

DEVON NEWSLETTER

Spring 2009



**DEVON PLANTSPEOPLE: MATT BISHOP
RUSCUS * COLLECTIONS CO-ORDINATOR**

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THE MISSION

The NCCPG seeks to conserve, document, promote and make available Britain and Ireland's rich biodiversity of garden plants for the benefit of everyone through horticulture, education and science

DEVON GROUP PLANT SALES 2009

- ① Sunday 22 February in Totnes Civic Hall.
- ② Sunday 22 March in Tavistock Pannier Market.
- ① Sunday 19 April in Totnes Civic Hall.
- ③ Saturday & Sunday 25-26 April at Rosemoor
NCCPG members free, otherwise normal garden entrance.
- ③ Monday 25 May at Castle Hill, Filleigh
- ③ Sunday 5 July South Molton Pannier Market.
- ③ Sunday 6 September at Rosemoor
NCCPG members free, otherwise normal garden entrance.

Sales start at 10 o'clock, members free except Castle Hill

For organizers details see page 2

- ① Sally Dean
- ② Tim Millar
- ③ Derek Burdett

EDITOR'S NOTES

Details of our new Chairman are provided by Mike Squires under the title Devon AGM 2008. We are still looking for a new secretary and anyone who is interested should contact a member of the committee.

Jan Wagstaff has started a series on Plants-people in Devon, the subject of the first article is Matt Bishop, Head Gardener at The Garden House.

There are lots of Plant Sales and visits organised across the county. Most of the visits are to places that are not normally open to the public.

David Cann

MEMBERSHIP RATES:

Single	£20
Double	£34
Student (up to age 25 in full time education)	£5
Gardening clubs and non-commercial groups	£30
Corporate	£55

Cover: *Ruscus streptophyllus* showing 3mm long central column of male flower surrounded by petals, with pollen grains at the top in white.

Courtesy: David Cann

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DEVON'S PLANTSPEOPLE

Devon is a rich county for flora and fauna; we have many superb gardens both public and private to enjoy, a tremendous range of plants to enthuse about and a long horticultural heritage. But what about the people behind these gardens? Some of them are public figures, some are beavering away unknown but all are experts in their own way. The following article is the first of an occasional series of articles about these people and their passions; some will be well known to you and some will not.

The subject of this first article is **Matt Bishop**, known to many of you as the Head Gardener at The Garden House and to others of you as a Galanthus expert. But talking to him and others during the preparation of this article revealed a varied history and a passion for and knowledge of plants that seemed unbounded.

MATT BISHOP

Studies and early career

Matt, the son of an accountant, was born and schooled in Plymouth and by the age of 15, as with many young men, had no idea of what he wanted to do. Then his father arranged a holiday job for Matt with a client of his, two elderly ladies who gardened. Matt worked with them for several weeks caring for plants and so the passion was born. At 16 Matt applied for and was taken on by the RHS on their trainee scheme at Wisley. The two year course was very practically based, the weekly routine was four days in the gardens and one day at Merrist Wood College. After a successful two years at Wisley Matt moved on to Cannington College in Somerset where he took the Advanced National Certificate of Horticulture. By now the ripe age of 18 he went onto the one year accelerated programme for mature students! (one of his fellow alumni is David Cann, our own newsletter editor).

Now well trained and educated in both the theory and practice of horticulture Matt returned to Devon and worked at first for Endsleigh, as it used to be, and then as Technical Officer for Plymouth Parks Department. Two events lightened this otherwise rather tedious period of his life – he discovered The Garden House and John Carter. Through John, Matt developed an interest in the shows and frequently worked with John at Chelsea and other shows on the Rowden stands. John was to prove a good mentor stimulating Matt's growing passion for plants and encouraging him to become involved in a new absorbing activity, plant hunting.

The love of plants was also fostered by visits to



The Garden House, mainly the plant centre I think, where he was able to see and buy a very wide range of plants propagated by Ros and Keith Wiley. Matt thought that he would love to work at The Garden House where plants were king, a dream that was to come true many years later.

