

# HILL CLOSE GARDENS

The hidden hedged gardens of Warwick



Summer 2020



## Welcome back!

**N**obody expected the dramatic hiatus that was thrust upon us all in March, but now we're back and raring to go!

Although the gardens have been closed for 14 weeks, much work has gone on: propagating, weeding, hedge cutting, sweeping of leaves blown off by the strong winds, a very late May frost, hot blue skies, pouring rain and now thunder storms. The gardens have had a spring clean, brush and sweep up and are ready to have you all back again.

It seems a long time ago and much has moved on since "the lockdown", but the gardens have been tended by the gardeners, the grass mown and the entrance gates stripped, cleaned and repainted. Though we've missed spring and early summer, we look forward to high summer and a colourful autumn when the gardens are looking at their best.

We have also missed so many special events: Easter, music and drama, children's drop-in sessions, gardening workshops and the walks conducted by the Head Gardener. And we haven't forgotten those who use the

Lammas room for their meetings and activities. We are hopeful that there will be some events later this year (although probably in a slightly different format to comply with Government guidelines).

As with so many gardens that now open, we have instituted a designated route which takes visitors through most of the gardens, giving an opportunity to peep into some of the summerhouses and then to visit the plant sales area where there are a number of rare and interesting perennials and some produce for sale.

Work has also gone on in progressing the Transforming Visitor Experience (TVE). The display panels are up in the Bleasdale room. The introductory video is now finalised so, when the Centre is open again, there will be the opportunity for visitors to find out about the history of the gardens before they start their exploration. Finally, story-telling has been an innovation, and the children's garden is due for a complete make-over thanks to the generosity of Warwick District Council.

*Some things you've missed while you've been away...*



## From the Centre Manager

Although the pandemic has hit all of us, it has also given some time for those of us here at the gardens to take care of some essential maintenance works. Our main entrance gates (originally from Handsworth Cemetery, Birmingham) were looking tired and were starting to deteriorate. We therefore decided to give them a full make-over: they were stripped back to iron by removing all the rust and old lead-based paint. This has revealed the intricate details of the gates which shows off their Victorian craftsmanship. The gates had also started to sag on their hinges so they have now been re-hung and are ready for their top coat of paint, which will offer a really good first impression of the gardens.

In similar vein, behind the scenes many other jobs have been undertaken while we have been closed, in order that we can give the best possible experience to our visitors.

We are excited to be re-opening and once again welcoming visitors to the gardens. Things will obviously be a little different until we can get back to the old normal, but each step we take will bring us nearer to showing off these fascinating and unique gardens.

We are unfortunately unable to host events or hire out the centre for the time being, but the information within the new Bleasdale Room will allow visitors to take the history home with them and to keep the story of Hill Close Gardens moving on to new audiences.



## The Education Team's been busy...

During lockdown, we were obviously not able to visit the Gardens or run any of our usual children and family activities so, with help from our Community Engagement Worker, Caroline Noel, we made the most of our time by applying for some grants. And the good news is we were successful in both of our applications.

Our first grant, from the Heart of England Community Foundation, was to put something in place that would compensate for not being able to open the gardens to our families. With this grant, we have employed a professional story teller, Kate Coleman, to deliver a story-telling session each week, for 12 weeks, with art and craft activities to go with each session. Kate has been reading **Isabella's Garden** by **Glenda Millard** which is all about how the elements like the rain, the wind, the sun, help Isabella's seeds to grow. This has been further enhanced by poems to accompany each session, written by our very own Jenny Dodge, like this:

### The Clouds

Some of them are thin and white,  
Look! The sky is blue and bright!  
Some of them are thick and grey  
And they hide the sun away.  
WHAT AM I TALKING ABOUT? CLOUDS!  
White clouds show it's sunny weather.  
Let's go out and play together!  
Grey clouds show it's going to rain.  
Let's all run indoors again!



Our cloud mobile

## From the Head Gardener

Like they have for everyone, the last few months have brought strange times to the gardens. Our team of volunteers were asked to remain away and this left only a few of us still coming in regularly to do all the necessary tasks.

Watering has been one of those jobs and increasingly so as we saw less rain throughout May. Even with short, persistent downfalls, it just hasn't been enough and trying to get enough water on the plants was a challenge at times; June's rains however have eased that pressure somewhat.

