

HILL CLOSE GARDENS



HILL CLOSE GARDENS TRUST
Registered Charity no. 1085278
www.hillclosegardens.com

Newsletter January 2010

The snowdrops are coming!

by Rosemary Mitchell

Remember last year's enchanting display of snowdrops in the Centre? Well, it will be back again this year. Those who missed it are in for a real treat with all the promise of spring. It is one of the few times when we are able to study and observe closely the markings and the petal form of a considerable number of different sorts of snowdrops without grovelling on hands and knees.

John Williams, a noted galanthophile, will be creating another beautiful display of snowdrops in the Centre on **Sunday 14 and Monday 15 February 2010**. There will be the opportunity to hear him speak and to ask questions on Monday at 11.00am in the Centre. His talk will be entitled 'The Delight of Snowdrops'.

Last spring, hundreds more snowdrops were planted throughout the Gardens and two special borders with named cultivars were created. One is by the main entrance and is filled with Victorian snowdrops including 'Magnet' with its long pedicels (pictured), 'S Arnott' which smells of honeysuch and 'Lady Beatrice Stanley'; and the other is in Plot 19 with more modern varieties including "our" 'Warwickshire Gemini', 'Blewbury Tart' and 'Anglesey Abbey'.



Many other snowdrops were planted under the hedges where they can be undisturbed. It is not often that the Gardens are open in the winter when they and summerhouses take on a different air and the bare trees open up vistas and create different shapes and shadows. The strong backbone of the Gardens is very apparent at this time of year.

Named snowdrops and other winter bulbs and plants will be on sale, and coffee, cakes and teacakes will be available.

LOOKING FORWARD TO 2010...

*2010 will be a busy year at Hill Close with a full programme of gardening, social, historical and children's events to look forward to. **Do cut out the programme included in this newsletter** for your pinboard or keep it by your calendar. If you would like to receive reminders about events by email please contact me on mbegg@cbegg.com and I should be happy to supply brief news updates on what is coming up.*

*Not to be missed is the Snowdrop event (see left) which this year includes both an indoor and outdoor display and a talk on snowdrops. This will be followed by a special event for members and volunteers on **Sun 28 March** when you can hear about latest developments in the gardens, including the newly restored summerhouse near the pig sties and the progress on plans for an education garden. There will be an opportunity to tour the gardens and learn more about the Victorian owners from the new interpretation boards.*

A new feature of our programme this year will be to introduce short talks for visitors around the historical and social aspects of the gardens. Watch out for these at the Wartime and Victorian events and over Heritage and Warwick Open Gardens weekends.

Margaret Begg

Garden Supervisor's Update

It's the time of year when garden magazines remind us to put our feet up in the potting shed with a mug of hot tea, our seed catalogues and a good gardening book. But I don't recall a single winter in 20 years of gardening where I've enjoyed such peaceful activity!

Whilst the gardens may appear to be restored and developed across the whole site, there is still room for projects which pad out these winter days quite effectively. New cold frames, nursery expansion, tree planting and removal: there is never a dull moment where Hill Close gardening is concerned.

In order to try to keep up with the ever-changing world, I have now developed a garden supervisor's BLOG which, for those new to blogging, is an internet feature which allows me to 'post' articles concerning Hill Close Gardening. This is intended to make it easy for followers of the blog to keep abreast of happenings within the garden. In fact, my first few posts have included updates on the rebuilding progress on the summerhouse on Plot 16. The intention is to post to the blog at least weekly, so do have a look and send your comments in for improvements or to ask about anything you'd like me to cover. There is a link to the blog on the Hill Close website: www.hillclosegardens.com

The 2009 season has simply shot by and the volunteers involved in caring for these historic gardens have put in some amazing work to create the special atmosphere that exists for the on-site team and visitors alike. If proof were needed, a quick flick through the visitors comment book is all it takes. Here are just a few:

"What lovely, serene, colourful and interesting gardens"

"What delightful gardens, a real tribute to the volunteers"

"Last week Kew Gardens, this week Hill Close – enjoyed this more!"

The gardens have been stocked full of produce in 2009, much of which has been welcomed in the sales area. Plants have been donated from the volunteers and visitors to help raise funds, and donations/bequests have also been gladly received. On top of this, time (possibly the most valuable donation of all) is being given in quantity from loyal volunteer teams. So much has and continues to be achieved on the back of generous people, and I know everyone deserves thanks for the part they play – so thank you!

