



The HPS Hertfordshire Group Newsletter Autumn 2014



<http://www.hertshps.com>

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Editorial

Well, what a glorious gardening year we've had. A warm spring led to summer starting early and, despite soaring July temperatures, regular rain to keep the garden looking green (almost). Ex-chairman Annie Godfrey scored a hat-trick when Daisy Roots triumphed at Chelsea, Gardeners' World Live and Hampton Court, bringing home three more Silver-Gilt medals. Bravo!

Autumn is one of my favourite times of year. The graceful decline into winter produces some of the most beautiful effects in the garden, especially when illuminated by slanting, golden sunlight. From the glowing yellows and oranges of deciduous trees, the vivid crimson of Virginia creepers and swaying veils of ornamental grasses amongst late-flowering perennials, there is plenty to enjoy. I try not to think about the gloomy months ahead but make the most of the chameleon colours and chaotic collapse around me.

Autumn is a good time to peruse bulb catalogues, too. If you're thinking of ordering a consignment this year, how about putting a few by for the Herts HPS Group? Pot them up, label them and leave them outside in a sheltered position. Once the shoots begin to emerge, bring them in to one of our early spring meetings to help raise funds on the plant table. It would provide some welcome variation at a cheerless time of year, when it's always difficult to find anything interesting for the stall. I'm sure Beryl would be delighted.

Lots in store for the Herts Group this season, kicking off with the redoubtable Helen Yemm and following on with a veritable smorgasbord of speakers, including nurserymen Bob Brown, Brian Ellis and Neil Lucas. They, and perhaps a hipflask, will keep us all going when the frost begins to nip.

Marion Jay

Chairman's Report 2013 - 14

Here I am in my second year as chairman. It is a great privilege to be the leader of such a lively and successful group. My committee are all so able, efficient and willing that I need never have feared volunteering for the job.

We have had such a successful 25 years and the celebration in April, to honour the establishment of the Hertfordshire group by Rachel Crawshay, was a great success. Especial thanks must go to Janet Horton for the celebratory cake, Liz Egre for the distribution of bubbly, to the Tea Team and to all the members for their contributions of wonderful party food. It was particularly pleasing to see original members and past chairmen attend.

Heather Osborne as secretary has been my mainstay, she has done this job for a number of years and is our main link with the national society. The group really owe her a great thank you.

There seems to be a natural cycle of events with Annie Godfrey starting the year with excellent speakers and Linda Williams providing the always welcome refreshments. Booking excellent speakers is only possible because the plant sale produces enough revenue for us to afford them. Beryl Davis very ably conducted this year's sale with a most gratifying end result.

I would particularly like to thank Edwina Robarts, who will be standing down at the AGM this November, for all her efforts in arranging coach trips and garden visits over the past three years. This year, Edwina's summer programme started with the Seedling Swap, hosted by Adrian and Clare de Baat. We would welcome any other members who might volunteer to host this event in future. A spring propagation workshop led by Annie Godfrey was followed in July by the ever-successful coach outing, this time to gardens in Northamptonshire (see page 8).

The next highlight was the Member's Open Garden visit; Jacqueline Turner's garden was looking very colourful when we visited in June, and we're all looking forward to Renata Hume's open garden in early September (see page 18). We are always looking for volunteers prepared to host these relaxed social affairs.

None of this would work without the efforts of the rest of the committee, so special thanks to the Treasurer, Mary Robey; Membership Secretary, Janet Horton; Website Person, Bill Hodgson, and David Singleton and his team who prepare the hall for our meetings. It is always a great pleasure to receive the Newsletter with its smart colour format that Marion Jay introduced; it is a pleasure to read.

Diana Garner deserves especial thanks for her efforts on behalf of the Societies Conservation Group; she has been doing this for 8 years now and would like to pass her role onto a successor (see page 7).

This just leaves me to thank the many members who are willing to help behind the scenes and make the group the success it is.

Irene Cowan

Grand Plant Sale

This year's annual Grand Plant Sale at the end of May was a huge success, with Homewood Church Hall stuffed to the gunnels with foliage and flowers. It looks as though Annie's propagation course paid off! A grand total of **£1,611.05** was achieved, which is £500 more than we made in 2013. Enormous thanks to all of you who donated plants, those who helped sort and price them the evening before and the members who helped out on the day - it was a group effort and you all did a marvellous job. Particular thanks to Beryl Davis, under whose guidance the sale took place.

Seedling Swap

Adrian and Clare de Baat's garden was full of lush, promising growth when members gathered for April's Seedling Swap. There was delicious tea and cake on offer, lots of chat, and everyone went home with something new to try in their garden. Adrian even provided miniature forks and trowels to prise the seedlings from their trays. Thankyou, Adrian and Clare, we had a lovely afternoon.

New Members

Hello to new members Ruth Ackerley, Susan and Peter Balmbro, Beryl E. Bishop, Anne Corcos, Vic Inzani, Tim Kirk, Sally Pearson, John and Margaret Rolfe, and Carol Waters. A warm welcome to you all.

Electronic Communication

Providing us with your email address enables us to keep in touch with you between newsletters, with information about garden open days and other events of interest. Your address will not be passed on to any third parties.

