

Amersham Gardening Association

www.amersham-gardening.org.uk

November 2022 Newsletter

From the Secretary

In the 2021 November Newsletter I hoped that 2022 would be a good gardening year. Not sure I would call it a good year as it was such a struggle to keep plants alive. I wonder what 2023 will be like.

At least meetings have been able to go ahead in person rather than on Zoom and our summer holiday went well, despite one rather unfortunate mishap which was reported in the August Newsletter.

Xmas social December 15th

Note this is the 3rd Thursday, not our usual 4th Thursday.

As usual, we will provide wine and soft drinks from AGA funds; please bring along "finger food" to share. If your name begins with A – L, please bring savoury food; if it begins with M – Z, please bring sweets / dessert food. It will help if you put a label on any plates or dishes that you bring food in – every year someone leaves a dish behind and we don't know whose it is.

As the Christmas Social last year had to be cancelled we held a social in July which seems to have been enjoyed. Hopefully there will be no problem with holding a December social this year, so do come, everyone welcome. More details below.

The committee wish everyone a happy and healthy New Year.

Jean Bowling

We will have a tombola – please bring prizes to the November meeting (24th).

Please bring things you would like to win! and if it is food or drink, please make sure it is in date and not opened!

There will also be a table quiz and other entertainment.

Holiday May 15th – 19th 2023

Details of next year's holiday to the Isle of Wight are on pages 5 – 11, and the booking form is attached.

Subscription renewal

Subscriptions are due at the end of December – the renewal form is attached. The cost remains at £10 for a single member or £17 for a couple at the same address.

Plant sale Saturday April 29th

We will be holding a plant sale in the forecourt of St Michael's Church from 09:00 – 12:00 on Saturday April 29th. Please take cuttings, split large clumps of perennials, sow extra seeds (especially vegetables), ready to bring along for the sale. Please make sure cuttings are well-rooted! As well as adding to our funds, the plants sale is an excellent way of advertising ourselves and attracting new members.

Jean Bowling writes: Some of you may be thinking of buying an amaryllis this Christmas. I hope you are prepared for it to grow like this on the right! The box said height 18", I think that was a little inaccurate to say the least.



Restoration of the family boot scraper



This boot scraper has been in the family since I was born, maybe longer, and I decided to have it restored. First it went to be sandblasted and coated by a wonderful man called Bear in a hidden small workshop in an old farmyard in Hyde Heath. Then down to Chesham for new brushes to be tailor made at R. Russell Brush Co, established in 1840. This is one of the few remaining brush factories in England.

Then it came home.
Restored to glory!

Felicity Vickery



Ice cubes for orchids?

I enjoy James Wong's article in *The Observer* each Sunday. On October 2nd he wrote about the use of ice cubes to water tropical orchids. This seems to be counter-intuitive – why would you want to cool tropical plants kept in a British living room. In fact, it seems to be a misinterpretation of how orchids from the cool highlands of Singapore (and other tropical countries) are grown in the lowlands. In Singapore the average temperature is above 32°C, and orchids from the temperate highlands do not thrive – so, in Singapore people water their highland orchids with ice cubes. This is not necessary in temperate climates or with a room temperature of about 21°C.



When we were in Singapore a few years ago, we visited the National Botanic Gardens, and paid the few Singapore dollar entrance fee for the National Orchid Garden (entry to the rest of the Botanic Gardens was free). We were more than happy to linger in the area devoted to highland orchids – both they and we appreciated the air conditioning and cooled air spray in what was otherwise a hot and very humid environment.

The other place we saw outdoor air conditioning was Las Vegas, where the problem is heat but not high humidity. We queued to see the white tigers at the Mirage resort and were grateful for the gentle spray of cooled air and water vapour overhead. We visited the Flamingo Hilton, where they have an outdoor aviary – obviously, flamingos, and, to our surprise, house sparrows, but also penguins – and these Antarctic birds were kept cool by outdoor air conditioning.



What is the weather like outside?

