



COMING EVENTS!

Wednesday, September 15, Olbrich Gardens Commons, 7:00 p.m. (social hour 6:30-7:00). John Elsley from Klehm's Song Sparrow Nursery will present *New Plant Introductions*. There will be a plant give away courtesy of Klehm's and a silent plant auction.

Saturday, September 18—WHPS Plant Exchange 10:30-Noon at Stephanie O'Neal's, 1850 Baird Street, Madison. From the Beltline, take Park Street toward Madison. Just past Buick Street, Beld Street curves off to the right. Take Beld, then turn right on Bram and left on Baird. It's the first little white house on the left. Bring plants that you are thinning or dividing, plants you bought and never found a place for, this year's seed-grown plants that are "extra," and annuals to take cuttings from. Bring donations between 9:30 a.m.-10:30 a.m. for labeling and setup. At 10:30 a.m. the selection of plants will begin (ending at noon). You can also take a stroll through the garden.

October 20, Olbrich Gardens Commons, 7:00 p.m. (social hour 6:30-7:00) *Member Potpourri & Annual Business Meeting*. Don't forget to take slides of your garden to bring (10-15 slides) to the Potpourri.

November 17, Olbrich Gardens, 7:00 p.m. (Seed Exchange and social hour 6:30-7:00). *Guest speaker will be Bill Thomas, Executive Director, Chanticleer Garden in Wayne, PA.*

December 1, Olbrich Gardens, 7:00 p.m. (social hour 6:30-7:00). *Guest speaker Mike Yanny of Johnson's Nursery in Menomonee Falls will discuss new plant introductions.*

Coming up
Trip to Virginia April 2005

Next newsletter—November

Symposium: *What's Hot, What's Not: Plant Picks from the Nurseries Symposium*

October 9, Saturday, 8:45 a.m.—4:30 p.m.

New plants and cultivars are arriving in the marketplace at an all-time astounding rate. It's great news for avid gardeners but also a challenge to keep up with what's hot and what's not! This Olbrich symposium, co-sponsored by WHPS, was created to give you a unique opportunity to get the opinions of the professionals who grow and sell all the latest plant introductions!

Learn from four of the top plant sources around the country, each representing all of the plant categories you should be growing in your garden. The speakers from each nursery will give you their perspective on their top picks to know and grow and will bring some representative plants that will then become part of a silent auction held during the symposium.

Here are the experts you will have at your disposal: **Harlan Hamernik** and his wife Shirley have been operating **Bluebird Nursery, Inc.** in Nebraska since 1958. This well-known nursery's wholesale division now ships millions of perennials, herbs, grasses, and wildflowers to garden centers, landscapers, mail order firms, botanic gardens, and parks and zoos throughout the United States and Canada. **Larry Stanley**,

owner of **Stanley & Sons Nursery, Inc.** in Oregon is one of the world's foremost propagators of and experts on dwarf conifers. Peruse his catalog and you'll see one of the best selections of conifers and Japanese maples available. **Dave Wanninger** manages **Beaver Creek Wholesale Nursery**, owned by Roy Klehm, perhaps one of the most respected names in the nursery industry. Beaver Creek provides some of the best quality trees and shrubs to Midwest landscapers and retailers. **Kristin Ludwig**, New Products Specialist at **Ball Horticultural Company**, has generously agreed to share what's new and upcoming in 2005 in both annuals and perennials. Ball Horticultural Company has established itself as one of the premier suppliers of quality annual and perennial seeds and plants. Without a doubt, some of the most outstanding advancements in new plant materials can be attributed to Ball propagation, research, and field trials.

REGISTER NOW! The cost is only \$85 for WHPS members and Olbrich Botanical Society members and \$105 for the general public. A continental breakfast and lunch is included.

For more information or to register, call 608-246-4550.

WHPS Trip to England—Part I, 9 Days, 27 Gardens

June 9, 2004—In the Beginning



I traveled from Riga, Latvia, via Amsterdam, to London's Heathrow Airport. Had to transfer to Gatwick via the

National Bus Service. The fare was 17 pounds (\$34) for a 45-minute ride—just the first indication of how much the dollar had lost to the pound since our WHPS visit two years ago. Prices generally in London, and to a lesser extent the countryside, were outrageous (\$9 for a Big Mac?!). Enjoyed a late dinner at the Copthorne Hotel near Gatwick with Georgene Stratman and Kay Allen who had also arrived that day.

Thursday, June 10 Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew —the Warm-Up Garden

I left the hotel at 8:00 a.m., having agreed to meet a gaggle of WHPS members who did not feel that 27 gardens in nine days were quite enough. After a series of disastrous train miscues (accurate information about the local trains is very difficult to ferret out, and even when you accept what meager information is offered, it turns out to be wrong), I arrived at Kew Gardens at 10:00 a.m., about 30 minutes late. Kew is located on the banks of the Thames River, about ten miles south of London. Met up with my niece Betsy (studying in London) at the entrance gate who, the poor thing, was totally uninitiated to the world of the plant nut. We enjoyed the hour tram ride around Kew, which hit the highlights, a must for first-time visitors, as many of the attractions in this 300-acre garden are spread pretty far apart. Finally met up with the rest of the WHPS crew, having spotted them from the tram—Ed Hasselkus, Jeff Epping, Joan Severa, Ann Hasselkus, Marlette Larsen, Barbara Obst, Eleanor Rodini, Jane Gahlman, and Shari Voss. We found them debating about where to go for lunch, of course. Don't remember much about the lunch except for the delicious loaf of Latvian black bread I shared with the group from my earlier travels.

The 250-year-old Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew were founded by the mother of King George III, Princess Augusta, in 1759. In the late 1700s, King George and Queen Charlotte enlarged them by combining the royal estates of Kew and Richmond. It is hard to believe that Queen Charlotte found time to "garden" with

15 royal children!! I do recall seeing Queen Charlotte's cottage somewhere on the back 40 of the grounds, where the children were often banished with their nannies for much of the day. King George was responsible for the famous pagoda—163 feet high. At the time it was built in 1762, it was the tallest building in England. Originally gold gilded with 80 fanciful glass dragons, subsequent royals, who were a bit short of cash, stripped it of its lavish adornments. Ascended by a spiral staircase (no longer open to the public), you can imagine the difficulty of the ascent for the women and men of the 18th century, given their attire. King George III did provide refreshment stations for the climb. Just imagine the British royalty enjoying a coveted invitation for one of these pagoda parties at the same time the King was orchestrating the suppression of the revolt in the American Colonies! The pagoda did survive a German bomb attack in WW II. Ironically, English engineers had cut holes in each of its 30 floors to practice dropping the models of their newest bombs, designated for German cities.

The new director of Kew, as of 2003, is Sir Peter Crane, the former director of the Field Museum in Chicago (1992-1999). There were lots of new features in the garden, giving it a more hands on feel, similar to the exhibits at the Field Museum. (I've always wondered if kids really learn anything, or do they just play with all those buttons and toggles?) New features included a living willow furniture garden, some very modern "idea" gardens by graduate students in the school of horticulture, and a tree top walk through the collection of enormous redwoods and English oaks (*Quercus robur*). The living willow furniture garden—chairs, wine rack, lamps, magazine rack, tables, etc.—was obviously a big hit, judging from the wear and tear on the surrounding areas of grass.

We marveled at some of the original plantings dating back to the time of King George, including ginkgos and oaks. Kew lost hundreds of trees during the big hurricane of 1987, but they have done a great deal with the new open spaces created by the storm, with many new benches on which to sit and people watch.

The glass houses are a Kew hallmark. These imposing 19th century Victorian structures included a temperate house, palm house, tropical house, and a small water lily house (wow factor here was big lily pads of *Victoria amazoniae*). In late afternoon we enjoyed honey ginger ice cream with tea. Later, a few of us enjoyed fish and chips in the village of Kew before returning to Gatwick and the Copthorne.

Friday, June 11 Max is on the road again!

Met Franki and Max at the Hilton Hotel at Gatwick, south terminal. Amazingly, we were on the road by 10:30 and rolling towards Co. Essex, NE of London. It was the site of Hyde Hall, the only RHS Garden we had not visited on previous WHPS trips to England. Perched on a hilltop in the generally flat, eastern-most area of England known as East Anglia, the eight acres of garden could easily be seen from a distance. Hyde, literally an old English word for farm, literally referred to the old farm hall building. Dr. and Mrs. Robinson purchased it in the 1950s. They developed the farm and its extensive outbuildings into their private garden, before donating it to the RHS in 1993. Described as a bit of Tuscany in England, the sweeping panorama from the hill top was reminiscent of Italy, though rather than Italian cypresses marching across the landscape there were copses of oak. This was a relatively small garden, and after taking a light lunch in the thatched barn restaurant, we proceeded to explore the grounds. Almost immediately we entered the spectacular dry garden (only planted in 2001, after a site preparation of large rocks and gravel). It was modeled after the well known Beth Chatto Garden nearby, and suitable to the climate of East Anglia, the driest part of England (24 inches of rain a year). The golden torches of verbascums (mulleins) were dotted dramatically throughout. The cistus were in full bloom, and I will never forget the use of grasses, particularly the stipas—the tall *Stipa gigantea* and the shorter and narrower columns of *Stipa tenuissima*. There were lots of low growing blue campanulas (*C. poscharskyana*) in full bloom amid the small blue and silver junipers used as accents throughout. There many gorgeous penstemons in full

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bloom.

