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# NEWSLETTER – WINTER 2021

## *In this Issue*

- Editorial
- Study Day Programme – Friday 19th February
- October Study Day and AGM Reports
- RHS Practical Courses at Cholmondeley
- Dates for your Diary

## **Editorial**

Welcome and a very Happy New Year to you! I think many of us are quite relieved to see the back of 2020, but clearly, we are still not out of the woods with the pandemic. I do hope you and your families have been keeping well and coping with all the lockdowns and restrictions as well as can be expected.

We are happy to announce the programme for our February study day. Our speakers will be Advolly Richmond and Barry Grain, both former students at Reaseheath who have gone on to do exciting things. It should be an interesting and varied day and we hope you will join us. The programme and details of the speakers are below.

Also in this newsletter, our President, Will Parks, has written an article on the RHS Practical Courses which are now being held at Cholmondeley Castle. What a wonderful place to study – I am quite jealous. Perhaps it will inspire you to send in an application for one of the courses next year.

Best Wishes to you all

Debbie Holden (Chairman)

## **STUDY DAY PROGRAMME** **Friday 19th February 2021 – Zoom Meeting**

As things lurch from tier to tier and lockdown to lockdown, it has become clear that we won't be able to meet face-to-face at Reaseheath for our Study Day and so we will be Zooming again.

While this is very disappointing for us, our October meeting on Zoom was very successful and we had a lot of positive feedback from members. I hope that you will join us – sadly we will all miss the plant sale and fish & chips in the Reaseheath canteen, but I'm sure it will be an informative and enjoyable day nonetheless.

We will send out the meeting invitation with the Zoom link one week before the meeting, so keep an eye on your inbox for it.

The programme for the day is:

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|-------|---|
| 10:30 | Zoom meeting will be opened to allow members to connect in  |
| 10:45 | Welcome and introduction followed by<br>Lecture: <b>"A Quick Introduction to the Social History of Gardens"</b> by <b>Advolly Richmond</b> , Garden, Landscape & Social Historian |
| 12:00 | Break for lunch   |
| 13:00 | Meeting will be opened to allow members to connect back in  |
| 13:15 | Lecture: <b>"The Evolution of Cholmondeley Castle Gardens"</b> by <b>Barry Grain</b> , Head Gardener at Cholmondeley Castle   |
| 14:30 | Close   |

**Advolly Richmond** – Garden, Landscape and Social Historian



Advolly Richmond is an independent researcher in garden, landscape and social history and is based in Shrewsbury, Shropshire. She has an MA in Garden History from the University of Bristol and is qualified to RHS Level 3 in Practical Horticulture.

She conducts her research alongside the delivery of Introduction to Garden History courses for National Trust staff in various regions and courses for Birmingham University at Winterbourne House and Gardens, Birmingham and at the Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery. She has presented a feature for Gardeners' World from the 18th century Painswick Rococo garden, Gloucestershire (October 2019) and written for The English Garden magazine (January 2020) and is a Garden Media Guild member.

She passionately believes that the study of garden history must take into account every aspect of Society and therefore it can never truly be separated from social and political history. Key factors such as economics, politics, conflict, religion and the influence of travel can all inform us how gardens and green spaces have been developed over the centuries. Garden history encapsulates a fascinating mixture of subjects including landscape, architectural, literary and art history.

**Barry Grain** – Head Gardener Cholmondeley Castle Gardens



Coming from a family of gardeners it was natural that Barry should follow suit, and on leaving school in 1996 he started an apprenticeship in horticulture at Chester Zoo with day release at Reaseheath College.

During his career Barry has also worked at Eaton Hall, Chester and as head gardener at a private estate in Oxfordshire before taking the post of head gardener at Cholmondeley Castle in February 2013.

Barry works closely with the Cholmondeley family, and together they are guiding the garden through a new and exciting era.

**"The Past, Present and Future of Chatsworth Gardens"**



**Mick Brown** gave a very interesting talk about the history and the present developments of the gardens at Chatsworth House. Currently he has the title of horticultural technician with responsibility for keeping the plant collection records at Chatsworth, the purchase of seeds, bulbs and plants and management of the 75 volunteers who work in the gardens at Chatsworth.

His talk set out how the history of the gardens at Chatsworth influences the present and the future for the gardens but does not set things in stone. The 12th Duke and Duchess of Devonshire are keen to influence the present and future development of the gardens at Chatsworth, mindful of the past but keen to add their influence.

Chatsworth is set within the Peak District in a sheltered valley which provides water resources to the gardens and surrounding parkland. The site was listed in the Domesday Book but the first major development of the house was started by Bess of Hardwick and William Cavendish in 1549. This Tudor House included a garden and productive areas such as fish ponds and orchards. Very little remains of this apart from some outbuildings in the parkland - the Hunting Tower and Queen Mary's Bower.