If you are happy to access the twice-yearly Newsletter by downloading it as a PDF from the Herts HPS website instead of receiving hard copy, please do let us know. It saves the group money on printing costs and is just as good if not better, as there are extra photographs available to view online for which space in the Newsletter does not allow. For more information on e-communication, or to opt for the PDF Newsletter, please contact Bill Hodgson (details inside back page).

Subscriptions for 2015

Renewals notices will be sent out in November under separate cover. Please note that membership of the National HPS is a requirement for continued membership of a Local Group.

In Praise of...*Diascia personata*

Do you grow a perennial that begins flowering in May, blooms continuously until November without any deadheading, survives dahlia-blackening frosts and still looks presentable throughout the winter? If not, you're not growing *Diascia personata*.

This remarkable plant, so different from its hanging basket-type siblings, stands proud and erect at 4-5ft when grown in well-cultivated soil. It might, however, be better grown in somewhat poorer soil stopping at 3ft and performing a little less lushly. Its pink flowers make a good companion for the lofty pale mauve spires of *Veronicastrum virginicum* 'Fascination', on whose stiff stems it can lean for support.

Think 'penstemon' when contemplating its cultivation; full sun or partial shade and cut back to around 2ft before winter sets in, but leave the evergreen foliage to protect the crown since its hardiness is not fully established. By early spring, new growth will appear from the base and from the old stems, just like penstemons, at which point the old top growth should be cut back. Propagation is unbelievably simple. Cuttings taken from non-flower-bearing shoots in late summer, if you can find any, will root in a glass of water but better, of course, to use a proper cuttings medium. Then a frost-free greenhouse will be required to get the young plants through the winter. Alternatively, take basal cuttings from new spring growth.

A very recent review of diascias (Simon Garbutt, p.57 of *The Garden*, June 2014) has, however, thrown doubt on the true identity of this remarkable plant. Garbutt refers to a detailed study by plantsman John Grimshaw who thinks that the plant is more likely a hybrid involving *D. rigescens* and should be referred to as *Diascia* 'Hopleys'. Garbutt states that the true *D. personata* is not garden-worthy and has probably not been grown in the UK for the last 15 years. The *RHS PlantFinder*

compounds the confusion by listing 32 suppliers of *D. personata* and 9 of *Diascia* 'Hopleys'.

Whatever its true identity, this plant is definitely on my top-10 list of perennials. Give it a try.

Roger Trigg

Photograph: Roger Trigg



Diascia personata...or is it?

Seed Distribution Scheme

One of the most important aspects of the national Hardy Plant Society is its Seed Distribution Scheme, which ensures that garden-worthy plants remain in cultivation and have the widest possible distribution. Its success depends on members both giving and taking seed. The response to the scheme in 2013 was tremendous, and as a result there is a change to the seed donation procedure this year. In order to ease the pressure on HPS volunteers, we are dividing the donors into two groups (see below).

- Collect, name, dry and clean your seed (in that order). Take care when identifying and labelling seed. Store seed in a dry and cool environment, e.g. a plastic container at the bottom of the fridge.
- Put your seed into labelled packets. If you do not have suitable packets available, they can be obtained free of charge from Joe Sime (address below). Ensure envelope seams are well-sealed.
- Write out an alphabetical list of the seed you are sending, making sure that the name on the list is the same as the seed and that your name, address and, if possible, email address and phone number are on the list (in case of queries).
- If your surname begins with **A - J**, please send your seed to **Sue Bosson, Penylan, Penybontfawr, Nr. Oswestry, SY10 OEL**
- If your surname begins with **K - Z**, please send your seed to **Joe Sime, Park Cottage, Penley, Wrexham, LL13 OLS**
- Please ensure you have the correct postage on the envelope. Do not use recorded delivery as we are rarely in when the postman comes.
- All seed should be sent by the **31st October**. Don't worry if you send it to the wrong person by accident; it will find its way onto the list somehow! Any seed arriving later than 10th November will have to be stored until the following year.

Hints and Tips

No quantity is too small, but please don't send huge amounts of any one type, as we aim to fill just 50 small glassine envelopes of each variety of seed.

Any seed is accepted, including unusual or heritage vegetable seed. If possible, provide a complete name. If it's an unnamed variety, a description certainly helps.

Cleaning seed is not that difficult. For most plants with dry seed heads just remove the bits of dried flower ends and broken seed cases. Often gently blowing over the seed, or shaking it gently in an open bowl will help separate the rubbish. There is no need to get paranoid about it. If 90% is seed, it is fine.

A bit more care is needed to separate out the real seeds of plants with composite flower heads as they tend to include many infertile seeds or have dried bracts which can be confused with seed. This applies to *Eryngium*, *Ligularia*, *Aster*,

Monarda and many other genera. Wet fruits (pommies, berries etc.) also need some care. The fruit often contains germination inhibitors and must be removed by washing. One technique is to remove as much the pulp as possible and put the seed into a small bowl of water. Usually the seed will sink and any remaining pulp can be poured off and the seed collected and dried.

The most important thing is that the seed should be dry before it is stored. It should then be put into a labelled, paper envelope, placed in an airtight container (if possible with a bag of silica gel, such as those often given when you buy electrical or leather goods) and placed in the fridge. However, if you are not confident about your ability to store it, send it to us directly. We are happy to receive seed at any time of the year.

Joe Sime, Sue Bosson and Pauline Cooper

Volunteers Please!

