

HILL CLOSE GARDENS

The hidden hedged gardens of Warwick



September 2018

Chrysanthemum glory

Saturday 27th October will see our second hardy Chrysanthemum Day where visitors can admire more than 70 varieties in flower from our National Collection. This year many of our stock plants have been re-located to new beds to avoid any build-up of diseases, ensuring they remain healthy and vigorous in the coming years. Plants will be available to buy on the day and Judy Barker, who shares the National Collection, will be on hand to answer any questions visitors may have on the cultivation of this versatile group of plants.



The Weeding Room?

The summerhouse on Plot 16 is now home to a small second-hand bookshop specialising in gardening books.

If you have any old garden books that need a new home then please bring them down to Hill Close, where all proceeds will go towards the upkeep of the Gardens.

Our new Trainee

Rebecca Coates (right) is the fifth trainee to join us at Hill Close Gardens and the fourth under the Work and Retrain as a Gardener Scheme (WRAGS). A keen gardener, she is especially interested in succulents and vegetables, and is hoping to forge a career in horticulture when she completes her traineeship next year. Rebecca looks after her own allotment and volunteers for the National Trust at Upton House as well as working 2 days a week at Hill Close. Do say hello to Rebecca next time you visit the gardens.



Farewell

Maggie Curtis's very sudden death in August made us all realise what a very special person she was and how much she will be missed by many people. Maggie was involved in many aspects of arts, drama, music, history and brought aspects of those to her wonderful displays and interpretations relating to special events at Hill Close Gardens.

Maggie was one of those exceptional volunteers who always smiled, was never in a rush, and was always successful in completing the work for which she volunteered. She brought imagination and flair to these displays which were an accurate reflection of the event. One of her last displays was a Victorian sweet shop in the summerhouse on Plot 17 earlier this year and was truly spectacular.

Maggie had been involved in Hill Close ever since the restoration in 2007 when she was appointed the first Centre Manager, and subsequently became a Volunteer. She readily talked about the gardens either as a tour guide at the Gardens or as a speaker to outside societies wishing to know more about the social history of the Gardens.

We, like many others, will remember Maggie with affection and with thanks for all that she has contributed to the life of Stratford, Kenilworth and Hill Close Gardens.

"Growing and learning outdoors" is still growing

Our once-a-month 'Drop In' for pre-school children and their parent/carer continues to prove a success, with hundreds of would-be mini-horticulturalists rolling up their sleeves and getting stuck into the garden.

The sessions offer an amazing, calming space for parents and children alike. It provides an opportunity to explore and get close to nature and to see the changing seasons: it's a tactile learning environment where children can experience different textures, and an opportunity to plant, dig and water and then to harvest and enjoy the fruits of their labours - perfect hands-on learning!

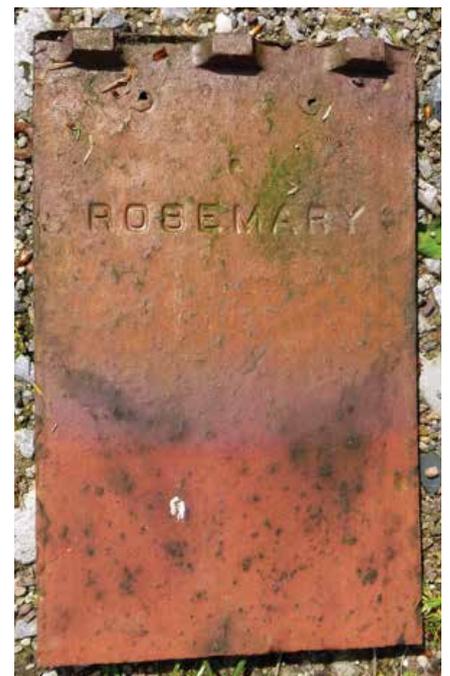
The children always have something to take home to remind them of their time in the garden; often this is something to grow on at home, as well as craft activities. Each session includes a garden walk where we encourage children (and their adults) to observe their surroundings, using all their senses.

Hilary Morris who leads the sessions, is a trained Nursery Nurse who has worked in Early Years settings for over thirty years. *"I think the learning opportunities at HCG are huge. In an age where children can have limited access to outdoor areas and where we are surrounded by plastic, the opportunity to explore nature in the safety of such a beautiful space is very special for adults and children alike."*

"Most young children are active learners, learning best when they are moving, using their hands and their bodies. Our gardens are the perfect place to do this and, with the help of the Volunteers, I hope I can pass my passion for this learning onto our young people."

