



**HPS**  
HARDY PLANT SOCIETY

**Derbyshire**

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## **Visit to Doddington Hall and Pottertons Nursery by Ruth Sands**

Doddington Hall is a privately owned Elizabethan hall, and the gardens are laid out in the Elizabethan style. As you approach the hall, standing either side of the entrance are 4 large topiary unicorns. (We thought they were elephants at first.) These are part of the family's coat of arms, very impressive.

The west garden was re-organised in 1900 with help from Kew gardens. It is mainly laid to box parterre, and we were very lucky to be there for the bearded Irises that filled the centre of these borders. They looked wonderful, mainly blues, shown off well by the clipped hedging. There is a large, walled kitchen garden that grows all the vegetables, fruit and herbs for the house and restaurant. It is gardened in the organic way, with few pests and diseases.

The family have really gone to town on the visitors centre. There is a huge farm shop, clothes shop, and even a Farrow and Ball paint shop. The restaurant was excellent, and was where we had lunch before moving on to our next stop. Pottertons nursery was holding a small but good plant fair, with nurseries including my favourite Edrom Nurseries from Scotland. Purchases were of course made before moving on to the inevitable tea and cake. Pottertons nursery is mainly for alpine plants, with a huge range to choose from. I just need my alpine house now! There were also display gardens to sit in and soak up the sunshine. This was a good visit with just right weather. Thanks again to Martin for the organisation.

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**“GARDENING  
IS THE PUREST  
OF HUMAN  
PLEASURES”**

**Sir Francis Bacon**



# The Gardens of West Wales by Nigel Needham



The weather gods had clearly miscalculated for our annual HPSD holiday in west Wales this year; the sun shone brightly virtually non-stop and we didn't have a drop of rain. We are more accustomed to a holiday where webbed feet would be helpful. The gods also conspired that I would end up writing this article about the holiday without the aid of a safety net or contemporaneous notes, other than to record my favourite plants. I hope you will therefore excuse anything you deem incorrect as I strive to negotiate my misty memory. Given the aforementioned limitations, I will restrict my comments to just a general impression of each garden and name a star plant which I saw at each one.

Our first stop en route to our hotel at Goodwick, which overlooks Fishguard Bay, was at Aberglasney, a splendid house and garden which had been 'lost' after years of dereliction and decay, but restored to health by a trust with the aid of many benefactors, and re-opened in 1999. As we walked past the house, which there was no time to view, we saw a large expanse of walled arches. These were very impressive, but where were the gardens? I need not have worried; the gardens were extensive with many linked 'rooms' of differing nature and character with numerous splendid flowers, shrubs and trees. Strongly featured was thalictrum, of which there were many intriguing types, but my \*STAR PLANT\* award goes to iris ensata 'Ocean Mist', with its ramrod straight three foot stems topped by enormous purple flowers with 'small'

white and yellow central petal sections. They were at their regal best, and really had the wow factor. Day two, Saturday, saw us venture firstly to the National Botanic Garden of Wales, near Llanarthne, Camarthenshire. This garden, with an extremely large variety of plants on display, was very impressive and so large that I didn't manage to see all of it in the time available. Its features include a double-walled garden, a glass dome and a butterfly house. The double-walled garden is laid out in quadrants within which are many beds and plants detailing the evolution of flowering plants. The dome, designed by Lord Foster, is 110 metres long and is the largest single span glasshouse in the world. A fantastic array of plants, including many endangered ones from six regions of the world, make a dazzling display within the structure. The butterfly house was another delight with some beautiful creatures, which sadly have a life of only 2-4 weeks after being hatched on site from bought-in chrysalises. Personally, I thought that the garden was better than the 'comparable' gardens at Eden and Kew. It was thus sad to see relatively few visitors on a glorious day and to note that our coach was the only one in the coach park when we departed in early afternoon. The 'isolated' location of the garden may be the problem. As Ian Evans remarked, imagine how many visitors there would have been on such a day if the garden was located near Birmingham. From the many gorgeous plants seen, my \*STAR PLANT\* was kniphofia 'Old Court Seedling' which



seemed relatively compact for a kniphofia, not too tall, and with knockout 'pastel orange' flowers. Look out for this one.

