

HILL CLOSE GARDENS

The hidden hedged gardens of Warwick



January 2017

Remembering John Bleasdale

John Bleasdale, who died on 1st September 2016, spent much of his time in retirement furthering the progress and development of Hill Close Gardens Trust. He brought with him a wide experience of horticulture from his work at Wellesbourne Vegetable Research Centre but above all he was a great leader, pulling together the divergent views of all those committed volunteers who were responsible for so much work in the restoration of the Gardens.

John became involved in the Gardens soon after the site had been registered Grade 2* on the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. In 1997, Warwick District Council convened a working party of interested local persons to consider what to do with the site which no longer could be used for housing and John's name was put forward by Noreen Jardine to bolster the horticultural debate.

His experience as an eminent scientist and head of a world famous vegetable Research Centre was valuable both then and in future years. Eventually a Trust was formed and John became the first Chairman of the Trustees in 2001 and continued as a Trustee until his death this year.

The Trust became a charity as well



as a company limited by guarantee which meant that there had to be in place formal documents governing the way by which the Trust operated. This he well understood.

Further detailed documentation had to be prepared for the application to Heritage Lottery Funds (HLF) for restoration of the site. This was at odds with his previous experience of applying for research monies by a well-known establishment which was so different from a small charity run by volunteers but he proved equal to the task.

The restoration of the Gardens, after much upset to the gardens and summerhouses, was completed in the autumn of 2006 with John

leading the Project Team.

John's health meant that he could not be a hands-on gardener but one who was always thinking about ways by which the gardens could be improved and monies obtained. His knowledge of vegetables, especially onions, was valuable when there were problems of pests and diseases.

At one time there was a move to theme each garden and he was very keen on a War Time Garden with an Anderson Shelter. He was quick to involve the Gardens in the Ancient Orchard project (Hill Close Gardens counts as an "ancient orchard") in 2006. This led to an advancement of apple ID through attendance at workshops. Now most of the fruit trees are named.

As an accomplished wood turner John provided the Centre with measuring dibbers, wooden labels and twine sticks – all amongst our best sellers.

John Bleasdale's legacy is a thriving and vibrant historic garden of national importance which gives much pleasure to visitors, volunteers, historians and educationalists and to both young and old. We have lost a good friend who will be much missed.

A bit from the Centre Manager...

2016 has seen much improvement not only for the Visitor Centre but also for our much loved summerhouses. Those on plots 22, 16, 17 and 19 have been painted using traditional paints and colour codes. This leaves plots 11 and 25 to go. These buildings have so much character and it is great to see them back to their best. A big thank you to everyone who has helped to keep these historic buildings (two of which are Grade 2 listed) protected and looking great.



October hosted our yearly Apple Day and again it proved to be a hit. The weather held after a worrying start and the event was enjoyed by all. This year we added a local cider stall, and beer was also available from a local brewery.

Apple juicing and information was offered and caught the attention of both old and young alike.

Bookings at the Centre are improving year on year as are visitor numbers. 2017 will hopefully follow suit.

Finally, we are pleased to have won Gold in the category "Public Access Gardens" in 'Warwick in Bloom'.

On the lookout for volunteers

Activities at Hill Close Gardens are supported by more than 100 volunteers in a variety of roles from helping with children's activities, in the café or admin, as well as in the gardens, plant centre and potting shed. We are keen to boost this friendly team with still more people in 2017.

Volunteering at Hill Close offers flexibility, with people choosing dates when they can help and roles that suit their own interests.

If you or anyone you know may be interested, see www.hillclosegardens.com/support-us/ or ask at the Visitor Centre, where a range of print-outs for the various roles can be collected. We are particularly looking for café and education activity volunteers, as well as a Treasurer or book-keeper.

There will also be **volunteer recruitment days** on Sunday 2nd April 11am-2pm and Thursday 6th April 1pm-3pm, offering the chance for an informal chat about the opportunities.

Farewell to Teresa

Teresa Thomas has been the Café Manager for the past six years but unfortunately recent ill health has meant that she is unable to carry on.

Her pleasant manner welcoming visitors has helped many to appreciate the Gardens. She has managed to ensure that there were always volunteers and that we never had to close the café during weekend opening. She has been excellent with both visitors and café volunteers.

We wish Teresa better health in the future and thank her for her contribution to the Gardens.

