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NEWSLETTER – AUTUMN 2024

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Editorial

Welcome to our Autumn Newsletter. It's been a rather strange summer, such as it was. On the plus side, I don't think our water butts were empty all summer which has been great news for our water bill. There have been some strange effects with some perennials growing much taller than usual, and then promptly flopping over in the strong wind. Ah, the joys of gardening!

Despite a mixed summer, we were very fortunate with the weather on our garden visits this year. No rain, not windy and not too hot, except for Thenford which was rather warm at times. A big thank you to all of the people who supported our visits this year – I think everyone had a really good time and there was a good variety of different gardens. Of course, now we are looking to our members for suggestions for our 2025 garden visits – if you have any suggestions, please let me know because we need some ideas.

In this newsletter, besides our reports on the garden visits, we have our programme of our Autumn Study Day. We hope you will enjoy our speakers – their subjects are quite diverse and we are all sure to learn a lot. Both Advolly Richmond and John Scrace have spoken at THEA meetings before, during the pandemic when we were holding our Study Days via Zoom ... seems a very long time ago. Both speakers were really excellent then so we are delighted to have them speak to us in person.

I will also be running a high-speed AGM at the study day – if you have any issues you'd like to raise or if you have an interest in joining the committee or just helping out at study days, please let me know. The AGM papers have been sent out to everyone in preparation for this meeting so I hope that you have received them.

Best wishes to you all

Debbie Holden, Chairman

STUDY DAY PROGRAMME
Friday, 1st November 2024 – FE Lecture Theatre, Reaseheath College

Here is the programme for our next Study Day, which includes our Annual General Meeting (AGM). We will be back in the usual lecture theatre (now refurbished and renamed to the **FE Lecture Theatre**) at Reaseheath, next to the restaurant, which is good news.

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 and we are hopeful that there will be fish and chips!

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. Plants sales and our raffles make a big contribution to THEA funds and enable us to keep our membership fees down. We really appreciate your support with this - thank you. 😊

From 10:00	Sign in
10:15	Coffee available in Restaurant
10:45	Lecture: "A Short History of Flowers; The stories that shaped our gardens" by Advolly Richmond , garden historian
11.45	THEA Plant Sale
12:00	Lunch available in Restaurant Plant Sale – continued
13:00	Raffle Prize Draw
13:15	46 th Annual General Meeting
13:30	Lecture: "Fabulous Fungi (and Malicious Moulds)" by John Scrace , freelance plant pathologist

More about our speakers:

Advolly Richmond



Advolly is a plants and gardens historian, TV and radio presenter and independent researcher in social history. She lectures on garden history subjects from the sixteenth to twentieth centuries and contributes garden history features on BBC Gardeners' World and presents plant history profiles for BBC Radio 4's Gardeners' Question Time. She is also the presenter of The Garden History Podcast, an A-Z. Advolly is passionate about promoting garden history in all its branches and likes to encourage people to value their garden and landscape heritage. She has written numerous articles and features on plants and historic gardens for a variety of publications.

Have you ever wondered where your favourite garden flowers came from? Where their names are derived from? Or why some cultivars go in and out of favour? Every flower we grow has a story, and in her new book *A Short History of Flowers: The Stories That Shaped Our Gardens*, Advolly takes us on a tour of the most intriguing, surprising and enriching.

Tales of exploration, everlasting love and bravery bring these beautiful flowers to life. Advolly has dug down to uncover the royalty, scholars, pioneers and a smuggler or two that have all played a part in discovering and cultivating some of our favourite species. From the lavish bougainvillea, found by an 18th century female botanist in disguise, to the humble but majestic snowdrop casting a spell and causing a frenzy, Advolly brings alive the people who introduced and cultivated some of our favourite plants and shares the juicy tales that made some flowers so well known.

John Scrace – Freelance Plant Pathologist



John has over thirty years' experience in the identification and control of plant diseases and disorders. He graduated with a degree in Plant Biology from the University of Hull, and went on to obtain a Masters in Crop Production from Bath University. After working for ADAS (an agricultural/horticultural consultancy business) for several years John left to set up as a freelance plant pathologist. He has worked for the Royal Horticultural Society since 2001, and has also done 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. He also carries out research and consultancy work, and has lectured on both the RHS and the Royal Botanic Gardens diplomas in horticulture.