Next stop was the six acre Cae Hir Gardens at Cribbyn. The Welsh name translates to long pitch or field in English and is very apt. Even more appropriate would have been long slope. The six acre garden, started from scratch by Dutch gardener Wil Akkermans, sloped upwards from the roadside to a height where we could virtually see over the tree canopy from the top, and the trees were not small! We marvelled at Wil's indomitable spirit to tackle a garden on this 'terrain' and didn't envy him or his son, Stuart, who is now in charge, the long haul up the slope to work on its higher reaches. This was not a garden to forget to take your tools! There were many flower/shrub beds, but my abiding memory of the garden is of many trees and shrubs of different colour and form, set in verdant, lush grass, which provided a visual delight whether viewed from the top or the bottom of the garden. The occasional foray overhead by a red kite wasn't too bad either! The \*STAR PLANT\*



# The Gardens of West Wales by Nigel Needham



Lots of colourful plants, with quite a few in pots, were to be found, and enthusiastic owner Christina Shand, who had created the garden from essentially a wilderness, was constantly on hand to answer our questions. I loved Martin Brown's comment that the garden "had been tamed just enough" It was a delight. \*STAR PLANT\*? This goes to salvia microphylla 'Cerro Potosi' by virtue of its recommendation by Janet Norman for its vigour and striking magenta flowers. Maybe it will be coming to a plant fair near you soon! Am I on commission for the advert, Janet?



Next on the agenda was Picton Castle which had a forest with a variety of trees enclosing a well-designed adventure playground for children, and some lovely walks which provided welcoming shade on a hot day. The prime attraction garden-wise was the large walled garden complete with a sizeable pond and fringed by an ancient greenhouse. There was plenty of colour from the perennials in this garden and the pond enhanced the scene, attracting damsel flies, dragonflies and a visiting labrador. One part of the greenhouse had apparently randomly positioned life-size, ornamental, possibly plaster of Paris, hands. They might have appealed to Max Bygraves, but I didn't find one of our members who thought that the plants needed hands! However, the greenhouse did house a plant which was new to me and certainly my \*STAR PLANT\*. This was the elegant agapetes 'Ludgvan Cross' which had grown to about head height with slender arching branches and leaves and had clusters of delicate-looking, urn-shaped, pencil-slim light pink flowers with chevron-like light purplish markings. Like the styrax flowers they demanded close inspection to really appreciate their beauty. Be warned, however, that their origin is East Asia and Australia and the RHS website says they like lime-free compost and bright, filtered light and can stand outdoors in summer. Thus, this plant may not suit the average Derbyshire gardener.

here was admired by many, but identified by few. It was a shapely tree with mid-green leaves, but its appeal lay in the small clusters of pendulous dainty white flowers with darkish pink, not unduly prominent, central markings which, once spotted, warranted close inspection for their charm. Stuart confirmed the tree as styrax. He had several of this possibly new variety, as yet unnamed, from his cousin in Holland. However, I will be looking out for other forms of styrax (I gather that there are about 130 species) in future.

Our first stop on Sunday was at Dyffryn Fernant, a garden only 2-3 miles from our hotel and which needed access by minibus from a nearby layby. It was joint surprise package of the holiday and had been named the best domestic garden in Wales by The Times about a month before our visit. It was a mix of traditional and innovative planting with some unusual ornaments/statuary which seamlessly radiated into 'wilder' areas, the whole blending into the undulating surrounding countryside.

Free time in St David's wound up the day, with a welcome ice cream on a hot afternoon and a visit to the

beautiful cathedral. The plant magnet was in full working order and drew a number of us to St. David's Plant and Garden Nursery which was well-stocked with some sturdy, healthy plants. Since I bought it, I suppose that I had a \*STAR PLANT\* here too: leucanthemum 'Banana Cream'. There were three separate plants in the pot, actually, and they really were strong ones. I look forward to seeing their lemon-petal flowers with deeper yellow centres.

