

HILL CLOSE GARDENS

The hidden hedged gardens of Warwick



January 2019

Here's to the future gardeners

Children's activities have been offered by the Trust since long before the Gardens' restoration, initially from an old wooden classroom where the Visitor Centre sits today. The children dug in whatever piece of ground there was and the focus was on vegetables and Victorian planting. Our officer at the time was a keen environmentalist and persuaded a colleague from the Market Hall Museum to conduct the bug hunts for the children who came with their families, and which were then an exciting adventure amidst our untamed hedgerows and masses of cow parsley.

Put on hold during the restoration, children's activities resumed and we moved into new territory, exploring the Victorian families who had once cultivated the garden plots and offering workshops on how the gardens had been saved from redevelopment.

We developed the Children's Garden and instigated our Easter and Christmas workshops, our popular Teddy Bears' Picnic, Scarecrow Day and other events.



Over the years we have been able to offer visits to special groups such as children with additional needs and it has been a joy to work with them and their teachers.

We work with schools and preschools focusing on learning in the outdoors, and we offer a monthly Drop-in for under 5s and their families and other sessions in partnership with our local Children's Centre.

Needless to say, none of this would

be possible without our dedicated team of volunteers: some have worked in education, others have a love of gardening but everyone gets enormous pleasure from seeing young children enjoy the wonders our gardens have to offer, all year round.

If you are interested in joining the team please contact Centre Manager, Richard Hayward on 01926 493339, or email educationofficer@hcg.org.uk

Thank you to all those who already have their membership for 2019. Membership continues to increase each year which is very important in keeping the Gardens flourishing. There are now over 600 members. Membership is for a calendar year, Jan 1st to Dec 31st, and if you do not yet have your cards for 2019, do come along to the Gardens and renew. There are always new things to see: the Gardens look good in all seasons and there are lots of plants for sale (members get 10% off all plant sales). Do come to see the snowdrops and spring flowers and buy some for yourself.

Hardy Plant Society book launch

Chrysanthemum Day was the occasion for the launch of the Hardy Plant Society's most recent publication, *Hardy Border Chrysanthemums*, by Judy Barker. This is a valuable source of information about Hardy Border Chrysanthemums. Up to now there has not been any single comprehensive source of information about these plants. It was therefore appropriate that the launch should have taken place at Hill Close Gardens where there is a Plant Heritage dispersed National Collection of these wonderful plants which have looked good until late into November.

The book contains sections on the history, cultivation and a detailed section on the many cultivars, some of which have been found in old and often neglected gardens, including 'Fred's Yellow' found growing in Friars Street, Warwick. The author, Judy Barker, has been a good friend of the Gardens sharing her knowledge and plants with great generosity, working on the principle that if you want to save plants the best thing is to give them away.



Judy Barker (author), Rosemary Mitchell (Trustee, Hill Close Gardens), and Sue Catchpole (Hardy Plants Society Publications Committee)

Copies of the book, price £7.50, can be obtained from The Centre Manager at Hill Close Gardens or directly from The Hardy Plant Society, 15 Basepoint Business Centre, Crab Apple Way, Evesham WR11 1GP.

New Trustee

Robert Bleasdale, a qualified member of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors and a former Director and Senior Board Member of both Phillips and Bonhams auctioneers, was appointed a Trustee in November.

His experience in charitable organisations as a Trustee of the Royal Warwickshire Regimental Museum and of the Gordon Russell Trust will benefit the discussions of the board. His commercial experience with having his own business as specialist auctioneer gives an understanding of the scale of the work of the Trust.

Robert Bleasdale is very familiar with Hill Close Gardens, as his father John was the first Chairman of the Trust and is a Life Member. He is also very much a son of Warwickshire, having been educated at Warwick School and having spent most of his life in the area.

From the Centre Manager

2018 has once again shown an increase in Lammas room bookings. This is great news for moving confidently into the future.

This year also saw an increase in coach groups visiting the gardens.