The second phase of garden development occurred in the late 17thC when the 1st Duke of Devonshire rebuilt the Tudor house and redeveloped the gardens to reflect the formal Dutch and French styles of the period including the use of long tree lined avenues and formal parterres of the period. Apart from an engraving and a painting which shows the house and gardens at this period very little survives, although drought conditions the pattern of some of the parterres have shown up in the lawn.

The garden's third phase of development occurred the 1740s when the formality of the 17thC gardens and the remaining productive areas from the Tudor period were swept away as extensive parklands in the English Landscape style were introduced by the 3rd Duke who employed Capability Brown. The current approach to Chatsworth is through these parklands.

The next phase occurred during the early 19thC when the 6th Duke employed the great horticulturist and engineer Joseph Paxton to be head gardener at Chatsworth from the 1830s. Paxton was responsible for significant extension to the pleasure and productive gardens. He accompanied the Duke on his 'grand tour' and was asked to build a large rock garden which still exists. He also designed the Imperial Fountain - gravity fed from 3 dammed ponds in the hills above the house.

The 19thC was the era of exploration and the work of the plant hunters bringing back plants from around the world. Paxton designed a number of glasshouses to house an important collection of orchids, the giant water lily *Victoria amazonica* (Paxton was the first to get it to flower in Britain) and the Cavendish banana plant. His enthusiasm for exotic plants led to him building the first large greenhouse in the country – the Great Conservatory – to house tropical plants. This was big enough so that carriages could be driven 2 abreast in it. His ability with glass engineering led to him being given the task of designing the Crystal Palace Great Exhibition.

The turmoil of the 20thC – the two world wars and the introduction of death duties on the great estates led to significant change in the gardens. The Great Conservatory was too costly to heat and was demolished in the 1920s and parts of the garden became overgrown with a reduction in the workforce. The 11th Duke opened the garden to the public and made the house and gardens into a charitable trust in order to preserve them for the visiting public.





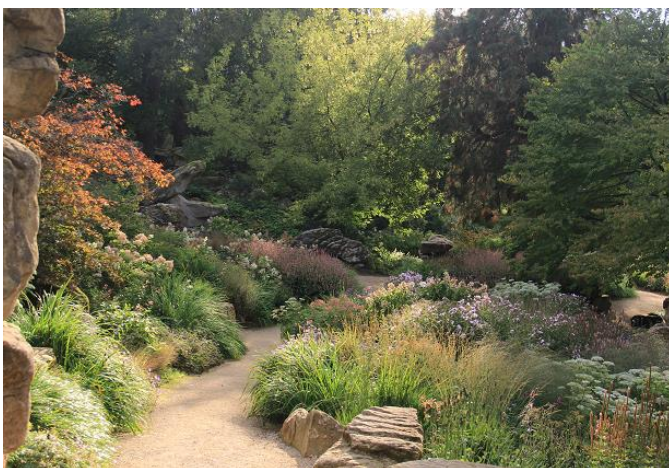
Aerial view of Chatsworth



Replanting in the borders next to the maze

The current Duke and Duchess continue to live at Chatsworth in private quarters for which they pay a commercial rent. They continue to have a significant interest in the future of the house and its gardens. They have encouraged the redevelopment of a number of areas in the garden. These included the return of the productive kitchen garden close to house. They also opened up the gardens near the house (by removing hedges) to ensure that the Capability Brown parkland could be seen. However, they also wanted to add a modern layer to the gardens. The first of these developments was the relocation of Dan Pearson's Laurent Perrier Chelsea garden to Chatsworth in 2015. This has provided important lessons for the further development of the gardens – such as the need for soil improvement and provision of irrigation infrastructure.

The next major development necessitated the clearing of *Rhododendron ponticum* from the woodland areas to create a series of five glades which has involved the planting of 250,000 plants over the past two years as well as the sowing of a meadow. The new 'Arcadia' area has been sponsored by Gucci and has been designed by Tom Stuart-Smith. He has also taken on the task of restoring the Paxton rock garden. This has involved cutting back overgrown areas and putting in winding paths without steps to improve interest and disabled access.



New planting in the rock garden



Newly planted woodland glades

A key theme from Mick's talk was that whilst the historic layers at Chatsworth do need to be respected the gardens do need to be reinvigorated from time to time to meet the needs of the public and the house in order to sustain them for the future.

In the question-and-answer session, Mick explained that Chatsworth was endeavouring to reduce their use of chemicals although glyphosate ground clearance was still required. He explained the very scientific approach to development of the seed mix by Professor Hitchmough of Sheffield University for the 5th Arcadia glade – in order to get the correct mix of plants to produce a long season of interest which will sustain itself through self-seeding.