Some years ago I bought an electronic indoor-outdoor thermometer – an indoor thermometer with an outside sensor that sent the temperature wirelessly to the indoor unit. It was very useful on bright sunny days in winter when I was warm indoors, and, without knowing the outdoor temperature, might have set off for work without a warm enough coat. That instrument has now been



replaced by one with three outdoor sensors – so as well as one in the garden in a shaded position, we have one in each greenhouse – very useful in winter to make sure that the heaters are working to keep them frost-free on cold days. Also interesting, but less important, in summer to see how hot the greenhouses get.

The new instrument also gives humidity indoors and from each outdoor sensor, as well as atmospheric pressure, and, very useful for checking watches and clocks, it has a radio-controlled clock linked to the atomic clock at the National Physical Laboratory in Teddington. It also purports to offer a weather forecast. This seems to be based solely on the barometric pressure and whether it is rising or falling. On August 14th, during the heatwave and drought, it told me that we were about to suffer thunderstorms and rain. No such luck.

We also have a small stick that a friend from USA gave us – it is apparently a Native American weather stick. In hot dry weather it points up; in wet weather (or high humidity) it points down. It may be no more than a variant on the hank of seaweed that as a child I collected and hung up somewhere in the garden, but it does seem to work. On August 14th, when our expensive electronic device thought it was raining, our weather stick was proudly pointing upwards.

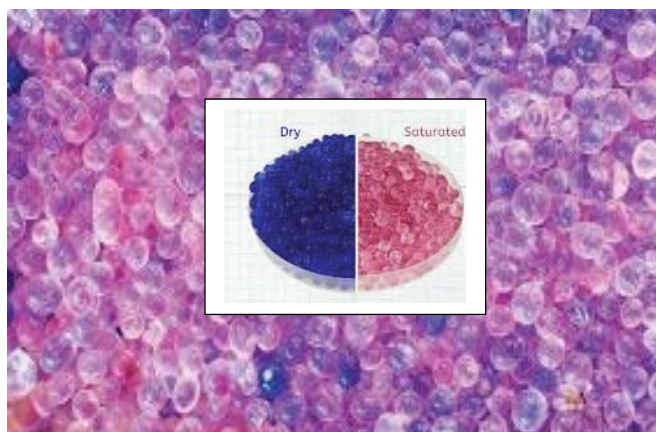


As a child, I remember seeing a seaside souvenir of a North American Indian (now more correctly known as a native, first or indigenous American) as a weather forecasting instrument. It was a plaster moulding, with an apron impregnated with cobalt chloride. Cobalt chloride takes up moisture from the air and is pink. However, if the moisture is driven off (as when humidity is low), it is blue. Hence the slogan on the ornament “Apron blue, weather is too; apron pink, weather stink”. Cobalt chloride also provided me with “invisible ink” as a child. A dilute solution was used to write a message. As long as it remained damp, or there was enough humidity in the air to keep it pink, the message was invisible. Holding the paper over a candle or other source of heat drove off the moisture and the now anhydrous cobalt chloride was bright (cobalt) blue. As

the paper picked up moisture from the atmosphere, so the message disappeared again.

Cobalt chloride is also sometimes used together with silica gel crystals used to keep instruments, etc dry. When the silica gel has absorbed moisture and is no longer capable of doing its job, the crystals turn pink. Putting them in the oven drives off the absorbed moisture, and the crystals turn blue, and are available once again to absorb moisture.

Some time ago, after one of those dreaded updates to Windows, a new weather icon appeared on the task bar at the bottom of my computer screen. As far as I can tell, it tells me, in Amersham, what the weather is in Great Missenden. On August 16th, when we might have been about to have some rain at last, over 15 minutes from 8 am, it cycled through: a warning triangle with the text “storm”; a picture of the sun with the text “sunny”; a picture of an umbrella with raindrops, saying “rain coming”; a cloud and the text “cloudy, 17°”; then back to the umbrella and “rain coming”. The final message before I left the computer was the umbrella with rain drops and the text “rain on and off”, followed more or less immediately by the cloud and text “cloudy, 17°”. Obviously this meant changeable weather – or perhaps “I haven’t a clue”. The only other image I have seen, which did not appear that morning, is of a closed umbrella and the text “rain stopping”. Perhaps during the winter I will see images of snowflakes and / or frost.



