

NEWSLETTER

2010

September

NEXT MEETING: **Wednesday 29th September at 7.30pm**

COOKHAM DEAN VILLAGE HALL

Grasses and grass-effect plants

A talk by Brian Fisher

Chairman's Letter

I hope you have all had a very good summer, and those of you with fruit and vegetables must now be in the middle of a harvest. Thank goodness for the rain we've had these last few weeks, I was getting so tired of the hose, but it's a shame for those on holiday who no doubt would have liked the warm and sunny weather to continue a bit longer.

I think our visits to Waltham Place were very popular by all accounts and well attended. The method of gardening there is extremely interesting but it's certainly no less work than the conventional way. I went on the second visit and loved the whole experience, but my fingers did itch to pull up a few "weeds" on the way round, and although I'm prepared to accept that ground elder may be good in a salad and I know some people love nettle soup I don't somehow think I shall go down that route. Beatrix was a wonderful guide and it was so interesting to hear about the various people who have made Waltham Place what it is, most of all of course Mrs. Oppenheimer herself. Some of you may have read the piece about the garden in an edition of the Sunday Telegraph magazine a few weeks ago. I'll try and bring it to our next meeting.



My husband and I also went to West Dean Gardens in Sussex at the end of July, I'm sure many of you know them and have visited there, but we were fortunate to be there the week before their annual Chilli Festival so we saw all the different varieties growing in the greenhouses. What an amazing range, every colour, shape and size one can imagine, and of course they also have the Tomato Festival in early September and Apple Week in early October. It's a pity it's quite so far from here, it would be such an interesting place to visit throughout the year. 'For anyone who's interested in obtaining soft fruit plants or canes from an organic supplier, I have been advised of the following website: www.welshfruitstocks.co.uk'

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gardeners than me have been able to do so the competition at our September meeting will be quite instructive.

If you have visited any interesting gardens or shows over the summer I'm sure Gill Townend would be delighted to hear from you, and it's always good to have some new ideas. I look forward to seeing you on 29 September.

Many thanks, Susie Tremlett

Summer Visits to Waltham Place

Our two visits to Waltham Place were a delight. The house and gardens have been owned by Oppenheimer family for the past 100 years. When the current generation of Oppenheimers inherited the house in 1984 the bare bones of the original Percy Cane garden remained but the garden had lost its charm. The current gardens were designed by Henk Gerritsen for Strilli Oppenheimer. Gerritsen's inspiration was the plants, plant communities and natural processes of life and death that he saw in the wild and the gardens he created at Waltham Place involve working with nature, not setting out to conquer it. Stephen Lacey writing in the Sunday Telegraph recently says "For visiting gardeners it is a challenge to the received wisdom of what a garden should contain or look like". To illustrate this, he reports that Strilli Oppenheimer rushes out if she sees kind visitors trying to pull out bindweed declaring "Stop - it's meant to be here!"

Both our groups of 25 members were welcomed by Fiona, the enthusiastic administrator. We then had a two hour tour of the gardens by Head Gardener, Beatrice Krehl. Beatrice proved to be a most entertaining guide. She showed us a number of medieval-style walled gardens dating from the 17th century, with naturalistic plantings of complementary plants which minimizes the need for human interference and encourages a wealth of wildlife. She showed us seats, sculptures, arbours and fountains which complement the natural planting and a charming butterfly garden, a poignant memorial to a child who died young. She showed us the very diverse kitchen garden and we had a peep at the working organic and biodynamic farm. She showed us the five huge manure heaps including the leaf mould heaps, which are used for seed sowing and as a mulch. Finally, she showed us woodlands, a large lake and a spectacular double border in an avenue leading down from the house framed by clouds of Yew trees interwoven with bindweed.

Along the way, Beatrice explained the whys and wherefores of the self-sustaining, biodynamic method and answered our questions about weeds and pests, which if properly managed (mostly left alone to get on with it!) do not impede the productivity and beauty of the garden. We learned that ground elder need not be eradicated but can be eaten when young. One or two people had their first taste of day lilies in the kitchen garden! There is a readiness to experiment and accept what happens should wrong choices be made, for example irises had failed in a damp meadow so a different solution is being tried. Plants are chosen for their seasonal



changes, lots of different umbellifers (a giant called *Peucedanum verticillare*, whose seeds we were invited to take home), red and white *Persicaria*, purple *thalictrum* and *veronicastrum* and unusual colours (browns and maroons combined to good effect.) It was almost too much to take in one visit!