Near the entrance was the Queen Mother's Garden, created after her death (like so many across England) as a remembrance garden. My favorite was by far the Hill Top garden, with its combination of herbaceous and woody plant borders. I will never forget the shrub rose walk, which was in its full June glory, from which erupted magically 400 (yes 400!), 8- to 10-foot tall pale pink spires of *Eremerus robustus* (foxtail lily) which towered over the roses. Ironically, in a telephone conversation with Mrs. A. Hort Hound later that night, she stated that she had been out staking these in my own front garden (minus the shrub roses) as the recent rains had toppled them onto the front walk. Alas, I might add, my wife's name for these magnificent lilies was something with more phallic connotations, reflecting her unconcealed disdain for them ("way out of scale, etc."). The herbaceous border, designed by the long-time gardeners at Sissinghurst (Pamela Schwerdt and Sibylle Kreutzberger), was stunning. Back by a solid hedge of yew, it was interrupted by buttresses of the yew hedge, which subdivided the border into individual galleries. Each section was its own painting and had its own color scheme, beginning with harsh yellows and reds and ending with the pale lavenders, purple and white. All in all, it was a rather inspiring interpretation of the Gertrude Jekyll color scheme for the herbaceous border. A farmyard garden next to the main hall featured a very large pond, at one end of which was a remarkable water feature—a small tank (4 x 6 feet) from which rhythmically pulsed a small 18-inch waterfall creating the sound of ocean waves. In addition, the water ran around each side of the tank in two bubbling rills whose sound bounced off the brick walls—each side playing a different tune. There was a very nice garden center with a large collection of plants for sale, including all of the *Stipas* I had admired.

We were off by mid afternoon for the town of Lavenham and the Swan Hotel, where we had stayed on the first WHPS trip to England in 1998. This 14th-century building has served as a hotel since the time of Henry the VIII, and is located in one of the most scenic Tudor villages in all of England—over 300 buildings dating from the 15th and 16th centuries made of wood beams, lathe and stucco. They were

having a mid-summer festival that included outdoor Shakespeare plays and a jazz festival. There was also a lecture about the historic buildings of the town, which a number of WHPS members were lucky enough to attend.

Everyone enjoyed finding their room in the hotel, arrived at by winding up and down staircases, as well as ducking ancient oak beams supporting the narrow passageways—a real rabbit warren, so to speak. We were treated to an elegant dinner in the dining room, which featured lamb shank (delicious—melted in your mouth) and an apple crème brulee for dessert.

It was here that I learned that Max, our fabled bus driver, had left "the road" for the Durham Coach Company and was now in management. Now, for the first time since November 2003, he was driving a coach, because the WHPS was so much fun.

Saturday, June 12 Beth Chatto says Hello

After a full English breakfast in the 15th-century dining room at the Swan, we were off to the first garden of the day, The Priory in nearby Suffolk. Its nine acres were gardened by Mr. and Mrs. Henry Englehart, who greeted the coach (along with their black lab and a miniature dachshund) on its arrival at the entrance to their 100-year-old "farm house." Actually, we were told it had never been a priory, the name being a somewhat fanciful invention of a previous owner.

The garden had fine views over the Constablesque countryside and the valley of the River Box, including the tower of the gothic church at Stoke-by-Nayland. This church was painted by John Constable himself in 1836, and hangs in a gallery at the Art Institute in Chicago. The Englehart family had been gardening on this spot for three generations, and it had a very lived in, tumbled look to it (read slightly unkempt—some rough edges). The most spectacular feature was the walled garden with a medley of colorful poppies and mulleins, all in a sea of pale lavender *Geranium pratense* (? species). An adjoining greenhouse held a fine collection of geraniums and some ancient gnarled fuchsias reach-

ing up to the roof. The roses were in full bloom, emphasizing their importance to the English garden, and reason enough to schedule a tour in the month of June. There was also a Chinese bridge leading to a red Chinese tea pavilion in the pond garden below the house. We encountered our first rain showers here, but we managed to retreat to several covered areas, where we enjoyed some delicious shortbread and oatmeal honey cookies. Our time in this garden ended all too soon and we were off to Colchester and Beth Chatto's garden in the village of Elmstead Market.

Beth Chatto's was a repeat for these trips, the WHPS having visited it for the first time 1998. We admired the hedge of Leyland cypress that had grown up in the interim to separate the spectacular dry garden from the parking lot. It did diminish the impact of the dry garden for the first-time visitor, with its riot of colorful flowers and puffs of grasses waving in the East Anglian wind.

We were greeted by David Ward (yes, as in *Pulmonaria* 'David Ward'), head propagator for the extensive retail nursery on the premises. David led us around the seven-acre extensively planted garden for an hour or so. We started out in the dry garden, now Beth Chatto's signature garden. The *Stipa giganteas* were repeated throughout, and their response to a persistent light breeze gave the garden a great sense of motion. I was struck by the towers of white foxgloves that appeared everywhere in the garden as a stunning accent plant. In the largest pond, I found a clump of *Iris lavezgata* 'Variegata' with its large royal blue flowers and striking green and white foliage. We had all admired this plant in the stream garden at Charles Cresson's in Swarthmore, PA, on our visit to Philadelphia in the spring of 2003. Of course, I made a beeline for the retail nursery, where all I found was the label indicating where the plant was before it had sold out. This is the number one plant on my wish list at present and I was somewhat disappointed. I probably would have gone through the customs hassle to take it back to the U.S., as it would be easy to bare root.

We wandered through the pond and woodland gardens, admiring the extremely artful plant combinations—Beth
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Chatto's hallmark as a gardener. (See her many books, which illustrate this artistry—**Green Tap-estry, The Dry Garden, The Woodland Garden, and The Damp Garden**. All of us were busy playing shutterbug as we dreamed of repeating these combinations in our gardens back home. I was stuck by some very large, well-placed clumps of hosta (including 'Krossa Regal' right near the entrance to the water garden). This same area included the largest clumps of Bowles Golden Sedge (*Carex elata* 'Aurea', three feet by five feet) that I have ever seen. Also, an enormous clump of Aruncus (goatsbeard) dwarfed the human figure. After picking up a brie cheese, grape and celery salad in the little restaurant, I munched my way around the plants for sale in the nursery.

Just before leaving, Beth Chatto herself appeared at the garden's entrance looking for the "little American group." All she found were Bob Berend and Dorothy Anderson playing hooky from the rest of the group. Bob was reading a copy of the *London Times*, and Dorothy was taking a smoking break!! Needless to say, these were not the most representative WHPS folks to make an impression on Beth Chatto, gardener extraordinaire and holder of the RHS Victoria Medal of Honor. Fortunately, most of the WHPS group quickly reassembled and we were treated to a 15-minute conversation with her. She was the charming, unassuming, delightful lady we had remembered, without any of those English airs!

Our final garden of the day was but half an hour away—Glen Chantry, Essex. The HPS members in the Essex-Norfolk area had recommended this garden to us. It was the not-to-be-missed garden, as advertised, with a series of well-edged island beds crammed with carefully, color-coordinated perennials and woodies. The owners, Sue and Wol Stains, had been gardening on this site since the 1970s, and we found them in the covered shed serving as the retail shop for the nursery, entertaining customers as well as dodging the rain showers. Their specialty nursery was noted for its unusual plants with only the "finest cultivars," and this was reflected in the plantings of the garden. There were lots of "what is this?" among the trippers. Interestingly enough, none of the color schemes included hot colors, focusing primarily on whites and pastels. I am

afraid Christopher Lloyd might have disapproved of the complete absence of "hot tropicals." They had a magnificent rock garden in front of the house, as well as a large terra cotta patio that just cried out for pots of plants, strangely enough, of which there were none. To a pot fanatic, this was a travesty. All this prime space and no pots?

Sue and Wol were just a bit stuffy. They informed me they had been in the school-teaching business but had never had children of their own. As a matter of fact, I was admonished, who would want any if you had to teach them all day long? I eagerly inquired about *Iris lavegata* 'Variegata', which I had not seen anywhere in the garden. Wol was kind enough to tell me that they did not have the plant for sale at the moment and when they did, it never stayed in stock very long. He then went on to extol its virtues—large royal blue flowers and the green and white variegation which persists for the entire growing season (sigh!).

There was a charming white garden, flush with white roses and white martagon lilies, foxgloves and white delphiniums. There were two fantastic sculptures of nuns, constructed with multi-layered poultry netting (i.e., chicken wire). The kitchen garden, which was meticulously maintained (and off limits to mere mortals), had a central rectangle of knotted boxwoods, which progressed up to a giant, charming scarecrow which appeared to be made of rebar. There were also those large terracotta rhubarb blanching pots dotted about. We observed a brief respite from the passing showers of rain in the little shed which served tea and instant coffee from a machine (ugh!). No homemade little cakes and cookies here either! Sue told us that she maintained this 2.5-acre garden without help, except for the edging and the lawn mowing. Actually, none of us believed this for a minute. This engendered banter between Jeff Epping and Nancy Ragland, as Nancy had decided that perhaps Jeff could maintain the gardens at Olbrich by himself if he just worked a little harder!!