The evening of 13 May saw the potatoes, beans and the wisteria blooms frosted off as a short, sharp frost spread across the gardens. The re-planting of beans and the re-shooting of the potatoes however will now at least bring a later (yet probably reduced) yield to the crops. Sadly we'll have to wait until next year to see the wisteria again.

The fruit blossom has been very good this year, as has the set; and we are waiting with trepidation just to see how much will reach maturity. Our fingers

are crossed. We've sown less veg than normal, not knowing when restrictions would ease, but have had good success with autumn-sown garlic, onions and broad beans.

One thing we have been able to do in the lockdown is to carry out some well needed repairs and essential maintenance jobs, some of these more obvious than others, but hopefully they will improve your overall visit to the gardens.

Now we are open again, the Nursery too is open and we hope you'll enjoy the plants on display and be encouraged to purchase some to take away with you. We've also plenty of late-flowering plants including *Hesperantha*, *Chrysanthemum* and *Aster/Symphoricarum*, so please do take the time to look closely at what is on offer.

Thankfully (from our perspective) our volunteers have now begun to return to help bring the garden back into shape. I hope you'll bear with us as we catch up with all the weeding and tidying that, due to circumstances, we've fallen a little behind on. However, the gardens are still looking good, and we look forward to seeing you all again.

To catch up on all the stories visit [www.hillclosegardens.com/childrenandfamilies/](http://www.hillclosegardens.com/childrenandfamilies/)

Again, with support from Caroline, we also submitted a bid to Warwick District Community Grants Fund. We were awarded almost £1,500 to provide plants and resources to enhance the Children's Garden and to create a sensory area. So hopefully, when things are a little more normal and you can visit us again, you will be able to see the transformation.



## TVE - that was the easy bit

Now the Bleasdale Room is finished, we need to explain to visitors how our Gardens began, and how they rose, fell and rose again. Our short, highly professional video is finished, and the substantial display boards are in place (below).



The touchscreens got caught up with the virus, and had to self-isolate in our fitter's workshop. They are now installed and programming them is underway.

The programming challenge is to gather together the multifarious stories about the People, Places and Plants which make our Gardens such a treasure trove, and build them into a coherent photo and text collection easily searched through via the touchscreens. Who was William Sleath? Where were the Chadbands' pigsties? Which is the oldest lawnmower in our collection? If

any Member is willing to get to grips with the user-friendly touchscreen software, and help build part of the story, I would really appreciate that help.

Thanks to the work of Christine Hodgetts, we know a great deal about the Gardens' history and who were the owners and tenants. We also have Rosemary Mitchell's Reminiscences project throwing light on the period within living memory. But there is maybe more that our Members could further contribute, extending and enhancing what we already have. Whether it be an old photo, an anecdote or a memento object, we would love to share it with our visitors. For instance, I am told that in the early 1990s, when the site had planning permission for housing, "the bulldozers were moving in". Exactly what did happen, and when?

Work on the new potting shed behind the greenhouse is of course at standstill. When it is complete the propagation work - such a good income generator - will move from Plot 24 and be better housed. George's bothy will then become a mini-museum.

The TVE project is a three legged stool. To be complete, our new Space and better Interpretation need also our Community Engagement work. Despite closed Gardens, Caroline Noel has organised an on-line weekly children's story hour and some Tai Chi sessions, both linked to the Gardens and grant-funded. Along with Richard Hayward's ongoing publicity drive, soon to include Google Arts and Culture, we are thus still being kept in the public eye, and that will surely pay off later.

*Chris Begg*

**The AGM** is usually held in July with the purpose for the Members to consider and approve the Annual accounts and reports. It has been decided to defer the meeting until a later date with the hope that social distancing will be relaxed and the usual arrangements will be made.

However, if necessary, arrangements will be made for a virtual meeting with provision for proxy and postal voting.

Members will be informed at least 21 days in advance of the meeting.

## Torry's Hardware & DIY Ltd

Come and browse in this real Aladdin's Cave.

Everything from timber cut to size to keys cut, gardening products, household, plumbing and electrical.

Enjoy personal service at its very best.

**You name it: we'll find it for you!**

**30-34 West Street, Warwick CV34 6AN**

**Tel/Fax: 01926 492249**



Hill Close Gardens Trust  
Bread and Meat Close, Warwick, CV34 6HF

Company registered in England No. 3981067  
Registered Charity Number 1085278

[www.hillclosegardens.com](http://www.hillclosegardens.com)

Tel: 01926 493339