Gold and more, again, for Amersham in Bloom

From the [RHS website](#)

“Amersham in Bloom were crowned as the Overall Winner at the 2022 UK Finals of Britain in Bloom, held at the RHS Lindley Hall. Also achieving a Gold award in the Town category, Amersham have succeeded in creating an inspirational culture of community connection through horticulture. With more than 1,000 people from the local area contributing to competitions, and educational or community events such as planting more than 8,500 new trees, their awards will be celebrated by all members of the community.

“Recognised for their efforts across all scoring criteria, Amersham in Bloom were particularly commended by Britain in Bloom judges and awarded a Sustainable Gardening Award for their contribution to improving the local environment. From increasing wildflower areas by 30% to replacing annual beds with perennial pollinators, a rise in biodiversity can be seen at every turn within the town.



“For their work with local schools and young people, Amersham have received a Children and Young People’s Participation Award. Through a children’s Eco Fest and seed project, they are paving the way for the next generation of green-fingered growers to take ownership of their town and care for community spaces.”

Forthcoming meetings in the Drake Hall starting at 8 pm

November 24th Dr Brenda Harold: Flower power – how plants control animals

Dr Harold is a botanist and retired university lecturer. This talk is about how plants defend themselves (physically and chemically) from herbivores, how they occasionally become carnivores, and how they use animals to carry their pollen and seeds.

Brenda writes: “Botany and genetics, the subjects that I tutor, are an unusual combination but they actually complement each other very well. After all, genetics began with Mendel's experiments on pea plants in the monastery garden. I knew from a young age that I wanted to be a scientist and I had always loved plants. I grew seeds and pressed flowers when I was quite small, but I grew up in London only rarely visiting the

country and the idea of becoming a biologist didn't cross my mind.

My school only offered botany and zoology as separate subjects and recommended that I took zoology. This was the moment when I recognised my passion for plants. I decided that if I couldn't take botany without zoology then I would have to take them both. Within a few weeks, I knew that I had made the right decision and went on to take a degree in botany. At that time, in the early '60s, genetics was also becoming very exciting as the genetic code was being cracked. I, therefore, opted for the Botany Department at University College London where the main research interest was in genetics.”

December 15th Xmas social – see page 1

January 19th Jill Eyers: Amazon adventure - flora and fauna

The story of a trip up the Amazon in a boat, camping in the jungle and exploring the ancient ecosystem of this wonderful part of the world.



5 day holiday on the Isle of Wight, Monday 15th May to Friday 19th May

Monday Channel View Hotel – Shanklin

<https://www.channelviewhotel.co.uk/index.html>



The AA Rated 3 Star Hotel boasts picturesque views of the English Channel in an idyllic location, set atop the cliffs of Shanklin Bay. The hotel sits in a prime location on the coastal path and within 2 minutes walking distance to the beach and 10 minutes walk to the town centre.

The Channel View offers 24-hour reception, and free Wi-Fi throughout the hotel. All rooms feature en-suite bathroom, flatscreen Freeview television, telephone, hairdryer, complimentary tea & coffee. Each en-suite

comes with complimentary toiletries and large fluffy towels.

There is an indoor heated swimming pool, jet spa and sauna. Solarium and massage treatments are also available (fees apply). There are 4 floors, most served by lift, but no rooms on the ground floor. There are 20 steps to the front of the hotel but also a ramp, and 3 steps up to the dining room. Rooms are inland view or side sea view, and a few full sea view rooms are available for a supplement.

Stuart Stanley

[Exbury Southampton SO45 1AZ](https://www.exbury.co.uk/gardens)

<https://www.exbury.co.uk/gardens>



In 1919 Lionel de Rothschild began to create a 250 acre woodland garden at Exbury. He assembled a celebrated collection of rhododendrons, azaleas, camellias, magnolias and other shrubs and trees. For over 100 years the gardens have been developed and provide spectacular walks through the gardens and down to the Beaulieu River.

