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# **NEWSLETTER – Autumn 2025**

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### **Editorial**

Welcome to our Autumn Newsletter. After the desert-like conditions this summer, I think we're all grateful to have had some rain at last (though no doubt I'll be the first to complain if we have too much rain!). We hope you've enjoyed the year's events. We had good turnouts to all our study days and trips – thanks to all of you who attended and, looking ahead to next year, if you have any suggestions for speakers or trips you think would be interesting, do please let us know.

We've missed having Debbie at our helm for much of this year. We send her our very best wishes as she continues on her road to recovery and look forward to seeing her when she's well enough to return.

In this edition of the Newsletter we have the programme for our Study Day on 31st October. Our two speakers will be Nick Bailey and Don Witton. Nick is a familiar face – a lot of you will have seen him on Gardeners' World. He will bring copies of his book '365 Days of Colour' for us to purchase. Don has been to speak to us before (in 2006, which was before my time!). He will be bringing plants for sale. We hope you'll enjoy their talks.

We will also have our AGM, which we'll try to keep as short as possible! 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,

Helen Gardiner, Secretary

**STUDY DAY PROGRAMME**  
**Friday 31<sup>st</sup> October 2025 at Reaseheath College**

Here is the programme for our next Study Day, which includes our Annual General Meeting (AGM). We will be in the usual lecture theatre, next 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 for you to pay the £10 when you sign in. Coffee can be purchased in the Restaurant before the start of the meeting and lunch will be available in the Restaurant from 12.00.

We are planning to have a plant sale, so please bring along any plants and cuttings that you can spare – we would really appreciate it.

From 10:00	Sign in
10:15	Coffee available in Restaurant
10:45	Welcome and introduction followed by Lecture: <b>“Euphorbias”</b> by <b>Don Witton</b> .
11:45	THEA Plant Sale
12:00	Lunch available in Restaurant Plant Sale – continued
13:00	Raffle Prize Draw
13.15	47th Annual General Meeting
13:30	Lecture: <b>“Unusual Urban Edibles”</b> by <b>Nick Bailey</b>

**More about our Speakers:**

**Don Witton**



Don is a retired schoolteacher with a passion for hardy herbaceous perennial plants in general and euphorbias in particular. He has been a keen gardener for over 40 years and is actively involved in three national garden charities – the Hardy Plant Society, Royal Horticultural Society, and Plant Heritage. Don is a garden lecturer, author and runs a small specialist nursery.

## Nick Bailey



Nick Bailey is a freelance horticulturalist, author, TV presenter (currently a regular presenter on BBC Two's *Gardeners' World*), garden designer and speaker. Nick has worked across many sectors of horticulture over the last 30 years, including nursery stock production, garden management, garden design, teaching, public speaking writing and broadcasting. He was also Head Gardener for London's Chelsea Physic Garden, where he spent seven years redesigning the gardens and diversifying the plant collection.

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### Memories of our Summer Visits

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This year we fitted in seven different gardens and nurseries, most of which were close to home, or at least close enough to drive to, and a couple that we travelled to by coach. The visits were all well attended and enjoyed by those who came along. Let us know if there are any gardens you think would be interesting to visit next year.

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### Ashwood Nurseries and John's Garden – Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> June

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We had visited John's Garden at Ashwood Nurseries in the West Midlands in April 2023. Several members had since commented that they would like to see the garden again at a different time of year, so we had a visit in June this year, with an excellent tour led by head gardener Chris Howell, who introduced us to the garden's summer planting.

The garden was looking splendid and Chris highlighted some choice plants such as *Rhododendron* 'Midsummer Mermaid', *Clematis addisonii* and *Rosa persicaria* 'For Your Eyes Only', the last of which he said was good in dry conditions (one for the shopping basket!). Those who visited last time thought the garden looked excellent then, but it was just as good the second time round (and several purchases were made at the nursery!).



*Rhododendron* 'Midsummer Mermaid'.



The Mediterranean garden in its summer colours.



The canal beds with magnificent *Cotinus*.



The patio garden dominated by *Aeonium* 'Zwartkop'.