Ongoing work is partly focused on the fruit trees, their care and, in some circumstances, renewal. After an extensive survey, we have detailed several trees for contractor's attention and have spotted planting opportunities for the next two winter seasons. This is part of a new focus on the fruit trees as an important collection and, as a result, we are developing the nursery area on Plot 19 to allow better care of existing young trees, some of which are quite rare. We are also developing links with the National Trust's Orchard Project which is designed to protect and raise the profile of orchards and fruit tree collections across the country. I'll cover more on this in my blog in due course.

Another project currently in the pipeline for winter attention is expansion of the nursery area, which should provide more space for plant selection. Space is becoming tight around the glasshouse, but the changes, in line with a very good 2009 plant sales season, will help us to reach our targets for plant sales for 2010.

You can see that time doesn't stand still down at Hill Close, we're as busy as ever, and working hard to prepare for the coming season. Thanks for your support.

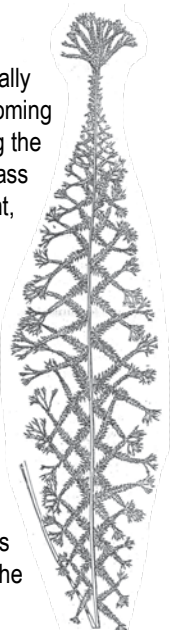
Gary Webb

VICTORIAN FERN MANIA

In the latter half of the 19th century, fern collecting from the wild was all the rage. Much took place on the West coast, especially in Devon, attracting visitors from London along the improved rail links. It reached such a pitch that hedge rows were becoming denuded of ferns. This resulted in 1904 in the first plant protection bye-law introduced by Devon County Council 'prohibiting the up rooting of Ferns or other Wild Plants in certain parishes mentioned therein'. Fern collections were housed in ferneries in glass houses, Wardian Cases and in damp and shady parts of the 'wilderness' part of the garden. Not only was collection important, but also growing from spores or bulbils which then led to attempts to establish a breeding programme to raise new varieties.

Athyrium felix-femina is commonly referred to as 'The Lady Fern' and the one which has recently been gifted to Hill Close Gardens has the name of 'Victoriae' given to it by Mr Moore, author of *British Ferns* who considered it to be the most beautiful of all *Athyrium felix-femina*. It was discovered by Mr James Cosh in 1861 on a by-way on the Buchanan estate and shown to the Head Gardener who had it transferred to the Gardens where it still is. As often happened, this rare plant found its way out of the great gardens, with dried fronds being distributed by collectors in 1863. The spores did not produce ferns with the characteristics of the original plant (the fronds are about ten to eighteen inches long and crested at the top).

Ferns are often difficult to identify because of the strange nomenclature and many markedly different variations within a species. Herbarium specimens, pressed fern and drawings are often easier to use for reference than photos. Some ferns do not come true from spores so there is always the hope that the seedlings will be more attractive than the parent: alas, this is seldom so. Slowness of propagation and the likelihood of inferior seedlings being sold as 'true' mean that the provenance of the plant is important. Nowadays, micropropagation taken from true stock does guarantee trueness to type.



CUT-OUT-AND-KEEP PROGRAMME OF EVENTS FOR 2010

For more information, visit www.hillclosegardens.com or telephone 01926 493339.

Opening times: the Gardens are open to the public every weekend from Fri 2 Apr - Sat 23 Oct: Saturdays & Bank Holidays 11am-5pm, Fridays & Sundays 2pm-5pm.

Events are held during normal opening times with standard admission £3, children up to 16 free unless otherwise stated. Light refreshments, plant and produce sales, children's trails, wheelchair and disabled access available.

Entrance from car park by racecourse off Friars Street CV34 6HF.

* Please telephone 01926 493339 to book a place for events marked with an asterisk

JANUARY

Sat 23 Fruit Tree Pruning Workshop 10.00am-4.00pm £15 (£10 for members of HCG, NCCPG, HPS)*

Sat 30 Children's Garden Watch: wildlife activities 10.30am-12.00pm and 2.00-3.30pm £3 per child*

FEBRUARY

Tues 9 and Tues 23 Vegetable Growing: talk & tips 7.00-9.00pm £5*

Sun 14-Mon 15 **SNOWDROP DISPLAY & GARDEN WALK** 10.30am-4.00pm Talk Mon 11am

MARCH

Sat 6 Spring Propagation Workshop 10.00am-4.00pm £15 (£10 for members of HCG, NCCPG, HPS)*

Sun 28 Members' & Volunteers' Pre-Opening Event: talks, tours and tea 2.30-4.00pm

APRIL

Sun 4-Mon 5 **EASTER EGG HUNT** Sun 2.00-5.00pm and Mon 11.00am-5.00pm £2 per child