Not feeling very fulfilled by his work in Plymouth Matt decided to return to college and after four years study was awarded a BA in Landscape Architecture. Included in the degree programme was a year's placement and, following a three month garden design holiday job in Connecticut, USA, he landed a prime placement in West Virginia, USA. He was working with a major garden design business and nursery in Charleston which provided very good experience. During this year he attended the Perennial Plant Association Symposium in Canada where he made many international contacts who would remain to this day. This sandwich year convinced Matt that it was plants that he really cared about and he undertook many plant hunting trips in the USA developing his interest in woodland, winter and spring flowering plants. Subsequently he would travel to Turkey, Spain, Guyana, New Zealand and Romania on plant hunting trips. His time in the USA and on his plant hunting trips made Matt many friends worldwide who still swap and share plants and expertise with each other, a range of contacts who were to be invaluable in his subsequent career.

First appointment, Parceval Hall

On completion of his degree course Matt joined the garden team at Parceval Hall, Skipton, North Yorkshire. Although functioning as a religious retreat the gardens of the hall were open to the public and Matt gained valuable experience, in a cohesive team under Head Gardener Phil Wilson, in restoration and replanting in tandem with the needs and requirements of garden visitors. Whilst at Parceval Matt began detailed research into snowdrop species and cultivars resulting in a book "Snowdrops – a monograph of cultivated *Galanthus*" published in 2001 (and revised in 2006) of which he was the principal author and photographer. This book is still referred to as 'the definitive work of reference covering identification, cultivation, propagation and sourcing'. So Matt the galanthophile and author was added to the plantsman, plant hunter and gardener.

During his three year stay at Parceval Matt continued to swap seeds and plants with his international and British contacts. Many of these added to the flora at Parceval but he also built up a personal collection of over 1000 plants. When he moved to his next appointment this plant collection took more space to move than his other possessions.

Head Gardener appointments

Hinton Admiral, Dorset

Four years followed as Head Gardener at Hinton Admiral, a large private landscape garden and the swapping and building up of the collection continued. Articles were written, talks and walks, primarily on snowdrops, were given all over the UK and Matt continued to develop skills and knowledge. And then in 2003 a particular Head Gardener job was advertised; Keith and Ros Wiley were leaving The Garden House to set up their own nursery and garden. Matt applied and following interviews with such great horticulturalists

as Michael Hickson, was appointed as Head Gardener at The Garden House, the job he had dreamed of all those years before.

The Garden House

Matt has now been at The Garden House for five years. One of the first tasks that the Trustees set him was to revitalise and replant two major areas of the garden, the African Garden and the walled garden. These areas had become colonised by some ‘thuggish’ plants which were destroying the good design and planting undertaken by Keith Wiley many years before. Taking courage in both hands Matt and his team completely stripped out both areas. He would be the first to admit that he was not very popular with some visitors to the garden; one note in the comments box accused him of being a founder member of the brown earth society! Four years later both areas were looking splendid, the new planting had filled out, the colour schemes in the walled garden reflecting the original planting schemes drawn up by the Fortescues. Those gardeners who grow herbaceous plants will appreciate the need for such drastic action every few years, particularly in this part of Devon where growth rates are high in the warm and wet climate.

Now the attention is moving onto the circles garden and the terraces. Some of the physical stripping out has started and design schemes and planting plans are well in hand.

In 2008 Matt was promoted to Senior Manager overseeing all aspects of the running of the Garden House and now spends some time away from his plants. But this has not prevented him from taking on new challenges and interests.

Conservation work

Always interested in plant diversity and conservation Matt is moving The Garden House towards sharing its enormous pool of plants. He decries the narrowing range of plants available to the general public to buy; feeling that sometimes plants made available are only those which do easily from tissue culture, thus narrowing the range causing variety to die out. Several initiatives have been started in the plant sales at The Garden House. The first is returning to the idea that good plant varieties in the garden should be propagated in house and sold. This will inevitably be slow but arrangements are in place with other nurseries to propagate and supply this widened range of plants. In addition a seed list is now available from The Garden House website offering a range of rarities reflective of the plants growing in the garden.

Having been custodian of NCCPG National Collections in the past Matt was keen to create some collections at The Garden House. Two have been applied for, *Colchicum* and hardy *Nerine* and are being considered for approval by NCCPG.

