

HILL CLOSE GARDENS

The hidden hedged gardens of Warwick



February 2020

TVE* progress update

* Transforming the Visitor Experience

Following a most enjoyable thank-you party for the many members who contributed to the project, the Bleasdale Room is now available for visitors to use, including a smart new “proper” coffee machine. The interpretation materials, comprising wall-mounted display boards, a video and touchscreens, will follow in the next few weeks.

Our attention now turns to the Gardens. A new timber building, matching those existing, will be erected between the Glasshouse and our Site boundary just as soon as planning permission is confirmed. This is purpose-designed to house our propagation activities, and will be welcomed by staff and volunteers alike.

What many of us refer to as “George’s Bothy” on Plot 24 can then become what it already partly is – a place to show off at least a small part of Mike Sheldon’s incredible collection of gardening machinery, tools and equipment.

George will not be forgotten, nor Maggie Curtis, giving visitors a sense of who we should remember as helping to create what we now enjoy.

I invite every member to call in when they have the chance, admire the Bleasdale Room, and most importantly fill out the quick questionnaire about audio guides they will find there. We really do need everyone’s opinion on the importance (or not) of having an audio guide system for the Gardens. A decision on this element of our interpretation is presently on hold, but by the Spring we need to decide. So please help us – if you cannot visit, e-mail me on cbegg@cbegg.com and I will send you the questionnaire by return.

Finally, a call for a craftsman! Our new “clever” tables need a bit of TLC on their bases and tilting gear to prevent them wobbling. Please get in touch with Richard or myself if you could help.

Chris Begg

HCG Apple Juice



This year we had a surplus of apples, so we decided to have them juiced down.

We now have bottles of a really tasty Hill Close Gardens Apple Juice to buy, at just £3.00 a bottle.

Come and get yours while stocks last!



Wee wellies wanted!

There is nothing young children who visit the gardens like more than jumping in puddles. If parents haven't dressed their children for wet weather, we have all-in-one wet suits to keep them dry - but not wellies, so often we have some very soggy shoes and socks at the end of the session! Do you have any children's wellies lurking in the back of a cupboard? If so we'd love to take them off your hands and put them on small feet!

A bit from the Head Gardener

After Apple Day 2019, our focus turned towards Chrysanthemum Day. With all the rain, the plants had put on a real growth spurt but sadly those in bloom at times looked very unhappy, their petals fused together in a drooping mass.

Fortunately a few dry autumnal days (there were!) allowed the stems and flowers to raise their heads again and we had some very good displays. We had a visit from photographer, Clive Nichols and also Gill Fletcher, a volunteer with us, whose photo will be adorning the cover of the RHS Partner Gardens Booklet next year (*right*).

Whilst we in the UK are known for our "weather fixation", this year we've had good reason to talk about it. After such a dry year last year, 2019 saw us have many days of prolonged heavy rain, making it difficult to get some jobs done.

Now when you visit in the new year, you'll see we've been renovating hedges, a practice which, whilst looking severe, is needed periodically to keep them at a manageable size and to allow visitors to use the paths.

Our Catalogue will be finalised by Easter and you should be able to download it from the website soon after that. Please take a look - and then come and visit us to get some plants for your garden! This is a great way to fill your borders and support Hill Close Gardens at the same time. Thank you.



We're winners!

Hill Close Gardens entered the Royal Horticultural Society's (RHS) competition. This was open to all RHS Partner Gardens in the Midlands, who were asked to submit photograph of their gardens for the cover page of the 2020 edition of the handbook for Partner Gardens.

Gillian Fletcher who took the successful image (*left*) is a very talented and experienced amateur photographer. She has become the photographer for the, Transforming the Visitor Experience (TVE). She was involved in recording the National Collection of Hardy Border Chrysanthemums just when they were at their most colourful on Plot 19 in November. The backdrop to this was the grade 2 listed summer house. The result was a picture which shows both the history of the Gardens and the excellence of its horticulture. We are delighted that it will be used on the front cover of the RHS Partner Gardens handbook for 2020. This will give us great exposure nationally, and will become the iconic image of the Gardens.

Well done, Gillian, and many congratulations; this is such a brilliant start to your involvement with the Gardens. Not only does she have this award, but Gillian has also been awarded a grant from the Warwick Leete to fund the printing of large photos of our chrysanthemums. It is snowdrops next, and medicinal herbs...more about this in the next newsletter...

