

ISLE OF WIGHT GARDENS TRUST

SPRING 2024



**Front cover—Snowdrops at York Gate, Leeds, opening for their annual snowdrop week.
There is a collection of about 100 different snowdrops - how wonderful that so many
gardens open in mid February for their snowdrop displays.**

ISLE OF WIGHT GARDENS TRUST

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ISLE OF WIGHT GARDENS TRUST

Charitable Incorporated Organisation No. 1165283

Member of The Gardens Trust

Committee of Management (Trustees) 2024

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Vicky Basford (Research)

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Front cover : Snowdrops at York Gate

Isle of Wight Gardens Trust Trustees forward.

In our last newsletter John Harrison recorded the many achievements the Trust had made over 35 years. With the help of Helen Thomas, we produced a booklet on the kitchen gardens of the Isle of Wight with the help of a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Sadly the champion of walled gardens, Susan Campbell, died recently and Helen pays tribute to her. We also produced a booklet celebrating Humphry Repton's contribution to the Isle of Wight landscapes.

We have celebrated how during the period of the Gardens Trusts there has been such an appreciation of the importance of our historic landscapes, parks and gardens. Now AONBs are being rebranded as National Landscapes. *Country Life* (January 17th issue) has a leading article "Three cheers for gardens", declaring that gardens "are in an extraordinary fine fettle", citing Chatsworth, Woburn and Blenheim as all having grand plans, and celebrating too the fine state of smaller gardens, with so many new plants becoming available to enjoy. Also pleasing is that the National Trust have acquired Gertrude Jekyll's garden, Munstead Wood at full market value, recognising the importance she brought to garden design.

In our newsletter we highlight some of the challenges ahead.

Back home our Marine Villa project progresses, and we achieved some planning successes with East Dene, where our objections and the listing of the site has persuaded the owner to withdraw plans for holiday units in the grounds. Our recent visit to Puckaster Cottage, reminds us how precious our marine villa sites are, and we will consider submitting Puckaster for registration with Historic England. The Committee (being the Trustees) have also been reconsidering members' roles, and wish to fill the vacant position of President, who will preside over the formal meetings of the membership. John Brownscombe returns from sabbatical to chair our meetings, keeping us in order but sadly Pamela England, our membership secretary, is having to retire. Sheila Caws is taking on this position. Do help us and we hope to see you at our various events. We still need a Treasurer and newsletter editor.

We have an interesting programme of visits planned and hope you can join us for as many as possible. Please also renew your subscription due April 1st if your payment is not by standing order, or if your standing order is an old one. It should be £15.00 single and £20 joint. Contact sheila.caws@btinternet.com if you are unsure.

Happy garden enjoyment!

Trustees

What we do.



A very jolly Christmas lunch was held at One Holyrood Street, Newport in the appropriately named “shed” by 19 members, and prospective members. Thanks to Jane Watson (in the distance at the head of the table) and Susan Dobbs (absent taking photo) for organising it. Very pleased to see Patsy Thompson, our retired events organiser now living in Dorset. It proved a valuable networking event.



Working as well! A lesson in recording at Puckaster Cottage by Vicky Basford with Moira Sibley, Sheila Caws and Sue Giles helping with plans.

Marine Villa project update.

The most significant event has been a visit by our working group to Puckaster Cottage in October, fortunately on one of a few dry days. Fourteen members of the group attended and we gained useful additional photos. After a speedy walk round, members went in groups to record features. Although many features like the glasshouses (probably 1930s) have fallen into disrepair we were impressed how little the site must have changed in the last 100 or so years and indeed since the house was built sometime before 1824. We were reminded why Kate Felus, in her report for Historic England, felt that this was the most intact of our south coast marine villas sites, and worthy for inclusion on the National Register. We were very grateful to Linda Breaks for giving us a free range, and have arranged a general visit. We aim to have a talk by Kate Felus have arranged a visit to Lisle Combe.



Members at the Belvedere or terrace admiring the sea.