## Plas Cadnant Gardens

Plas Cadnant Gardens, hidden from view near to Menai Bridge on the Isle of Anglesey, have been described as ‘one of North Wales’s best kept secrets’. Former owners of Plas Cadnant were related to the Tremayne family of Heligan House, now famous for its Lost Gardens. In 1996, the present owner bought the 200-acre Plas Cadnant Estate. We were shown round by head gardener Chris Pilkington, who described the work on the restoration of the historic garden and grounds. He explained how large parts of the gardens have undergone a spectacular transformation and have been restored to their former glory.

Extending to nearly 10 acres, the garden has three distinct areas: the large ‘Walled Garden’, the ‘Valley Garden’ with its waterfalls and the ‘Upper Woodland Garden’. Of particular interest was the wooded area to the south-west of the main house, which is not open to visitors unless on a guided tour.



The walled garden, which was covered in brambles when the present owner took over, now a magnificent lawn, topiary and borders.



Wilder areas of the garden offer a contrast to the more formal parts.



Plas Cadnant is home to many fabulous hydrangeas.



Head gardener Chris gave us a fascinating tour of the garden and its history.

### **Crûg Farm Nursery**

Crûg Farm Plants is the creation of successful plant hunters, Bleddyn and Sue Wynn-Jones. Sue and Bleddyn have travelled the world hunting for plants and many of the plants they grow are not normally seen in cultivation.

Sue and Bleddyn took us through the gardens, describing the huge range of plants and giving us some background into where they were found and tales of their latest plant-hunting travels. They say they have yet to meet anybody who can walk through the gardens and recognise everything they see – that was certainly true for me!

The garden encompassed a woodland area, the walled garden (with collections of palm-like Schefflera and Daphniphyllum, and huge-leafed Tetrapanax), and the nursery itself, where Bleddyn showed us how they propagated the seeds they collected (in small plastic tubs, rather like the rest of us do).



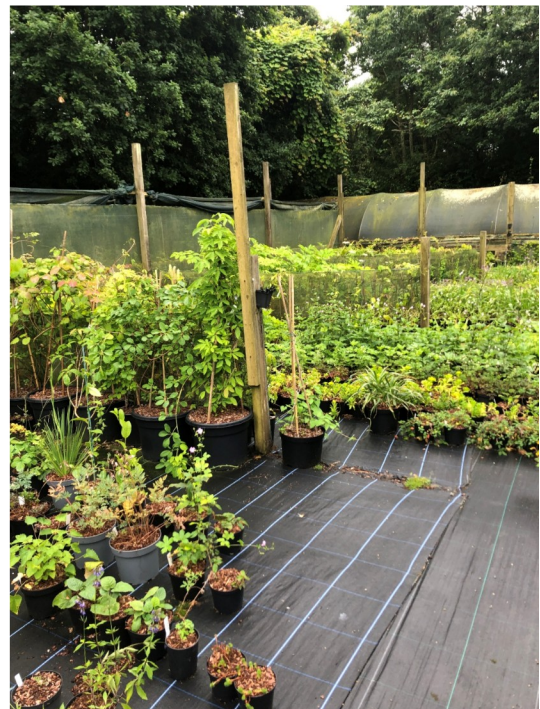
Bleddyn (second left) describes the various plants and their provenance.



*Tasmannia lanceolata* (previously known as *Drimys*)  
– no prizes for guessing where this is from!



*Hydrangea davidii* f. *purpurascens*



The nursery with its range of rare plants.

## Sandymere

Sandymere, near Tarporley, is the home of Sir John Timpson and the garden comprises 16 landscaped acres of beautiful Cheshire countryside with terraces, walled garden, extensive woodland walks and a hosta garden. Head gardener Rachel Norwood guided us round the garden, showing us the different features including a new rill built in 2014, which links the main lawn to the hostas. A terrace extending around the house has a vibrant planting scheme.

The plot includes a wildflower garden and a new boat house, housing a swan-shaped boat, which our members were invited to take out onto the lake! We were also taken round the Japanese-themed garden, designed by Rachel, which includes a moon gate, drystone riverbed and Japanese sculptures and pagoda.