Soon we were on the road to Lavenham across the English count. We were all wowed by the late evening sunlight bathing the ornate gothic church and the charming half timbered crooked

houses of Lavenham. The Swan had been taken over by a large wedding party in our absence, and after a brief repose, we reboarded the coach for a dinner at a lovely private golf club nearby—Hintleshan Golf Club. While waiting for our meal, we all enjoyed watching the wood pigeons, pheasants, rabbits (and an occasional fox) who appeared to have taken over the links that evening. We also learned what a "Stud Bar" was—an area for the imbibing drink while wearing your cleated golf shoes!!!

We had a delicious dinner (I had the salmon) and returned to the hotel by 10:00 p.m., after a charming evening that included a dinner guest, a cousin of Ed Hasskelus who lived nearby. She was a gardener and had gardened on the same property for 50 years. In describing her garden to us, she went on so about the roses now in full bloom that we threatened to pay her garden a visit the next afternoon if she did not keep quiet. She then informed us that Ed only had her "email" address.

Sunday, June 13 Suffolk, Norfolk... and Amazing Yews

In the morning we took off for the first garden—Somerleyton (pronounced summer-layton), near the coastal city of Lowestoft on the North Sea, county Suffolk. The scenery was beautiful as we crossed the fens of East Anglia, whose drainage canals were occasionally assisted by wind mills (Dutch style). We were taken with the small country churches with rounded twin towers that sometimes had thatched roofs. There were also many thatched homes, the thatch being made from a much thicker reed than that typical of the Cotswolds. The entrance to the estate was marked by a Hansel & Gretel gate house with thatched-roofed turrets. We were met by the head gardener of 27 years, Bob Coutts (dressed in a shirt and tie!) who toured us around the garden for over an hour. It was started in the middle of the 19th century, and near the entrance were some remarkable glass houses designed by Robert Paxton. (He also designed the Crystal Palace and the glass houses at Chatsworth visited on our 2002 trip.) The one nearest the entrance had a remarkable ridge and furrow roof and was the last of its kind extant in England. Mr. Coutts explained the workings

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of the 150-year-old glass house, including its original ventilation, heating and watering systems. The houses were originally designed to grow grapes. Like some we had visited in Scotland in 2002, dead farm animals were typically buried under the houses for their beneficial compost. Obviously, this was before the age of garden visitors! Now they held a remarkable collection of thick-trunked abutilons (parlor maples), oleanders including an impressive double flowering one, grape vines and a large espaliered fig tree.

The second house was more rectangular, and was referred to as the peach and nectarine house, as this was its original function. The walls still held espaliered peach trees. The main brick gate to the formal wall garden surrounding the manor house was topped by a matching pair of potted agaves. We were told that new gardeners on the staff were initiated by being asked to water them, only to find out when they climbed up there, that they were made of cast bronze!

We passed through an amazing allee of ancient espaliered apple trees, whose large branches were covered with lichens and mosses like the ones we had seen in the rose garden at Mottisfont Abbey in 1998. From there we entered a 150-year-old cast iron pergola that extended for 75 yards. It was covered with blue and white wisteria vines that were as old as the arbor. Their massive trunks reminded me of the ones in the pergola at the Biltmore Estate in Asheville, North Carolina.

Mr. Coutts then turned us loose in the yew maze designed by William Nesfield in 1846. To reach the small pagoda on a mound in the center, one had to successfully traverse 400 yards of passage ways. The variation in the colors of the yews used in the maze was quite striking and secondary to the fact that the original yews were planted as seedlings rather than a single cultivar. The top of the maze was clipped into the shape of a hipped roof, so not only would the snow would roll off but it also allowed the clippings to fall to the ground. The hedge was clipped every August and the clippings were sold for 700 dollars to make Taxol (used to treat breast cancer).

As we crossed the main lawn leading

to the house, we were impressed by the 150-year-old cedars and Wellingtonia's (what the Brits call California redwoods) and Mr. Coutts told us once again about the famous hurricane of Oct 16, 1987, that had so devastated the gardens of southern England with its destruction of millions of old growth trees. This had opened up the garden to the cold winds of the North Sea, and he pointed out the damage done to the *Acer japonicas*, but we were all very familiar with winter dieback of Japanese maples! Also in this area was a very large tulip tree from North America that was in full bloom. It was pointed out that the name was due to the shape of the leaves rather than the flowers. A small specimen of a special variegated form was nearby. Another eye-catching plant was the native pokeweed, which had pinkish lavender flowers unlike the white flowers of our North American native.

The manor house had been built originally in the Jacobean style, but subsequently transformed to the Anglo-Italianate style in the early Victorian period (1850). The stone mason who had worked on the architectural details in the façade had also spent 17 years working on the exterior details of the Houses of Parliament in central London. We were then treated to a "Plowman's Lunch" in the manor house, which was basically plates of bread, cheese, cold cuts and vegetables.

After lunch, we drove for about an hour to Bressingham Gardens at Diss in county Norfolk. We had visited this garden on our first trip in 1998, and as PBS was making a television documentary for the U.S. that day, we had not been able to visit Foggy Bottom, the famous heather and conifer garden begun by Adrian Bloom in 1964. There were some shocking changes, as the main garden entrance had been blighted by a very commercial looking tawdry garden center, and a large tented restaurant. Steam trains from the steam train museum (a passion of Alan Bloom, the founder) had run amok, with little steam engines putt-putting around everywhere, spewing out their thick black smoke and offering rides to children and adults alike. As you had to traverse this area to get to both the Dell Garden and Foggy Bottom, it provided an inappropriate, distracting and ticky-

tacky introduction to the garden.

We made our way past Bressingham Hall, where, much to our surprise, we found the 94-year-old founder of Blooms of Bressingham (as well as the English Hardy Plant Society), Alan Bloom, sitting on a bench and greeting garden visitors with his trademark long silvery hair and earring. Bressingham's is now the largest commercial grower in England and supplies the bedding plants for the central parks of London.

At Foggy Bottom, we were met by Adrian Bloom, son of Alan Bloom, who gave us an introduction to Foggy Bottom, the lovely garden that surrounds his home. The colors, shapes, and textures of the various conifers were beautiful beyond description. The garden was accented throughout with spires of white foxgloves and some very interesting woody plant material other than conifers, including a *Cornus kousa* (Chinese dogwood) in full bloom and a very nice specimen of *Acer shirasawanum* 'Aureum' (Japanese yellow full-moon maple). We then moved on to Alan's Dell Garden. It had been started in the 1950s, and consisted of a series of island beds displaying an extraordinary collection of perennials. I was taken with a dwarf species of *Darmeria peltata* *ss nana*, some marvelous new cultivars of Rodgersias with dark pink flowers — 'Buckland Beauty' (deep, deep pink) and 'Kuppermuind' (a more coppery pink). We also took note of large ornamental plantins and a more dwarf form of *Polygonatum* (*P. x hybridum* 'Grace Barker', also sold as *P. x hybridum* 'Striatum') with more cream-colored variegation on its twisted leaves. (This was recently spotted for sale at Felly's here in Madison.) I then made a quick pass through the garden center. The prices of pots from Italy, Germany, and the Far East were much more expensive than the same ones we had at home, and the plant material, including the conifers, was very disappointing compared to the quality seen in the garden. And, of course, they did not have *Iris Lavegata* 'Variegata'.

As Franki was to say, Foggy Bottom was magnificent, but you could just draw a veil around most of the rest. I doubt if we shall return in the future. Ed Hasslekus, in a private discussion with Adrian Bloom, had learned that the Blooms had sold the garden center and the original

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England, Part 1, continued



nursery along with the name "Blooms of Bressingham," and even the steam trains were managed by a private foundation. They now had to negotiate access to the gardens through the maze of toy steam trains with their hoards of noisy kids, which all helped to explain the general demise of the operation. Adrian did say that his son (and Alan's grandson) had started a new nursery nearby, called Bressingham Gardens. I expect that this operation will continue to introduce the many fine perennials we have come to expect from the Bloom family over the years.

We departed late in the afternoon for the city of Cambridge. It took us about an hour and a half to traverse the 32 miles, due to the heavy Sunday evening traffic. We were glad to finally arrive at the Felix Hotel about a mile from the city center. This was a modern, sleek hotel built around a late Victorian house with a very large Wellingtonia (California Redwood) on the front lawn. The bouquets of flowers around the inside public areas were exquisite—green calla lilies, yellow-green Eremurus, phaleanopsis orchids and a large pot of blue and pink lacecap hydrangeas.

The check-in itself, however, was rather inconvenient, as each of us had to present a credit card to cover extras in order to receive our room card. Franki had some sharp words with the hotel management over this. We had a delicious dinner of chicken on roasted vegetables that included parsnips, and a walnut apple crème brulee for dessert. Afterwards, many of us gathered on the open air veranda for coffee and a harty conversation in the late evening twilight.