We are particularly grateful to Robin McInnes for allowing the use of the image of a painting by Susan Kirkpatrick (1864) painted above the Orchards with Puckaster Cottage visible towards the lighthouse. See enclosure for details of members' visit.



Events for your diary.

Cornwall Garden Visit. Sadly not enough response.

Organised by the National Gardens Trust : see www.thegardenstrust.org for more detail:-

April 16th. Online course series “A history of gardens “

May 9th. Exbury gardens - private talk and tour

May 15th. A glimpse of the life of William Robinson. A talk in London.

Organised by us:

June 2nd Sunday. NGS garden open at Northcourt, PO303JG.12-17.00.

June 4th Tuesday. Visit to Houghton and Longstock– see details and booking form.

June 19th Wednesday . Visit to Puckaster Cottage, PO38 2LZ for 15.30. Parking in St. Catherine’s Road (about 4 minutes walk to cottage). The garden is quite steep in places. There might be some very limited space to drop off less able persons at house. Tea afterwards at Niton Post Office.

June 26th Wednesday. 15.00. AGM at Barton Manor for members. Parking in car park before the house on right hand of the drive.

July 21st Sunday at 14.30. Visit to Lisle Combe and tea. Booking and payment essential, and friends permitted. Limited parking in drive, otherwise in Undercliff Drive.

August 31st and September 1st. Wolverton Garden Fair.

October 8th Tuesday. Visit to the Newt– see details and booking form.

Salterns is opening for groups for the NGS. Also open are Ningwood Manor by arrangement, East Cliff June 9th , Morton Manor May 19th and August 10th, Thorley Manor May 19th, Nunwell August 11th and a number of newer gardens, including some new Bembridge gardens. Also Mountbatten Hospice June 29th and 30th to see the Chelsea 2016 award winning garden.

For other openings on the Island see www.ngs.org.uk Do support them as they now support students as well as all the other charities they historically have supported.

A New Year and new opportunities.

In the last newsletter we celebrated what the Isle of Wight Gardens Trust had achieved over 35 years. We celebrated how several of our historic landscapes were being restored by owners and how much more aware everyone now is to the important need to maintain parks and gardens and open space for the benefit of our physical and mental health. It is pleasing to note that the National Gardens Trust Vice-Chairman and Chair of the Conservation Committee, Chris Blandford, has been awarded an OBE in the New Year's Honours. In Suffolk four sites have been added to the National Register thanks to a Suffolk Gardens Trust project.

Reading the New Year's issues of *Country Life*, our natural and man made landscapes are celebrated as Britain has such an extraordinary richness. I am also being encouraged to read their report of the 2023 sales of large historic houses and parks, which have held up well despite all the gloom around, with some extraordinary values being achieved such as Wolterton Hall, in Norfolk (a Walpole property) which I referred to in our spring 2021 newsletter, being a very major restoration of one of Historic England's at risk properties. We have to be grateful that technology has created the wealth for a new class of property buyer, who are keen to conserve and restore as appropriate, and technology has brought about a means of communication — high speed broadband — that enables employees and owners to work from home in the countryside (and enjoy their gardens as a relief from work stress).

However opportunities in technology has taken away so many young people that might have been horticultural students or garden labourers to learn to maintain our ancient or newly restored or created gardens. This now is the greatest risk to our garden heritage, and many of our students of today come away from college more interested in design and propagation less able to undertake the hard work involved in maintaining a large garden.

It is highly regrettable that our own Ventnor Botanic Gardens have dropped the apprentice scheme supported by the Friends but it is very welcome that the National Gardens Scheme now recognises the problem in providing £125,000 to English Heritage for three years, £26,000 to the National Botanic Garden of Wales for an apprentice, £100,000 to Perennial for training and support and others including supporting WRAGS, (the Work and Retrain as a gardener scheme). However this will not go far but at least the Historic & Botanic Garden Training programme ("HBGTP" managed by EH) is being much better supported, and Osborne is a principal training ground. The professional Gardeners' Guild has been a big source of funding. This is why support for organisations like Perennial is so important. See www.perennial.org.uk to make a donation or include them in your will.