All good things must come to an end, and we journeyed home on day four via Westonbury Mills Water Gardens, Pembrokeshire, Leominster, the other surprise package garden. A water garden we naturally expected, but owner Richard Pim, who bought the land unseen whilst working in Africa, has built several intriguing structures within his creation. These include a dome mainly created from around 5000 wine bottles, the world's largest water powered cuckoo clock, a spiral mound viewpoint, a Monet bridge, and a stone tower with spouting gargoyles powered by a restored water wheel. These alone make a visit worthwhile, but the water gardens were great too, with lakes, a brook, leat and rill and a host of water loving flowers, shrubs and trees, plus a wild flower meadow. Providing a wealth of colour on our visit were the candelabra primulas including my \*STAR PLANT\*, which I think was a form of primula wilsonii, a bright purple, yellow-centred flower which was available in the plant sales area, and which gave a swathe of colour in the garden.

All too soon, the holiday was at an end. Everyone involved deserved our thanks for making it so enjoyable: the hotel and its staff, Ralph, our driver, Macphersons, the coach company, and Ian and Anne Evans who had planned and 'managed' the holiday for us. I had a copy of Ian's meticulous costings and itinerary which incorporated estimated mileage between each venue and corresponding arrival times, and noted how accurate these estimates were. It's thus great news that I hear that Ian is already planning our 2018 holiday. It shouldn't be short of participants.

# Solanums by Ian Evans

The genus *Solanum* contains over 1500 species and includes a very diverse range of plants, ranging from edible tubers (potatoes) and fruits (tomatoes), through highly poisonous berries (woody nightshade), to beautiful ornamental shrubs (Kangaroo apple) and climbers (*Solanum crispum*, the Chilean potato tree). They cover the full range of annuals, biennials, perennials, evergreen and deciduous shrubs, trees and climbers, although those most commonly encountered are perennials and climbers. They are predominantly south and central American plants, although they are also common in Australasia.

*Solanum tuberosum*, the common potato, is now the world's fourth largest food crop after maize, wheat and rice. It originated in Peru, but most currently cultivated varieties were bred from early domesticated forms found in central Chile. It was introduced into Europe by the Spanish in the 16th century, and is now used throughout the world. In fact, China is now the world's biggest producer. There are over 1000 different varieties in cultivation. In common with many *Solanum* species, the fruits are poisonous and, if exposed to the sun, the tubers go green and become poisonous. The poison is an alkaloid known as solanine.

The other most common edible crop is the tomato, which is very unusual in that the fruits are not poisonous but good to eat. There are several species of wild tomato, all originating in the same areas of South America as the potato. Some species are very hardy and grow above the snow line in the Andes, but most are much more tender and prefer a drier environment. The wild varieties such as *Solanum lycopersicum*, *S. pimpinellifolium*, *S. peruvianum* and *S. chilense* look nothing like those we currently consume, and the fruits are generally, small and green. Modern varieties have been bred from several of these species and the history parallels that of the potato. The first tomatoes brought to Europe were large and yellow and were known as "pomi d'oro", the golden apple. It is now cultivated worldwide and it is difficult to imagine world without tomatoes (no ketchup!?!).



The aubergine (*S. melongina*) is also an edible member of the *Solanum* genus, as is the tamarillo (*S. betaceum*), which is a small tree; the tamarillo is also known as the tree tomato. The tamarillo should not be confused with the tomatillo, which is in the *Physalis* genus and related to the Chinese lanterns. Peppers and chilies are sometime thought to be members of the *Solanum* genus, but they are actually of the *Capsicum* genus. Both the *Capsicum* and the *Solanum* genus are members of the Solanaceae botanical family, however, as is the *Physalis* genus.