There is also a narrow-gauge steam railway which visitors can have a ride on. Picnic areas are available and food can be bought in the restaurant.

Felicity Vickery

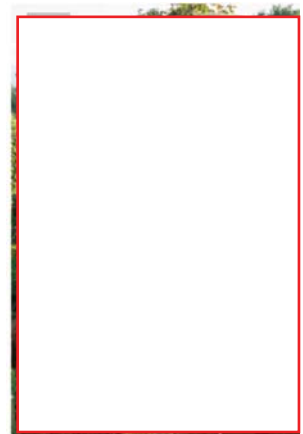
Tuesday Crab Cottage, Shalfleet PO30 4NE



Crab Cottage has 1¼ acres of gardens on gravelly soil. There are glorious views across the croquet lawn over Newtown Creek and the Solent leading to a wild flower meadow, woodland walk and hidden waterlily pond.

There is also a walled garden protected from westerlies, with mixed borders, leading to a terraced sunken garden with an ornamental pool and pavilion; planted with exotics, tender shrubs and herbaceous perennials.

Joan Clark



Northcourt Manor Gardens, Shorwell PO30 3JG

<http://www.northcourt.info/garden/>



This 15 acre glorious garden enjoys a very special microclimate, nestled below the Downs between the chalk and greensand ridges. This microclimate and soil conditions give them the opportunity to grow around 4,000 different plant varieties from around the world from subtropical plantings of exotic palms and bananas to bog-loving primulas, arums, and Mediterranean plants.

Northcourt Manor was chosen as a site for a monastic settlement because of the constant spring water which bubbles up from underground chalk aquifers and feeds the stream, pond and bath house. The garden rises 100 feet from the stream to the terraced woodland walks with distant sea views.

The terraced walks to the north lead down to the one acre organic productive walled kitchen garden. Throughout the garden they aim to work in harmony with the environment, with naturalised style herbaceous borders, wildflower meadows and woodland areas, and minimal use of pesticides or herbicides. Wildlife thrives in the garden, with red squirrels occasional visitors; buzzards and sparrowhawks are often seen flying overhead, barn owls and little owls nest in the stables, wall lizards and slow worms are seen sunning themselves, and even glow worms can be seen on warm summer evenings.

They hope to have plants for sale.

Frances Billington

Wednesday - free day with nothing formally planned for the group



There is the possibility of an optional trip to Osborne House. The entrance fee would be self-funded, probably in the £18 range. The house is maintained by English Heritage (EH), so members would be free.

Osborne house was a former royal residence, an Italianate palace designed by Prince Albert for Queen Victoria and built around 1850. There is a museum, state rooms, and a Swiss cottage to explore. The large estate contains gardens and a private beach accessed by a little bus (we hope). Lunch and coffee are

available in the café and restaurant. We would aim to spend the morning and early afternoon there, returning to Shanklin about 3pm.

Other venues to visit on the free day could be Carisbrooke Castle (EH), not far from Osborne House or Ventnor Botanic gardens or the Garlic Farm accessible from Shanklin by bus or taxi if people want to form a group to take the opportunity to visit it whilst on the Isle of Wight.

Jane Jenkins

Thursday Farringford House and Garden, Freshwater, PO40 9PE

<https://farringford.co.uk/>



Farringford is a Grade 1 Listed Building near Freshwater. It was the main residence of the poet laureate, Alfred Lord Tennyson, from 1853 until his death in 1892. He lived there with his family, seeking a retreat from the clamour of London life. Eminent friends visited and it became a centre of intellectual and artistic activity. It remained with the family until 1945 when it became a hotel but in 2010 work began to return it to its original condition. Now meticulously restored, the dramatic Gothic house reflects his tastes and lifestyle.