Perennial Charity.

The Perennial Charity is the operating name of the Gardeners' Royal Benevolent Society, established as early as 1839, as the Gardeners Royal Benevolent Institution. Its principle object initially was to provide pensions and housing for retired horticulturists and support those in the horticultural industry in other ways— training, health and welfare s, and advice on managing finance. It has since widened its support to help young people and anyone in related horticultural activities, and to manage gardens for the benefit of training and mental support for gardeners and volunteers.



At the 2022 Chelsea flower show the Perennial garden designed by Richard Miers won the People's Choice award, with a centrepiece plaque saying "If I had a flower for every time I thought of you".

The words are attributed to our very own Lord Tennyson and it follows by " I could walk through my garden for ever ". Maybe inspired by his garden at Farringford? How appropriate for a charity with the name perennial, as the Oxford Dictionary defines the word as "lasting or enduring, lasting for a long or apparently infinite time".



The Perennial Gardens.



In 1994 Perennial took ownership of the York Gate , Leeds (on last page) in 2013, Fullers Mill in Norfolk and in 2021 Sir Roy Strong's Garden in Herefordshire , Lasketts . (turned down by the National Trust)

The second national Gardens Trust weekend conference was held 34 years ago in Norfolk and we were told we were visiting a new garden—East Ruston, near Happisburgh. What an inspiration— creating a garden in the open windswept North Norfolk Coast! I have visited now five times and it is now extended to 32 acres it just gets better and better, with the matured shelter belt providing protection for numerous exotic and half hardy plants. On my last visit in 2022 I declared to Alan Gray, co-owner that I considered it to be the best new garden in the country.— for its design to maximise views, shelterbelt, horticulture and best of all to me the choice of plants. So I am delighted to know having just read the English Garden magazine which features it , that it is to be given to Perennial on the owners' deaths. What good news that under Perennial's care it will remain open for all to enjoy, be a place of excellence, and be perennial in the sense that the enjoyment will be enduring, and possibly infinite. A charity to support through donations or legacies, especially to support young gardeners which we desperately need to train and encourage so that our gardens can survive. See www.perennial.org.uk



Susan Campbell 1931 - 2024



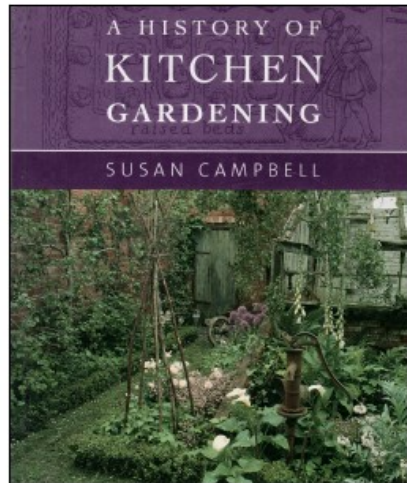
It is impossible for many of us to visit, read, write or even think about a walled kitchen garden without also thinking of Susan Campbell and we will long remember, and appreciate, her input to the 2014 IWGT project. Indeed without Susan's long dedication to raising the profile of walled gardens, which she described as like 'the disgraced member of an otherwise thriving family', we might never have thought of them as a project at all.

Interestingly, Susan only developed a passion for walled kitchen gardens in later life after a varied career as an artist, illustrator and food writer. After earning a first class diploma at the Slade School of Fine Art, she spent a year in Sicily drawing and painting peasant life, before returning to England to concentrate on drawing and illustration with commissions from magazines and newspapers like *The Observer* and *The Sunday Times*.

She married Robin Campbell in 1959 and while bringing up a young family her attention turned to cookery books. The first, 'Poor Cook', in 1971 was described as 'a must for families who are beginning to despair at the rising cost of living'. Other cookery books followed and it was only in 1981 that her great interest in walled kitchen gardens began after a visit to the intact and operational garden at Tullynally Castle in Ireland.