After 8 years as **Herts HPS Conservation Scheme Co-ordinator**, I have decided to step aside and let someone else enjoy the role. It has been a great opportunity to meet members of both the Herts group and other co-ordinators round the country, and have the opportunity to handle some very rare plants.

The role includes keeping a record of all the plants that the Herts growers have; sending out update forms for some of them once a year; collecting together all the young plants and taking them to the annual exchange meeting; and bringing back some new plants to pass on to Herts growers.

Would any of you like to take my place? I am willing to help you as much as I can. I had no knowledge of conservation when I started in the role, so you are all starting with more knowledge than me! It's a really interesting job; you don't have to attend the committee meetings and you'd be part of a great team.

Diana Garner

As Edwina Robarts will be retiring at the AGM this November, we are already on the look-out for a volunteer to take the essential post of **Coach Trip Organiser**. This involves arranging the summer trip each year and organising Member's Open Garden events. Lots of help is available to get you started.

We are still looking for someone to take on the role of **Publicity Co-ordinator**. The job entails organising the printing of posters and flyers for the Plant Sale, and highlighting the activities of the Herts HPS wherever possible, perhaps getting snippets into local magazines, newspapers, etc.

My husband, Bill, has been our Website Person and Publicity Co-ordinator for the past 18 months but he recently started a new job, so this year I stepped in and organised the Plant Sale publicity as well as producing the Newsletter. It was a lot for one person to take on, so any offers of help would be hugely appreciated.

Marion Jay

If you would like to find out more about any of these roles, call Heather Osborne on 01727 856354 or go to 'Contact Us' on the website: www.hertshps.com.

Coach Trip 2014

Coach Trip to Northamptonshire, Thursday 3rd July

A sunny day was forecast for our trip to Northamptonshire and so it turned out to be.

Our first call was to a village garden in Finedon that opens for the NGS. We were greeted by Stuart and Mary with a welcome cup of coffee and delicious home-made biscuits. The ½ acre garden was divided into two halves and stuffed full of interesting plants and appealing eye-catchers.

Our first glimpse was of magnificent, huge-leaved, slug-free hostas which lined a sunless alleyway. Beyond was a small lawn surrounded by flower beds. The other half contained a kitchen garden attractively laid out with beds surrounded by alternate red and green lettuces. This section of the garden had been a dumping ground for the previous owners. Stuart and Mary had laboured hard to clear it and many of the paths were created using materials found in the process. We came away with lots of ideas that we could use in our own gardens.

Next stop was Kelmarsh Hall. This had been the home of Nancy Lancaster, a 20th-century tastemaker and the owner of Colefax and Fowler, an influential British decorating firm. The house is now divided into flats and the garden is maintained by the Kelmarsh Trust.

The bones of the garden surrounding a large walled kitchen garden have been restored, but the planting when we visited was rather sad. One highlight, however, was the sight of *Tropaeolum speciosum* scrambling up through a yew hedge, its bright flowers studding the dark foliage. There is one gardener, helped by volunteers, and it was obvious they were struggling to manage such a large garden. It did, however, provide us with some very pleasant spots to enjoy our picnics.

On to Cottesbrooke Hall where our coach squeezed through the entrance gates with inches to spare! Across the park and over a hump back bridge, we were welcomed without the formality of signing in as RHS members which saved a lot of time for 30 of us. The gardens have had input from a variety of well known designers over the years but the result is nevertheless harmonious. My favourite part was an area close to the house, divided into four beds which were surrounded by York paving and planted with a mixture of unusual annuals.

In the borders, *Valeriana officinalis* wove its way through a tapestry of herbaceous plants, and old-fashioned, pale pink roses provided a clever repeat down the length of one side. Block planting of purple beech, clipped at a height of 90cm, lent a solid, structural element to the garden. A small courtyard serving tea and, I'm told, the best chocolate cake, rounded off the day before we clambered back into the coach for our journey home.

Edwina Robarts



The Prospect Tower as seen from South Cottage garden.

‘Tall and Damask as a Summer Flower...’

Sissinghurst. The very name conjures up visions of tumbling, blowsy roses against softly-coloured Elizabethan brick walls; the archetypal romantic English garden. Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson’s creation has held visitors in thrall for decades and I’m sure the majority of Herts HPS members will have visited this world-renowned place.

There has been a settlement at Sissinghurst for over 1,000 years. The original medieval manor house was significantly enlarged in the 1500s but decline followed during the Civil War. In 1756, Sissinghurst was used to house French naval prisoners captured as a result of the Seven Years War. There was severe overcrowding and by the time

the prisoners left in 1763, the buildings were described as ‘2/3 destroyed’. Towards the end of the 1700s, Sissinghurst was recorded as ‘now burnt’, though there is no date noted.

As the 19th century dawned, Sissinghurst flourished as the parish farm for the nearby village of Cranbrook, first as the local workhouse and then, in 1855, as a private concern (at this point a new farmhouse, now the B&B, was built on the site). There were orchards, hop gardens, cornfields and a dairy herd. In 1930, having sat unsold for two years during the economic depression, Sissinghurst came to the attention of Vita and Harold. Vita’s childhood at Knole, a vast Elizabethan pile near Sevenoaks, had left her enchanted by the romance of the Elizabethan Age. Sissinghurst encapsulated that sense of past glory, its ruins providing the perfect setting for her vision of a garden. Time, destruction, loss and beauty - a poetic backdrop for a romantic idyll.

