

HILL CLOSE GARDENS



HILL CLOSE GARDENS TRUST
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Newsletter Summer 2010

Sponsored by Hintons Nursery & Plant Centre

Guide Book has that WOW! factor

by Margaret Begg

Hill Close Gardens won the 2009 Prize for Guidebooks from the Historic Gardens Foundation, and the prize was presented by Gillian Mawrey at a special event at Hill Close Centre on March 28. The judges all agreed that the Hill Close guidebook was beautiful and innovative, packed with accessible and lively facts about its detached town garden plots. It had the “wow” factor!

The Foundation was set up in 1995 to fight for the conservation and enjoyment of historic gardens worldwide, and it publishes the magazine “Historic Gardens Review” (www.historicgardens.org). This £500 prize was given to recognise the importance of guidebooks in telling visitors about a garden site’s history, the origin of its plants and the people behind its creation.

Hill Close Gardens also won the award for best overall entry in all categories and received a £200 garden voucher from Simon Scott of Haddenstone in Northamptonshire.

Local historian Christine Hodgetts wrote the text for the Hill Close guidebook, and Elizabeth Newbery of Newbery & England in Oxford was the designer and editor. Heritage Lottery funded the production of the guidebook as part of their grant for the restoration of the site in 2006 and the monitoring officer, Rex Carson, came to the event to celebrate the award.

Phillip Roberts, Partnerships Director at Advantage West Midlands, also attended the event and toured the gardens. He said, “As a keen gardener and regular visitor to the gardens, I was impressed by the further progress being made with the restoration. This is of course down to the energy and enthusiasm of the Trust, its staff, volunteers and other supporters.

“However, we were pleased to help match that energy and enthusiasm with the financial resources needed to make this project happen, and we are now seeing our expectations for the project being exceeded in a number of key areas. Good luck for the future!”



David Grey (Chairman), Rex Carson (Heritage Lottery) and Gillian Mawrey (Historic Gardens Foundation)



After a record number of visitors last year, HCG Trust has appointed Alison Selwood as volunteer coordinator to support our 80-plus volunteers who are the engine behind our organisation. Alison, who has a background in HR and has worked for other charitable organisations, has a keen interest in both gardening and education. She has met volunteers and listened to their comments and suggestions.

She said, “I’m keen to recruit more volunteers to ensure the future success of the project. We offer a variety of opportunities – welcoming visitors, leading guided tours, serving refreshments, selling plants, garden maintenance and activities for children. We also need help with bookkeeping, and organising property maintenance and weekend events. I would love to hear from anyone interested in getting involved. We offer training, social events and a chance to meet new people. Just email me on volunteercoordinator@hcg.org.uk or ring 01926 493339 to find out more.”

The hidden hedged gardens of Warwick

Summer cometh...

The spectacular spring bedding which started as pale creams and yellows flamed into hot colours at the end of April, but will soon be replaced with summer bedding.

The auriculas continued to enchant and two more theatres were created, one using an old pair of wooden steps in the summerhouse on Plot 18 and a little wall theatre which was perfectly in scale for the Gardens. A comprehensive display about history, cultivation and classification of auriculas was set up in the Centre, as well as the development of theatres.

The fruit blossom has been spectacular this year despite the cold and the strong winds. We wait to see if the crop will be better than last year.

Vegetables are now coming through and some old varieties have been sown, some for the Warwick Horticultural Show in August. Rhubarb has grown very well this spring: this may be the effect of the cold winter which is important for some varieties of rhubarb.

The nursery was redesigned during the winter and now has a much larger selling area; a list of plants will soon be on the website. Apart from the restoration of the summer house on Plot 16, the other major winter work was the repair to the terrace on Plot 17 where the bricks were shaling due to the prolonged cold. These have been removed and a hoggin terrace was laid with an edging of bricks and a brick area near the pig sties and we shall see how this lasts during the summer.

At the end of April we said farewell to Gary Webb who has left to pursue his interest in historic landscapes. He has made a valuable and noticeable contribution to the enhancement and development of the Gardens. We wish him well in his new venture. The process of appointing his successor has started. In the meantime the garden volunteers are playing a magnificent part in maintaining the high standard of the gardens.