Over the next forty years Susan visited more than 700 walled kitchen gardens and wrote a number of books about them. Her most comprehensive book, 'A History of Kitchen Gardens', is illustrated throughout with her delightful drawings. Her 'Walled Kitchen Gardens' provided a list of places to visit including only Osborne and Northcourt on the IoW.

She also established the Walled Kitchen Garden Network with garden historian Fiona Grant in 2001 and advised on the restoration of gardens at places like Tatton Park and Hampton Court.



When IWGT determined on a walled kitchen garden project, Susan was the obvious person to turn to and in April 2014 she got our project off to a splendid start with two lectures. At Ventnor Botanic Garden Susan gave an excellent introduction to the history of walled kitchen gardens and, at Quay Arts, our novice volunteer garden detectives were enthused by an illustrated guide on how to look for clues in a walled garden. Susan also joined us on a visit to the then unrestored garden at Farringford.



Susan with some IWGT detectives at Farringford in 2014 and examining some of the project results at Landguard Manor

After a busy twelve months of detecting we were delighted that Susan was able to join us at Landguard Manor in early 2015 to celebrate the successful culmination of the project with the publication of 'Walled Kitchen Gardens of the Isle of Wight'. Susan was always encouraging and kindly wrote a foreword for our book which is copied below.

We were saddened to learn of the death of Susan Campbell on 2 January 2024 and will always be grateful for her enthusiasm, support and for her lasting legacy of walled kitchen garden knowledge.

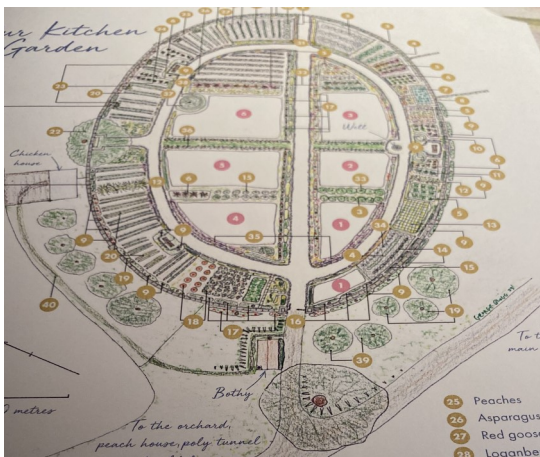
Helen Thomas, Project Leader, IWGT Walled Kitchen Garden Project

“Having become both expensive to maintain, and out priced by produce available from the supermarket, walled kitchen gardens were, until very recently, the most neglected department of our larger gardens. Like a disgraced member of an otherwise thriving family they were best forgotten. But their history, design, usefulness and beauty is something that is well worth investigating, and I salute the energy and dedication of the Isle of Wight Gardens Trust in producing this very valuable directory of the walled kitchen gardens on their Island”

SUSAN CAMPBELL
AUTHOR, LECTURER AND CONSULTANT ON WALLED KITCHEN GARDENS

Walled gardens at work

There is no doubt that Susan's efforts have saved many kitchen gardens from development, as they had become very labour intensive, and when such fresh and inexpensive produce could be obtained more cheaply from supermarkets. But then working walled gardens became an attraction to many historic gardens, and became the principle selling points for some hotels and restaurants. In the Spring we heard about Gravetye Manor and were delighted that Susan Dobbs and her husband were able justify a night there for their 60th wedding celebration.



What a wonderful garden view from the Michelin starred restaurant. On left the plan of the kitchen garden, an unusual circular design by William Robinson, with strip beds around the outside.

Much of the salads and vegetables for guests really do come from the kitchen garden.

Well done Tom!

More Walled Gardens at Work.

We were last month treated to a meal at The Pig at Studland. The Pig prides itself with producing their own fruit, salads and vegetables.