Vita and Harold’s marriage was far from conventional - Vita had a series of lesbian lovers and Harold dallied with well-to-do young men - but they were happy together and it was a strong, loving relationship. Artistically, their individual characters are what define Sissinghurst’s garden. Harold had an innate talent for formal structure and it was he who created the linear layout of the garden, cleverly adapting his symmetrical design to accommodate Sissinghurst’s eccentric Elizabethan floor plan. Vita’s style was characterised by huge exuberance; she encouraged plants to have billowing freedom, revelling in their

generous, relaxed profusion: 'There should be the strictest formality of design, with the maximum informality in planting', she declared.

In mid-July, to celebrate a big birthday, Bill and I spent four nights at the Sissinghurst Farmhouse B&B, which overlooks the Tower. Staying at the B&B meant we had an hour and a half in the gardens each day from four o'clock, when all the coach parties had gone home. It was a wonderful way to get to know the place and the late afternoon light was perfect for photography. On the second day, we attended a lecture evening and dinner held by Sarah Raven and her husband, Adam Nicolson (Harold and Vita's grandson), in which they took turns to guide us around different parts of the buildings and gardens.

Adam began with a brief history of Sissinghurst, interspersed with anecdotes about his family's life there. He revealed that Vita's grandmother had been the daughter of an Andalucian gypsy dancer from Malaga, known as Pepita(!) Vita's mother, Victoria, had beguiled many rich men, finally seducing the owner of the Wallace collection, John Murray Scott. It was Victoria's manipulative acquisition of Scott's fortune upon his death which provided Vita with the funds to buy Sissinghurst.

During Vita and Harold's time at Sissinghurst, Adam said, money flowed like water. Huge renovations were undertaken and everyone, including the staff, drank copiously; the chauffeur even had his own cider brewhouse. The first building to be refurbished was the original stables, which they named the 'Big Room' (now known as the Library). Vita and Harold reviewed books and Sissinghurst houses the National Trust's biggest collection of 20th century books, many of which are kept in the Library.

In 1955, with the coffers almost empty, Nigel Nicolson (Adam's father) suggested donating Sissinghurst to the Treasury, and then to the National Trust. Vita was violently opposed to the idea - 'Never! Never! Never!' - but when she died in 1962, Harold was left with huge death-duties and Nigel felt there was no option. At that stage, Vita's popularity as a poet was declining and Sissinghurst itself was slowly rotting: the National Trust turned him down. However, the success of Harold's book, 'Portrait of a Marriage', prompted them to do an about-turn. With immense foresight, Nigel secured a deal with the organisation which ensured that income from visitors would be ploughed back into Sissinghurst, rather than squirrelled away into National Trust funds.

Sarah's talk began with a brief overview of the gardens. She described the rubbish-strewn, dilapidated, weed-infested grounds which greeted Vita and Harold on their first visit, but said that even then Vita was aware of the 'borrowed landscape' around the estate, and the moat, that 'black mirror of quiet water in the distance'. The Tower, famous now for Vita's charming 'room of one's own', was originally built as a viewing platform for Elizabethan ladies to watch their men chase deer in the surrounding parkland; during Vita's time, her female lovers were ensconced in the rooms above her study.

Veronicastrum virginicum 'Alba' and *Phlox paniculata* 'White Admiral' are a classic combination in the White Garden.



An aerial view of the gardens from the top of the Prospect Tower. The surrounding landscape provides a rich backdrop to the formal design.

Vita Sackville-West's bedroom in South Cottage. Faded tapestries and muted, flower-themed oil paintings adorn the bare brick walls.



According to Sarah, there was friction between Harold and Vita when designing the gardens, with Vita fighting for simplicity in the face of Harold's more ostentatious pretensions. Vita usually won; there is no fussiness about Sissinghurst's gardens, they are not littered with pools, fountains, pergolas or unnecessary terracing. Harold created simple full-length axes in the form of features such as the cool, green Yew Walk and the Pleached Lime Walk, with its bright, spring flower borders. His austere designs were softened by Vita's planting, which was full and luxuriant - 'Cram, cram, cram, every chink and cranny' - with climbers patterning the old brick walls and beds spilling over with flowers. Fond of exaggeration, she often planted in groups of five or seven, repeating the same plant in a second, smaller group nearby. She likened plant growth habits to the shape of a mosque, advising that if you have domes, you must provide minarets. Vita's minarets included dainty, pale pink *Linaria* 'Canon J. Went' and the ivory pyramids of *Yucca gloriosa*.

Vita was fascinated by colour and colour relationships and, influenced by Gertrude Jekyll and William Robinson, she experimented with different combinations within the gardens. The first area to be addressed this way was the Purple Border, still a gorgeous celebration of mauves, purple-pinks and rich royal hues. Next was the White Garden, Sissinghurst's most famous feature. A masterclass in restricted palette design, the White Garden employs three main colours; foliage in green and grey/silver, and white flowers (on the cream-white spectrum, avoiding blue-whites). In places, new cultivars are now used in the White Garden which were unavailable to Vita, such as the impressive massed spires of *Veronicastrum virginicum* 'Alba'.