Rosemary Mitchell

New summerhouse for old!

Back in 2006, the Restoration Project had to make a virtue out of necessity. We had seven summerhouses to restore, but funds only for six. So the Plot 16 summerhouse, fondly known as the Chicken Palace from its former use, was left as found "to show visitors what they had all been like before restoration". A lame excuse – let's face it, the building was barely safe. Imagine the Trust's relief when a year ago Mrs Ryan offered an extraordinarily generous donation of £ 15,000 in memory of her husband, and thus enabled the Trust to restore the Chicken Palace.

Much effort then began behind the scenes. Mike Sheldon and Jerry Fuller investigated, measured and recorded exactly what was on the site. We sought advice from Warwick District Council's conservation architect, Alan Mayes, as to whether to attempt to repair the building, or take it to pieces and rebuild it. The consensus was for rebuild, particularly in order to give the building a firm foundation incorporating a retaining wall to absorb the soil pressure pushing the east side inwards and threatening eventual collapse.

Careful comparison between the Chicken Palace and Plot 17 showed that both had a basement, and were much the same size, giving us a good starting point for design. We wanted disabled access, and so included the necessary staging. Although unhistoric, access from the next-door Plot 9 is more convenient, and allows the basement to be a true gardener's bothy.

With planning permission and designs at last in place, our volunteers first took the building to pieces, and then poured about 6 tonnes of reinforced concrete. Just getting the materials up the hill was hard enough, and strong formwork was needed for the retaining wall. Alan Smith and Tony Green did a magnificent job, and our contracted bricklayers Neil Duxbury and Bob O'Driscoll then carefully rebuilt the walls with the old bricks and reclaimed stock. KAD Roofing constructed a tiled roof

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...and bringeth summer highlights

Two key events this Summer are the Wartime and the Victorian Weekends. Wartime in the Gardens is on June 19-20 and we have re-enactment groups coming in 1940s dress to share wartime memories as well as displays of memorabilia, some live pigs in the sties at the top of the garden and activities for children on the Home Front theme.

The re-enactors will be back in Victorian dress for the Victorian Weekend on August 14-15 to talk about life in Victorian times and there will be croquet for all the family and other Victorian games.

We also plan to mark Lammas (loaf-mass) Day on August 1 by producing some freshly baked local bread. The early English church observed the day as a harvest festival at which loaves of bread made from flour from the first ripe corn were consecrated. The north side of Warwick racecourse was known as Lammas Land and the main room at the Centre is called the Lammas Room, so there is a clear link with Hill Close.

If anyone is interested in baking bread and helping with this event, Di Brennan would love to hear from them (telephone 01789 551594 or send an email to brennanstratford@ntlworld.com).

matching that of Plot 17, and the finishing touch was to add a superb weathervane, specially designed for us by David Grant. All the site carpentry was the work of Richard Usherwood, with windows and doors supplied by G&N Joinery. Paul Busby found an old fireplace for us, and other vital reclaimed items. We are grateful to all these craftsmen for their achievements.



Nothing would have gone right, however, without a Clerk of Works to pull it all together, and Jerry Fuller has been tireless in keeping control over the site and undertaking a great deal of hard work both on and around the restored summerhouse to give it the setting it deserves. Gary Webb has also been a constant support.

The Trust is very grateful to everyone involved, and looks forward to our visitors getting extra pleasure from this truly delightful addition to the Gardens.

Call for more apple recipes

We are already making plans for Apple Day which will be on Sunday October 17 this year (10.30am–4.30pm). Pattie Hall, our Centre Manager, is putting together a collection of apple recipes and would welcome new ideas.

Just send your suggestions to her at Hill Close Gardens, Bread & Meat Close, Warwick CV34 6HF or email her on centremanager@hcgt.org.uk.

Fruit trees in the gardens

The collection of historic apples is one of the outstanding horticultural features at Hill Close Gardens. Since 1856 apples, pears and plums were known to have been grown in the Gardens as well as soft fruit. Now there are more than 60 different varieties in the Gardens.