Moves into plant breeding

Matt was fortunate enough to receive most of the *Nerine* bred and kept by Terry Jones in Zeal Monachorum. Many of you will remember Terry Jones as a great gardener and plantsman. In his retirement Terry was determined to increase the range of colour in hardy

Nerine, crossing the tender but diverse in colour *N. sarniensis* with the hardy, yet mainly pink, *N. bowdenii*. The names of Terry's hybrids were all prefixed 'Zeal' denoting their place of origin.

Matt only met Terry in his last few years but was inspired by him and is determined to carry on his work. His first task is to repeat Terry's crosses and to document the unsuccessful hybrids as well as those deemed to be successful. Anyone who has tried plant breeding will know that it can be a slow process; the involved procedure of emasculation, pollen collection, pollination which, in these interspecific hybrids, yields meagre quantities of seed not all of which germinates, and having to wait up to four years before selection can begin. Matt is working closely with Dr Marion Wood, a plant geneticist, who is also undertaking breeding experiments on hardy *Nerine*. It will be years yet before Matt has a range of *Nerine* he can share, but, having seen the result from some early crosses, they will be worth waiting for.

Looking to the future

Matt sees one key aspect of his own development is to enthuse and help the future generation of gardeners. Informally he does this with talks, articles and short courses, formally with the studentship scheme at the Garden House. Several years ago a bequest to The Garden House enabled it to set up the Heath Scholarship, which pays the wages for one trainee per year. More recently funding has been acquired to increase this to 2 trainees per year. Every year trainees selected by The Professional Gardeners Guild are sent to The Garden House for final selection and hopefully successful employment. The trainees stay for one year on what is mainly a practical training in horticulture. They work in the garden under guidance most days complimented by instruction, talks etc on site. One feature that Matt has been able to add, because of his varied background, is time spent visiting the major shows. He



has also been able to arrange for the trainees to sit in on the RHS judging committees. At the end of the year some trainees go onto formal qualification courses, others seek work in another garden before going on to qualify. One thing they should all leave with is the same passion for plants that the 15 year old Matt felt after his holiday job.

On a personal level no doubt he will continue with his plant breeding work, his plant hunting (he is off again in the spring to Spain) and his developments at The Garden House, with one thing certain – he considers himself a very lucky chap.

Jan Wagstaff November 2008

NEWS AND EVENTS

IS YOUR GARDEN OR NATIONAL COLLECTION OPEN THIS YEAR?

Let me know and have the dates included here. **David Cann**

FOAMLEA GARDEN, CHAPEL HILL, MORTEHOE, EX34 7DZ, will be open as follows: May 14th, June 11th, September 10th, all Thursdays, 10-5. Visits on other dates by request. 01271 871182. For full details of the type of garden refer to the yellow book. It is however a 5 year old, 1 acre, full maritime exposed garden, with a wide range of tropical and temperate plants on a frost-free cliff top alongside the S W Footpath. NO parking at house or on Chapel Hill: use Morteohoe Car Park.

Beth Smith

BOTANY GROUP IN DEVON

If you are interested in Botany in Devon then why not join the Devonshire Association Botany Section. We are a group of amateurs and professionals who all share an interest in wild flowers, conservation and recording our natural history. Throughout the year we have a series of field meetings where you can learn and record at whatever level suits you. Complete beginners, children with families, visitors, everyone is welcome. Please contact Dr. Frances Billinge, Hon. Secretary fbillinge@btinternet.com 01626 833620

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Following a recent email communication to members who provided their email address, many were returned undeliverable. We are looking to update the membership list with correct email addresses by asking members to **email** the membership manager Sue Cox see p. 2, including in the body of the email your correct postal address and membership number so the email address can be matched to the correct entry. We can then send things by email.

NURSERIES AT COUNTY EVENTS

One nursery at a time is invited to sell plants at the Devon Group's county events, usually held in March & November. If you are interested in being invited please contact Trevor Wood, who will sent you more details. Email: trevor@wood31.wanadoo.co.uk Post: 2 Willens Cottages, Kenton, EX6 8HQ.

AN APPEAL FROM THE CHAIRMAN

I have had a number of requests and suggestions from members regarding a website for the Devon Group. This is something we would like to do but are short of two important things, time and expertise. The Committee is busy reviewing all aspects of our activities. I would very much like to hear from anyone with an interest in helping to build a website for the Group, to prepare material or actually construct the site.

We would also welcome ideas and help from anyone with skills or experience in publicity and publishing.