Monday, June 14 Cambridge and Environs

Breakfast at the Felix was marred by controversy. We were presented with a menu that only included a continental breakfast. Any element of the full English breakfast was extra! Frankie, who expects nothing less than the full English breakfast, became quite indignant and exchanged some hot words with the hotel management. Eventually we got off to the first garden of the day, after our full English breakfast.

It was very warm and sunny—the temperature must have climbed up close to 80°, with a brisk breeze. Fortunately for us it remained dry, though most of the local gardeners all were praying for rain. The first garden was Anglesey Abbey, just NE of the city of Cambridge. It was a very large garden (98 acres), dating to 1926 and originally belonging to Lord and Lady Fairhaven, who had donated the garden and the manor house to the National Historic Trust. Normally closed on Mondays and Tuesdays, we enjoyed a private tour by the head gardener, David Jordan.

We began our stroll through one of the many meadow gardens with a collection of native wildflowers that had self-renewed after the mowing of the lawn had ended ten years ago. The garden itself was a wonderful mixture of the formal and the informal, frequently moving from one area into the next with a sudden, surprise transition. The collection of well-placed statuary was outstanding, of the type you would buy at auction at Sotheby's or Christie's. Many were originals, not copies. There were large expanses of lawn and grand allees of trees—copper beeches, spruces, chestnuts (like those at Windsor Castle), and hornbeams (Carpinus). A magnificent D-shaped perennial border, like the one we had seen on a previous trip at Hadspen House, was in full bloom with a stunning array of flowers. This rather small area occupied much of our time. I was particularly impressed with *Achillae grandiflora*, whose five-foot towers were topped with large white umbrells. This was to be one of the finest herbaceous borders we would see on the trip.

Our next stop was nearby at 21 Lode Road in a village of thatched cottages, many of which were surrounded by tantalizing gardens which we enjoyed peering into. This small garden (60 by 30 meters) belonged to Richard Ayers, who had been the head gardener at Anglesey for 40 years. After a tour of his small but wonderful perennial and shrub garden, we were treated to tea and delicious cakes made by ladies of the village. The garden had many narrow meandering paths of immaculately edged grass. There was a masterful display of foliage and color throughout—a continuous tapestry of plants.

As a galanthophile for more than 50

years, he had collected over 150 different snow drops, which bloomed from September to April, so all we saw were the labels (none actually bloomed in June as far as I could tell!). There was a striking water feature of polished green Chilean slate that stood about five feet tall, from which bubbled a fountain of water. Richard said this was a gift to himself when he retired as head gardener at Anglesey Abbey. He told us the thatch on his roof was of straw and had to be replaced every 15 years. There were large clumps of *Gunnera manicata*, hostas placed in simple black plastic landscape pots around the patio, including 'Great Expectations' and 'Nigrescens'.

Our final stop of the day was the Cambridge Botanical Garden, a botanical garden in the strictest sense—no wow factor here in general. Founded in 1846 (40 acres, 9 National Collections), the plants are grouped by botanical families and often in the order of having been introduced into England from around the world (in 20-year blocks). There was a large rock garden centered around a small pond, with lots of flowers. I was finally able to identify *Ornithogalum pyranaceium* we had been seeing all along the trip. The grass lawns were dotted with *Bellis perrennis* (that little prostrate, English daisy). We marveled at a striking yellow wood (*Cladrastis kentukea*) in full bloom—oh, the fragrance! There was clutch of small glass houses, but as it was so warm, some of us thought they were best viewed from the outside. (I missed the famous jade vine as a result.) By the way, the Latin (Roman) name for Cambridge is Cantabrigiense, hence explaining the name given to plants originating from the Cambridge Botanic Garden such as *Epimedium x cantabrigiense*. Our group's guide was not terribly knowledgeable (didn't even know that yellowwood was a North American tree) and most of us gradually wandered off on our own.

For the remainder of the afternoon, we were turned loose into the historic city, with its 25 different colleges that make up Cambridge University. It was the week of the May Balls (until the calendar was changed 400 years ago, they had actually been in the month of May), which is graduation week and alumni week all rolled into one, with lots of parties, dances, and concerts at the various

continued on next page

England, Part 1, continued



colleges. (Of course, there was very little drinking.) As a result, most of the colleges were closed, including their lovely gardens that we had originally planned to visit.

Some of us went punting on the River Cam, which courses behind the colleges. The student guides imparted lots of historic information about the university. Many went into Kings College Chapel with its Ruben's altar piece. A couple of us (guess which ones) hopped on the local train and ventured nine miles south of Cambridge to the village of Shepreth to visit a couple of small gardens. The first of these, the Crossing House Garden, was owned by Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Fuller.

It was a small, intensively gardened quarter acre, located right along the railroad tracks at a crossing station. When the trains went rushing by, you literally expected to be sucked out of the garden on to the tracks. Tiny paths were bordered with dwarfed *Buxus sempervirens* (boxwood). The beds were chocked full of every plant imaginable—*Acer erythrocladum*, *Acer shirasawanum* 'Aureum', a very rare split-leafed English walnut, many arums, tiny alpine plants, etc. There was some interesting iron work, including a collection of boot scrapers and a Scandinavian sleigh bed beautifully planted with annuals.

The owners were a hoot—typical working class folk and passionate plant people who seemed to have visited every rare plant nursery in England. You knew that they were the type always coming back

home with a car load of new plants, even though there was not a speck of unplanted space in the garden. Their rose-covered cottage was built in 1850.

In the same village we also visited The Garden of Docwra's Manor. An elaborate and gorgeous iron gate stood at the entrance to the garden in front of a small Georgian manor house, reached by a path-lined with white roses and the spires of *Euphorbia wulfenii* self-sowing everywhere. It was reminiscent of the entrance courtyard at Christopher Lloyd's Great Dixter.

We wandered through four acres of gardens, gradually acquired and planted since 1954 by the Ravens, who were great plant collectors. Plants had obviously been acquired with magpie acquisitiveness from friends, family and nurserymen. There were many garden rooms, with good hardscaping consisting of brick walls and old farm buildings. There was a kitchen garden, orchard garden, woodland areas, and many water features. The overall effect was very cottage like, with lots of roses and colorful annuals and perennials all blending together in a colorful display. I was particularly taken by the walled perennial garden, with its spikes of delphiniums and eremerus, lilies, etc. The garden was closed, but of course we invited ourselves in anyway, and did not regret our decision.

Then it was back to Cambridge on the train. We enjoyed a delicious dinner at the hotel with a very memorable celery sorbet and roast duck on a bed of fruit drizzled with a cinnamon sauce.

To be continued...A. Hort Hound

Coming in November WHPS Trip to England Part II— Will I ever find *Iris Lavegata*?

Tuesday, June 15

Well, the departure from the Felix Hotel was a little delayed this morning. We had settled the issue about the cooked full English breakfast, but the hotel got the last laugh. I mean, can you imagine waiting two hours for a couple of poached eggs? There was no breakfast buffet and the hotel was not sufficiently equipped to cook breakfast for 28 people who all had a departure time of 0900!

Need- less to say, Franki had some further "words" with t h e management. H e r standards are v e r y high and she does not tolerate the slightest deficiency in hotel services. She did get the hotel to supply us with cookies and drinks for a late morning snack as a sort of peace offering. (Despite all this, the place was really outstanding—I plan to take Mrs.



WHPS has a new Treasurer

Hi everyone! You've probably been wondering—who is this person who volunteered to be the new treasurer? My name is Laurie Zimmerman. I'm married with two lovely teenage daughters and we live in McFarland. We built a house there about 4 years ago and have been trying since then to coax some plants to grow in our infamous clay. Starting with a blank canvas has been somewhat of a challenge, so I am eager to learn much from you and for our garden to grow. I look forward to meeting each and every one of you and putting faces with all the names in my emails.

A word about messages: For those of you who have access to email but haven't been getting any email reminders, please email me at jltszim@chorus.net with a brief note, "Laurie, I haven't been getting emails," and I will then have your email address in our file. It may be that when you filled out your membership form, you left the email address line blank or maybe you didn't have an email account at that time, or perhaps it has changed. Thank you.

Potluck thank you!

I want to thank everyone who arrived early to help set-up for the August 18 Potluck—with special thanks to Carroll Schiller. As usual, there was an abundance of scrumptious eats! It is such a pleasure to belong to such a great group of people, and we hope even more members will join us at the Potluck brunch in January.

—Terri Maliszewski-Kane

..... **Member Tips etc.**

Now is a good time to walk through the garden with a notebook to write the location and names of plants in the beds. It makes that winter planning and dreaming so much easier.

And don't forget to mark those plants that are late to appear each year (like balloon flower and plumbago) so Spring does not find you digging where you

And this tip from Frank Greer earlier in the year bears repeating—as cleanup begins for the fall and annuals are being removed from containers, leave the potting medium in the container. These containers can be used to plant bulbs for an early spring display in the garden.