'Fabulous fungi (and Malicious Moulds)' takes a wide-ranging look at the world of fungi and mycology. Not just the roles fungi play (both beneficial and harmful) in our gardens and in the wider countryside, but also the ways we can use them (eat them, use them for medicines, etc), how they can harm us, and a look at some of the more spectacular-looking fungi and the weird things fungi do (such as changing the behaviour of insects they infect).

Dates for your 2024/25 Diary

- Next Study Day – Friday, 21st February 2025
- Autumn Study Day – probably Friday, 31st October 2025 (not 100% certain until Reaseheath publish their term dates)

Memories of our Summer Visits

This summer we had four visits to five gardens – 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!) and copious amounts of cake were consumed ... sounds like a perfect way to spend some time.

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 2025 visits**, please let us know. On the committee we're running out of ideas now so any ideas would be appreciated. Thank you

Groobarb's Wild Farm – Friday, 21st June by Debbie Holden

We are all interested in horticulture so we decided to take a look at vegetable growing this year with a visit to Groobarb's Wild Farm at High Legh near Knutsford.

David Fryer, the farmer, told us the background to Groobarbs (the name made up from "grow" and "rhubarb") before taking us on a tour of the site, showing us some of the crops they grow their and their techniques. He described some of the challenges they have and the constant battles (e.g. badgers versus sweetcorn).

David came from a farming family but felt most of the agriculture in Cheshire had now become large monocultures of crops rather than the more mixed crops he remembered from his childhood. He and his wife decided to move in to farming in a more traditional way, buying seven acres of farmland (plus renting a few adjacent acres) near High Legh in Cheshire. Their aim was to grow a wide range of vegetables with a minimal environmental impact with a focus on what's in season and tastes great. He picked up ideas and suggestions about the latest thinking in sustainable agriculture from a Canadian blogger called Jean Martin - if you would like to know more about him, please see <https://www.en.jeanmartinfortier.com/>.



<LEFT> Some of the THEA members hearing about the challenges of growing sweetcorn

Initially Groobarbs sold boxes (Grooboxes) of seasonal vegetables at farmers markets and encouraged people to sign up for regular vegetable box deliveries. As interest grew, they rented more land and employed more local people to grow, harvest and deliver the boxes. The vegetable boxes also include recipe cards with interesting ideas for using the vegetables – quite handy with some of the more unusual vegetables they offer. They now deliver to hundreds of people in Cheshire, Manchester,

Liverpool and parts of Staffordshire & Derbyshire.



Some parsnips which have been allowed to flower to attract pollinators



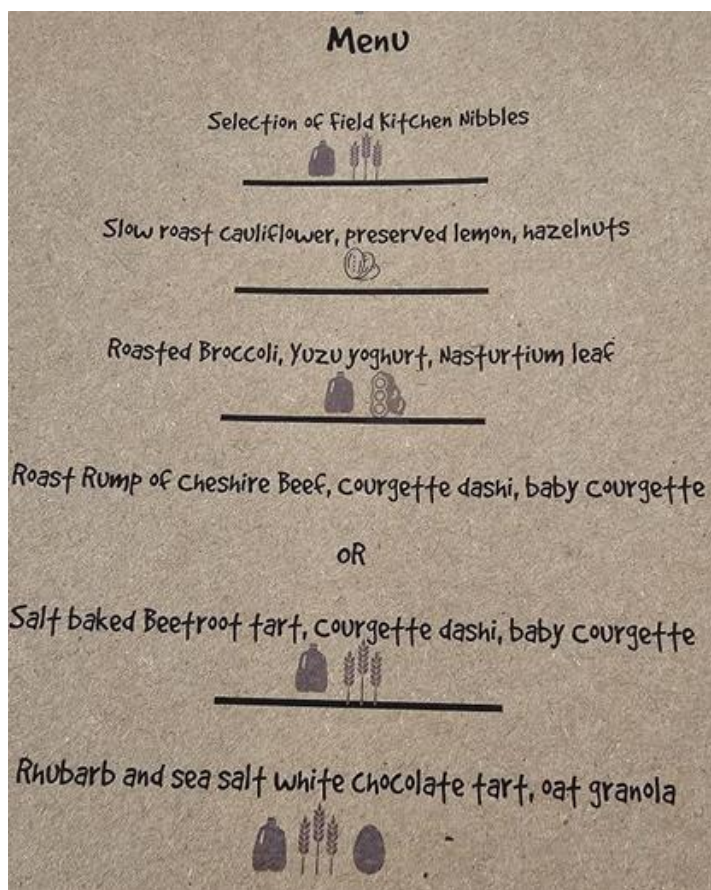
Courgettes growing under plastic to ensure an early harvest, extending the season

They now own a further 70 acres of land near Great Budworth and rent a number of fields near Tarporley. The different soil conditions and the aspect of the land means that they can grow different crops and stagger the harvesting times, giving a longer season to harvest.