The grounds have also been returned to their authentic Tennyson era planting, based on contemporary descriptions by the poet's friends. The garden slopes

to the west, at the top of which is a replica of the arbour which the poet built with rushes gathered from the withy bed, so that Emily could enjoy the afternoon sun and the view facing west. In time, the sweetly scented climbing plants will engulf this restful retreat.

The colourful planting scheme visitors will see today includes oriental poppies; poet's laurel (*Danae racemosa*); 'King Arthur', 'Galahad' and 'Guinevere' varieties of delphinium; and tobacco plants (*Nicotiana sylvestris*), although they are no match for Tennyson's, described by one visitor as towering over seven feet high!

Val Cannon

Mottistone Gardens NT near Brightstone PO30 4ED

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/mottistone-gardens-and-estate>



Mottistone Gardens are set in a sheltered valley, they surround an ancient Manor House (not open) and have a Mediterranean-style planting scheme.

Taking advantage of the southerly location Mottistone have planted drought tolerant plants and an olive grove.

Isabel Wise

Friday Furzey Garden Minstead, Lyndhurst SO43 7GL

<https://www.minsteadtrust.org.uk/furzey-gardens>



It is 100 years since the Dalrymple family first planted this informal woodland garden, with a significant plant collection from around the world. It is nestled in the New Forest & supports people with learning difficulties through training & work experience.

It is a 10 acre garden bursting with colour. Seasonal highlights include vibrant rhododendrons in spring & a cottage garden in summer.

They have plant sales and a good restaurant

Liz Moulton



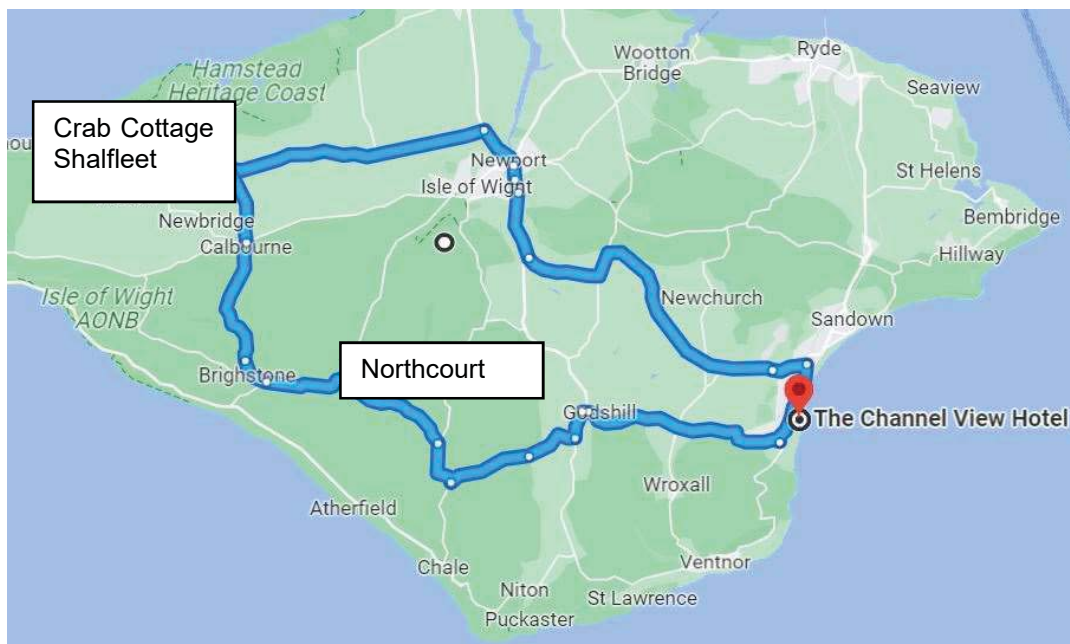
Monday

Amersham to Exbury (SO45 1AZ) <https://www.exbury.co.uk/gardens>
and on to Channel View Hotel, Shanklin <https://www.channelviewhotel.co.uk/index.html>



Tuesday

Crab Cottage, Shalfleet (PO30 4NE)
and Northcourt Manor (PO30 3JG) <http://www.northcourt.info/garden/>



