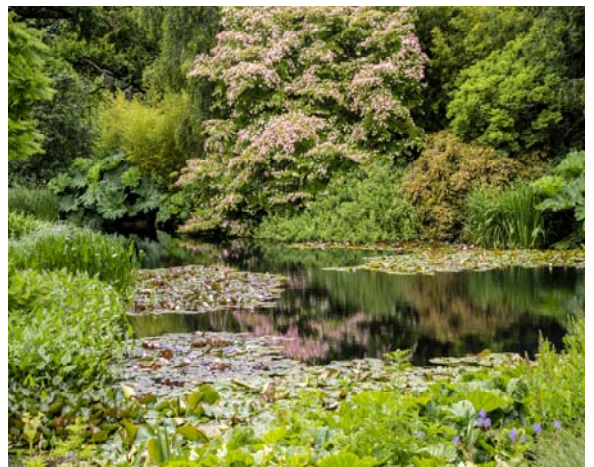
## Day 4, RHS Rosemoor



Opinions vary as to which of the RHS gardens is “the best”. I have not yet visited Bridgewater, but have visited the other four many times. I think my favourite is probably Harlow Carr, but that may be coloured by my Yorkshire roots, and the delightful walk from Harrogate station through the Valley Gardens to reach Harlow Carr. Ken, on the other hand, favours Rosemoor. Although this may reflect the natural bias of a southerner, it is difficult not to admire and enjoy Rosemoor. (Not that I have anything against Wisley or Hyde Hall – perhaps it is just that these two are easy to get to for a day trip, while Harlow Carr and Rosemoor need a longer trip away from home).

Our visit to Rosemoor was somewhat curtailed, because the direct route from Minehead, where we were staying, involved the same part of the A39 as had trapped us the day before. For obvious reasons Gareth, our driver, decided to take the longer inland route.

The delights of Rosemoor include the superb long borders, the delightful rose garden (at its best when we visited), the hot and cold gardens (both excellent examples of design that is probably beyond most of us in our more modest gardens), the fruit and vegetable garden and the many mature trees, especially in Lady Anne’s Garden, which was the original garden gifted to the RHS in 1988 by Lady Anne Palmer.



## Day 5, Tyntesfield



The main attraction at Tyntesfield is the Victorian gothic house itself, and its contents. There is the additional interest for gardeners that the founder, William Gibbs, made his fortune trading guano, the dried excreta of sea birds and bats, long used as a fertiliser. The modern equivalent is probably the pelleted dried chicken manure sold by a number of companies, although Amazon lists a number of companies selling bat guano.

The grounds around the house have the expected fine mature trees and views over the surrounding countryside. Near the house are terraces and decorative borders, and there is a rose garden as well as a walled vegetable garden. After Rosemoor the day before, the rose garden was somewhat disappointing, but there was a notice telling us that it is half way through a major refurbishment and redesign.



Our final stop was at Cobbs Farm Shop near Hungerford – no real garden interest here, not that we expected any (although there were some plants for sale). This was mainly for a comfort stop and refreshments (cakes superior to the usual motorway service station or garden centre), plus the chance to buy interesting foods. Much appreciated by those of us who would have to cook dinner when we reached home, not to mention some stock for the freezer, and an interesting truffled brie.

In previous years, one person has organised the whole of the holiday – most recently (and indeed since I joined

AGA), that has been Joan Clark. This year eight people were involved, with any one person organising one day or one garden, under Joan's guidance and with Stuart Stanley undertaking much of the organisation relating to members, payment, etc. So, many thanks (in order of the days they organised) to Joan Clark (hotel), Frances Billington (Rooksnest and Cannington), Stuart Stanley (Elsworthy Cottage Garden and Dunster Castle), Felicity Vickery (Marwood Hill Gardens, a victim of the A39 incident), Irene Glyn-Jones (Greencombe Gardens, again a victim of the A39 incident), Jane Jenkins (Rosemoor), Liz Molton (Tyntesfield) and Isabel Wise (Cobbs Farm Shop).