On the High Legh site they still grow a number of crops and have several large polytunnels which help extend the harvesting season, allowing for earlier crops. Also on site are a number of large agricultural buildings which house the packing and distribution facilities and the Field Kitchen restaurant where they offer a five-course sharing menu with vegetables as the star of the show.

After the tour we ate lunch in the Field Kitchen and it was a real treat – who knew you could make cauliflower so exciting. The main course had meat and vegetarian options – the locally reared beef was delicious. Everyone agreed that the food and ambiance were excellent and we all left feeling full. It would be worth a visit there another time with family and friends – see <https://groobox.co.uk/field-kitchen> if you would like to go there for a meal.





The menu in the Field Kitchen



A sample vegetable box and dining in the Field Kitchen

Ken Black's Garden, Adswood – Friday, 28th June by Helen Gardiner

June also saw our visit to Ken and Helen Black's garden, Adswood, in Mollington near Chester.



Ken's talk to THEA at the February study day had whetted our appetite and we were delighted to be able to visit and see Ken's extensive collection of clematis. The Blacks open their garden to the National Garden Scheme, and proceeds from our visit in June also went to the charity.

Greeting us at either side of the front door were two climbing Gertrude Jekyll roses, and the borders in the garden at the back were also home to some choice herbaceous plants. But the stars of the garden are the clematis, with seemingly every variety, from the large-flowered to the dainty.

<LEFT> The purple Clematis 'Jackmanii Superba' growing in a border at the front of the house.

Ken has clematis growing against fences, garden buildings and trellis as well as in pots, and many are trained to grow through shrubs and roses.



Clematis 'Princess Kate' growing well against a tree.



Clematis tangutica in a trough with annuals.

As well as the more well-known varieties, such as C. 'Prince Charles', C. Étoile Violette', C. 'Little Nell' and C. 'Betty Corning', Ken also grows unusual varieties, including C. 'Pamiat Serdtsa', C. eriostemon and C. 'Alionushka'.



Clematis 'Betty Corning'.



Clematis 'Alionushka'.

All the clematis were well labelled, but Ken was on hand to answer any queries we had, and his propagation method generated some interest. Ken uses a Hydropod propagator for taking cuttings. This is a misting system into which he inserts the cutting and it is constantly sprayed so that it doesn't dry out.

The afternoon was finished off in true THEA style, with excellent tea and cake. We came away with lots of ideas for growing clematis and new varieties to try.

This year, our coach trip was to Thenford Garden Arboretum and Garden – this had been recommended to us as a “must see” garden by many people and they weren’t wrong.

Our coach trip started well with everyone arriving in plenty of time to board the coach. We had a good journey down, stopping for refreshments at Norton Canes Services.

On arrival we were greeted by Rupert Heseltine, the son of Lord Heseltine and once we had our coffee and cake in the excellent visitor centre, Rupert gave us an introduction to Thenford and its history before setting us free, armed with a map, to explore the garden.

Thenford, which is near Banbury in Oxfordshire, is the home of Lord and Lady Heseltine who purchased the house and its surrounding garden in 1976. It was the end of a long search for a permanent family home after becoming the MP for the Henley-on-Thames constituency. Michael, Anne and their three children, including the then seven-year-old Rupert, moved in and work began. The house was in need of renovation and the garden and surrounding woodland were very overgrown, though for a young Rupert, this was an ideal playground for building dens.

In 1978 Michael was introduced to Harold Hillier through some mutual friends and Harold and his then curator, Roy Lancaster, made several visits to Thenford. They suggested which weed trees should be removed and supplied large numbers of specimen trees to start the arboretum. Roy made many subsequent visits and made recommendations on maintenance and future developments.

Throughout the garden are large numbers of statues, many of which are British contemporary designs. There is a sculpture garden which contains a great many of the dozens of sculptures, including a very imposing, nine-foot-high sculpture of Lenin rescued from Latvia after the fall of communism.