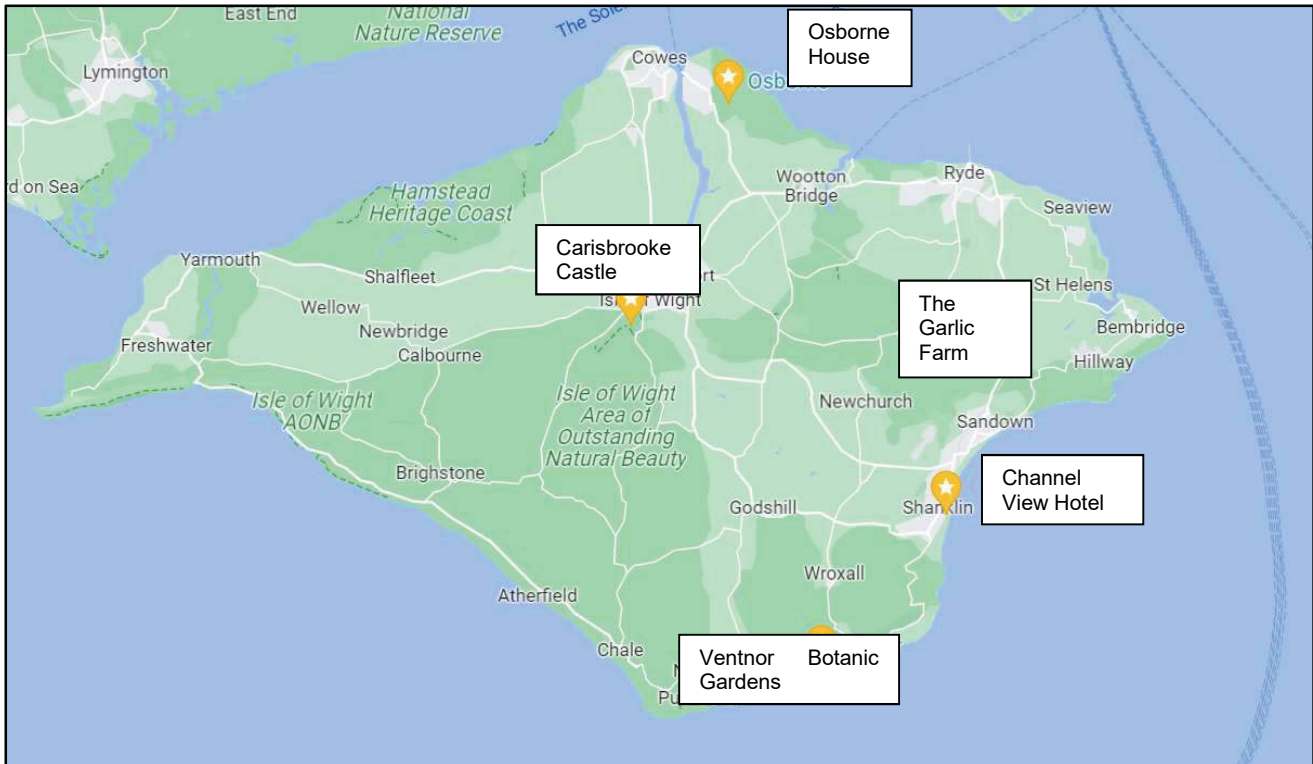
Wednesday Free day

Carisbrooke Castle <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/carisbrooke-castle/>