The tours ended for most of us with tea and a slice of delicious homemade cake, made using Waltham Place milk and butter, in the tea room. We followed this with a visit to the small farm shop, selling amongst other things a selection of gardening books, organic vegetables, home baked bread, chutney, jam, sweet peas, wool from Waltham Place sheep and salami from Waltham Place pigs. Most of us left vowing to make another visit on one of their regular open days (details below).

www.walthamplace.com Open for the NGS on Fridays, 10am-4pm, until Sept.24th.

An exhibition about Henk Gerritsen and the Dutch Wave opens at the Garden Museum, London SE1 on Oct.5th. www.gardenmuseum.org.uk.

SUDELEY CASTLE; HISTORY AND HEALING



On a fine June afternoon we called in to Sudeley Castle, nestling in the Cotswolds, close to the village of Winchcombe, an ancient wool trading town. The Castle was once home to Queen Katherine Parr, the last remaining wife of King Henry VIII and the gardens ooze history from the beautiful and romantic Tithe Barn Garden to the formality of the Queens Garden. Following the destruction of the castle as a military base by

Cromwell in 1649 Sudeley was at the mercy of the weather and looters until it was rescued from dereliction by the wealthy Worcester glove-makers, the Dent family. Emma Brocklehurst, wife of John Dent, was a major contributor to the design of the existing gardens. Today Sudeley is home to Lord and Lady Ashcroft and their family, the Dent-Brocklehursts. It is a popular wedding and hospitality venue as well as a thriving visitor attraction.



The jewel in the crown is the Queen's Garden sited on the original Tudor parterre and re-designed by Jane Fearnley- Whittingstall within the magnificent yew hedges planted in 1855. We were there a week before the official Rose Week which was perfect as the roses were just emerging and had that wonderful freshness and scent. The clematis, alliums and poppies were also still colourful and it was peaceful and magical. The Herbal Healing garden is a new attraction for 2010 and Lady Ashcroft is apparently developing a small range of herbal creams (based on the success of Trevarno products?) soon to be marketed at Sudeley. The Mulberry Garden featured a range of shade tolerant plants under the old multi-stemmed mulberry tree planted by Emma Brocklehurst in 1865. The underplanting included crown imperials, cowslips, primroses, hostas, ferns, cyclamen and peonies.



The modern Knot Garden was constructed in 1995 from 1,200 box plants and coloured gravel from a design based on a pattern from a dress worn by Elizabeth I. The central fountain has a Moorish theme and papyrus plants add to the sense of mysticism. There is a magnificent actinidia kolomikta on the south facing wall. In addition to the gardens above there is a White Garden, a secret garden, East Garden and a wild flower walk. There is a good website www.sudeleycastle.co.uk with more detail on the history, facilities and

gardens.

GT

Late Summer Herb Couscous

Here's an easy recipe using lots of those delicious homegrown herbs. It's an adaptation of one from Sarah Raven's Garden Cookbook. It can be served hot or cold, on its own or with anything you like.

Serves six.

275g couscous

500ml vegetable or chicken stock

Handful of mint, coriander or basil or a mixture of these

Handful of parsley

Grated zest and juice of half a lemon or lime

Salt and pepper

Optional extras.....

Splash of extra virgin olive oil

2 tbs. toasted pine nuts, pumpkin or sunflower seeds. Mary Downes

Events from the Plant Heritage Group (BBO area)

Saturday October 23rd, 2010: Harvey Stephens, Head of the Savill Garden, will give a guided tour of the garden which should be in its glorious autumn colours. The tour will start from the Savill Building at 14:00 but why not make a day of it and visit the Valley Gardens in the morning? There are lunches/teas etc at the Savill Garden and there is a picnic spot nearby. There will be a number limit, and the cost will be £6.65 per person to cover the garden entry (preferential group rate) unless of course you are a Friend of the Savill Garden. This cost will also cover the cost of parking at the Savill Garden car park..

Sunday November 21st, 2010: AGM at Waterperry Gardens (in the classroom) at 14:00. There will also be a speaker (subject to be confirmed).

Our own society will welcome a return visit on October 27th from Andrew Halstead from the RHS who will speak on Plant Pest Recognition and Control. Copy for the October newsletter to Gill Townend on gilltownend@aol.com.

Method

Put the couscous in a bowl and pour over the boiling stock, stir, cover with a plate and leave to stand for 10 minutes. Season and add the chopped herbs, lemon or lime zest and juice. Stir in the extras if you wish.