OBITUARY – ELIZABETH HEBDITCH

Elizabeth died some weeks ago [Autumn 2008], at an advanced age. She came from a farming family in Stoke sub Hampden in Somerset. During World War 2 Elizabeth served in the Women's Royal Air Force and later, with her sister Ann, ran Coombe Cross Hotel in Bovey Tracey. They specialised in garden tours, taking their guests in 2 mini-buses to gardens large and small in Devon & neighbouring counties. After retiring Elizabeth lived in a small house near the hotel, gardening and welcoming visitors, growing plants for, and serving at, NCCPG plant sales. She was member of the Devon group committee from 1992-1995.

Trevor Wood

South and West Area Winter Lunch

Tuesday, 24th February 2009

at

Rattery Village Hall

Coffee & plant sales from 10.45 am

followed by an illustrated talk by Charlie Pridham at 11.30

“Using climbing plants to great effect”

Lunch at 1.00 pm: main course, choice of desserts and coffee.

(Please state if vegetarian dish, or other dietary requirements, when ordering tickets.)

Booking essential.

Tickets £11 per person.

Please send SAE to:

Mrs E. Pickard, 11 Peter's Close, Elburton, Plymouth PL9 8NU

Tel: 01752 492765

Cheques should be made payable to NCCPG Devon Group

SOUTH WEST ALPINE FLOWER SHOW

Organised by the **ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY EXETER GROUP**

SATURDAY 28th MARCH 2009

at: **St. LUKE'S HIGH SCHOOL**

HART'S LANE Off HILL BARTON ROAD EXETER

(next to Pinhoe Road Sainsbury)

PLANT SALES OPEN AT 10 am (13 nursery stalls)

SHOW OPENS AT 12 NOON UNTIL 4 pm

Entry: £2 (AGS MEMBERS FREE)

Refreshments. Parking is free.

There is also a book stall selling new & secondhand books.

Those who have been to the show before will know that it is an amazing event, with many plants rarely if ever seen before, and grown to perfection.

AREA EVENTS 2009

All events in each area are open to members and members' guests. Charges (including tea and cakes) except where otherwise stated: members £3 per day and members' guests £4. All events will take place whatever the weather. May we ask you to respect the owners' privacy and not enter before the time specified.

EAST DEVON

Area Co-ordinator: Diane Rowe, Orchard House, Parsonage Farm, Uffculme EX15 3DR.
Tel. 01884 840545. Email: diane@little-southey.demon.co.uk

NORTH DEVON

Area Co-ordinator: Mrs Margaret Jewell, The Croft, Yarnscombe, Barnstaple EX31 3LW.
Tel.: 01769 560535.

SOUTH AND WEST DEVON

Area Co-ordinators: Jan & Rob Wagstaff, North Boreston, Halwell, Totnes TQ9 7LD.
Tel: 01548 821320. Email: borestongarden@btinternet.com

Saturday 14 February

HEANTON MILL COTTAGE, WRAFTON & MARWOOD HILL GARDENS

11 am

BOOKING ESSENTIAL - contact Margaret Jewell.
By kind permission of Jane & Brian Connor who invite us to coffee and a chance to see their video of the garden before viewing it live. This lovely & varied garden created since 1999 by plant and wildlife lovers, has many separate areas, well stocked with trees, shrubs & herbaceous plants. Winter interest provided by hellebores, snowdrops, early daffodils, witch hazel, daphne and camellias. Wildlife ponds active with spawning frogs and a 1.5 acre strip of wild woodland with daffodils and snowdrops runs along side the river.

Directions

From Barnstaple or Braunton leave the A361 & turn N into Wrafton village. Due to **very** limited parking leave car at lower car park or the 'Williams Arms'. Or in the village & car share. Turn R after the car park, then L & L again into Mill Lane for 1/3 mile walk to the cottage. Wellingtons probably essential at this time of year.

Lunch
pm

At **MARWOOD HILL GARDENS**, see below.
Lunch is followed by a brief garden walk before a talk by Terry Underhill titled 'Eastern Turkish Delights – Pontics to Lake Van'.

Cost

£10 (includes lunch) cheques made payable to NCCPG Devon Group with advance booking to Margaret Jewell, see above.