Vita's idiosyncratic attitude to gardening was embraced and perpetuated by two gardeners taken on two years before she died; Pam Schwerdt and Sybille Kreuzberger. Employing two women as Head Gardeners was highly unusual, possibly unique at the time. They continued gardening according to Vita's ethos for many years after her death. Sarah told us that in recent times, the garden has suffered due to a lack of reference to Vita's writings and has lost its way to some extent. That is now being addressed, with the appointment of Troy Scott Smith (whom some of you may remember gave us an excellent talk on Bodnant Gardens in October, 2012) as Head Gardener. He is currently liaising with Dan Pearson on a project to rekindle the romance of Sissinghurst.

Sarah took us to South Cottage, which is where Vita and Harold lived day to day. Usually closed to the public, it was a privilege to be allowed to visit their private house. We passed through the living-room, with its tables draped with rugs and walls lined with old books, before ascending the stairs to Vita's bedroom. This was a beautiful, shabby yet immensely characterful room. The large wooden bed was covered in a tattered bedspread which Sarah explained had been found cut into a pair of curtains in the attic. She and Adam had recognised it as the original bedspread from old photographs and brought it down to help restore the bedroom

to it's former style. There was a large fireplace (Vita loved a roaring fire), which would have warmed an otherwise chilly room. The story goes that Vita awoke one winter's night to find that part of the roof had given way and she was sleeping under a foot of snow which had settled on the bedspread!

After the lectures were over, I wandered through the brick archway to the White Garden and the pale flowers, luminous in the evening light, had a spectral quality which lent the whole garden an atmosphere of ethereal suspense. This was a truly memorable trip; I was inspired by what I saw and heard. My thanks to Adam Nicolson and Sarah Raven for their engrossing stories, and generous input and advice for this article.

Marion Jay

B&B: www.sissinghurstcastlefarmhouse.com

Photos: Bill Hodgson

For information on the dates of Sarah and Adam's lecture/dinner evenings in 2015, go to sarahraven.com or call 0845 0920 283.

Front Cover Plant Profile

Front cover: *Gladiolus papilio* 'Ruby'

Photograph: Bill Hodgson

This is a relatively new introduction, hybridised in New Zealand from its South African parent, *Gladiolus papilio*. It aroused much comment when it was used extensively in the Olympic Park in 2012, and has been listed by prominent designers in Gardens Illustrated magazine as one of the top 100 plants.

With a refined shape not usually associated with gladioli, *Gladiolus papilio* 'Ruby' bears 3ft spires of cherry-coloured, crab-claw shaped buds which open to large, hood-shaped flowers of intense ruby red splashed inside with maroon-purple. The leaves are sword-shaped and greeny-grey. The corms, which have a vigorous, stoloniferous habit, are generally hardy in the south of England, provided they are planted in well-drained soil in full sun. However, once the flowering stems have been cut down it's advisable to apply a straw mulch over winter, as a precaution.

Good companions for *G. papilio* 'Ruby' include the purple-green leaved *Cercis canadensis* 'Forest Pansy' and the lime-green bracts of summer-flowering euphorbias such as *Euphorbia donii* 'Amjilassa'.

Marion Jay

Cornucopia

Cornucopia is the twice-yearly digest of the best articles from the Newsletters of the HPS local and specialist groups. An annual subscription costs just £3, and members can pay for the magazine along with their national renewal remittance.

AGM Agenda, 1st November 2014

THE HARDY PLANT SOCIETY – HERTFORDSHIRE GROUP **TWENTY-SIXTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

To be held on Saturday 1st November 2014 at 2.00pm
at the Memorial Hall, Wheathampstead.

AGENDA

Apologies for absence

1. To approve the minutes of the 25th AGM held on 2nd November 2013
2. Matters arising
3. Chairman's report
4. Treasurer's report and approval of accounts for the 12 months ending 30th September 2014 (to be laid round).
5. Election of Chair, Vice- Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Membership Secretary and Newsletter Editor for the ensuing 12 months
6. Election of Committee for the ensuing 12 months
Four committee members are standing for re-election and there are three vacancies.
7. Election of Examiner of the accounts.
8. To propose that the annual group membership fee be raised to £7 single and £12 joint.
9. Any other business

*Please submit NOMINATIONS for members of the Committee in writing,
to the Secretary by Saturday 11th October 2014
(20, St Stephens Avenue, St Albans, AL3 4AD)*

Prior permission of any person nominated must be obtained.

Heather Osborne, Secretary

The AGM will be followed by 'Gone to Pot', an illustrated talk by Madeleine and John McCormack (see Events Programme, page 18).

AGM Minutes, Autumn 2013

MINUTES OF THE TWENTY-FIFTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE HERTFORDSHIRE GROUP OF THE HARDY PLANT SOCIETY

Held at the Memorial Hall, Wheathampstead
on Saturday, 2nd November 2013

Present:

Irene Cowan	Chair
Elizabeth Egré	Vice Chair
Heather Osborne	Secretary
Mary Robey	Treasurer
Janet Horton	Membership Secretary
	Committee Members: Stephen Dudley, Anne Godfrey, Edwina Roberts, David Singleton, Rosamund Willis

50 Herts Group Members and 2 visitors

Apologies for absence were received from: Judy Barker, Mary Hines, Bill Hodgson, Marion Jay, Yvonne Mansergh, Julie Pegrum, Rita Woodward

1 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on Saturday, 3rd November 2012, which had been circulated, were agreed and signed as a correct record.