Osborne House <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/osborne/>

Ventnor Botanic Gardens <https://www.botanic.co.uk/>

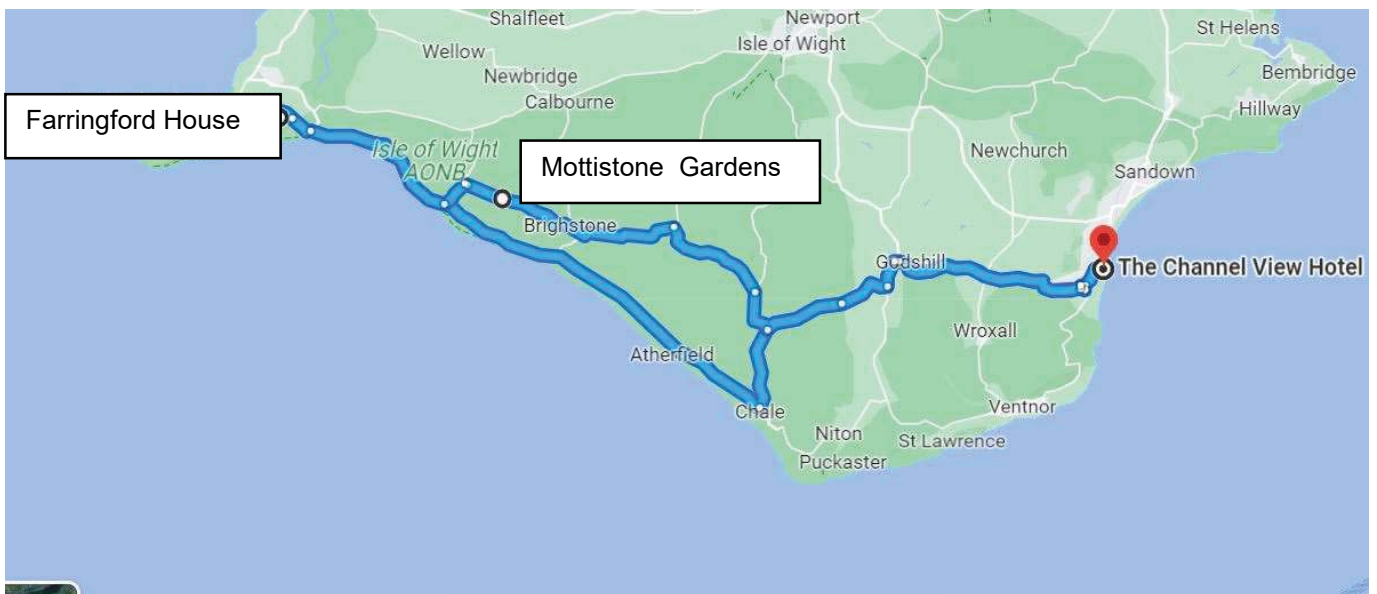
The Garlic Farm <https://www.thegarlicfarm.co.uk/>