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BBC visits Hill Close

October 13th saw BBC Gardeners' World pay a visit to Hill Close to make a short film about hardy Chrysanthemums and their value in the border for late season colour. Judy Barker, who shares the National Collection with Hill Close and Norwell Nurseries, came along to give an interview about all the research she has carried out over many years. Director Lisa Lipman was also keen to capture Hill Close Gardens on camera, in particular its history and survival. The episode will be broadcast on BBC2 sometime in 2017.



Bye-bye Winter, Hello Spring!

Our enthusiastic team of volunteers have enjoyed another great year of very successful events and activities for families and schools, with good attendance and lots of happy children and adults.

Now here we are, a new year and another exciting programme of 'Learning and Playing Outdoors', offering children and their families' opportunities to explore the changing seasons in the gardens.

We have lots planned to get the children digging, planting, exploring, creating, and celebrating the changing seasons.

*In April you can join in the fun of our **Easter Family Workshop**, enjoy an 'eggstravaganza' of 'eggciting' Easter arts and crafts. Grab a magnifying glass and explore the gardens in June, searching for **Boggling Bugs and Curious Critters**.*

Snowdrop weekend

Our annual Snowdrop event will take place on Saturday 4th and Sunday 5th February 2016 with an indoor display prepared for us by local horticulturist John Williams.

There will also be over 130 varieties on show in the garden with the unusual 6-petalled variety 'Godfrey Owen' (see picture below) taking pride of place.



There will be potted snowdrops for sale in limited quantities as well as a range of early flowering bulbs such as Iris reticulata and Muscari

As usual our café will be open selling hot drinks and snacks.

As well as our normal weekday openings there will be another chance to see our snowdrops on Sunday 19th February when we will open in aid of the National Gardens Scheme.

Vacancy for Treasurer

Hill Close is looking to appoint a new Treasurer. The role need not be overly time-consuming, with is plenty of help available for routine work. The important elements are leading on setting budgets, on ensuring that financial procedures are followed, and on attending the Trustee meetings six times a year to report on financial progress.

Accountancy experience would be ideal, but a wider background in some other aspect of finance might well suit. The Trust relies heavily on Sage accounting software, and increasingly on cloud computing, so that it is easy to do most of the supervision from home.

Vacancy for Webmaster

We are also looking for a volunteer to edit entries prepared by Team Chairmen to ensure the integrity of the Wordpress-based site. Experience of working with websites and/or computer literacy would be useful (although training can be arranged).

Further information

If Members are interested in knowing more, or know of someone who might be, please get in touch with Chris Begg or Rosemary Mitchell through the Centre Manager on 01926 493339.

What is that purple/red/yellow flower up there in the gardens?

Every year there is one plant which excites more requests for the name even if it is on the “What’s in Flower” leaflet. There is always the effort of extracting from the enquirer a fuller description, such as colour, height and which plot they saw it in, plus anything else which might help. This year it was the turn of a “tall purple flower”. Requests came from lots of visitors including some very good gardeners.

It was a lovely Zinnia growing on the cut flower border on Plot 19. This beauty was enhanced by a row of dwarf double annual Asters in front and behind was a row of the everlasting Helychrysum. The colours of all three rows



was a happy coincidence as these annuals had been sown as part of the propagating workshop using any packet of seed which had been

donated earlier in the year. The Zinnia proved to be an excellent cut flower with long straight stems and lasted well in a vase.

Membership

I would like to say a big thank you to all our members, particularly those who continue to renew their membership year after year. Your support is very important as it helps us to continue the maintenance and development of the Gardens. It is very much appreciated.

At the end of the year we have 420 members. This includes 66 life members and 75 members who have already paid in 2016 for 2017 memberships and about 100 who pay by standing order at in January.

If you do not have your 2017 card yet, now is the time to get one. We are open weekdays 11am-4pm, so come along to see the snowdrops and other spring flowers and buy your 2017 membership. There are also plants for sale (10% discount for members).

Our special Open Afternoon for members and volunteers is on Sunday March 19th, with talks, tours, tea and cake. Do come along to see what is new in the Gardens and the Centre.

An invitation to recent members

Keep the morning of Sat 21st January free and come to Hill Close for coffee and croissants (or tea and scones if you prefer) and meet the Chairman Rosemary Mitchell and other Trustees.

Members are important stakeholders in the organisation and this will be the opportunity for you to get to know us and for us to know you.

We want our members and visitors to enjoy the Gardens and its many activities and this will be a time when we are not busy with doing ‘things’ but a relaxed time to chat about the Gardens and how we can enhance everyone’s involvement in the Gardens.

More details will be published in the New Year.



Hill Close Gardens Trust
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