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# **NEWSLETTER – AUTUMN 2023**

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### **Editorial**

Welcome to our Autumn Newsletter. It's been a rather strange summer, weather-wise this year; hot then cold then hot again, followed by a wet July and August and a hot week in September. My garden hasn't been sure whether it was coming or going but my hydrangeas and phlox have been very happy with the situation.

We've had a busy summer with our three sets of garden visits this year taking in Ashwood Nurseries, David Austin Roses, Stone House Cottage Garden and RHS Bridgewater. We were very fortunate with the weather in all cases and the trips were largely well attended and we received positive feedback, which is always a plus. Reports on the visits are included further down the Newsletter.

Friday 27th October is our next Study Day at Reaseheath. The speakers and the programme for the day are announced below. We have two very interesting speakers – Christine Walkden and Sylvia Travers. We hope you will be able to join us for this meeting.

In the AGM part of the Study Day, we will be asking for people to volunteer to join us on the committee (yes, again!!). Please do give this some thought as we are a friendly bunch and our meetings are always enjoyable with many digressions on gardening and plants in addition to the normal committee business. There's almost always cake involved too – what more could you want! We are pleased that Ann Pinnington has joined the committee and she has already come up with lots of really good suggestions.

We are looking for suggestions for gardens to visit in 2024. Are there any gardens you have visited recently that you would recommend? Do let us know. Similarly, if you have heard any good speakers at events you have attended, we'd love to hear about them as well. Just drop an email to our email account – we'd love to hear from you.

Best wishes to you all

Debbie Holden, Chairman

**STUDY DAY PROGRAMME**  
**Friday 27th October 2023 – Main Lecture Theatre, Reaseheath College**

Here is the programme for our next Study Day, which includes the Annual General Meeting (AGM). We will be back in the usual lecture theatre at Reaseheath, next to the restaurant this time, which is good news.

From 10:00	<b>Sign in</b>
10:15	Coffee available in Restaurant
10:45	Lecture: <b>“Making the most of your Garden” by Christine Walkden</b>
11.45	THEA Plant Sale
12:00	Lunch available in Restaurant Plant Sale – continued
13:00	Raffle Prize Draw
13:15	45 <sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting
13:30	Lecture: <b>“Breathing New Life into Old Walls - restoring the walled kitchen garden at Haigh Hall” by Sylvia Travers</b>

### **Christine Walkden**



Christine needs little introduction as a familiar face on television and a regular contributor to garden magazines. She has been a keen horticulturalist all her life, from her early career in a parks department, to the Royal Botanic Gardens at Wakehurst Place and has worked with many colleges throughout the UK.

As a freelance plantswoman she has lectured nationally and internationally, appearing on many television and radio shows and has written several gardening books. She has a wealth of experience to share with us.

The talk “making the most of your garden” looks at many of the things we do in our garden that we shouldn't, even though we all know we are doing it. She will encourage us to change our practices and improve our gardens.

## Sylvia Travers



Sylvia has worked in horticulture for nearly 20 years, having studied at the National Botanic Gardens in Dublin and Reading University. She took a detour to Denmark ten years ago to complete a PhD in plant science, researching apples and has specialised in fruit and vegetable horticulture throughout and managed the productive gardens at the Lost Gardens of Heligan before moving on to set up and manage kitchen gardens for Michelin starred restaurants.

She was part of the team that rebuilt the walled gardens at RHS Garden Bridgewater. As well as working on the restoration of Haigh Hall, she is also a part time tutor at West Dean College in Hampshire and consults on all aspects of walled kitchen garden restoration and management.

The talk covers her work at the 300-acre Haigh Hall estate in Wigan which is undergoing major restoration. The hall will become an art gallery and cultural space, with a cafe and restaurant, while the Victorian potting sheds and walled gardens will undergo a full programme of rejuvenation. There will be new glasshouses and using methods old and new, the kitchen garden will once again become intensely productive. There will also be a new food focused horticultural apprenticeship developed in collaboration with Wigan and Leigh College. Her talk will give an insight into the work that goes into renovating a walled garden; and how to make it intensely productive, whilst also creating a beautiful, bio-diverse space.