Le Manoir Aux Quat' Saisons perhaps set the trend and now grow beyond their walled garden, but the Newt,(below) which we are visiting in the Autumn, has in the past four years set a new standard and as seen below, its kitchen gardens extends way beyond the original walled garden. As well as Susan Campbell, maybe we should also thank the BBC for showing *The Victorian Kitchen Garden* in 1987 and Tim Smit with the *Lost Gardens of Heligan* project filmed in 1996 for fully bringing walled kitchen gardens back from being lost for ever. Thankyou Helen Thomas and her team for recording many of ours here.



Childhood in a Capability Brown landscape.

Spring Hill is a Grade II Registered Park and Garden It stands at the centre of a c. 50ha park, c.3km east of Snowhill in Gloucestershire. SPRING HILL HOUSE, Blockley - 1000896 | Historic England. The list entry asserts that Spring Hill House was designed in 1763 by Lancelot Brown for John, sixth Earl of Coventry as a retreat from social involvements at Croome Court, the family's Worcestershire seat c. 25km to the north-west. However, Garden Historian Jane Bradney states that the 5th Earl of Coventry left Springhill to his youngest son John Bulkeley Coventry (comments on Historic England List Entry posted by Jane Bradney in 2017). Lancelot Brown's accounts confirm John as a client from 1756-58. Both the house and the park were designed by Brown. In 1830 the property was sold to General Lygon, a veteran of Waterloo, who made additions to the house and planted clumps in the park and elsewhere. Not far away is Broadway Tower, a Grade II listed folly built in 1798 by James Wyatt for the sixth Lord Coventry high above the village of Broadway. BROADWAY TOWER, Broadway - 1214238 | Historic England.

I lived with my grandparents at Spring Hill for much of the time from my birth in 1941 until the early 1950s. My grandfather was the Head Groom on the estate. Spring Hill was owned by the Hannay family. Mrs Hannay was the daughter of Robert Fleming, the banker. She was aunt to Ian Fleming, of James Bond fame, and to the actress Celia Johnson.



Spring Hill House and grounds 13 August 1938. Source: Historic England Archive EPW058691

At first, we were living in a cottage at Campden Ashes, one of three farms on the estate. Here, we had no electricity or running water but we did have ample toilet facilities - a three seater outside toilet. We moved to Spring Hill House when the evacuees left after the war, occupying their former accommodation in the upper part of the east wing above the stable range.

Being high in the Cotswolds, life became interesting during the harsh winter of 1947 when we became snowbound for about six weeks.

I spent many hours playing in the walled garden, the 'Circle' and the rockery as well as exploring the wider estate. The rockery was very large with a maze of paths, ideal for playing games. The walled garden was well maintained and very productive. I can remember German prisoners of war tending the garden and working around the estate. Peaches were grown on the south sides of the north wall and south wall. A small, square building on the outside of the south garden wall may originally have been a boiler house for heating some of the walls. My grandmother did her weekly wash in a large copper in this building. Despite its rural location, a number of bombs fell close to the house during the war and the greenhouse in the walled garden was badly damaged. Another bomb fell very close to the cottage where we lived at Campden Ashes and destroyed the clothesline! I was told that on this occasion we had to shelter under the stairs.

There were two ha-ha features. The one in front of the house on its south side, enclosing a small area of lawn, was functional and in good condition. This no longer exists. There was also a ha-ha which enclosed most of the ornamental walk running around the outside of the Circle or shrubbery to the north of the house. This ha-ha was possibly ornamental rather than functional as the wall was low and the ditch was shallow. The Circle was bisected by the main entrance drive from the north, leading to the rear of the house. To the east of the entrance drive, which was flanked by gate pillars, the ha-ha wall continued but there was no sign of a ditch.