Proposed by Diana Barry; seconded by Linda Williams

2 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

3 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman referred to her report, which had been set out in the last newsletter.

New members were welcomed, and sadly others were moving on. Lesley Hopkins was thanked for her supporting role on the Committee. Roz Willis and Steve Dudley were both planning to move out of the area and were presented with a token of thanks for all their hard work as Refreshment Organiser and Plant Sales Co-ordinator respectively. Appeals for volunteers to take over these roles had resulted in one person agreeing to come onto the Committee, and clipboards asking for help at the monthly meetings on the Members' Plant Stall and selling tea tickets were circulated.

Proposed by Mary Martin; seconded by Margaret Bardell

AGM Minutes (cont.)

4 TREASURER'S REPORT

The Treasurer referred everyone to her report which had been circulated. The accounts are in draft form; they had not been approved yet as they were subject to two small queries, but it was hoped that full approval would be confirmed soon. She asked whether members had any queries about the Accounts, none were forthcoming.

Proposed by Malcolm Michael; seconded by Linda Williams

5 ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Irene Cowan, Elizabeth Egré, Heather Osborne, Mary Robey, Janet Horton and Marion Jay were re-elected.

Proposed by Diana Garner; seconded by Dennis Sandor

6 ELECTION OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Anne Godfrey, Bill Hodgson, Edwina Robarts, and David Singleton were re-elected (to serve respectively as Speaker Booking, Web Person, Coach Trip/Summer Programme, and Hall Manager).

Linda Williams was elected on to the Committee to co-ordinate Refreshments.

Proposed by Margaret Easter; seconded by Maggie Lacey

7 ELECTION OF EXAMINER

Michael Foers was re-elected as examiner.

Proposed by David Singleton; seconded by Dennis Sandor

8 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chair reported that she had been approached by a member with some suggestions for group activities. She would welcome any further ideas.

The Secretary outlined some of the changes at Head Office. The new Administrator Joy Dimond was getting to grips with all the jobs. A change of software had resulted in some newsletters being wrongly named, that problem has now been resolved.

A new initiative is an electronic newsletter. The first one introduced Joy and her working environment. The second, from Izzy Tardy (Is it hardy?) encouraged members to take part in the Seed Distribution scheme.

The meeting closed at 2.15pm.

Musings on Gardening Life

I'm in a reflective mood brought on by giving a talk on my family history. The one family member who always comes strongly to mind is my grandmother. Her father was a prominent amateur botanist who published several books on the native flora of the area where he lived. This was Tula, in Russia, which lies south of Moscow and is where Tolstoy had his country property, Yasnaya Polyana. My grandmother inherited her father's great love of nature and when some 75 years later she arrived in Australia, the alien fauna and flora fascinated her. She did, however, long for a bit of the old country and desperately wanted some violets and snowdrops in her garden. She succeeded with a tiny patch of violets but the snowdrops were a non-starter.

This made me think of my own garden (full of both violets and snowdrops). Of the plants I inherited from the previous owner (some rhododendrons, azaleas, roses and a few trees). Of the plant my daughter threw out and I retrieved (crab apple with yellow fruit). Of the plants given to me as birthday presents and those given simply because plant-people like to give plants they love to others. Of the plants that are flourishing and those that will soon be forgotten.

There are a few that are really special. One, *Aster x frikartii* 'Mönch', with its clouds of blue flowers, my friend and I bought from the nursery at Holkham Hall. We were frequently in Norfolk with our dogs, and the plant brings back those happy times. I would never be without the rose cuttings she made for me; one is a patio rose which has become a manageable climber, with clusters of dusky pink flowers; the other, a thornless, would-like-to-be climber with smallish, pale pink flowers that look good against a dark blue clematis. They are particularly special now as my friend died a few years ago.

This brings me round to the death, earlier this year, of the last founder member of the HPS, David Barker. His family must be so proud of the contribution he made: a society now over 50 years old, still flourishing, still imparting knowledge, expertise and friendship to a host of new gardeners. Having celebrated our own group's 25th birthday in April, it brings me round to thinking of Rachel Crawshaw, our own founder. Juliet Robinson was the first chair, followed by Etain Atkinson; it was lovely to see Juliet at the anniversary celebrations.

We really should thank them for having started a group that still gives a lot of pleasure. *Dahlia* 'Moonfire' always makes me think of Rachel. I bought a pot with 2-3 tubers on one of the last HPS outings she organised, which was to East Ruston Vicarage in Norfolk. Now, 15 years later, every time I look at my pots of dark foliage and bright orange/yellow flowers I think of the benefits the group has brought me. *D.* 'Moonfire' still appears at the plant sale now and then.

I hope your garden brings you as much spiritual nourishment as mine has to me.

Irene Cowan

Events Programme 2014

Indoor Programme. All events start at 2pm.

Sunday 7th September 2-5pm - Member's Open Garden

Renata Hume, 10 Cross Street, Letchworth. SG6 4UD

'The garden in September is about late flowers and grasses with a background of shrubs, held in check by the circular lawns. Although I love grasses, I don't have many of them because I continue to struggle with shortage of space and the dream of expansive planting over all the seasons!