### Arrangements on the day

This event will take place in the **Main Lecture Theatre** adjacent to the Restaurant. Please assemble there from 10:00 a.m. onwards to sign in. If you haven't yet paid your annual subscription we will be happy to relieve you of your £10 when you sign in.

**Coffee** can be purchased in the Restaurant before the start of the meeting. **Lunch** will be available in the Restaurant from 12.00.

Members are asked to park in the **Main Students Car Park** near the Worlestone road (Main Road) **entrance 1** (see Campus map). For members who are unable to walk far, the college reserves **six parking spaces** for us in front of the Old Hall which are accessed from the college entrance on the A51, almost opposite the Reaseheath Equestrian Centre. If the security bar is closed, simply drive up to it and it will open automatically.

We are planning to hold a plant sale and if you have been busy propagating over the summer, then please bring samples of your efforts along. Thank you. 😊

### 45th Annual General Meeting Nominations to THEA Committee

Our Annual General Meeting will be held in the Main Lecture Hall after lunch at the Study Day. We try to keep it as short as possible by sending out information for your scrutiny prior to the meeting. However, we are aware that it is important that we leave enough time for you to question the committee and for you to get your ideas and opinions across. If you are unable to attend, please contact any committee member and leave your apologies.

We would like to invite you to join the THEA committee, either at the AGM or at any other time. To find out more, either speak to one of the committee members (below) or read the **Nominations to THEA Committee** information sheet which has been emailed or posted to you together with the AGM Papers.

THEA Committee meets three or four times a year for a two-hour meeting to plan Study Days and Summer Outings and to decide topics for the Newsletter etc. There is no fixed term for a Committee Member and you don't need to have any special skills, although to be able to communicate by email makes life easier.

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### **Annual Subscriptions for 2023/24 Now Due**

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Annual Subscriptions for 2023/24 became due on 1<sup>st</sup> September; it remains at £10.00 for both members and associate members. A renewal notice with details of how to pay has been sent out via email but if you would like this resending, please email [horticultural.enthusiasts@gmail.com](mailto:horticultural.enthusiasts@gmail.com). Prompt payment would be appreciated and if you decide you don't want to renew, then **please let us know** and we'll stop chasing you! Thank you.

New members who joined between May and August this year do not need to renew until 01/09/24.

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### **Memories of our Summer Visits**

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This year we had three sets of visits – all were well attended with around 30 members and guests attending each visit. In all cases we did well with the weather and many of us took the opportunity to buy plant souvenirs at each location (it would be churlish not to!).

Below are the reports on the visits for those of you who weren't able to come along.

As ever, we are always looking for suggestions of places to visit – if you have any suggestions for our 2024 visits, please let us know. Thank you.

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### **Ashwood Nurseries – Tuesday, 18th April by Helen Gardiner**

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Our visit to Ashwood Nurseries near Kingswinford in the West Midlands included a tour of 'John's Garden', the private garden of Chelsea Gold medallist John Massey who set up the nursery. Our guide was head gardener Nigel Hopes, who gave us a fascinating tour of this inspirational garden – even in April the borders are full of interesting specimens.

Nigel took us through the various gardens, starting with the Christopher Lloyd Garden – he said John and Christopher were friends. When we were there in April it was planted up with yellow tulips and primulas – later in the season this would be replanted with a tropical feel, reminiscent of Great Dixter's bright colour schemes.





THEA members about to start the tour



Christopher Lloyd inspired planting

Nigel told us he prefers to plant tulips singly rather than en masse to avoid clumps of what he feels are unattractive leaves. He also pointed out a group of *Rhododendron yakushimanum* 'Koichiro Wada', which he liked for its spreading shape, silvery new growth with pink buds opening to white flowers, and brown indumentum underneath the leaf.