The rockery was on the east side of the Circle and seems to have been a relatively late feature, possibly post-dating 1903 on the evidence of an OS map of that date. A portion of the rockery can be seen on the aerial photograph with the levelled area of a croquet lawn to the north. Sadly, the rockery no longer exists. To the east of the rockery lay the course of a Roman road called Ryknild Street which extended from the Fosse Way at Bourton on the Water, Gloucestershire to Templeborough in South Yorkshire. I should add that when I was living at Spring Hill no one mentioned Capability Brown or the Roman road!

Whilst I was at Spring Hill the lake to the south-east of the house was merely a wet area in the fairly steep-sided valley. I can't remember any earthworks relating to the lake. However, a LIDAR image shows earthworks which may be the remains of the lake. They suggest that the lake was not serpentine but an elongated sub-rectangular shape, possibly determined by the topography. The west end of the lake seems to have been restored since my childhood as a square pond directly in front of the house.

The Hannays always seemed to have lots of dogs and there were two pet cemeteries at Spring Hill. One was on the southern edge of Hare Park Plantation. Another cemetery was located within the Circle, just to the east of the gate piers flanking the main drive.

Over sixty years have passed since I last visited Spring Hill but the landscape remains fresh in my mind with the vividness of childhood memories. **Frank Basford.**

Cyclamen Coum

Snowdrops are not the only winter treasure.

As we come out of the seemingly endless dark days of winter, we gardeners all look excitedly for the opening of the first snowdrops, and what a joy they bring. Undaunted by snow and frost, the seemingly indestructible nodding white bells flower prodigiously in church yards, woodlands, road verges, banks and of course lovingly tended in our gardens. For those who have developed the condition that leads to being labelled a 'Galanthophile' the acquisition of as many species, varieties and forms of snowdrop for the garden becomes an insatiable driving force. Like-minded souls can be found on hands and knees examining the often-minute variations of petal markings, shape and form; travel miles to renowned snowdrop collections and can spend a fortune on new cultivars as they hit the market. It is hard to dissuade Galanthophiles that there is any other winter flower that can challenge and enthrall in the same way.



The winter flowering and hardy *Cyclamen coum* should be high on the list of treasured winter flowers. Growing in Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, the Levant, the Caucasus and the Crimea, this is a winter gem flowering from late December to the end of March. The flowers are unaffected by frost and snow, ranging in colour from magenta through pink to white; held above kidney or heart shaped leaves which vary from plain green through pewter to silver or some combination of these.

A planting of mixed forms is very effective and once established will freely seed about. With a preference for some shade this plant can naturalise and create stunning drifts of colour in an open woodland setting or running amongst the plants in a shrub border. *Cyclamen coum* are equally effective as a carpet beneath a specimen tree in the garden.

Once established plants of *Cyclamen coum* soon flower and set seed prolifically, tending to spread and naturalise. However, by collecting seed when the flower- stalk coils, drawing the seed capsule closer to the soil surface to release the ripe seed, allows the sowing of seed to produce plants for elsewhere. Best sown fresh, the seeds benefit from an overnight soaking, Cover the container with a clear plastic bag, keep in light shade and at a minimum temperature of 16°C. until the seedlings are large enough to transplant. **Simon Goodenough.**

Picture below : seedlings in pots in third season and frosty leaves.



Latest News.

Due to the work of the Isle of Wight Gardens Trust's submission the parkland of Quarr Abbey has now been added to the IW local list.

Annual General Meeting.

This will be held this year at Barton Manor, Whippingham, PO32 6LB by kind permission of Mr and Mrs Haig-Thomas.

Wednesday June 26th at 15.00 hrs, followed by a chance to see the garden and have a cup of tea.

Barton Manor became part of the Osborne Estate when bought by Queen Victoria but went into private ownership in 1922. It holds a national collection of *Kniphofias* and *Watsonia*. It is listed Grade II and on the record of Historic Parks and Gardens, owing to its Royal connections .



Marine Villa visit to Lisle Combe. Sunday July 21st 14.30.