Mick also put forward his opinion that the benefits of Chatsworth hosting the RHS show outweighed any negatives. Lastly Mick explained his career background in response to a question which involved him working as a florist and a teacher before becoming horticulturist.

**Paul Brickwood**

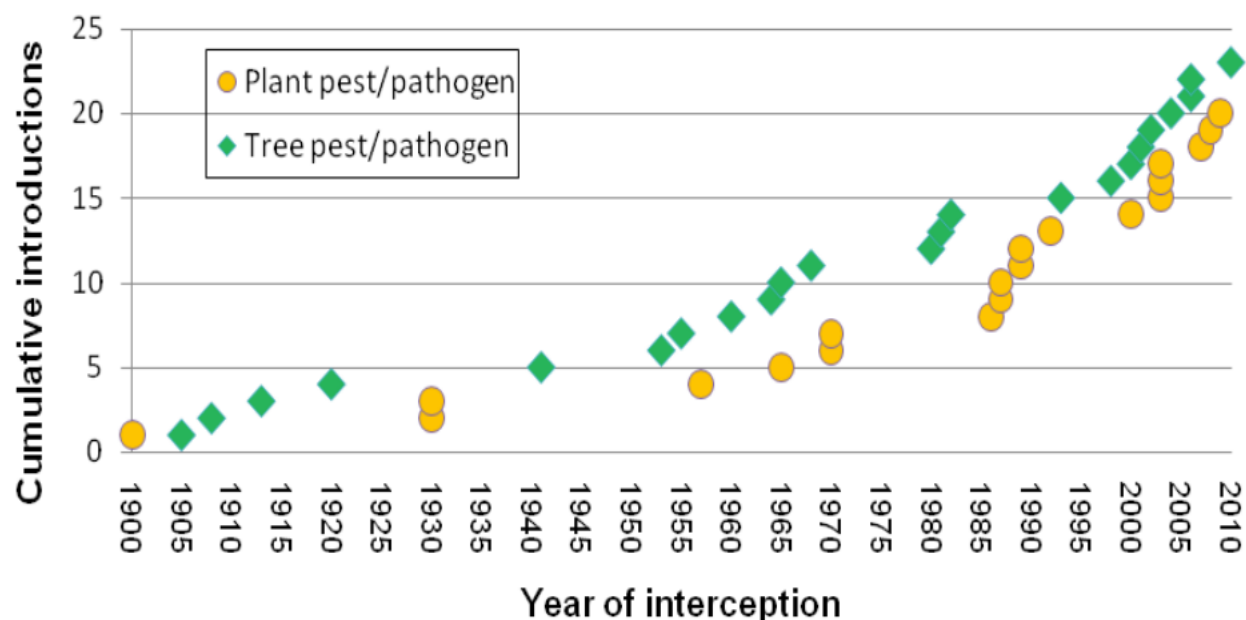
### ***"The Invaders - the latest pest and disease threats to the UK"***



We were fortunate to have a very interesting, if slightly scary, talk from **John Scrace** entitled "The Invaders, the latest Pest and Disease threats to the UK".

John has over 30 years' experience in the identification and control of plant diseases and disorders. He has worked for the Royal Horticultural Society since 2001 and also does work for the Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA), ADAS, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew and others. His main area of work is diagnosis of plant problems on both garden plants and commercial crops.

John told us that there has been a large increase in the number of pests and diseases entering the UK in recent years. There are a number of factors contributing to this increase, climate change, the huge increase in international trade and lack of Plant Health Inspectors available to check imports and exports. Also, we are bound by EU regulations which enables free movement of plants within the EU and finally we are planting larger plants, imported from Italy and Holland and mature species are often difficult to inspect.





Particular diseases that John mentioned were Ash Dieback, a fungal disease now widespread in the UK, and Oak Processionary Moth which arrived in London in 2006.

Tragically, Ash Dieback was mostly imported into the UK in 2012 on young plants imported from the Netherlands which had been grown from UK seed; these saplings were distributed far and wide in the UK spreading Ash Dieback with it. Ash Dieback will eventually kill the ash tree but on a positive note, some ash trees appear to be resistant to the disease, giving us hope that we might be able to continue to grow ash trees.



Symptoms of Ash Dieback

A couple of pests are also causing problems, for example the Asian and Citrus Longhorn Beetle. Both are native to parts of Asia and being imported to the UK on plant material. The larvae are more damaging than the adult beetle. John told us that the Asian Longhorn Beetle was first found in Kent in 2012 and it was discovered that a building company had imported slates from China and discovered the beetles in a wooden crate containing the slates – the crates should have been heat-treated to prevent this but clearly this hadn't happened. Slightly more frightening was the example John told us about where beetle larvae had arrived in the UK inside the wood of dining chairs imported from China. An offending bug had chewed its way out of the plastic seat covering and was found wandering around the dining room!