Ashwood's famous hellebores were finishing, but there was still a lot of colour in the fading flower heads. Here they feed their hellebores in July or August and mulch them well. Self-sown teasels had been left over winter to provide structure – the gardeners weed out any that seed in the wrong place.



Tulips were a striking feature of the garden when we visited



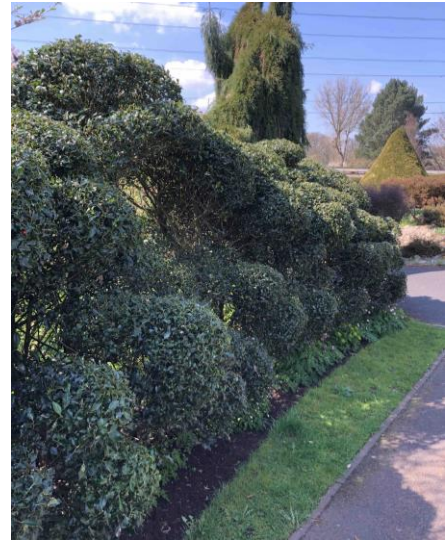
Hellebores with interesting willow structures

Part of the garden features meadow planting in which is planted a stunning group of jewel-like *Anemone pavonina* – Nigel said these need an open site and free-draining soil.





Delicate *Anemone pavonina* dancing in the breeze accompanied by a metal sheep, one of many sculptures in the garden.



Cloud-pruned *Ilex aquifolium* 'Alaska'

Round the corner from the meadow, a line of cloud-pruned *Ilex aquifolium* 'Alaska' demonstrated the gardening team's skill in pruning. This seemed to be a signature of the garden, where trees and shrubs are carefully edited to create interesting shapes. In the autumn/winter garden the evergreens were important and coloured stems of cornus in front of evergreen shrubs set off the darker foliage.



We heard the story of how squirrels had raided the greenhouses for *Fritillaria meleagris* corms that were being grown for sale, and buried them in the iris bed – but they only took the white ones – this is now a glorious display in spring. A wonderful example of squirrel gardening!

As we approached the patio area, the garden's owner John Massey popped out from behind a wall and chatted to us.

John Massey on the left, with head gardener Nigel on the right







The pots on the patio garden are regularly moved and replaced when the plants have gone over. They included alpine troughs and magnificent pots of colour.



Interesting metal sculptures are a feature of John's Garden. The garden is bordered by the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal.

After the tour our members dispersed for lunch and a browse in the garden centre for some choice reminders of our visit.

It was a super garden to visit and one which would be worth a return visit at any time of year.

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**David Austin Roses and Stone House Cottage – Monday, 17th July by Debbie Holden**

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The trip to **David Austin Roses** was more exciting than planned – an unexpected road closure with poor diversion signs caught most of us out just before we got to David Austin and many of us had an “exciting” tour of the area. Sadly, this delayed a number of members arriving at David Austin, and those that did were a bit frazzled!

We were split in to two groups of 15 and were taken into the garden by different routes. To start with we were told a bit about the history of David Austin Roses and then taken to see some of the beautiful roses in the gardens, along with the attractive companion planting – lots of ideas for everyone. Despite the hot, dry weather we'd had up to that point, the roses were growing well and looked healthy.



Some of the rose displays and examples of companion planting in the gardens.





The roses grown in pots were also thriving – the key to success was lots of water every day and regular feeding.

Particularly interesting was our behind-the-scenes tour which took us to the glasshouses where the rose breeding was done. It was an amazing sight. In one huge glasshouse there were the parent plants that had been crossed this year – each seedhead/hip was labelled with the parent plants – each year 40,000 individual cross-pollinations are done by the breeders. There were literally hundreds of these. When ripe, the seeds are extracted and around 350,000 would be sown and grown on.