Frank & Ed sit a spell—WHPS Philadelphia Garden Tour, 2003

Garden Expo Display Planning Begins

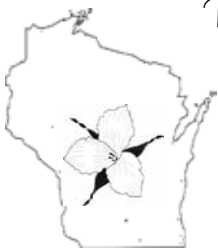
Would you like to volunteer to help plan the display booth for the February 2005 Garden Expo?

Please call Stephanie O'Neal at 256-6108, or email her at sone2@aol.com.

Got a garden tip or idea for our members to use in their garden? Contact Stephanie O'Neal at sone2@aol.com

We have a Web site! <http://www.madison.com/communities/wisconsinhardyplantsociety/>

*Wisconsin Hardy
Plant Society*



**September 2004
Newsletter
925 Waban Hill
Madison, WI 53711**

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Someone you know interested in joining WHPS?

Contact WHPS Treasurer Laurie Zimmerman at jltszim@chorus.net, (608) 838-4477

A Hort Hound to dinner there next month!)

Anyway, though everyone did not manage a full cooked English breakfast, we were off for to first garden of the day—Cottesbrooke Hall. This was a magnificent estate, which opened just for our group that day. Owned by the MacDonald-Buchanan family, it was said to be the setting of Jane Austin's novel "Mansfield Park". Two very famous English garden designers had been involved in the 20th century reworking of the gardens, Dame Sylvia Crowe and the late Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe. The house was built in the early 18th century of rose-colored brick with local Duston stone on the ground floor level. The entrance drive passed over a stone bridge built in 1780, which gave you the best overall view of the manor house. The view from the entrance gate extended for 3 miles and sited perfectly the steeple of the Brixworth Church, the oldest and only extant Saxon Church in all of England, built in 680 AD. We were met by the head gardener of 5 years (who used to work for the National Trust) dressed very casually in blue jeans and a plaid shirt. He gave us an introduction to the garden and turned us loose to enjoy the immaculately kept grounds. I headed immediately for the wild, less formal garden which was created along a stream crisscrossed by a series of bridges, and dotted with sculpture, gazebos and fantastic woodland plants. Back at the manor house, there were many formal garden rooms to be explored, all towered over by a pair of 300 year old cedars of Lebanon, which taken by themselves would have been worthy of a stop. It had a Dutch Garden, a Pool Garden, a Statue Walk, a Gladiator garden (contained a statue of a gladiator), Philosopher Garden, and a Secret Garden, all connected by charming gateways in the walls and hedges, with perfectly framed views of a bench or statue. Even the entrance to the manor house was very elaborate with a stone courtyard, statues and urns. One of the gardeners told us they had just brought out the pots of "aggies" (Agapanthus) from the green house. I was very impressed by the magnificent tree lined vistas which stretched from the house to the horizon in every direction, including the one to the ancient Saxon church. This garden was one of the big-

gest surprises of the trip, as it had been previously unknown to all of us.

After regretfully departing Cottesbrooke Hall, we passed by Naseby, the site of the famous battle of 1649 where Oliver Cromwell and the Roundheads defeated Charles the First, who ultimately lost his head in the English Reformation. Unfortunately, the next couple of hours were not so scenic as we passed through the environs of Birmingham with motorways choked with lorries and bordered by ugly apartment blocks that appeared to be much like low income settlements you see in the US. We did make a motorway stop, just managing to get there before the "Crinklies" (an English euphemism for the retired, older crowd). It included a KFC and a Burger King with prices exactly twice those in the US—a meal with a whopper was \$9 not \$4.50. During the afternoon coach journey, we were entertained by a video featuring the creation of the most avant-garde, tradition-breaking garden entered in the Chelsey flower show this year. It consisted of a giant Easter egg pavilion of metallic brilliantly colored balls and a path of lollipops (grown from seed, no less) by the contemporary Irish Garden designer, Dairmuid Gavin. The story of the garden was a television sensation and it was the most visited garden at the show. It actually won a medal for its innovative use of plants—all foliage without any flowers. All of the color was provided by the lollipops and the giant, beaded Easter egg.

In mid afternoon, it suddenly clouded over as we entered North Wales with its rugged mountains, slate quarries, fields of sheep, and quaint villages. The roads were narrow and winding and we all took in the beautiful countryside. Wales is a small "country"—170 miles long, 60 miles wide—but one of intense nationalism. Children are only taught Welsh in the first few years of school. We didn't arrive at our second stop of the day until 5 PM—Crug Farm, the nursery and display garden of Bleddyn and Sue Jones. The garden even had its own brown and white official road sign marking it as a "destination". Bleddyn gave us an hour tour of the garden which was like visiting an exotic plant zoo. It was a jungle of rare plants, not really a garden in some ways. We were overwhelmed by the new and

exotic species of disporums, polygonatum etc., mostly from the Far East. Bleddyn and Sue are plant collectors extraordinaire. Their most recent expedition had been last November to North Vietnam with Dan Hinkley. They have also traveled on expeditions with Darryl Probst, the Arnold Arboretum staff, Galen Gates of the Chicago Botanic Garden, etc. Though they do not do mail order, they had a wonderful sales area.

The coach returned for us promptly at 6 PM, having dropped off our luggage at the beautiful Seiont Manor Hotel, a small (28 rooms) exquisite hideaway at the foot of the Snodownia Mountains of North Wales. The long narrow lane into the hotel, lined by huge oaks, chestnuts, and beeches as well as parallel hedges of cherry laurel, was a coach driver's nightmare, but Max came through with just a few squirmishes with the overhanging branches. It was a lovely place surrounded by gardens and magnificent views from every window, a bubbling brook and lots of singing birds. Each of the rooms was named for one of the 600 castles in Wales. We had a wonderful dinner in the restaurant Llwyn Y Brain (don't ask me what this means) with a menu offering a choice of Welsh delights and plenty of good wine.

Wednesday, June 16

This morning, we had a wonderful cooked English breakfast, done very efficiently compared to the Felix, only the hot water boiler had given out during the night and no one could have hot shower. We dreaded Frankie's arrival in the breakfast room!!!

Our first garden was across just the Menai Straits on the Isle of Anglesey. We approached the Port Britannia Bridge with its massive rectangular pylons and enjoyed the fine view from the bridge towards the island. Though overcast with low clouds, there were occasional bright periods which promised more sunshine later in the day, so that the Welsh mountains could be viewed on the horizon. At Plas Newydd, we were met by the head gardener, John Dennis, an hour before the normal opening time. The bones of this 169 acre estate had been laid out in 1798, though considerable improve-

ments had been made to the property since the Marquis of Anglesey turned it over to the National Trust in 1976. Mr. Dennis had been the head gardener for 25 years and we started off through a spectacular grove of the giant Monterey cypress (*Cypress microcarpa*) just over the Ha Ha that bordered the entire area of built up gardens. We were taken with large specimens of *Pinus Radiata* and *Thuja Plicata*, also from North America. The growing season we were told was 250 days. that explained the immense size of the woody plant material. There were marvelous views out to the Straits and the Welsh mountains on the opposite shore, if we could have seen them. There was a very large rustic tree house built from scrap by the children of the Marquis in an enormous sycamore-beech. We were told that of the 16 tree houses owned by the National Trust, this was the only one made out of scrap—quite charming compared to the formality of the castle. The parklands were heavily planted with azaleas, rhodies and hundreds of hydrangeas, but unfortunately we had arrived during the “June gap” (no hydrangeas in bloom yet)! We were then lead through the arboretum, which was known as Australasia, meaning all the woody material was from Australia, unique to all the gardens in the National Trust. It was here that we learned of an easy way to convert centigrade to Fahrenheit—10 degrees C = 50 degrees F, 16 degrees C = 61 degrees F, 28 degrees C = 82 degrees F. We eventually ended up at the magnificent Terrace Garden below the castle, which had been restored by the National Trust into a very formal area, and a real treat. It was in the Italianate style and was topped by a trellis garden house where a Victorian green house had once stood. We picked up sandwiches and light refreshment in the restaurant before re-boarding the coach and heading back across the Straits. We then proceeded to Carnarferon around the NW corner of Wales towards Plas Brodanw. Here we were met by Linda Davis who told us about the eccentric Welsh architect, Sir Clough Williams Ellis who was not knighted until the age of 93 and the oldest age at which anyone have ever been knighted in England. He had been born in 1883 to a middle class family and the Plas had been given to him in 1908 by his father as a birthday present. He extensively restored the buildings

and grounds, in a more or less Arts and Crafts style, though this was certainly in a different vein than the house and gardens of Lutyens and Jekyll seen on previous WHPS trips. Most of the decorative iron work, including the garden furniture, was painted in Port Meirion green with yellow highlights. Port Meirion green, a pale greenie-blue, was Ellis’s favorite color and we would see more of this as the day went on. (Personally, I much prefer Kiftsgate blue, a darker blue- greeny color.) The Plas grounds had wonderful hard scaping of gray Welsh stone and many fine topiaries, though they were somewhat less than perfection. Flowers were not a strong feature but the setting and feeling of the place were enchanting. Across the road, most of the party made it up the hill to Clough’s lookout tower for a marvelous view of the countryside. The tower had been a wedding present to Clough from members of the Welsh Guard. We didn’t get tea at this place, which would have been a culminating event to the visit.