The front garden with a dramatic water feature



Sandymere's hostas seem unaffected by slugs and snails!



The moongate leading to the Japanese-themed garden

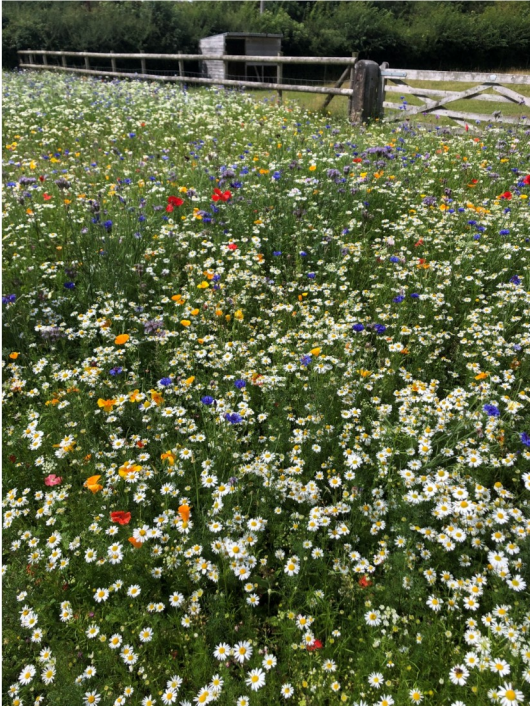


THEA members displaying their boating skills

### **Norley Bank Farm**

We were welcomed to Norley Bank Farm by Neil and Margaret Holding who have developed this garden from scratch over many years, with a lot of hard work and dedication. The first area we saw was an incredible wildflower meadow. The garden itself is set within a traditional setting of courtyards, barns and fields and is filled with shrubs, perennials and annuals to give a very colourful display.

A newly planted orchard is home to free-range hens and there is also an enclosed cut flower garden with raised beds that surround a wooden greenhouse. New this year was a border made up of annuals and first-year-flowering perennials. The pond was restored in 2013 having gradually become silted up and had been home to some thirsty crack willows. It is now a wonderfully mature pond full of wildlife with a backdrop of trees and flowers. A second pond has been dug to attract great crested newts.



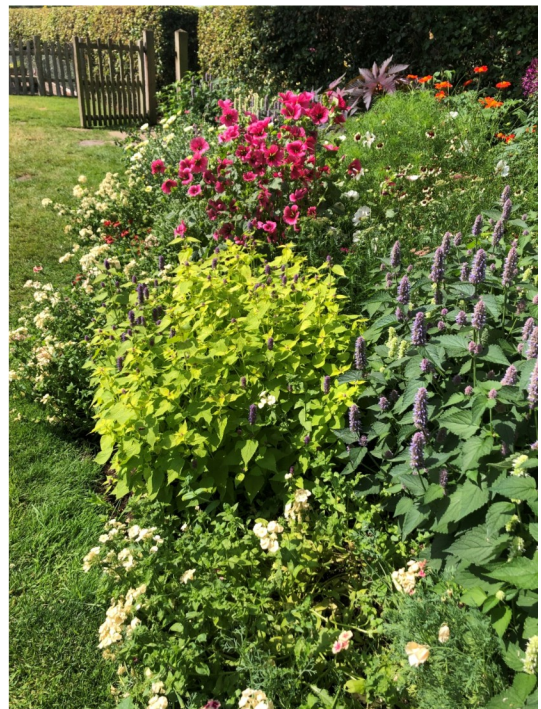
The wildflower meadow greeted us when we arrived.



Norley's vibrant borders – the Holdings propagate a lot of material from cuttings and seed.



The pond has been an enormous undertaking and still needs regular maintenance.



The annuals border – new for 2025.

## York Gate

York Gate near Leeds is designed in the Arts & Crafts style as a series of beautifully crafted outdoor rooms. It was created by the Spencer family during the 20th century and entrusted to Perennial in 1994 so that the garden could live on and continue to be enjoyed by the public.