Directions: from A1(M) J9 signed Letchworth, across 2 roundabouts, R at 3rd, across next 3 roundabouts, L into Nevells Rd, 1st R into Cross St.

4th October

Helen Yemm - 'Thorny Problems'

Helen Yemm writes the Saturday *Telegraph* 'Thorny Problems' column each week answering readers' garden problems. Tricky challenges that gardeners face range from how to deal with the GOOD (hedgehogs and bats), the BAD (moles and aphids) and the UGLY (slugs and black spot) to when is the best time to prune a cherry tree or advice on lawn maintenance. So come armed with your questions for Helen and expect answers from her, and possibly other members as well, as we all get involved in the debate.

1st November: AGM followed by Member's Talk -

Madeleine McCormack - 'Going to Pot'

Madeleine and John McCormack have a charming suburban garden in Bushey, full of unusual plants. Over the course of a year, Madeleine made a series of small posies for her kitchen table which John, a gifted photographer, captured from every angle. This talk describes and explains the choice of plants used in the posies, illustrated by a selection of John's photographs. There will also be a selection of small pots for sale, made by Madeleine's brother, Nigel Thompson.

6th December

Jim Almond - 'Something for Everyone'

Jim is a keen grower/exhibitor of alpine plants, a hobby which has given him much pleasure for the past 20 years. Specialising in Primulaceae, he has a large rare bulb collection, and is a member of the Alpine Garden Society judging panel.

This talk should appeal to any audience of discriminating plants-people! Autumn bulbs, berries and colour; summer herbaceous plants; the odd tree; fabulous foliage and the occasional shrub. Specific genera include *Cyclamen*, *Hepatica*

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Anemonella, *Rhododendron* and *Daphne* - yes, something for everyone. He comes very highly recommended by other HPS groups.

Jim's talk will be followed by our

Christmas Party

Our usual yuletide celebration, with festive cheer provided by the Committee's special punch!

Please bring a plate of nibbles to share, savoury or sweet, on a paper plate to avoid washing-up. Gluten-free contributions particularly welcome.

NB: No cutlery is available so finger-food only, please!

3rd January

Dr Brenda Harold, a.k.a 'The Botany Geek' - *'Flower Power; How Plants Control Animals'*

Dr Harold is a qualified 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. Beautifully illustrated with digital photos of British wild flowers.

7th February

Bob Brown - *'New Garden Worthy Plants'*

Bob Brown is well known for his strong opinions on matters horticultural. He famously gives plants in his catalogue marks out of 10, based on how they have performed at his nursery, Cotswold Garden Flowers, and his garden in Evesham. He is also at the forefront when introducing new varieties to the gardening public.
www.cgf.net

7th March

Dr Julian Sutton - *'Herbaceous Berberidaceae'*

Julian Sutton runs the very aptly named nursery 'Desirable Plants', which 'specialises in herbaceous perennials, the choice, the interesting and the offbeat'. The herbaceous Berberidaceae group includes delicious plants like *Epimedium*, *Jeffersonia* and *Podophyllum*, varieties of which Julian will be bringing for sale.
www.desirableplants.com

4th April

Brian Ellis - *'Foliage First'*

Brian runs Avondale nursery, near Coventry, which holds National Collections for

Events Programme 2015

Aster novae-angliae (the ones that don't get mildew!), *Sanguisorba* & *Anemone nemerosa* as well as growing many other perennials and grasses. This talk demonstrates the importance of foliage and texture when planning a border, illustrated by photographs taken in the Library Garden at Avondale.

www.avondalenursery.co.uk

3rd October

Neil Lucas - '*Go Large: Gardening the American Way*'

With fabulous natural landscapes for their inspiration, often on a massive scale, American gardeners have created a mix of gardens that rival those of any other gardening nation. Having travelled across the USA, Neil takes a look at some of the wonderful landscapes and gardens he encountered along the way.

Neil Lucas is the owner of Knoll Gardens & Nursery, specialising in ornamental grasses, and is holder of ten consecutive Chelsea Gold Medals. He is also an RHS Council Member and Senior Judge.

www.knollgardens.co.uk

7th November - AGM, followed by Member's Talk

5th December

Stefan White - '*Skulduggery in the Shrubbery*'

Stefan White will relate the intriguing story of the Tradescants, father and son, who were master plantsmen and gardeners to the aristocracy in the reign of Charles I. The talk describes the fascinating ups and downs in the life of these 17th Century pioneers who were widely-travelled plant hunters, collectors of curiosities and founders of the world's first museum.

Layers of Light

I have a weakness for kinetic plants. When I say kinetic, I mean those which move in the wind, suspend myriad droplets after rain, and shimmer in sunshine. When I say weakness, I mean I'm liable to walk into a lamp-post if I catch sight of one of these plants growing in someone's front garden.

Kinetic plants are very often transparent, with slender stems and a branching habit, the taller ones useful both for height at the back of the border and also at the front, as a gauze through which to glimpse other plants. Most of these plants reach their kinetic stage in high summer. Camassias, however, erupt in a cool haze of blue and white star-shaped flowers earlier in the year, looking particularly effective amongst meadow grasses in May. Hot on their heels are the early-flowering ornamental grasses, amongst them annuals like *Hordeum jubatum*, the

Foxtail Grass, with its rosy-edged, feather-like flowerheads, and diminutive *Agrostis nebulosa*, Cloud Grass, which weaves its way between other plants like a low-lying mist, a fuzz of tiny, fibre-optic flowers which reflect the sunlight. Both enjoy a well-drained, sunny site and self-seed if happy.