Lisle Combe, owned by the Noyes family for nearly 100 years is one of the best examples of our marine villas and Robert and Ruth Noyes welcome us for tea and cake, which they will provide, and a chance to see the garden and views. The house, with its cottage ornée features, was built by Lord Yarborough's son in 1839. See booking form. All welcome.



Visit to Houghton Lodge and the Longstock Water Gardens. Tuesday June 4th 2024.

We plan an away day by coach first to Houghton, near Stockbridge and then onto The John Lewis gardens of Longstock. See enclosed booking form.



Houghton Lodge (above) is a very late 18th century *cottage ornée* idyllically set above the river Test, slightly reminiscent of our Puckaster. The walled garden contains what is considered to be the largest trained pear tree in the country.



Longstock Water Gardens are part of the Leckford Estate, having been John Lewis' private home. There are over 40 different water lilies. The estate operates an up-market garden centre.

See booking forms

The Newt.

To celebrate walled gardens Susan Dobbs is organising a visit to the Newt on Tuesday October 8th 2024

Somerset in Autumn has the sweet sharp lemony scent of newly ripened apples. Don't miss this opportunity to visit the Newt this October .

Penelope Hobhouse the renowned garden designer lived here at Hadspen house This was bought by the owners of Babylonstoren near Cape Town and transformed into The Newt . They have also sponsored the Chelsea Flower Show.

The wonderful parabola walled garden trained with apples and pears, a new cascade , a farm shop, kitchen garden, a fragrant garden , a roman villa and walks from 4 to 30 minutes are amongst the many attractions

TRAVEL 9.0am by coach or minibus on Red Funnel to Southampton. The drive to the Newt (near Bruton) is about an hour and a half. Return on the 6 or 7 pm ferry

COST About £37 depending on numbers. ENTRY on TUESDAYS RHS members can enter for free and each member can take in 6 others for £20 each. TOTAL FOR FERRY , BUS AND FERRY. Please let me know if you are a RHS member.

RHS members £37

Non RHS “ £57

Visitors should choose and pay for either deli food from the shop (and cider)

or to book a table and see the menu at the garden café via

www.thenewtinsomerset.com

If you are interested please complete the enquiry form and return it to Susan Dobbs



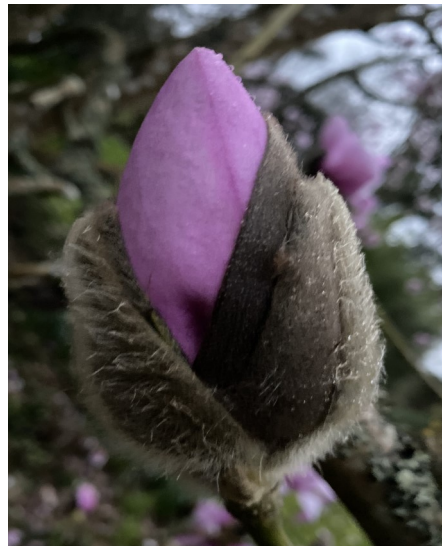
Plants of the month *Magnolia Campbellii*.

Spring is declared in Cornwall by the Nare Hotel when specimens of the *Magnolia Campbellii* in six gardens each have 50 flowers on them.

This year was a near record with Spring being declared on February 16th. The date has varied from 10th February (2016) and 3rd March (2015). The Nare hotel even has a Bloomometer online to track progress.

The story of the magnolia is an interesting one. Although very old in terms of evolution, it was first discovered by plant collectors in the early 19th century but brought to the attention of the world by Joseph Hooker in about 1850, who named it after the official Archibald Campbell who gave him entry into Sikkim. Introduced into this country by George Forrest in 1856, it was first planted in Southern Ireland and Cornwall to enjoy the mild climate. In fact, the tree itself is quite hardy but it is the early blooms which can be wrecked by late frost or cold winds. (like the later suburban and common *M.Soulangeana*). In sheltered Himalayan valleys it can be found at 2000 metres.