We were shown around the garden by head gardener Jack Ogg, who trained at York Gate about 17 years ago, then returned as senior, and then head, gardener. He gave us an entertaining tour of the different garden rooms, which included a sand garden, pinetum, herb garden, arbour, dell, hot garden, white garden and kitchen garden. The garden covers one acre but seemed a lot bigger, presumably because it packs so much into its limited space.



Jack describing how the pinetum was originally planted as dwarf conifers but a lot of the trees have outgrown their space so will be replaced.



Borders either side of an Arts-and-Crafts-style path.



The potting shed used by Sybil Spencer.



A pleasing mixture of shapes and textures.

### **Breezy Knees**

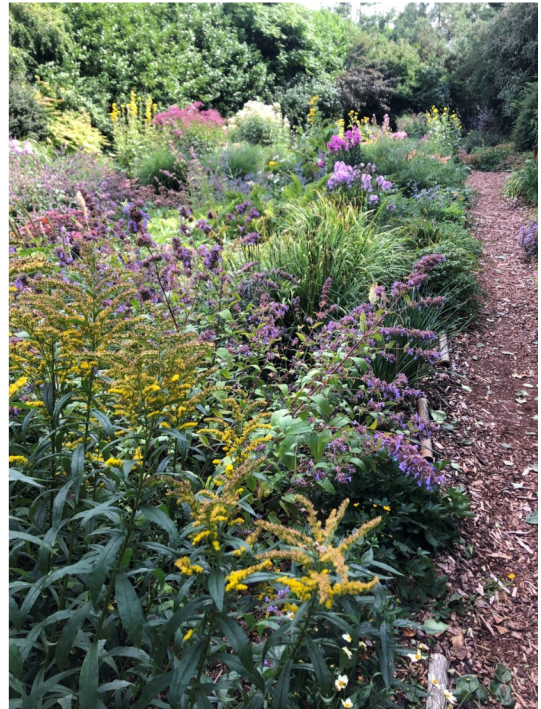
Breezy Knees was in sharp contrast to York Gate. Where the latter was a small, intimate space, the former was vast – it covers 20 acres and has every possible type of garden feature, including some interesting sculpture.

This was a self-guided visit and there was certainly plenty to see – with extensive borders, fountains, lake and quirky features such as a ‘Stonehedge’ and a ‘Rogues Gallery’ – the latter so named because it was planted with invasive species that would easily swamp normal borders. The planting was diverse and, with

individual gardens such as cottage garden, shrub garden and rose garden packed with gorgeous shapes and colours, it was truly a feast for the eyes.



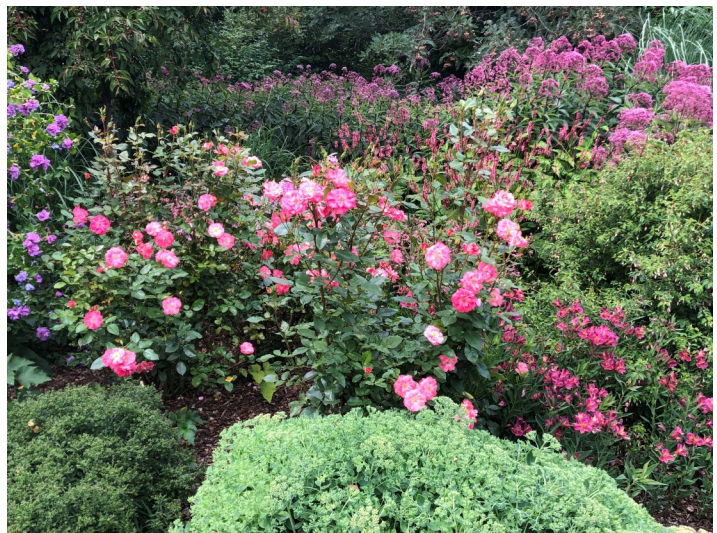
'Stonehedge' – a horticultural interpretation of the famous prehistoric monument.



One of the many perennial borders.



A larger-than-life garden implement (for scale, this is in a bed of *Persicaria*).



Roses in full bloom.