In June, richly-coloured heucheras begin to throw up their beaded stalks. My favourite of these is dark-leaved *Heuchera* 'Prince'. In summer, it produces long stiff stems bearing large (for a heuchera) creamy lime-green flowers, which contrast perfectly with the purple-black sheen of its ruffled-edged foliage, much more eye-catching than the smaller, off-white flowers of *H.* 'Palace Purple' or 'Obsidian'. Best grown in semi-shade to maintain the velvety dark colour, like many heucheras, *H.* 'Prince' is easy to propagate in summer by simply cutting a piece of stem-tip about 10cm long and pushing it into a pot of gritty compost. Kept in a shaded, sheltered place, the cutting will root in a few weeks.

By July, the big guns are blazing! In a veritable forest of filmy foliage, verbena, thalictrum, sanguisorba and ammi float effortlessly above their more substantial counterparts in the border. One of the most commonly-grown kinetic plants is *Verbena bonariensis*. Long-flowering, with stiff stems and soft mauve flowers, it is a magnet for bees and butterflies and self-seeds easily. This year, I grew a new form of verbena which came highly recommended by eco-nurserywoman Marina Christopher; *Verbena macdougalii* 'Lavender Spires'. It resembles *V. hastata*, but it grows taller and is sterile, flowering for much longer yet still producing enough nectar, despite its sterility, to attract a steady stream of bees. I can report that it's definitely a winner.



Thalictrum delavayi 'Album'

Thalictrum has an ethereal quality to it which brings an airy, light feel to the border. I have grown *Thalictrum delavayi* 'Album' from seed and the intricacy of the flowers, from pearly little buds to tiny snowy skirts held on branching stems, never fails to charm me. They prefer a dampish soil in semi-shade, though if the soil is really moist they will be happy in full sun. Sanguisorbas are low-maintenance, long-lived plants, enjoying similar conditions to thalictrum and reaching heights of anything from 1-5 ft. Those originating from *S. officianalis* produce dark red bobble-like flowers on strong stems in late summer, which persist through autumn and provide a striking winter silhouette.

Sanguisorba is a perfect foil for annual *Ammi majus*, a plant which has won my heart in recent years. Who can resist its lacy green and white umbels, so much finer than any perennial white-flowered umbellifer? Yes, it's a nuisance to get going, especially



Sanguisorba

back in). Springing from a mound of lush foliage, initially its branching stems are upright but as they expand they curve outwards, creating wide archways shimmering with minuscule flowerheads. An arresting sight, particularly after rain when tiny cabouchon droplets ornament every filigree branch. I have discovered it has a convenient habit of 'self-pruning' its flowering stems at the base, so they can be easily removed in February with just a gentle pull.

One of my favourite shrubs elegantly graces the border; the exquisite *Indigofera pendula*. Although it requires free-draining soil and a sheltered position, this



Molinia caerulea ssp.

as it can sulk if planted out prematurely or too late, particularly if it has become pot-bound, but I wouldn't be without it. I cannot include *Ammi visnaga* amongst the kinetics, however, as it is an altogether denser plant with a solidity that sets it apart. Still worth growing, nevertheless, for its exceptional flower-heads, so beloved of florists. Talking of annuals, I grew dill from seed this year and it has offset the violet-blue flowers of Verbena 'Lavender Spires' beautifully in an oscillating layer of yellow-green, unexpectedly lofty at 4ft.

No kinetic border would be complete without one of the tall varieties of *Molinia*. These trouble-free ornamental grasses definitely add a wow factor to late summer, with evocative names such as 'Skyracer' and 'Windspiel'. My favourite is *Molinia caerulea ssp. arundinacea*

'Transparent' (excuse me while I put my teeth

exceptional plant is well worth the trouble.

Sometimes described as wisteria in shrub form, *I. pendula* has an arching habit with dainty, pinnate leaves and long, trailing racemes of pink-lilac pea-like flowers in mid to late summer. I've noticed that it has the endearing habit of closing its leaves, prayer-like, in the evening. I bought mine as a rooted cutting from Derry Watkins, who says *I. pendula* isn't always hardy in the coldest winters, but cuttings take readily and can be overwintered in a cold-frame as an insurance policy.

Marion Jay

Photos: Bill Hodgson

Committee

Please see the Committee page on the website for email and phone numbers, and if needed request the password via the Contact form.

Meetings

Indoor meetings start at 2pm, and are held at the Wheathampstead Memorial Hall on Marford Road, Wheathampstead, AL4 8AY.

Visitors are very welcome and are asked to contribute £5 per visit.

Tea and a cake costs £1 (tea only 50p). If you are able to offer help by serving tea or baking a cake please contact Linda Williams on 01582 832361.

The opinions expressed by contributors to the Newsletter are not necessarily endorsed by the HPS.

Herts HPS Coach Trip, 3rd July 2014



Mary Hendry with members in her garden in Finedon



Cottesbrooke's pale pink roses



Through the archway at Finedon



Passiflora 'Incense' at Kelmarsh

Photos: Edwina Robarts & Helen Cullens