Some of the climbing members of the *Solanum* genus are very beautiful ornamental plants, although few of them are hardy enough to grow outside in the UK. *Solanum crispum* (the potato vine) will survive a mild winter with protection, and the cultivar "Glasnevin" is reputed to be hardier than the species. It is best grown on a south-facing wall where it can reach 5-6 metres tall. It has lovely purple/blue flowers, followed by poisonous yellow berries. It will grow well in a greenhouse or conservatory, but suffers badly from red spider mite. *Solanum laxum* is very similar in habit and form, except that it has white flowers, followed by black, equally poisonous berries. Unfortunately, it is even less hardy than *crispum*.

The Kangaroo Apple (*Solanum laciniatum*), as one might expect, comes from Australia and New Zealand. It is a half hardy shrub which can be grown in a container in the UK if it is moved into the greenhouse whenever frost is forecast. It has typical blue potato-type flowers followed by yellow, tomato size fruit, which are highly poisonous until fully ripe, when brave souls might risk eating them! *Solanum aviculare* is also known as the Kangaroo Apple, but has smaller, red fruit.



Woody Nightshade (*Solanum dulcamara*) is extremely poisonous, but fortunately it is also very bitter, and is therefore unlikely to be mistaken for an edible berry. It has many names in different parts of the world, such as bittersweet, poisonberry, snakeberry and fellenwort. It is native to Europe and North Africa, but has become naturalised elsewhere. In North America it has become an invasive weed. It is quite common in woodland, where its berries are part of the diet of certain birds, such as thrushes, which seem to be immune to the poison. Deadly Nightshade (*Atropa belladonna*) is not a member of the *Solanum* genus although it is within the Solanaceae family. It is more dangerous than Woody Nightshade because the black berries are sweet tasting.

Many of us grow potatoes and tomatoes, but the ornamental species of *Solanum* are well worth growing if one has a conservatory or greenhouse, and does not have small children who might be tempted by the berries. *Solanum crispum* "Glasnevin" is worth trying outdoors in a sheltered position on a south facing wall.



# Hemingford Abbots Open Gardens

## by Linda O'Neill

After a smooth and uneventful journey we arrived at our destination – a chocolate box village to rival any of those the Cotswolds has to offer. There was a mix of thatched cottages, older houses and new, all pristine, clustered around the church and village green, and radiating outwards.

We were there to visit the Open Gardens - of which there were twenty six - and the flower festival being held in St. Margaret's church. This is a biennial festival and this year is special as it marks its 50th anniversary. I thought the flower arrangements in the church were stunning. The theme was Sir William Blake's poem, "Jerusalem", and this was very cleverly interpreted.

The church was lovely, and well maintained. The festival has obviously raised a lot of money for its upkeep over the years. In fact, the whole event was extremely well organised and managed.

Of the gardens themselves I did not see them all; as there were so many. My overall impression was that many of them were very similar in style with a country feel. There were lots of shrubs and trees with some herbaceous planting but not an awful lot to excite the Hardy Planter. Many were quite large and had had a lot of money spent on them but they lacked intimacy and the personal touch that comes from spending hours in your garden among your plants. I stress that this is my personal impression and opinion. Others might disagree and I welcome their feedback.

Of the gardens that stood out for me these were, in no particular order:

### **The Tall House**

This was quite unusual and the planting was excellent. The owner was quite modest about her achievements but her eye for colour, form and texture was very good. The house was indeed tall and looked as if it had been wedged in between the ones on either side but it was quirky and original. A bed in front of the house contained Alliums and Fennel which provided interesting contrasts in shape

or foliage. Access to the back garden was several houses away, resulting in it being long and narrow. On entering I was immediately struck by the array of plants. Beds curved round so only one part was visible at a time. There was a good use of shrubs interwoven with perennials. Again there were lots of Alliums and scented Roses and Clematis. I particularly liked the liberal use of Larkspur.

### **No. 12 Common Lane**

This was a very large garden which meandered down to the River Great Ouse. There were some interesting beds planted among the many trees and shrubs. One which caught my eye was small and circular and contained topiarized box underplanted with Ajuga and Saxifraga and a well-placed sculpture. There was a lovely pool and fountain with a Zen garden atmosphere.

### **4 Barnfield, Common Lane**

This was completely different as it was devoted to growing vegetables. The owner provided an interesting fact sheet explaining the ethos of the garden. It was cultivated organically and it was clear a lot of time and effort went into the growing.