Here at Ventnor, in the Dell they flower almost as early as in Cornwall, but at Northcourt, in our frost pocket we are usually 10 days later but this year with frostless late January and early February our form, - *M. Sargentiana Robusta* was also with 50 blooms on March 16th, compared with last year on 26th and our best huge *M. Campbellii Alba* (next page) at its best on March 3rd instead of March 17th in 2020. (left more common pink form)



***Magnolia Campbellii* coming into flower.**

Once the buds start swelling and casting off their hairy sepals there is no stopping them, although colder weather will slow them down. So what is the trigger point? Apparently not daylight hours or sunshine (as we have had little of that!). The answer is the plant intelligence ("PI"), analysing lots of data on soil and air temperatures, to decide when it is most likely to be frost free. It must be the trend of the data which is critical, but what is particularly interesting this year is how Cornish weather resulted in a more similar result here this year. The answer must be due to the number of our overcast (and often wet) nights and days, giving record average temperatures which we have had on the Island in February compared with any other years. In Cornwall the National Trust and others say they are blooming a month earlier than 20-30 years ago, putting pressure on opening earlier, but ground conditions with the wet are preventing that, and there is more risk of late frost damage- English weather being still so unpredictable compared with its native valleys.

Can the bloomometer now be used as our best measure of global warming? *Magnolia Campbellii* is the most majestic of trees but beware it may take 12 years to flower and can reach 40 feet so not for small gardens, but well worth the wait. As Springs get warmer might we see many of its cultivars planted more in public spaces to celebrate the arrival of Spring. Now one can choose cultivars and hybrids which flower at a younger age, and even ones which have spent the English winters in a New Zealand summer to accelerate the first flowering. If only we could all join them and escape a record rainfall.



The chance seedling flowers has a delicate scent and attracts bees.

Our 24 year old *Alba* form (right) was sold as a deep pink by Burncoose Nurseries in Cornwall but as it took 10 years to flower we could hardly take it back ! I paid just £7.50 for a seedling, rather than £27.50 for a grafted one or £45 for one which had enjoyed New Zealand summers. How pleased now that I went for the cheapest option, with gigantic flowers. What an investment!



Bad news for *Gunnera*.

Having viewed the televising of *Bates v The Post Office*, and being horrified with the slowness of response to 20 years of gross injustice, leading one to tears for the victims from lack of official action, one has to be equally surprised at how speedily the fate of what we considered to be *Gunnera Manicata* has been sealed.

The giant rhubarb, a native of Brazil, has now been banned from sale without a fair hearing under the Invasive Alien Species Order 2019, following recent genetic and morphological research by the RHS, suggesting it is a hybrid of an already banned species. This magnificent architectural plant has been a feature of so many of our grand wet woodland and bog gardens for over 200 years with leaves reaching 11 feet across. This year has seen leaves of exceptional size as climate change has provided exceptional warmth, humidity and rain, just as it is being banned as the plant that most of us grow is considered to be a hybrid of *G. Tinctoria*. We have grown it for 40 years and have never found any evidence of it seeding despite ideal conditions and if the crown becomes too large it is as easy as dividing rhubarb.

Also recently banned is the American skunk cabbage *Lysichiton Americanus*, which in our garden admittedly will self-seed but is easy to dig up and control, and has only escaped in a few boggy places in the south of England, unlike the banned Himalayan Balsam which seeds so prolifically and smothers all other streamside vegetation. The greatest weed in our garden is ransoms the, broad leaved garlic introduced it is thought, in the sixteenth century and now widespread throughout England, smothering our native woodland flora, yet reprieved and how about the poisonous snowdrops thought not to be native, yet the most promiscuous, leading to hundreds of variants, and giving rise to an enormous fanclub of Galanthophiles (York Gate included).

Where is the justice ? Can we support an appeal for all *Gunnera* to be reprieved? Or give it special immunity from prosecution as its native rain forests in Brazil fast disappear?



Left—Stephen Griffiths making fame at Abbotsbury.

Right - my own *Lysichiton Americanus*, a very welcome plant but no more !