## More on the holiday, by Libby Crabbe

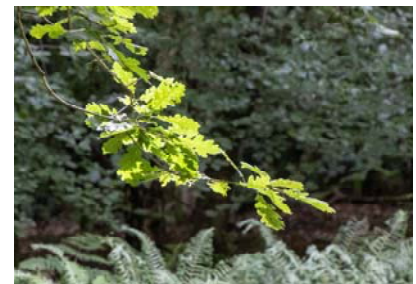
On the 30<sup>th</sup> June forty eight members of the AGA  
Boarded a coach with Gareth our driver in Chiltern Way  
(no Ave)  
Our destination Minehead to visit gardens in Somerset  
and Devon  
First stop - Rooksnest - which had a garden of such  
splendour, we were quite in heaven  
Designed in part by Arabella Lennox Boyd - of  
spectacular plants it was not devoid.  
However we were not enlightened with the name of the  
owner  
But the house had a tower with a shute to the pool so  
one could go under.  
Next a visit to the walled gardens of Cannington  
organised by Frances again  
With John standing by with his photographic prowess  
These were set in the grounds of a medieval priory  
without an abbess.  
To shelter from the shower of rain to the Glasshouse we  
retired  
Where we did espy rows of flowering cacti - one  
reaching right up to the sky.  
We then arrived at Northfields Hotel and overflow  
Foxes, occupied by Chris and Di,  
Maureen and Jan, Gareth and Libby, with Judith and  
Bob in a B&B nearby.  
To dine in the evening at Northfields we crept  
Where thankfully Joan reorganised where we all sat,  
Although breakfast was eaten in the place where we  
slept.  
Friday dawned all sunny and bright, so off with Stuart in  
charge to  
Elworthy Cottage on a north- facing site  
Brimming with flowers of every hue, with geraniums  
galore in a nursery too.  
Next on to Dunster Castle perched on a hill with a  
wonderful view.  
In the town was a Yarn where they used to sell wool.  
Bequeathed by the Luttrells to the National Trust  
A walk round the castle and gardens was simply a must.  
Inside - of note - was the 17<sup>th</sup> century staircase carved  
in one piece from elm and oak,  
And leather pictures believed to be the largest in the  
world.  
The story of Anthony and Cleopatra - the star-crossed  
lovers in all their glory unfurled.  
Saturday turned out to be a day of high drama,  
Thus missing Marwood and Greencombe and their  
panorama.  
Having negotiated the hills of Porlock with ease,  
The coach grinded to a halt on a sharp steep corner if  
you please.  
All piling out - our ex policeman Mike - partner of leader  
Felicity - up the road did hike,  
While yellow jacketed Richard Jones halted traffic  
without cones.  
The police then arrived with the West Somerset Free  
Press  
To help these stoic pensioners in the rain and in their  
distress.

Keith Hofmeister, not only master of the yard, but also  
photography  
Was there to snap us, along with police notice and our  
paraphernalia.  
Into the police car Irene, Sarah and Libby did hop  
To go to the loo and for sandwiches shop  
At the Watersmeet Café which was quite a drop.  
A hundred pounds worth of well filled bread  
Purchased to keep the waiting gardeners fed.  
Four hours passed before the coach was jacked up and  
set free,  
Then to Lynmouth we all went for cake and restorative  
tea.  
Next day, with coach in good order, to Rosemoor we  
sped, with weather not mizzly  
These glorious gardens to see comparing favourably  
with Wisley.  
Cool, hot, rose, herb, winter gardens and long border,  
Plus arboretum, bog, exotic, stone and Mediterranean,  
Allotments and lake – Jane keeping us all in good order.  
Monday dawned when we had to pack, plants on the  
coach we did not lack!  
But drama was not at an end as protesters were  
blocking the M5  
Which to Liz Moulton's dismay made Gareth give us a  
longer drive.  
He had to divert to get us to Tyntesfield - a neo-gothic  
mansion of such splendour -  
Whose sixty thousand possessions us speechless did  
render -  
Not to be removed from the house  
Unless of course it were a dead mouse.  
Owned by the Gibbs family who had made their fortune  
from guano!  
[William Gibbs made his dibs, selling the turds of foreign  
birds]  
Death duties were settled by the acquisition of Bellini's  
Madonna  
Loaned back to the house for display in the Ante Room.  
Our final visit to Cobbs Farm Shop near Hungerford -  
Yet another ride on the coach we could ill afford!  
With its quite diverse display of things to eat,  
After yet more cake and tea we were quite replete.  
To the coach we were guided by organiser Issy,  
Yet more plants to load made Gareth quite dizzy.  
Although some were carried on people's laps  
Without I hope too many mishaps.  
So finally a big thankyou to Tim, our president, and his  
stalwart clan,  
And thankyou too for fellow members' company and my  
coach companion Anne.  
And to Gareth who coped without any fuss  
Loading and unloading plants and cases stowed under  
his bus.  
I look forward to the social evening at the end of July  
When we can view photographs supreme  
Taken by Keith, John, David and the rest of the team.  
What tales to tell while dining in style  
With laughter and jokes from all of us folks.  
I'm sorry if your name I've failed to mention  
To offend anyone for the omission was not my intention.