One thing I noticed was the similarity of the planting in a lot of the gardens. For example, *Trachelospermum jasminoides* adorning walls. They were excellent specimens in full flower – I hope the one I have planted in my garden does half as well! The other plant which seemed to be everywhere was *Hemerocallis fulva plena* "Kwanso" – a beautiful day lily with a soft peachy apricot colour. It is very vigorous – I know because I have it!

All in all it was a lovely day. The weather was kind to us with only one short, sharp shower. The chance to look at other peoples' gardens, and their generosity (and courage?) in opening them is irresistible to keen gardeners.

Thanks must go to Martin for his excellent organisation and choice of visit and to our very pleasant coach driver who got us there and back so safely and efficiently.



“Some ladies asked me why their plant had died. They had got it from the very best place, and they were sure they had done their very best for it... They had made a nice hole with their new trowel, and for its sole benefit they had bought a tin of Concentrated Fertilizer. This they had emptied into the hole, put in the plant, and covered it up and given it lots of water, and it had died! And yet these were the best and kindest of women, who would never have dreamed of feeding a new-born infant on beefsteaks and raw brandy.”

Gertrude Jekyll (1843 – 1932) from *Wood and Garden*

## Plant of Interest: *Sanguinaria Canadensis Multiplex 'Plena'*



A Plant of Interest: *Sanguinaria Canadensis Multiplex 'Plena'*  
Well, that's a mouthful. How many of us will remember the full botanical name? At least we may remember the canadensis element and hence the plant's Canadian origin and consequently anticipate its full hardiness. Perhaps we'd better think of it then by its common name: bloodroot, the name I was told by the gardener from whom I bought my plant in summer on a Wingerworth gardens open day. Unsurprisingly, this name is derived from the intense red colour of the plant's roots, which are, in fact, slowly spreading rhizomes. It

appealed to me because of its (arguably) glaucous, lobed leaves, which grow into a nice little 'clump', and I was told that it had white flowers in spring. The gardener said that it was not a common plant and that the pot I bought may contain a second, small white flowering plant.

The plant duly flowered next spring and what a wonderful surprise it was. The short flower stems appeared before the leaves (which grow to about 8-12 inches tall in my garden) and the white double flowers which appear in March/April were exquisite. I was immediately hooked on the plant, albeit that the flowering period was short. This year, we had a speaker at my village gardening association and he had a couple of these plants for sale. I commented on the 'rarity' of the plant and its gorgeous white flowers. He agreed on both points and commented on the pure whiteness of the flowers, saying that they weren't a grey or dirty white. I found the plant again on the HPSD visit to Potterton's Nursery, Lincolnshire, this May, and noted, with slight disappointment, its price of £3.50. In preparation for this article, I tried to trace the plant online, and the HPS website linked it to 28 vendors. The nearest ones, it suggested, were in Yorkshire: Slack Top Nurseries, Hebden Bridge, and Stillingfleet Lodge. This lifted my spirits with regard to the perceived

scarcity of the plant. Further, on subsequent inspection, I found that the price of the plant at these nurseries were £6.50 and £7.50, respectively. What a relief; my plant had instantly doubled in value!

I also found on the RHS website that bloodroot should be planted with a south, east or west facing aspect. I have planted mine with a north facing aspect! So much for my gardening acumen.

As the relatively large double flowers of my plant disappear and the leaves start to emerge, they are apparently replaced by dainty white double, smaller flowers of slightly different form. I took this as another bonus of the plant until this year when I saw these dainty flowers in a nursery bearing the name *anemone nemorosa alba flore plena*, the double form of our native wood anemone. Ah, this struck a chord: the possibility of a second white plant mentioned by the Wingerworth gardener/vendor. Subsequently inspecting the plant at home, I found the much smaller leaves of the *anemone nemorosa* 'hiding' beneath the leaves of the bloodroot. Thus, I had two gems for the price of one. If you get the chance to buy either, don't miss it: they make an excellent addition to any garden.