One of the most magnificent sights was the rill in the Fountain Garden – it was on a huge scale and surrounded by conical yew hedges. On a hot day it was very refreshing to see.



Thenford House



The Rill in the Fountain Garden – a wonderful sight

The walled garden was restored and at its centre is a sunning water feature surrounded by geometric paths, hedges and topiary. Next to the walled garden there was an amazing double herbaceous border, full of colour. There was also a lovely rose garden, a trough garden and many ponds, ideal for wildlife.



Water feature in the centre of the walled garden



Part of the amazing double herbaceous border outside the walled garden

After wandering round the more formal parts of the garden it was nice to explore the wider area of the arboretum where there are lakes, restored mediaeval fish ponds, and some magnificent shade-giving trees.



Some of the many dozens of pieces of sculpture created by British artists, placed around the garden – some modern and some classical



The rear of Thenford house viewed from across the large lake

We then had a good journey home and had the added excitement of seeing deer grazing in the car park at Norton Canes services – totally unexpected. A thoroughly enjoyable (and tiring) day was had by all!

Goldstone Hall & Sambrook Manor – Tuesday, 20th August by Helen Gardiner

On our visit to Goldstone Hall and Sambrook Manor, both near Market Drayton in Shropshire we experienced two very different gardens. Goldstone is a country house hotel with five acres of kitchen garden and borders and rose beds. Sambrook is on a more domestic scale – a private garden that opens regularly for the National Garden Scheme.

Goldstone Hall Hotel

We were given a tour of the gardens by head gardener Ross Underwood, starting with the rose garden and herbaceous border in front of the hall – full of colour with phlox, hollyhocks and the towering *Salvia involucrata*.

The stand out roses were *Rosa* 'Ballerina', *R.* 'Tickled Pink' and *R.* 'Rhapsody in Blue'. Ross's feeding regime for the roses includes a dose of manure in winter, two applications of bonemeal and a monthly spray with a foliar feed combined with black-spot treatment in summer.

Ross explained that Goldstone's perfectly manicured lawns are tended by the hall's owner John Cushing. The hall has been in his family since his parents bought it as a private home in 1978. Ross is assisted in the garden by kitchen gardener Sarah Smith-Roe.



Goldstone's herbaceous border is two-tiered – split by a path in the middle. *Salvia involucrata* forms an impressive backdrop against the wall.



Phlox, rudbeckia and *Rosa* 'Ballerina' make a colourful display.

As we entered the one-acre walled garden, we were met with beds of flowers grown for cutting. They were filled with late-summer colour such as dahlias, lupins, zinnias and heleniums.



The cutting beds in full flower



Dahlias with self-sown atriplex in the background

Further into the walled garden were the kitchen beds, where Ross and Sarah grow a huge range of vegetables, fruit and salads that are used in the hotel's restaurant. The gardeners and chefs collaborate on decisions about what to grow.



Artichokes with espaliered pears in the background



Admiring the abundant produce in the kitchen garden

As well as the traditional range of produce, the kitchen garden featured some more unusual plants such as Saskatoon berry (*Amelanchier canadensis*), Sichuan pepper, *Physalis ixocarpa* (tomatillo) and *P. edulis*, yakon (*Smallanthus sonchifolius*) and *Oxalis tuberosa*. Ross said the chefs were even trialling a lady smock soup!

After the tour, we sat down to a lovely lunch made with produce from the garden – quiche, salad, homemade bread, and a chocolate roulade with raspberries and blackberries.

Sambrook Manor

Our next stop was Sambrook Manor. Totally different in atmosphere, this is a garden that has been lovingly created by its owner Eileen Mitchell. The 18th-century manor house was originally a farmhouse – the farm buildings are now run as holiday accommodation by Eileen's daughter.

Eileen gave us an introduction to garden – the garden was made from a field and has gradually evolved over the 60 years she has lived there. They have added in ponds, a summer house, a Japanese garden and an arboretum. It is a very personal garden, filled with choice plants and some idiosyncratic touches, such as the family of deer sculptures taking shelter under the trees, and with lovely views over the countryside.



Lifelike deer sculptures



Beds full of hydrangeas and echinacea

As well as the trees, the garden included a colourful range of shrubs and herbaceous planting, with roses and hydrangeas looking particularly lush.

We ended the visit with tea and excellent cake (despite having had lunch, many of us managed a second slice!).