## Visit to Montana, July 27<sup>th</sup>

We were originally booked to visit Montana in October last year, but were told that as a result of recent rain the ground was extremely wet, and wellies would be essential. So, we cancelled the booking and made arrangements for July 27<sup>th</sup> this year. How very different – like ours, the garden had seen no useful rain all month, and everywhere was very dry.

The owner, Diana Garner, greeted us at the gate and gave us a brief history of the garden that she and her husband started some 27 years ago. Their first planting was a hedgerow to block noisy neighbours at the adjacent stables. Shortly after, they were excited by the description of *Liriodendron tulipifera*, the tulip tree, and bought one which stands at the garden entrance. What they learnt after planting it was that it would not flower until it was 15 – 20 years old. It has now flowered, so their patience has been rewarded.



In addition to creating the garden from scratch, some years after moving in they had the opportunity to buy some 3 acres of woodland that stretched from the end of their garden around the neighbour's garden. This is an interesting area of mixed woodland with bracken undergrowth but no apparent brambles. There are a number of stumps where trees have been felled, and evidence of new planting as well as natural regeneration. We were told that in spring the woodland is a mass of daffodils, and they plant more each year – oddly, there was no mention of bluebells, which we might expect to find in an old-established wood.

Despite the lack of water, the hydrangeas seemed to be flourishing, and most were blue, suggesting that either the soil is rich in aluminium, or Diana waters them with aluminium salts – left to their own devices, in iron-containing soil, blue hydrangeas will always revert to pink, with a rather unattractive intermediate stage part way between blue and pink.

The sweet peas around the edge of the vegetable garden were sparse (as so many of us have noticed this dry year), but very strongly scented. Was it mean of us to remark that the runner beans were not as advanced as ours?

Over tea and cakes there was some discussion of an article in *The Guardian* about whether or not runner beans should be sprayed with water to encourage setting of seed (opinion around the tea table was as divided as in the original article).

David Bender



## Some requests for help

We always need people to meet and greet members and visitors at our meetings.

If you can help, please contact Felicity Vickery Tel: 01494 726284, email [felicityvickery@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:felicityvickery@yahoo.co.uk)

We need people to help with the tea and coffee at our meetings. There is a rota so you are not expected to help at every meeting.

If you can help, please contact Liz Moulton Tel: 01494 784913, email [libbym6740@gmail.com](mailto:libbym6740@gmail.com)

**Please remember the raffle at each meeting.** The profit on the raffles makes a very useful contribution to our expenses; subscriptions alone do not cover the cost of meetings and speakers.

**Publicity.** If you know where you could put a publicity poster please contact [david.bender@btinternet.com](mailto:david.bender@btinternet.com)

At present we have posters in the following places:

White Hill Centre, Chesham  
Van Hage garden centre  
Little Chalfont Library  
Coleshill Village Hall

## Committee and Contact Details

President	Tim Hillier	<a href="mailto:president@amersham-gardening.org.uk">president@amersham-gardening.org.uk</a>
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Visits Secretary	Joan Clark	
Show Secretary	vacant	
Membership Sec	Clive Symes	<a href="mailto:membership@amersham-gardening.org.uk">membership@amersham-gardening.org.uk</a>
Talks Secretary	Julie Burton and Sue Edwards	<a href="mailto:speakersec@amersham-gardening.org.uk">speakersec@amersham-gardening.org.uk</a>
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Newsletter Editor	David Bender	<a href="mailto:newsletter@amersham-gardening.org.uk">newsletter@amersham-gardening.org.uk</a>

## Past newsletters

There is an archive of past newsletters from May 2014 to the current issue on our website at

<http://www.amersham-gardening.org.uk/newsletter.html>

## Local events

If you know of local garden events, open gardens, etc, please email [newsletter@amersham-gardening.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@amersham-gardening.org.uk) to let us know as early as possible, so that information can go out in the newsletter and on the website.

## Photos from outings

You can see links to lots of photos from our outings at <http://www.amersham-gardening.org.uk/outings.html>

## See the photos in this issue full size

[Click here](#) to go to the Flickr site containing the photos from this newsletter.

Click the button on the top right of the screen for a slide show; you can scroll through the pictures using the > and < arrows on the right and left of the screen