It was just a short distance down the road to Clough’s masterpiece, the village of Port Meirion. Fortunately, just as we arrived at this magical village, the clouds lifted and the skies became solidly blue as if a magic curtain had opened across the landscape. Sunshine on the pastel buildings of this fairyland gave you the impression you were somewhere on the Italian Amalfi Coast, not on the coast of Wales. Having traversed a number of the dark gray villages of Wales (dark stone houses, dark slate roofs with minimal decoration and rare window boxes of flowers) I could see where an eccentric architect would long for this magnificent folly! As the coach approached, the ladies in the group immediately spotted the Port Meirion pottery seconds shop, famous for its botanical china pattern. Several of the group disappeared in there only to re-emerge when the bus departed. The tea facilities were rather disappointing, but a number of us enjoyed the Welsh cakes with raisins and currants. The Portmeirion green was everywhere and there were wonderful small plazas in which to sit and enjoy the sunny afternoon. The decorative details on the buildings were enchanting and I was very glad to have my telephoto lens. The village was full of

beautiful flowering shrubs and pots of decorative annuals. We were led by guides over the steep hills surrounding the village into a dense forest of exotic trees and shrubs. We were told about the dreaded *Rhododendron ponticum* which had originated in China and was extensively planted on English estates for harboring wildlife, especially pheasants. Now the woody plant, reaching 30 feet in height and making dense impenetrable groves, was a terrible nuisance and they were being removed across England and Scotland at a cost of more than 50 million pounds. It was easy to see why it was a primary source of firewood in the mountainous parts of China. The other two pests from the far east, were *Impatiens glandulifera* (policeman’s helmet) and Japanese knotweed—*Polygonatum cuspidatum*. Our guide was nontalkative. The other group’s was quite loquacious, but without them we would never have found our way through the forested rocky crags to the shores of a tidal estuary, which at low tide stretched to the distant horizon. It was bisected by tidal rivers and streams shimmering in the sun—truly a memorable sight.

We had a beautiful ride home (along with all those packages of Portmeirion pottery) along the NW coast of Wales with the Welsh mountains as a backdrop in the Snowdonia national park. We got a fine view of Mt. Snowdon, the highest point in England and Wales. (At least we thought so anyway.) That evening, we had drinks in a fine sunny courtyard at Seiont Manor, and then a delicious dinner. This was memorable for me for the main course of risotto with laver (a seaweed) bread, a specialty of Welsh cuisine. For dessert, I had slices of fresh pineapple with fresh ground black pepper corns over vanilla ice cream topped off with a sauce of maple sugar—delicious. After dinner, we requested the chef, Martyn Williams come to our table, and we congratulated him for his efforts. He was a very entertaining Welsh man, and though native to North Wales, had grown up in a cottage inside the Westonbirt Arboretum. He was delighted to hear that we would be paying a visit there in the coming days.

Thursday, June 17

After another hearty cooked English

breakfast which included black pudding (blood sausage) we boarded the coach for a rather late departure—0900. The weather was mostly cloudy and described by the locals as fresher (read colder) than the day before, with brisk northerly winds. But, at least it wasn't raining. Our first garden a short distance away, was Penrhyn Castle. We were greeted by Phillip Makin the charismatic assistant head gardener, with a marvelous sense of humor who immediately commanded everyone's attention. He had been on the staff for 14 years. The castle and its 45 acres of garden and parkland were reached through a massive entrance portal, then up a long dark, winding road through dense woods, where suddenly the castle with its battlements loomed before you. It was built in 1837, the beginning of the Victorian period, the very year Queen Victoria began her reign which lasted until 1901. The castle was built in the neo-Norman style, and was built to impress. The every imposing edifice said to the Victorians "here I am, look how successful I have been, and look how much money I have made." I couldn't help but think of a very similar trend set by the "starter" castles popping up in American suburbs at the present time. In the car park area was a large Wellingtonia, planted by Queen Victoria herself in 1854 and a very large turkey oak planted by one of her daughters. The castle was not presently lived in, but contained many treasures including a Vermeer painting of the Burgermeister of Delft, which recently sold for 8 million dollars. The gardener joked that perhaps the castle would have much more charm if it was a ruin with vines creeping all over it. We passed down a long woodland walk, past the ruins of the 14th century church with its pet cemetery, to the formal wall garden of stark formality. The entrance was through a small wooden door much like the one in the Secret Garden, the wall itself overgrown with flowering climbing hydrangeas, kiwis, and passion flowers. Inside, we were struck by the Chusan palms and the massive cordylines in full flower, used as accent plants. Along one side was a long iron pergola covered with a red and purple fuchsia (*Fuchsia magellanica* hybrid) dotted occasionally with a large flowering white clematis. Below the wall garden, was my favorite garden, the bog garden which was one of the

largest we had seen in England. It was dominated by great masses of *Gunnera manicota* with their massive five foot wide leaves. Around the edges were Japanese red maples, purple *Corylus* (*Corylus maxima* 'Purpurea') in front of which were planted bright green New Zealand tree ferns. All of this was surveyed from a rustic thatched belvedere, which was something you might expect to see in an old Tarzan movie. Returning through the woodlands to the front of the castle which overlooked the Straits of Menai, we marveled at the spectacular views of Puffin Island, the great headland of Orme, and mountains of Snowdonia. The Castle itself was starkly place in the landscape without any horticulture adornment other than some Virginia creeper climbing up the facade in places.

From Penrhyn, it was but a short ride to Bodnant, the most famous of the Welsh gardens and certainly one of the finest gardens in all of the British Isles. If you can see but one garden in all of Wales, this is the one. Owned by the Aberconways, whose lordships include two previous presidents of the RHS, the Bodant Manor House, built in the Victorian style, is magnificently situated just above the River Conway looking across a wide valley to the Snowdonia Range. Near the house are a series of 7 formal terraces which lead you down gradually to the magnificent Dell garden, entered through the reconstructed Pin Mill, now a stunning garden house. The mill dated from 1730 and had been rescued by the Late Aberconway from Woodchester in the Cotswolds, where it was falling into ruin. We had a marvelous introductory tour of the grounds by Martin Puddle, the third in a line of gardeners from the same family stretching back to 1920. As he told us, the gardens of Bodant, though now a National Trust property over which the Aberconways uniquely remain in full control, were the creation of just 7 persons—three Puddle gardeners and 4 members of the Aberconway family. There was never a grand plan and no designer gardens. It all just sort of evolved and underwent continuous improvement and expansion. The soil was very poor, sometimes as little as two inches of clay over solid bedrock. We were overwhelmed by the 55 yard Laburnum walk near the entrance, the finest in the British Isles, as well as

by the magnificent convoluted trunk of an ancient Japanese maple. We gradually worked our way down the 7 terraces (no central staircase), which included a marvelous wooden pergola. Even the decorative urns on the tops of the wooden lattice-work were constructed of wood. It was covered with roses, clematis, etc. A man made stream flowed down through the center of the terraces, and was used to form a water feature on each level. The views looking back up at the Bodnant manor House were stunning. Passing along the final terrace and through the Pin Mill, was Bodant's hall mark garden, the gorgeous ravine or dell garden, which was entered by a winding path seeming to fall hundreds of feet below to a meandering stream and from which it wound back up again. The views of the stream and waterfalls seen from many different angles took the breath away. Though the azaleas and camelias were out of bloom, there were epimedium lined paths and rivers of pink foxgloves flowing down the walls of the ravine. There were towering Wellingtonias and *Thuja plicata*. There were large clumps of blue hostas that literally engulfed wooden benches, and gorgeous clumps of ferns. Everything was absolutely enchanting. There was a series of bridges and at the very bottom another old mill. Going back up the ravine, we happened upon the "The Poem", the mausoleum of the Aberconway family. We passed through the shrub borders on the way back to the house and were struck by the flowering dogwoods, including a stunning specimen of the pink flowering *Cornus florida* 'Cherokee'. Many of us felt that this had been the finest garden of the trip so far.