Tuesday 24 February

WINTER LUNCH AT RATTERY VILLAGE HALL

BOOKING ESSENTIAL - contact Edwina Pickard, details below.

10.45 am

Coffee & plant sales prior to a talk at 11.30 by Charlie Pridham: "Using climbing plants to great effect" followed by **lunch** at 1.00pm.

Directions

From Totnes take A385 W towards the A38 & Plymouth; turn R where signed to Rattery & then follow NCCPG signs in Rattery village.

Cost

Please send SAE for tickets (£11.00) to Mrs E Pickard, 11 Peter's Close, Elburton, Plymouth PL9 8NU. Cheques should be made payable to NCCPG Devon Group. Meat dish or vegetarian alternative (please state choice when ordering tickets); puddings & coffee.

Monday 9 March

VISIT TO FLETE WALLED GARDEN, PL21 9NX

NB The visit planned for March 2008 had to be postponed due to severe storm damage.

2.30 pm

Contact: Jan & Rob Wagstaff - BOOKING NOT NECESSARY
By kind permission of Andy Byfield. The 2 acre walled gardens which used to serve the Flete estate still contain the old glasshouses, vine and peach houses and their boiler room etc, together with large open areas within the walls where flowers, fruit and vegetables were produced for the house. Andy Byfield is now restoring this historic site. The glasshouses are used to keep large collections of *Hepatica*, *Cyclamen*, *Galanthus*, *Primula* etc. Andy is working with the NCCPG towards Provisional National Collection status for *Helleborus*, *Polypodium*, and *Vireya* rhododendrons. This collection of tender *Vireya* rhododendrons, with 125 varieties, is thought to be the largest in Europe. Teas and plant sales.

Directions

Take the A379 Modbury to Plymouth road. Flete House is about 1 ½ miles W of Modbury almost opposite the junction with the A3123 road to Ermington and Ugborough. Turn into the main drive to Flete House & then follow the NCCPG signs.

Thursday 16 April

VISIT TO THE GARDEN HOUSE, BUCKLAND MONACHORUM, PL20 7LQ

6.00 pm

Contact: Jan & Rob Wagstaff - BOOKING NOT NECESSARY
By kind permission of the trustees of The Fortescue Garden Trust. The Garden House is so well known that it needs little introduction. However, this private visit will be special because Matt Bishop, the Head Gardener, will

give a brief talk and then, with a colleague, lead a tour around the garden, concentrating on the spring flowering areas; the bulb meadows will be particularly striking. Plans for future development will also be explained. After the walk light refreshments of wine and savouries will be served in the house. Access to the garden will be available from 5.45 pm. Please meet on the lawn in front of the house at 6.00 pm. Cost, including refreshments: £5 for members & guests.

Directions

From A 38 through Plymouth take A 386 north towards Tavistock. After about 6.5 miles turn left to Crapstone and follow brown tourist signs to The Garden House. From Yelverton, take A 386 south towards Plymouth, turn R to Crapstone & follow brown tourist signs to The Garden House.

Friday 1 May

VISIT TO THORN HOUSE, NR WEMBURY PL9 0EQ
Contact: Jan & Rob Wagstaff - BOOKING NOT NECESSARY

2.30 pm

By kind permission of Drs. J D & E Gibson. The present garden owes its origin to Thomas Lockyer, Mayor of Plymouth, who moved to Thorn in 1804. Much of the statuary & formal garden was added by a later owner, William Arkwright, in the 1920s. The 9 acres of garden now include formal areas with roses & lavenders near the house, but the main areas of the garden still hold an impressive collection of trees & shrubs from the great plant-hunting days. These include rhododendrons & azaleas, camellias, magnolias, cornus, luma, pittosporum, rare oak & huge Monterey pines. Many of the examples are champion trees. In addition to this wealth of horticultural history the garden offers fantastic views of the Yealm estuary & carpets of bluebells. Teas & plant sales.

Directions

Take the A 379 Kingsbridge to Plymouth road towards Plymouth & continue until the village of Brixton. Go through Brixton & take L turn at Chittleburn Cross signed Garden Centre (Otter Nurseries) & Brixton Tor. Follow this road for 1.3 miles until cross roads with more major road (cemetery on R at junction). Turn L signed Knighton & Wembury. Continue on this road for 1.4 miles to outskirts of Wembury. Where road turns sharply R into village go straight on (Pilgrims' Rest campsite on L). NCCPG signs from here. In about half mile turn L to Thorn on private road.