Nigel Needham

## Using Peat in the Garden by Ruth Sands

**I have been aware of one or two of our speakers saying that it is acceptable to use peat which, according to the RHS, is not the case. We all need to rethink our use of peat-based products.**

**For more information go to: [www.rhs.org.uk/The RHS position on peat use in gardens.](http://www.rhs.org.uk/The_RHS_position_on_peat_use_in_gardens)**





## All the Fun of the Fair!

The plant fair, held this year on Saturday 20 May, is our annual fundraising event. This final meeting of the indoor programme is a very friendly affair as members enthuse, buy and sell plants (albeit after a lot of preparation), generally enjoy each other's company... and the tea and home made cakes.

Thanks go to all those who contributed to this effort in whatever way, as it plays an important part in funding the winter programme.

New members may like to have a sales table next year (or share one with a friend) It's an interesting experience and you can sell any kind of plant you like to beginners and also very knowledgeable gardeners.

Many of those attending are regulars, and very proud of their attendance record and we are so pleased they continue to support us.



## Dates for your Diary

Date	Event	Location
16 Sept	<b>Plants for the Shady Garden</b> by Robert Barlow	Shirland Village Hall 2pm
21 Oct	<b>High Glanau Manor Gardens</b> by Helena Gerrish <b>AGM</b>	Shirland Village Hall 2pm
18 Nov	<b>The Patch: A Garden for all Seasons</b> by Jim Almond	Shirland Village Hall 2pm
9 Dec	<b>High Grove, Hardy Plants and Hayloft</b> by Lark Hanham <b>Christmas nibbles</b>	Shirland Village Hall 2pm
20 Jan	<b>A Labour of Love - 40 Years at Pottertons Nursery</b> by Rob Potterton <b>Plant sale</b>	Shirland Village Hall 2pm
17 Feb	<b>Spring Bulbs and Perennials</b> by Christine Foulkes Jones of Hall Farm Nursery	Shirland Village Hall 2pm
17 March	<b>Growing and Showing Herbs</b> by Malcolm Dickson of Hooksgreen Herbs	Shirland Village Hall 2pm
21 April	<b>Agapanthus, Tulbaghia, Nerines and Dierama</b> by Colin Hickman	Shirland Village Hall 2pm
19 May	<b>Plant fair</b> 11am to 1pm	Shirland Village Hall 11am to 1pm
15 Sept	<b>Humble Umbels</b> by Brian Ellis of Avondale Nursery <b>Plant sale</b>	Shirland Village Hall 2pm

## Mr We! by Dorrell Harrison

After yet another gardening task had fallen to my imaginary helper, I wondered how many of my fellow male "Hardy Planters" who are married to a fanatical gardener were familiar with the same situation.

I call this the Mr We Syndrome. Here are a few of the situations when this imaginary persons labour is required:

"We will weed the vegetable plot"

"We will mow the lawn"

"We will trim the hedge, sweep leaves, clean out the green house, maintain all "tools and machinery etc."

It has taken me quiet a few years searching for Mr We. I have now realised that Mr is me.

The Apprentice Gardener.

## About this newsletter:

The opinions expressed by the authors are their personal views and not specifically endorsed by the HPS Derbyshire Group. The Editor reserves the right to edit contributions as necessary.

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## Editor's Note:

If you have an article that you would like to see published in the newsletter, please send as a Word document to: [alisonfarnsworth@btinternet.com](mailto:alisonfarnsworth@btinternet.com) or by post to:

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Please send photos (as separate attachments) too if you have them.

**Cancellations:** If a meeting has to be cancelled due to adverse weather, details will be posted on the website [www.HPSderbyshire.co.uk](http://www.HPSderbyshire.co.uk) or please contact Celia Weaver on: 01773 824446 or email: [celia24c@gmail.com](mailto:celia24c@gmail.com)

**Reminder:** If you would like to receive your copy of the HPS Derbyshire newsletter by email, please let me have your name, address and e-mail address so that I can add you to the list.

Thanks once again to Emma Oaks for designing the newsletter.