After a short drive along the coast, we arrived at Bodysgallen Hall in time for an early afternoon high tea. This hotel and spa, was built of the local rosy pink sandstone which picked up the color of the pink *Centranthus rubra* growing out of the garden's stone walls. The tearoom in this 17th century manor house, with its views of Snowdonia and the distant Conway Castle, was one of these elegant, stuffy English affairs with stuffed furniture and dark wood paneling. The sandwiches and cakes were memorable, especially the Welsh cakes with clotted cream (well, not quite as thick as Devonshire clotted

cream which is typically thick enough to use as mortar between bricks). After tea, we were treated to a tour of the grounds by the head gardener (never did catch his name). The gardens had been restored to their 1913 appearance. The formal wall garden was perhaps the most memorable, with its formal box parterres and stone walls dripping with gorgeous climbing roses and the two feet tall pink spikes of centranthus (the most beautiful display of the latter I have ever seen on these tours). There was a series of walled rooms, including a pool garden, a rose garden, and a very large kitchen garden. Along the outer walls, there were a 100 yards of trimmed box wood hedges (two feet tall) flanked by espaliered pear and apple trees on the stone walls. At the entrance to the rose garden was a magnificent pair of umbrella shaped silver pear trees that knocked your socks off. In 1986, this garden had been a wedding present to previous former owner. There was also a small, walled rock garden and a large wedding tree (variegated pagoda dogwood) seen just beyond the walls. Beyond the kitchen garden was long walk that meandered through the woods with occasional views of the distant waters and the nearby Conway Castle. It was with regret that we left this lovely place, as we had to get back to Seiont Manor by 5 PM for Max and Frankie to take in the Euro Cup match between England and Switzerland at 5:30 PM

That night at Seiont we had a very fine traditional Welsh dinner in the restaurant Llwyn Y Brain (I did learned on this trip that the Welsh pronunciation has no relationship to the spelling of the words). I had the chicken apricot and black pudding terrine with apple chutney, pot roasted lamb shank on Rwdan Stwnch with Glazed parmesan shavings, and for dessert, ah dessert—bread and butter pudding with toffee-um sauce. Hmmm, delicious! The Chief, Martyn Williams, briefly popped his head out after dinner and we congratulated him one last time. After dinner, we were entertained by a charming Welsh choir of mostly older women, who sang lovely songs in Welsh including the Welsh national anthem and the song “Come Home to Wales”. I am afraid Bob Berends was so taken with the performance, that he embarrasses us all. He had the bravado to introduce as

the WHPS singing group and we were forced to performed rousing renditions of ‘Varsity’ and ‘On Wisconsin’. As it turned out at least half of us did not remember all of the words to either song. Oh well, it was good for laughs!

Friday, June 18—The Longest Day

We regretfully waved good-bye to Seiont Manor after our hot cooked English (Welsh?) breakfast in the sun filled dining room. This began our 7 hour odyssey over the mountains and coastal roads of Wales, towards the cathedral city of Gloucester. It was slow progress on the winding roads of the Snowdownia National Park, but the scenery was awesome. We had a mid morning stop in the village of Dolgellau for coffee and the loo, and Frankie picked up some sandwiches for us for later in the day, made up especially for us by the village baker. Getting out of the village was a major feat as at one particularly sharp corner those of us on the right side of the bus had our noses plastered into the cold gray stone wall of a two story building, as Max inched back and forth repeatedly, until miraculously, the coach rounded the corner. Needless to say Max got a good round of applause. It was nearly 2 PM by the time we reached the first garden of the day—Bryan’s Ground. This is the garden of David Wheeler and Simon Dorall who publish the literary garden journal, Hortus. David is the editor and Simon does the illustrations (black and white drawings). We were greeted by Simon, who gave us a brief introduction to this wonderful garden, just perhaps, my favorite of the entire trip. This was a true artist’s garden, that as one of us put it, poked fun at many of the formal gardens of England. It was a fun garden whose delights were obviously the joy of its makers. The house was built in 1911 in the Arts & Crafts Style, and the hardscaping done by the present owners to enhance the setting was fabulous. This included a two-story mortise and tenoned dovecote which matched the house, the second floor of which was used for candle light dining. The entrance courtyard was through an orchard of small pollarded apple trees, under planted with blue Siberian irises and

tall white daisies. In the surrounding fields, the sheep where bleating which enhanced the bucolic scene. The main part of the garden was divided into about 20 rooms by walls and hedges. Just to the right of the front door was a courtyard named St Ann for Ann Raver, the garden columnist of the NYT who had written a piece on the garden. Directly behind the house was a courtyard not of box wood, but of boxed yews (yews enclosed by wooden frames shaped like obelisks for a stunning effect). Flowers spilled out from everywhere into the paths and there were many artist whimsies to demand your attention. One of my favorites was the garden building referred to as the Sulking House, whose bench was backed by a wall of vintage wardrobe items. I was particularly impressed by the pots of single martagon lilies in full flower at the entrance—what an elegant touch. There was a small Edwardian green house full of scented geraniums in full bloom, all growing in antique hand thrown terracotta pots. There was a more formal courtyard with a hedge on stilts (alla Hidcote) around a reflecting pool, at the head of which was a statue of a Dalmatian. This room was referred to as ‘Dalmatia’. Another room, call the lighthouse, focused on an odd tower like contraption, that had been used to dispense gas for lighting homes around 1900. Outside of the central three acres of gardens, was a newly planted 5 acre arboretum with allees of rather newly planted trees lining up stunning views of the Herefordshire hills. Back on the coach, we were all abuzz with “did you see that?” type of conversation, and of course this garden had so much to offer, that we all missed things!

Back on the Coach, it was short drive to our second garden of the day, Lance Hattat Design Garden (formerly Arrowhead Cottage). The previous owner had moved to Budapest, Hungary, to be with the British Embassy, and the charming couple, the Martins (he was an air traffic controller based in London) who purchased the property had closed on it only two weeks before our visit. This was a lovely designer garden, in stark contrast to the previous garden, and perhaps enjoyed

to lesser extent by some of us. We all agreed in later conversation that the new owners had no idea what they were in for when it came to the maintenance that was going to be required. There was a natural stream coursing through this small garden, which was crossed by a dainty, blue painted bridge. There was a gravel area, with a stone paved central circle from which erupted a startling jet of water. More water ran down a 170 ft rill, rigidly enclosed between very high hedges. There were many richly planted borders and a small kitchen and white garden.

From this last garden it was an hour or so to our hotel, Hatton Court perched in the hills overlooking the city of Gloucester. Enroute we had a fine view of Gloucester's magnificent cathedral. It was our third time on these trips to stay in this country hotel, and once again we marveled at Max's ability to negotiate the iron and stone gateway into the hotel grounds. Between the coach and the stone of the gate, there was not enough room for a single finger. We had a delightful dinner in the hotel dining room, with its fine views out over the city. I remember having salmon as both the appetizer and the main course, and a wonderful slice of lemon custard for dessert. After a long day's coach journey, I think we all went to bed early that night and did not venture down into the charming village of Upton St. Leonard's. The next morning, after a cooked English breakfast, we had time to pose for a group picture on the steps of the hotel. It was rather amusing seeing the hotel manager taking photos from a pile of about 15 cameras! He did remarkably well and must have done this type of thing before. Then, we were off on our final day of gardens.

The coach proceeded towards the village of Tetbury. We passed St. Mary's church in the village of Painswick, whose grounds contained 99 sculpted yews. Painswick is a charming Gloucestershire village of Cotswold stone dry walls towering up to ten feet, stone shops and houses, often with roofs of split stone. At the center of the village was a gem of a church, with a single, tall,

very thin spire. There were antique shops galore, many with garden items visible in the windows. We passed "The Snooty Fox", a charming hotel which has always appealed to me as a place to stay someday. Just outside the village is High Grove, Prince Charles's country estate. He purchased the estate about 20 years ago and has 300 acres of formal gardens and park lawns managed with organic techniques, about which he is quite proud. Needless to say, this led to discussions about Prince Charles and Camille Parker Bowles as this seems to be their favorite residence. There is a polo club nearby and a famous hunt club. In fact, we were told that Camille went riding with the hunt club on alternate days. Of course, the area of England with royalty about, has become very popular with the English upper class, many of whom now have country places in the immediate vicinity of High Grove. By the way, we did apply to visit this garden two years ago, and eventually received a reply from the garden manager, that our group had been placed on the list, and perhaps we would be able to visit High Grove sometime in the future. We heard from Frankie, that the letters are occasionally put into a basket, from which one is occasionally selected, and the group called and invited to come the next day. I suspect we will never see this garden! Anyway, just down the road from High Grove was the famous national arboretum, Westonbirt. With its 600 acres, 18 miles of paths and 18,000 trees there was plenty to see, even if it did not include Camille and the Prince in their polo outfits. The original plantings were done in 1820 as a private arboretum and it had been passed to the government in 1950 as part of the "death duties". Someone came on the coach to give us a brief introduction, which was not up to our usual standards. Frankie said that our group had been slighted as we were not even given a map of the garden. The facilities were very impressive, including a restaurant called The Maples with a stone and sedum covered roof, and a wonderful store—The Forest Shop. Most of us went immediately to the 'Festival of the Garden' area. Here we saw the third annual competition of England's

festival of contemporary garden design, modeled after the avant-garde festival of gardens at Chaumont-sur-Loire in France. Combining art and the garden, it raises the question of where art installation starts and where the garden begins? We were told that artist from all over Europe submitted 200 designs for this year's festival, from which 20 were selected for installation. The designers are limited to a maximum plot size of 200 square meters and the only instruction is to create "ideas to steal". Most of us spent some time here, pausing to read the introductory description of the various gardens. One of my favorites, was a "Ha Ha" in reverse, for this garden was created at the base of the Ha Ha and not visible until you looked down over the Ha Ha itself. Another garden was literally a 5 meter "hole in the ground" with steps going down into it and an elegant suspension bridge crossing over it. It was one of the few gardens with brightly colored flowering plants, however. In the center of the festival of gardens was one entitled "wind shore", planted to look like the seashore, over which where stretched ribbons of shiny plastic (the same plastic strips used to bind up large boxes you might receive from the UPS truck). These ribbons literally shimmered in the sunshine, and the when the wind was just right, gave out a mysteriously sound like someone twanging a single string on a harp. Another garden consisted of a stone ramp which lead into the earth, on either side of which arose green grassy banks gradually shrinking your view of the countryside and limiting your vision to the blue sky and the tallest tree tops. It was called a Dust to Dust meditation garden, why I don't know for at the very bottom of the path was a pile of shredded black rubber mulch, not dust! My favorite garden was a Celtic Labyrinth done in rocks covered with wire, leading you to monsters in the depths of the nearby woods also created from wire sculptures stuffed with pieces of Cotswold stone! Another garden had potted agaves planted within wire rectangles filled with lovely water smoothed rocks. Just off the main area, and hanging from the low branches of an enormous conifer was the "Sounds of