In the next greenhouse were the resulting plants from the previous year – literally thousands of them crammed into a huge greenhouse. How gardeners didn't disappear into there, never to be seen again, I do not know! These young plants were grown on until flowering and the best selected. These will be propagated and grown on in field trials for up to five years to determine whether they are garden worthy. Of the successful ones, maybe one or two will be selected to be sold commercially. We didn't get to see the rose fields but I'm sure they must be an amazing sight.

One amusing story we were told was about a rose rejected to the compost heap as not suitable. Despite this, the rose continued to grow and its potential was spotted. It was taken back in to trials and is now one of the very successful roses available today called Generous Gardener – and what a beauty it is.

After the tour many of us stopped for lunch in either the café or restaurant and many people took home some beautiful roses – the nursery had so many to choose from.

It was inspirational and I am now desperately trying to work out where I can put extra roses in my garden . . . roses growing up obelisks is probably the answer!





From David Austin, many of our members ventured on to **Stone House Cottage Garden** – thank goodness for satnav as it was quite a complicated journey!



Stone House Cottage Garden was created in 1975 by Louisa and her husband starting almost from scratch. The garden is within a one-acre walled garden and the walls are quite unusual with quite a lot of towers and follies (many built by Louisa's husband) set into the walls – one in particular gave an excellent high-level view of the garden (if you were brave enough to tackle the spiral staircase) – see view to the left.

The garden has a romantic feel to it with overflowing borders within a number of garden rooms, separated by yew hedges. Louisa maintains the garden herself which is a major achievement. The garden was bursting with colour and contained a number of unusual plants and was a pleasure to walk around.



Some examples of the planting and some of the building set into the walls of the walled garden

Adjoining the garden was the nursery. This has been scaled down over the years as Louisa admits that it was becoming too much work to maintain all of the plants she used to propagate and stock. There were still some choice plants there and, as usual, THEA members did their bit and bought a few reminders of the day.



### Visit to RHS Garden Bridgewater – Thursday, 17th August by Helen Gardiner

It was a joy to be back at RHS Garden Bridgewater again this year (THEA first visited in 2021), especially after having had a talk by its curator Marcus Chilton-Jones at our study day in February.



This time we had a tour of the walled gardens, which gave us some background into the progress of this area of the garden and how it is used.

The beds in the walled gardens have filled out since our last visit and now feature large stands of perennials such as eupatorium, persicaria, phlox, *Anemone japonica* and *Verbena bonariensis*. A lot of these plants are ones we use in our own gardens, but seeing them in such large groupings was, for me, inspirational.



Wonderful *Eupatorium purpureum*



Wild flowers sown outside the walled garden

Wild flowers were very much in evidence this year, echoing the increasing trend, seen for example in designer gardens incorporating 'weeds' at this year's RHS Chelsea Flower Show.





The Mediterranean Garden is planted for low rainfall (though not so appropriate for this summer's downpours!) and features grasses and other plants suited to dry conditions – perovskia, alliums, salvias, stachys and lavender.

We learned about how the garden has been designed with the community in mind and that part of the walled garden is given over to members of the community to come and work in.

In the Peel Learning Garden children can come and learn how to grow, and there is also a wellbeing garden.



After the tour we had the opportunity to explore the wider gardens. Behind the walled gardens the hydrangea trial is ongoing with some sumptuous plants on show, and there is now also a trial of heleniums, which looked vibrant.

In the Welcome Garden, veronicastrum, lilies, lythrum and selenium were stand-out plants.

I noticed how the Chinese Stream Garden is now a lot more established. New since our last visit is the music pavilion, which is an interesting centrepiece and has apparently been built using classical Chinese architectural design and authentic construction.

As the Bridgewater Garden continues to be developed it will be interesting to revisit and see the changes.

#### Other Dates for your 2023/24 Diary

- Next Study Day – Friday, 23rd February 2024
- Autumn Study Day – probably Friday, 1st November 2024 (not 100% certain until Reaseheath publish their term dates)