Our guided tours of the gardens continue to prove popular with groups from around the country and these are managed by a dedicated team of volunteers who help both within the

kitchen service area and giving the tours.

Through varied marketing strategies we are looking to increase visitors still further through 2019.

Our Head Gardener's free tours of the gardens have proved to be popular and are seeing more people taking advantage of his horticultural expertise.

May I wish you all a very happy New Year.

Farewell

Gary Leaver, our Head Gardener, will be leaving at the end of the February to start a new and exciting stage in his career when he becomes the new owner of Avondale Nursery in September after a handover period working with Brian Ellis over the summer.

During the eight years Gary has been at Hill Close the gardens have continued to develop after the initial restoration. As a result the Gardens have become a Royal Horticulture Society Partner Garden. His love of plants has seen snowdrops become one of the Garden's outstanding features in the spring as well as the introduction of heritage daffodils.

A more recent development which he has spearheaded is the collection of Hardy Border Chrysanthemums which is now recognized by Plant Heritage as part of a dispersed National Collection.



Gary Leaver, Head Gardener

The sale of plants from the nursery has increased year on year during his time here and it is now a significant income source for the Trust.

Gary has developed better labelling of nursery plants and a yearly catalogue of plants, as well as expanding the nursery area.

He has been active in promoting the Trust's policy of learning through workshops, guided garden tours and supporting trainee gardeners.

Volunteers from all aspects of the Gardens have enjoyed working with him and he has always been there to help with events during the year.

We wish him well in his new venture and are pleased that he will be taking over an independent nursery with a very good national reputation.

Below is Gary's final contribution to our newsletter.

MULCH: This winter we will be trialling a new mulch on various beds throughout the garden. "Strulch" is a mineralised wheat straw that can reduce the amount of watering needed throughout the summer, preventing evaporation from the soil surface as well as keeping roots cool and preventing plant stress. This product is also great for weed control, when put on the surface at a sufficient depth, blocking out light and preventing seed germination. The straw breaks down very slowly and should prove effective for up to two years, eventually adding nutrients and organic matter to the soil. There is also anecdotal evidence that it deters slugs and snails but we'll report on that later in the year.

WINTER PRUNING: The chill winter season is a busy time for the Garden Team, concentrating on maintaining the structural planting within the garden. With nearly a kilometre of hedging and 160 fruit trees, this is quite a task! Winter pruning of the apples and pears is important to keep them productive. The cordons and espaliers will need thinning and tying in, and pruning the free standing trees promotes new grow for fruiting as well as removing old unproductive or diseased branches. Young trees will also need formative pruning to ensure they reach the desired height and shape and all this work will need completing before the beginning of March when the trees start back into growth.

SNOWDROPS: It's a plant with many names in many languages such as campanillo de febrero (February bell) in Spanish and schneeglöcken (snowbell) in German, but to us it's just the humble snowdrop. This year's snowdrop weekend falls on 2nd-3rd February when there will be an indoor display featuring over 50 snowdrop varieties. And outside you will find no fewer than 150 varieties planted throughout the gardens alongside other late winter bulbs such as winter aconites, cyclamen and Iris. There will as ever be the opportunity to purchase some of the varieties from our collection including Trumps (see picture on back page), Lapwing and Heffalump along with many other late winter bulbs.

Wreath Demonstrations

At this year's Apple Day, Patricia Loughland's wreaths were much admired. So as a follow-up she has held two demonstrations showing the techniques and skills needed, so that participants can make their own individual wreaths using live material from the Gardens.

Patricia has shown how to use and blend a rich variety of greenery, foliage and seed heads to create a vibrant and unique wreath.

Participants left with wire rings, moss and a selection of foliage to use for their own wreath.

Follow the website for more demonstrations and workshops in 2019 – even making your own hanging spring ball of snowdrops, or primroses or small daffodils.



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The splendid and delicately painted
Galanthus Trumps
(see p3, bottom right column)



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