Asian and Citrus Longhorn Beetle



Box Tree Moth

Fuchsia Gall Mite, a pest attributed to many people bringing home holiday souvenirs, and the Box Tree Moth were also mentioned as becoming a problem particularly as they are spreading up country from the South/South East.

Many of you will be aware already of Box Blight, a fungal disease which has caused major issues for the National Trust Gardens and English Heritage. Again, the spread of this disease is attributed to movement of infected plant material.

One big concern is *Xylella fastidiosa*, a bacterial disease, which is causing a huge amount of damage in mainland Europe and 595 plant species are susceptible to this disease including vine, citrus, olive, cherry, oak, lavender, holly and many more. It spreads between infected plants by leaf hoppers. It's not currently present in the UK and while importers are being vigilant, it is hoped that the climate in the UK will not suit this disease. It is a notifiable disease and is responsible for the death of many, many olive trees in Italy.



*Xylella fastidiosa on old olive trees*

So, having told us all about these various pests and diseases and scaring us keen gardeners half to death, John was able to advise us that there are things we can do to prevent these nasties appearing in our gardens:

- When sourcing new plants give them a good check over for health and vigour, if the plant looks poorly it probably is.
- Buy UK grown plants.
- If buying imported stock check that the suppliers have quarantine measures in place.
- Avoid holiday souvenirs
- Plant small and watch your plants grow.
- Keep your eyes peeled for anything unusual.

***Alison Kinsella***

### **THEA 42nd AGM Report**

The minutes of the 41st AGM were accepted by the members attending the meeting.

The chairman's report (read by Debbie Holden) described the two successful and well attended study days that we had in the preceding 12 months and our regret that we were unable to run any of the planned garden visits over the summer.

Kate Bell, our treasurer, gave a report on the THEA Annual Financial Statement.

No members have put themselves forward to join the committee and all current committee members have agreed to stay in their current roles for the next 12 months. The AGM finished with another plea to members to assist on the committee to help organise the study days and outings.

Minutes of the AGM are available – please email [horticultural.enthusiasts@gmail.com](mailto:horticultural.enthusiasts@gmail.com) if you would like a copy now. Otherwise, they will be emailed out to all members a month before our 43rd AGM which will be held at the end of October 2021.



The Cholmondeley estate has been home to the Marquesses of Cholmondeley since Norman times. The Castle was built in stages between 1801 and 1828, whilst the garden was landscaped around it. Much of the modern garden was the life's work of Lady Lavinia Cholmondeley who, following her marriage in 1949 to Hugh, 6th Marquess, set about creating "a garden of great romance". Over the next 65 years she



transformed the garden in her own uncontrived planting style, adding many new areas of planting and editing all the existing ones. Her legacy is to be found in her love of the spring garden, with Cholmondeley being home to important collections of Magnolia, Camellia, Rhododendron and Cornus. The garden continues to evolve in her stead under the guidance of David, 7th Marquess of Cholmondeley.



*Will Parks & Barry Grain*

Reaseheath College is now working in partnership with Cholmondeley Castle which is now an outreach centre. So, in association with all the wonderful resources available at Reaseheath College, we are now able to offer this fabulous opportunity to students wishing to study and be assessed for the RHS Practical Level 2 & 3 courses. This year has already started, and the students are enthusiastically enjoying this great opportunity which commenced in September 2020.

As well as studying and carrying out the assessments required for both qualifications, it means that the students will receive a more rounded horticultural experience, having the opportunity to see a working garden and estate through all the seasons. This includes seeing how the gardens change with the emergence of bulbs from late Winter into Spring, through to the full splendour of Summer, then the wonderful colours of Autumn and the putting to bed of the gardens for the Winter.



The wonderful colours of Autumn



Students cultivating their own plots in the walled kitchen garden



The resources available at Cholmondeley are second to none, so not only will the students carry out gardening and horticultural tasks such as propagation from seed and cuttings, all aspects of pruning and grafting, ground preparation and plot management, live plant identification, establishment and maintenance of plants and so much more. But they will also get the chance to work on projects around the gardens and estate such as lifting and dividing perennials, tree and shrub planting, the creation of new borders and planting areas plus the establishment of a new rose garden. They will also be able to cultivate their own plot in the walled kitchen garden. This will all be done under the supervision of the Head Gardener and the Horticultural teaching staff of Reaseheath College.

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#### Dates for your Diary

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- Super Summer Study Day – Friday, 2nd July 2021 – we still hope this will go ahead face-to-face and we confirm details when we know more
- Autumn Study Day – **To be confirmed**, but probably Friday, 29th October 2021

We hope that we will be able to add a few organised garden visits to your diary for this summer – we probably won't try and organise anything until mid-July in the hope that we will be allowed to get together by then. Details will be announced in our Spring Newsletter which will be sent out in April.