Sunlight” which gave off prehistoric, moaning sounds from time to time. The sounds were created by sunlight reflected off of spinning aluminum disks, which was then converted to low voltage electricity to make the weird noises. Though I enjoyed the Festival of Gardens very much, which push comes to shove, in my own mind, nothing replaces the sheer artistry and beauty of the plants themselves and I will take the sounds of birds and a bubbling brook in the garden any day! Unfortunately, we only had a couple of hours to spend here. Most of us spent the remaining time in the old part of the arboretum which including a main drive and the half-mile long specimen walk, which was just as you might imagine. I believe the enormity of the Wellingtonia, Scotts pines, black pines, Douglas firs, Monterey cypresses, and Pinus radiata, made a lasting impression as they towered high up into the sky above the walk. I made an excursion into the Maple Glade. Every once in a while, the serenity of the place would be interrupted by the sudden juxtaposition of another Festival of the Gardens entry, like a blazing aluminum covered garden house, or a “formal” table setting in a grassy opening, of broken pieces of mirror and gold apples on a gold lame table cloth.

We left this wonderful place all too soon, and proceeded by Coach towards London for our final garden of the trip—Wisley, the main show garden of the Royal Horticulture Society. We got a very fine view of Windsor Castle from the M-4 Motorway along the way, which at this time of year was likely to house the queen with horse races going on at nearby Ascott. Wisley’s 250 acres of gardens include a fine restaurant, fabulous shop with a terrific selection of books, and a large plant center. Needless to say, those of us who had been here before (most of the folks) knew that 3 hours was not nearly enough time to see the grounds, but we managed to scurry around to check out our favorite venues. There was some dismay on entering the car park, which was overflowing with cars and a long row of coaches, but after all it was a gorgeous, sunny, Saturday afternoon. Most

of us made a beeline for the double herbaceous borders leading up to the top of Battelson Hill, with a side trip through an adjoining archway to see the Penelope Hobhouse’s Country Garden in full flower, with its central square of calla lilies in full bloom. There were also spires of the blue aconitum ‘Bressingham Spire’ everywhere, which could be the delphinium replacement for Wisconsin gardens (Flower Factory does carry this one, at least early in the season). There were many different colorful geraniums spilling into the pathways in a typical English cottage garden fashion. Another archway led you to the new rose garden which had been under construction on our previous visit in 2002, which to my eyes was not as impressive as the old rose garden further a field. In the shrub borders further up the hill, we marveled at the various Japanese maples, the fabulous Sambucus ‘Black Beauty’ (dark black foliage with pink flowers) and several stunning martagon lilies, for which I could find only one label—Lilium martagon ‘Brocade’. It was a beautiful deep pink one, to die for. Over the top of the hill, the test gardens came into view with the long bed of delphiniums in glorious flower, which never fails to impress even the repeat visitor. There were also rows of sweat peas, snapdragons (tall and short), hardy geraniums, taller pinks, seed dahlias etc. I did find the test area for the genus Actea (which now includes all of the Cimicifugas as this genus has been incorporated into Actea) which was a genus I could relate to in my Wisconsin shade garden. All of the purple leafed forms were lined up in a single row, and several of us agreed that ‘Hillside Black Beauty’ (Connecticut origin) took top honors! I finally found the basilar acteas side by side that I had purchased at We Du nurseries ten years ago. The one with smaller shiny leaves is Actea japonica which has the late summer flower display of 50 or more of upright, 18 inch candles. This one has self sown and many of you have purchased this at our plant sales over the years. The other, with much larger, but non glossy leaves, is Actea biternata. I was delighted to finally identify this one as Richard Weaver (one of the original owners of We Du)

had been unable to identify it exactly. Of course, this never stops me from buying a good looking plant. I also discovered a new basilar form in the test area—Actea heracleifolia, with even larger, more palmate and glossier foliage than Actea japonica. It has now moved to the top of my “must have list”, just below Iris laevigata ‘Variegata’. After spending some time in the test garden, I wandered over to the avenue of idea gardens, a number of which were new since our last visit. I was taken by the pot garden (well, what would you expect?) and the display of English terracotta. As it turned out, all of my favorite pots were made by Whichford Pottery in Warwickshire (they always have an advertisement in The Garden), my absolute favorite being one sold as the RHS Jekyll Flowerpot with an inlaid floral design of darker fired clay. You know, we have never visited an English pottery before, and perhaps we should do this on our next trip! And, perhaps we should convince the Garden Room in Shorewood, WI to import a supply of these pots for Wisconsin Gardeners who want something really special!

Most of us made it to the famous rock garden, which is undergoing a progressive reconstruction of the water course and I was surprised to see how severely some of the 100 year old conifers had been severely pruned. Up above the rock garden, I marveled at the jewels in the alpine houses with their security alarm system. I was only later to realize that I completely missed the new Piet Oudolf grass garden just beyond (isn’t that always the way, when you get back on the coach and hear the chatter, you are made to feel that you missed the best part of the garden?). I did not make it into the tropical glass houses with their fabulous displays of fuchsias, begonias, and exotic impatiens this time, but perhaps on the next visit! I spent most of the last hour looking at books in the shop and managed to view the Whichford pottery display of terracotta in the Plant Center (yes, definitely we will have to visit this pottery) I even managed to have a coconut cake and a cup of coffee in the new eating place now tacked on

to the book shop.

From Wisely, we managed to navigate the dreaded M-25 (ring road around London) and made it to the Copthorne Hotel near Gatwick, in less than a half an hour. We said our good-bys to Max who promised to accompany us on our 2006 tour of English gardens! Later that evening in the hotel dining room, we had a champagne reception courtesy of the Felix Hotel in Cambridge (for some transgressions which included a horrific group check in procedure and some confusion over our breakfast entitlement), and then our pick of the buffet tables in the Carvery Restaurant. It was a rather noisy affair, but as there was a big wedding party across the hall, we did not seem too out of place. We said our goodbyes to Frankie and our fellow travelers and turned in for the night. It was not a quiet night, as the wedding revelers were running around the hotel until 4 AM. Some of us did manage to see each other again at breakfast before our departure for the airport.

For those of you who have followed these epistles and have been along on one or even all of these trips, I suspect you have a your own ideas of what constitutes a “great garden”. We have seen many. Ed Hasselkus purchased a book at the Wisley bookshop entitled ‘England’s 100 Greatest Gardens’. I understand that we have visited 30 of these on our four trips to date. But a “great garden” is truly an individual thing. Sometimes, a great garden exists only in our distant memory. The first “garden” that really made an impression on me belonged to a great aunt who lived in the Catskills somewhere near West Point, New York. I only visited her garden once. I was but four years old and had come to attend an uncle’s marriage and graduation from West Point, the first week of June. I remember a long gravel drive up to a house on the top of the hill, overlooking the magnificent Hudson River Valley cut from the surrounding mountains. The drive planted on both sides, was my first double herbaceous border done in the English style. I vividly recall the overwhelming fragrance and the sheer beauty of the flowers,

but best of all, my great uncle, sensing the appreciation of this exceptional four year old, walked me along the drive while cutting me a huge bouquet of the flowers I particularly admired. I was in heaven and still remember my aunt’s look of dismay at her husband’s transgression when we made it back into the house.(55 years later I can appreciate things from my great aunt’s point of view!) The next morning as we drove away, I can still visualize the border framed by the back window of our old Ford. This was a garden viewed but for a few milliseconds of my life, but it will always be one of the “greatest gardens” I have ever visited. For me a great garden is one which I inspired to write about after a visit. On entry, you must get a feeling of excitement with the very first impression, which then leads to the great anticipation of what is going to follow. And what follows should not disappoint but lead to a succession of oohs! and aahs! The garden becomes crystallized in your memory after leaving it, and over a fine glass of wine or a gourmet dinner that evening or on many subsequent occasions, engenders wistful conversation. Well, what are the four greatest gardens I have seen on these trips? Only if you twist my arm until I cry “uncle”, my four most memorable gardens from these four WHPS trips are (drum roll): Sissinghurst Castle, Preen Manor, York Gate, and Bryan’s Ground. Of these four very different gardens, only one is not in Ed’s book, Preen Manor.

A. Hort Hound

