

HILL CLOSE GARDENS

The hidden hedged gardens of Warwick



May 2018

Volunteers are our lifeblood

As a volunteer over many years, I have enjoyed putting together displays on various topics for Hill Close Gardens. I am now an expert on Easter Victorian baking, maypole dancing and even wassailing! Visitors who braved the rain this Easter were able to enjoy a number of our displays including Victorian sweets and one summerhouse transformed into a Victorian sweetshop.

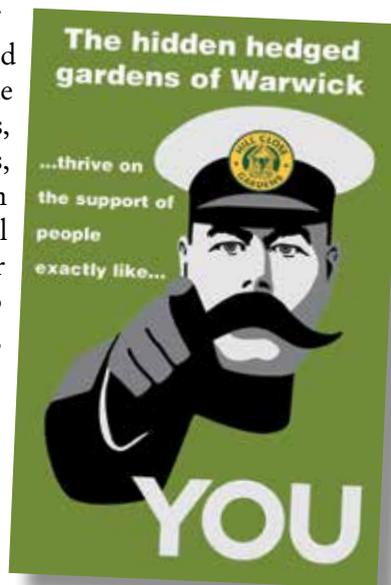
There are many areas where help is needed and you can choose what you would like to do: helping in the tearoom, at events, on the education team, meeting visitors, the social history of the garden or even doing some actual gardening, there will be a role for you as there has been for me. You don't need to be restricted to a single area. I have helped with events, created displays, helped in the tearoom, guided tours and even lifted a few weeds!

All roles make a vital contribution to keeping these fantastic gardens open for members and visitors.

As a volunteer, I have learned new skills and made new friends. You could too.

All in the enchanting surroundings of Hill Close Gardens. So do come along and join the friendly Hill Close team.

Maggie Curtis - Volunteer



A volunteers' view

"My husband and I started serving refreshments on a Sunday afternoon soon after the restoration of the Gardens started, and we still enjoy volunteering here.

"It is a lovely environment to work in and we have made lots of friends. I particularly like working in the kitchen, sampling the delicious refreshments and talking to visitors.

"Also eleven years ago I took over the job of membership secretary and I have seen the membership steadily increase as more people find these lovely Gardens."

Sylvia Fair

Volunteer Membership Sec'y

Adieu

We said farewell in March to Jackie Walsh, our WRAGS trainee for 2017/18. In a surprise party she was awarded her certificate by Liz Harrison-Hall, the regional co-ordinator for the scheme and by Gary Leaver (Head Gardener). We wish Jackie every success in her future career and hope that she comes back to the Gardens to update us on her progress from time to time.

Our new trainee Rebecca Coates will start in May for a 12-month placement, and I'm sure all the members and volunteers will make her time with us an enjoyable one.



From the Centre Manager

After a wet start to the year spring has now sprung (though presently clouds and cool weather persist).

We are looking forward to another successful year here at the gardens. Membership numbers continue to increase year-on-year, so thank you for renewing and welcome to all new members.

This year Di Brennan, a long-time supporter and volunteer, has stepped down from her events management role. She will continue to be an active volunteer but has decided that it is time to pass on the baton. If you would like to get involved with our events, please let me know.

After 10 years, the visitor centre Lammas room lighting is being replaced. This continues the work already carried out within the main hallway and kitchen. The Gardens are still popular with hirers and bookings are up again on last year.

Tickets are available for all of our forthcoming events (see opposite): as you know, these sell out fast so do apply for them early!

Hill Close Gardens are preparing for the 'GDPR' (General Data Protection Regulation), and you will be receiving a letter/email to explain more in due course.

Finally, this issue puts the spotlight on volunteering and the wide range of social opportunities that this offers at Hill Close Gardens. If you (or anyone you know) might be interested in volunteering, please do get in touch. You can call me on **01926 493339** or email me at **centremanager@hcg.org.uk**. We look forward to hearing from you.

Richard Hayward, Centre Manager

From the Head Gardener

Following the completion of the garden shelter on plot 23 there have been a number of improvements to the appearance of the plot. Visitors will find a spring in their step with the newly laid paths which are a mixture of a rubber crumb and aggregate bonded with resin. The previous ash paths put down in 2006 were no longer



New paths and beds at Plot 23

fit for purpose and had become eroded by rain, snow and ice. The new paths are SUDS compliant (Sustainable Drainage System) and any downpours immediately soak through avoiding standing water around the gateways.

New beds have also been planted either side of the shelter. The theme is late season colour with a mixture of hardy Chrysanthemum, Aster, Miscanthus, Salvia and Helenium in a blue and yellow theme. These will flower from August until the first frosts extending the season within this part of the garden.

New herb beds have been planted in a formal pattern outside the wooden shed to replace those lost during the building process. They contain culinary varieties including chives, thyme, sage, parsley and winter savoury and the beds are separated by golden marjoram.