Top fruit are like people: they have a life span, some longer than others. Plums have the shortest life, followed by apples (although everyone knows that Bramley Seedling are renown for their longevity) and then pears. They get diseases, become scarred with canker, branches die off, some get moved in the restoration and other just lose vigour and die.

This winter the Garden Team instigated a survey of all the trees and concluded that a programme of restoration and replanting was necessary to ensure the continuity of historic trees in the gardens. Since 2004, at least seven trees have died and several - especially the Laxton's Superb trees - are looking distressed and have considerable canker as well as red coloured lichen.

Two were so badly diseased that they had to be removed. The root stock of a Victoria plum had grown and distorted the tree so much that it needed to be removed as it was not practicable to prune it out in order to leave the grafted Victoria plum. It also hampered the view of the newly restored summerhouse. Two other dead trees have been left standing as they provide a habitat for many small insects and are still sound. There were still a few apple trees which had been transplanted to Plot 29 during the restoration which needed to be relocated.

It was a suitable time to consider the overall positioning of trees and to ensure that there was a continuity of new and vigorous stock. All the varieties of the new fruit trees were of an appropriate period with the pear Worcester Black, known well in 1575, the apple Annie Elizabeth in 1857 and an other pear Beurre Hardy in 1820-40. The apples include Lord Derby (1862), Ribstone Pippin (1707), and Queen (1854). More mature trees of Newton Wonder and Manaccan Primrose were replanted in Plot 22.

The Gardens do not have much variety of plums with Worcester Drooper appearing all over the place. It was decided to plant a damson which would replace one which was near the old schoolroom before the restoration. A greengage was also planted in Plot 17.

The garden volunteers have played a major part in planting these trees.

This is the third major planting of new fruit trees in the gardens; the first was in 2000-2003, then in 2007 and now in 2010. This will ensure that there will be a gradual replacement of the old trees over a period of time and at the same time ensuring healthy new stock.

New garden plot is “open”



The long-awaited garden plot, designed for the Education Team by Geoffrey Smith, is up and running. The contractors moved in their equipment this spring and we watched from the boundaries as beds, paths and paving were completed. The paths are wide enough to take wheel chairs. Slender hornbeam saplings indicate where a green hedgerow will half-conceal the plot from outside and the arched gateway, designed to support a climbing rose, will welcome visitors in. We aim for a garden that will delight the senses, improve plant knowledge and horticultural skills and nurture wildlife. We are currently running a competition to name the garden, with the aid of the many school children who visit us.

Planting has begun and we have trees, shrubs and climbers in place to give structure to our soft landscaping. The centre bed will be devoted to plants that have particular appeal to sight, touch, hearing and smell and our newly planted fruit bed, with espalier apples and pears, red and black currants, gooseberries

and strawberries, will enable children to pick and taste. Our beds will serve as an introduction to a wide variety of plants, enabling youngsters to recognise shapes and structures of leaves, stems and flowers in other Hill Close Gardens plots. Two beds, devoted to vegetables, will be planted, tended and harvested by visiting children, aided by adult helpers. Four, rather wiggly, rows of seed potatoes were planted last week by a local Brownie pack, each with a label showing the name of the girl who dug the hole, planted the potato, filled in and watered it. We hope the girls will return later to harvest their crop.

We want to record our thanks to our designer, Geoffrey Smith, to our Site Manager, Gary Webb, to David Howell for planting advice, to Chris Begg for managing our finances, to Randall Cousins for erecting our arbour and to the many others at the gardens who have helped and encouraged us. Major funding has come from the Trust, The Warwick Society and Cadbury as well as anonymous donors, but we have received many smaller offerings of money and plants to cheer us on our way. Any further contributions will be gratefully received and put to good use.



Although the plot has been designed with children and education in mind, it will welcome visitors of all ages on open days and garden tours. You are welcome to wander round our paths, sit in our arbour and enjoy our plants and wild-life. And don't be too hard on us if you detect the odd weed! Nobody's perfect.

If you would be happy to receive future newsletters by email, please contact centremanager@hcg.org.uk. This will save us printing costs and help us to focus our funds on the Gardens.



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- Award-winning bedding, containers and hanging baskets, ready for summer planting and enjoyment
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Company registered in England, No 3981067
Registered Charity Number 1085278

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