Thursday

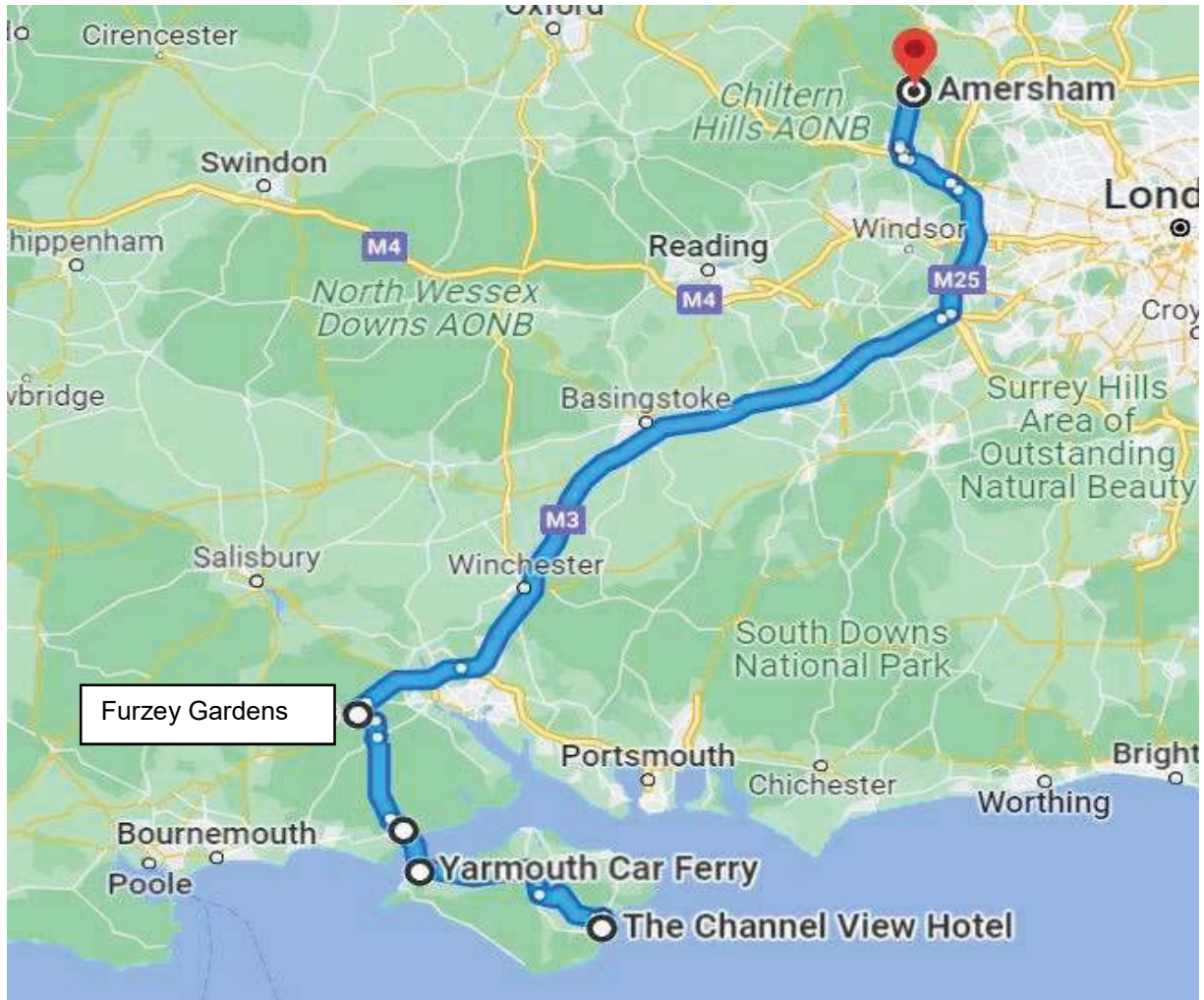
Farringford House (PO40 9PE) <https://farringford.co.uk/house-isle-of-wight/garden-and-grounds>

Mottistone Gardens (PO30 4ED) <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/mottistone-gardens-and-estate>



Friday

Furzey Garden (SO43 7GL) <https://www.minsteadtrust.org.uk/furzey-gardens/>
and back to Amersham



There is nothing special about these photographs

... except that they were taken in our garden on November 8th



This was the day that the Radio 4 weather forecast just before 8 am told us that temperatures would be “higher than they should be” – an interesting way of saying higher than usual for the time of year. Certainly the catkins on the hazel bush should not appear until February, and the flowers on the mahonia not until late January. We did not buy either the hazel bush or the yellow-berried holly. Both were presents from the garden wildlife – birds, squirrels or perhaps even field mice. Certainly we have hardy cyclamen coming up in places we did not plant them, and we know that field mice are said to like cyclamen seeds.



These unseasonal appearances in the garden are the result of the long hot dry spell in summer followed by plentiful rain in an unusually mild autumn. The dahlias are still flowering (just) and we have not yet brought the fuchsias in to the greenhouse. The dahlia on the left is Western Spanish dancer, with fuchsia thalia in a pot alongside.



We did not remember to give this hydrangea its annual dose of colourant (aluminium salts) early in the year, so the first few flower heads were that rather insipid liverish colour intermediate between pink and blue. The last flower head appeared after the dose of aluminium, and was the desired shade of pale blue. Now that its season is over, the flower heads are dying very attractively to deep purple (where they had been insipid) and deep blue.



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

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

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

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

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Show Secretary	vacant	
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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 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>

2023 has been named as year of the poppy by Fleuroselect

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