Fri 9 Gardeners' Walk: guided tour 2.30-3.30pm £2 plus £3 admission to gardens

Sat 24-Sun 25 Auricula Weekend

MAY

Fri 14 Gardeners' Walk: guided tour 2.30-3.30pm £2 plus £3 admission to gardens

JUNE

Thurs 3 Lottie the Ladybird's Garden Walk 10.30am-12.00pm & 2.00-3.30pm £3 per child*

Fri 11 Gardeners' Walk: guided tour 2.30-3.30pm £2 plus £3 admission to gardens

Sat 19-Sun 20 **WARTIME IN THE GARDENS:** period costume, displays & live pigs

Tues 22 Maintaining your Garden in Summer: talk & tips 7pm-9pm £5*

JULY

Fri 9 Gardeners' Walk: guided tour 2.30-3.30pm £2 plus £3 admission to gardens

Sat 10-Sun 11 **WARWICK OPEN GARDENS:** Sat Bug hunt & crafts £2 & Sun free guided tours

Tues 13 Summer Propagation: talk & tips 7.00-9.00pm £5*

Tues 27 Flowers from the Garden: flower arranging demonstration 2pm-4pm £5*

AUGUST

Thurs 5 Scarecrow Workshop 10.30am-12.00pm 2-3.30pm £3 per child*

Fri 13 Gardeners' Walk: guided tour 2.30-3.30pm £2 plus £3 admission to gardens

Sat 14-Sun 15 **VICTORIAN WEEKEND:** period costume, croquet & children's activities

Thurs 19 Teddy Bears' Picnic 10.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-4.30pm £3.50 per child (incl. picnic)*

SEPTEMBER

Fri 10 Gardeners' Walk: guided tour 2.30-3.30pm £2 plus £3 admission to gardens

Fri 10-Sun 12 **HERITAGE WEEKEND** Free entry, with short talks on history of the gardens

Sat 18 National Gardens Scheme Open Day

Sat 25-Sun 26 Michaelmas Weekend: display of michaelmas daisies

OCTOBER

Sun 3 Harvest Thanksgiving: service, display of produce and sales 3pm

Fri 8 Gardeners' Walk: guided tour 2.30-3.30pm £2 plus £3 admission to gardens

Sun 17 **APPLE DAY & COUNTRY CRAFTS** 10.30am-4.30pm

Thurs 28 Henry the Hedgehog's Autumn Workshop 10.30am-12.00pm & 2.00-3.30pm £3 per child*

DECEMBER

Sat 4 Members' & Volunteers' Christmas Party 7.00-10.00pm £5

Fri 10 Children's Victorian Xmas Workshop 10.30am-12.00pm & 3.30-5.00pm £3 per child*

Seasonal Cheer For Education

As another busy year draws to a close, we have hugely enjoyed our last three events on the calendar: Apple Weekend, Hallowe'en and our Victorian Christmas.

Visitors to Apple Weekend may have seen children walking around Hill Close Garden decked in leaves as



they enjoyed making leaf crowns, masks, prints and rubbings. A creative time was had by all! Our Hallowe'en party developed into two parties which were both full of fun and games and our Christmas Workshops were a chance for children to get really crafty, making paper lanterns and doves, stars for the tree, traditional cards and calendars. A mixture of sequins, paper, glue and children's voices all made a wonderful atmosphere and we were all left feeling very festive!

Plans are already underway for next year's events, the first of which is our Garden Watch. We are supporting the RSPB Garden Watch in January again this year, with activities for school children and two Saturday workshops. These will take place **between the 18th January and the 1st February**, with the Saturday events taking place on **Saturday 30th January**. Families can join us on our Garden Watch, enjoy a

scavenger hunt, find out about encouraging birds into your garden, help make a bird-watching hide and identify the birds at Hill Close Gardens. We are offering two sessions to choose from: 10.30am–12pm or 2–3.30pm. Cost is £3.00 per child. Please contact the Centre Manager on 01926 493339 to book a place.

New for 2010

Look out for our trail characters events, and our Scarecrow event, all of which will encourage children to explore and enjoy the outdoor environment.



Trail characters Henry the Hedgehog, Lottie the Ladybird and Art the Amazing Ant

All of our family events and school visits are only possible through the commitment of our Education Volunteers, they really do a fantastic job. If you are interested in becoming an Education Volunteer, please contact Sarah Perrott on 01926 493339 or by e-mail to educationofficer@hcg.org.uk

Hello,
We're really pleased to be supporting the Hill Close Gardens newsletter. We've opened an inspirational garden store in Leamington Spa & we'd love to know what you think.

HiddenEden™
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Heritage
LOTTERY FUNDED