Garden events

On the evening of **Saturday 23 June**, we're holding a special session of Midsummer Jazz in the Gardens, and are delighted to welcome back the **Roy Forbes Quintet** to play at this event.



Roy is a jazz vocalist who interprets his songs with blues and soul influences. He's highly regarded in the music industry, and the quintet received a fantastic reception when they last played at Hill Close Gardens in 2016.

"Infused with warmth"
Jazz UK

"Cool, swinging and very hip"
The Birmingham Post

* * *

Kenilworth folk group **Romany Pie** are a firm favourite on Apple Days and gave us a memorable Wassailing evening in 2016. This summer they are returning on **Saturday 11 August** with their WW1 anthology of songs, readings and poems, including some with local interest.

There will also be an exhibition about life on the home front in Warwick. Profits from the evening will be divided with the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers Museum (The Royal Warwickshire Regiment).

This promises to be an evening of poignant reflection and an opportunity to remember those connected to Hill Close Gardens.

Links with Plant Heritage

The Gardens have had a very long term relationship with Plant Heritage (or NCCPG as it was in the early days). Their work on conservation of garden plants reflects the conservation policy of the Gardens and we participate in their activities

The Warwickshire Group, through Noreen Jardine who was on the Warwick District Council steering group, was much involved in Plot 17. She encouraged members to work on that Plot and developed the Rare Plant border which she used to bring together all her 'rare' plants which she had received through the Plant Exchange. These plants are defined as having two or less mentions in the Plant Finder. Plot 17 and the glasshouse are used for that propagating today. We are keen to help distribute these plants to others in Plant Exchange and each year we send off about 80 plants which have been propagated from those growing in that plot.

Equally we receive some new plants each year so that the border or the glasshouse has some new and interesting plants to add to our existing collection. Sometimes we are not surprised that some plants have become rare: the wonderful heliotropes from the National Collection at Hampton Court were so difficult to grow as they were very fussy about their growing conditions – either it was too hot, too cold, there was too much humid, or not enough humidity and so on, whereas others such as the Kniphofia 'Bees Jubilee' has always been the centre of admiration.



Kniphofia 'Bees Jubilee'

Sometimes a plant is at risk because it is difficult to propagate or bulks up so tightly that it is difficult to divide. We have found that with Hemerocallis 'Beloved Returns'.



Hemerocallis 'Beloved Returns'

This border illustrates how many good garden plants drop out of the commercial horticultural scheme and are kept alive by members of the Plant Heritage. We at Hill Close help to be part of the great national conservation

Gradually we grew more hardy border chrysanthemums all acquired through the Plant Exchange. After discussions with our friend Judy Barker who verified the names and generously gave us more varieties we, together with Andrew Ward of Norwell Nurseries became joint National Collection Holders of a dispersed Collection of Border Chrysanthemums.

These are plants which dropped out of favour and now, because of milder and longer autumns, are seen to extend colour in the garden until the end of Oct.

Plant Heritage nominates a member to be a Trustee who has been Ken Joy, and Rosemary Mitchell (Chair of the Garden Team) is on the Plant Heritage Council. We all benefit from the interchange of plants and horticultural information.

To find out more about becoming a volunteer and the opportunities available, please visit us in the Gardens, or call the Centre Manager on 01926 493339 or email centremanager@hcgt.org.uk

Tea time!

Last season was “blooming lovely” not only in the gardens but also in the Tearoom with the introduction of a new range of botanically-themed cakes: rose, lavender and elderflower, and infused loose leaf teas.

Bread & Co worked closely with the Head Gardener to further develop the range exclusive to Hill Close incorporating seasonal produce from the gardens in traditionally baked cakes, such as courgette, pear, plum, strawberry to name but a few - and the now infamous “windfall apple” became last season’s most popular choice!

The Tearoom is open at weekends and bank holidays from 11.00am - 5.00pm until the end of October. On behalf of the Tearoom Volunteers, I would like to extend a warm invitation to join us in the Tearoom after walking around the lovely gardens for a reviving cuppa and a slice of delicious cake!

Susan Garrett (Tearoom Supervisor)



...and don't forget the Hill Close Gardens gift shop

As well as the wide range of plants and produce on sale in the Gardens throughout the year, we also stock a range of greetings cards suitable for every occasion featuring seasonal flowers and Hill Close scenes, and gifts from small ornamental birds to china mugs and fridge magnets. Postcards of Hill Close are also available.

New in stock for you to browse are tea towels, pens and memo pads specifically produced for Hill Close Gardens.

All items are competitively priced, and profits go towards the maintenance of these historic gardens.

Treasurer Vacancy

We are seeking a Treasurer to replace Steven Warr who is resigning from his post this summer after the AGM.

The Treasurer is responsible for guiding the Trustees on all financial matters and for the annual accounts and report including the management accounts and VAT returns.

If you are interested, there is a job description which details the responsibilities. Please contact Tony King, Trustee at Hill Close Gardens if you would like to chat about it or require more information.

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Heritage
LOTTERY FUNDED