Welcome to Harriet Groves

Harriet joined the gardening team under the Work and Retrain As a Gardener Scheme (WRAG) in November. She is working two days at Hill Close gardens supervised by the Head Gardener Neil Munro and follows a training programme designed by the WRAG team. She is also studying for her RHS examinations at Ryton Gardens.

Harriet studied at Winchester School of Art and graduated from University of Southampton with a degree in Fine Art (Painting). She has been working with the National Trust at Hidcote Gardens in administration where there were occasional opportunities to work in the Gardens. This encouraged her to train and gain experience as a full time professional gardener. Her particular interests are in propagation and conservation.



From the Centre Manager

As we move into 2020, and after big changes to the visitor centre, we are looking forward to the final loose ends to be completed within the Bleasdale room. Once everything is up and running the grand opening will take place.

New visitor feedback forms have been drawn up with the help of our new Community Engagement Worker and this will give us invaluable feedback in how we move into the future with confidence.

As we look forward to our "Snowdrop Weekend" (1st-2nd Feb) we have also been busy getting ready for the new season of entertainments. Leading the way are FB Pocket Orchestra who are on the bill for our "Music in the Gardens" event happening on Saturday 27th June (6.00-9:30pm). This followed on Tuesday 14th July (also from 6.00-9:30pm) by "The Great Gatsby", being performed by HCG regulars, Heartbreak Productions.

We hope you can join us for these events, and for other occasions here in Hill Close Gardens.

Victorian Society, Birmingham

On Saturday 28th March 2020, the Victorian Society, Birmingham and West Midlands Group, are holding a one-day school on "Victorian Parks and Gardens in the West". The venue is the Birmingham and Midland Institute, Margaret Street, Birmingham B3 3BU.

I will be one of the speakers, but despite that if anyone wishes to attend, it should be an interesting day.

Please e-mail me, Chris Begg, at cbegg@cbegg.com for the programme if it is of interest.

Welcome to Kate

With the help of our great team of volunteers, we have continued to run our monthly Drop-In sessions until the end of the term.

Last summer we were lucky enough to find a replacement play leader, Kate (*pictured below*), who will be a fantastic addition to our team.



"I've been a storyteller for over three years - though arguably, all my life! I love how stories bring people together and help young children and adults make a sense of the world. I'm so excited to be a part of the wonderful team at Hill Close Gardens and I can't wait to share stories and begin new ones together."

The gardens provide an amazing environment to share stories and explore nature: we're hoping that over time Kate will offer more storytelling sessions, enthralling young children and grown-ups.

Keep an eye on the website for these special events.

Vacancy for a General Maintenance Volunteer

Are you good with odd-jobs? Then this could be the perfect voluntary position!

You would be helping a great local charity. The range of activities will vary, with a number of restored summerhouses that need attention through the year to keep them looking good. Fencing, doors, gates and a host of things need looking after. If you have any time to spare and feel that this would interest you please do get in touch. **01926 493339** or email centremanager@hcg.org.uk

Anyone for a Cream Tea?

Introducing a new offering within our Tearoom: the "Hill Close Gardens Cream Tea".



Whether you are a "Scon", "Scone" or "Scoon", this bit of the Midlands is the perfect place to enjoy a cream tea. We invite you to give it the taste test in the Gardens' Tearoom during the summer. The Tearoom is open to the public at weekends from the first weekend of April to the last weekend of October.

We also offer delicious cakes, filter coffee and choice of speciality teas.

So come along with friends and relax in the Gardens' tranquil setting. Now, jam before cream, or...?

Star of Snowdrop Weekend (1-2 Feb)

This lovely delicate snowdrop Modern Art with green tips on the outer petals is one of the many different varieties of snowdrops on display. In the gardens there are over 100 different varieties ranging from our own Warwickshire Gemini to the fat Natalie Garton and the distinctive broad striped leafed Augustus with seersucker petals as well as the honey scented Brenda Troyle. This is the opportunity to recognise your 'nivalis' from your 'elwesii'.



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Rotary International's Crocus Campaign: End Polio Now



We are looking forward to seeing the purple Crocus which is the symbol of this campaign. The Warwick Rotary Club has donated purple Crocus bulbs (*example left*) which will be planted in the Gardens in support of this important health project. For more information, please visit Rotary's website www.rotarygbi.org/our-causes/end-polio-now/



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