Rosemary Tiles

A sharp eyed visitor, now a member, noticed that several of the roof tiles in the new shelter on plot 23 had the maker's emblem on them, including one which just had the name 'Rosemary'. This can hardly be the name of the maker however it is a descriptor used for the type of tile and is still in use today but perhaps without Rosemary stamped on them. The 'Rosemary' name is synonymous with clay plain tiles, adding distinction and character to pitched roofs. These tiles have been around for over 175 years and are still being made commercially.





Hill Close Garden Volunteers submitted fruit, vegetable and flowers in the Warwick Horticultural and Allotment Society Show and in the Old Milverton Show, with a considerable degree of success.

Thank you, Di



Di Brennan has stepped down as Events organiser after 10 years involvement and we thank her for all the work which she has done during this time. She was able to bring a fresh slant on events each year. It is difficult to single out any one event which was special but perhaps “Art in the Gardens” was one of the most imaginative and successful. The work that went into this event has hopefully laid the foundations for a repeat event in 2019 and beyond.

As ever events always need much work behind the scenes which is never seen by visitors and Di had a great capacity for ensuring that all went well on the day. Press releases are always an important part of publicizing any event and with a good play on words our events have managed to capture the spirit.

Jenny Lamb has offered to take on this important role and will continue to build on the great work achieved by Di.

Biodegradable pots

We are currently trialling biodegradable pots made by Vipot in an attempt to reduce our use of plastic pots. They are made from natural ingredients such as coconut fibre and grain husks with a vegetable oil varnish and are distinguishable from our other pots by their golden colour. They should have a three-to-five year life span but are not suitable to be planted in the ground; however, when broken, they can be composted in 9-18 months.

Vipots are slightly more expensive than plastic pots but are better for the environment and during the recent hot weather they have proven to have good insulation properties, keeping plant roots cool meaning less stress and reduced watering.

At the moment they only come in 1 litre and 2 litre pot sizes but we are hopeful that other manufacturers will follow suit and provide a greater range. There are other recyclable pots being developed which can be recycled with other plastic waste collected by the local councils and we may trial these in the future.



At the going down of the sun...

On Saturday 11th August the gardens played host to a well supported fund-raising event for both the Gardens and for our local regimental museum.

Romany Pie (below), who are regarded as part of the scenery here at the Gardens, performed a moving First World War anthology in music and readings and poetry, together with a display remembering life on the Home Front in and around Warwick.

There were refreshments from Bread & Co. which harkened back to the days of rationed foodstuffs and time to enjoy the gardens.

Warwick Mayor, Rich Eddy, and Colonel John Rice, Chair of the Trustees of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers Museum at St. John's House in Warwick joined the party and enjoyed a garden tour by umbrella with Margaret Begg.

Braving a mid-performance downpour, our trusty volunteers achieved a rescue of the refreshments from the marquee outside and our audience enjoyed their supper from the corridor with good humour.

As Maggie Curtis had organized the event and been due to perform the readings with her friends in Romany Pie, the occasion was regarded by many as a tribute to her long and much appreciated involvement with Hill Close. She will long be remembered here.



From the Centre Manager

What a sunny summer, officially the hottest on record. But unfortunately every Bank Holiday was a complete washout! This, as everywhere, affected visitors and the gardens alike but we came through in good form.

Weekday visitor numbers have been holding up very well as have private bookings within our Lammas room. Our summer performances were well attended and both Midsummer Jazz and Heartbreak Productions' performance of "The Railway Children" were a success.

Sadly midway through organising another hit event Maggie Curtis, a long-time supporter and Volunteer here at Hill Close, passed away. The Hill Close Remembers "At the Going Down of the Sun" event was partly held in her memory (see left). The event was a sell-out and a thoroughly enjoyable evening.

Summer saw another three summerhouses being re-painted, which completes the re-painting of the summerhouses, keeping these assets in prime condition.

*Finally, it's all steam ahead for our Apple Day & Country Fair being held this year on **Sunday 14th October**. Keep the date in your diaries for another day of all things Apple. And don't forget the last burst of colour is our Chrysanthemum Day on **Saturday 27th October**.*

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