Thursday 18 June

**VISIT TO ASH HOUSE FARM, ASH NR
DARTMOUTH, TQ6 0LR**

Contact: Jan & Rob Wagstaff - BOOKING NOT
NECESSARY

2.30 pm

By kind permission of Roger & Jane Davenport. This garden of 12 acres has been developed over the last 10 years around an old farmstead. It is extremely varied, & the approaches to the different areas add greatly to the interest & sense of excitement in exploring the garden as a whole. Areas include a bog garden & ponds, a fantastic wild flower meadow, arboretum, vegetable gardens, masses of roses & much more. Many sculptures, some conventional & some very unusual, add to the interest. Teas & plant sales.

Directions

Take the A3122, Halwell to Dartmouth road from Totnes Cross garage. After 4 miles, turn R just before 'The Sportsman's Arms' signed Bugford, Hillfield, & Ash. NCCPG signs from here. Continue to T junction (0.7 miles) and turn R, signed Hillfield, Ash, & Cottesbury. Almost immediately turn L to Ash & Bowden. Continue on to Ash Cross & go straight over cross roads; pass Ash Tree Farm nursery on L; in about 500 yards turn L into car park.

Friday 26 June

**HILLRISE, 24 WINDSOR MEAD, SIDFORD,
SIDMOUTH.** Mr & Mrs Robertshaw.

11 am

A plant lover's garden on a south facing slope with sea and countryside views. Themed borders include shrubs, perennials, grasses, woodland, ferns, dahlias & cannas.

Directions

Take A3052 from Newton Poppleford, past The Bowd pub & then Sidmouth Garden Centre, continue on & Windsor Mead is on L. Follow NCCPG signs. Limited parking.

Lunch

Sidmouth Garden Centre.

2 pm

YONDER HILL, COLATON RALEIGH, Judy McKay & Eddie Stevenson. Unconventional planting. Shady walks, sunny glades, young woodland, ponds, herbaceous borders, orchard, vegetables, wildlife areas including large pond. Several collections, many surprises.

Directions

On B3178 between Newton Poppleford & Colaton Raleigh, take turning signed to Dotton, then immediate R into small lane. PTO

Cost

£5 for the day (£2.50 to Mr & Mrs Robertshaw). Contact Helen Brown on 01404 850941.

Sunday 12 July

SUMMER LUNCH AT BROOK, EAST CORNWORTHY, TQ9 7HQ

BOOKING ESSENTIAL - Contact Edwina Pickard, details below.

12.30 pm onwards

By kind permission of Peter & Bee Smyth. This beautifully designed & maintained garden of three acres provides an ideal setting for a leisurely summer lunch. The level garden has been cleverly designed to incorporate formal areas near the house with terrace with raised fish ponds, colourful herbaceous borders & rose walks. Beyond are many specimen trees & shrubs. The garden is bordered by a stream, with pond & bog garden. Plant sales, drinks & lunch.

Please send SAE for tickets (£ 12.50 for members & guests) to Mrs Edwina Pickard, 11 Peter's Close, Elburton, Plymouth PL9 8NU. Cheques should be made payable to NCCPG Devon Group.

Directions

Take A3122 Halwell to Dartmouth road from Totnes Cross garage & continue to 'The Sportsman's Arms'. Turn L signed Capton & Dittisham & continue into Dittisham village. Pass the 'Red Lion' on R & take road signed Coombe & Cornworthy. NCCPG signs from here. Continue for about 1.5 miles, pass Brook on your & and continue on to Toad Hall (100 yards) on & for parking.

Friday 28 August

BOOKING ESSENTIAL

LITTLE ASH BUNGALOW, FENNY BRIDGES, HONITON. Helen & Brian Brown.

11 am

A plantaholic's garden designed for year round interest, with mixed borders of many different & unusual perennials, shrubs, bamboos & trees. Bring & buy plant stall.

Directions

From Exeter, leave A30 at Patteson's Cross exit, signed for Feniton & Fenny Bridges. At end of slip road turn R, up to T junction & turn L for Fenny Bridges. Follow NCCPG signs. Please park in the lane.

Lunch 12.30

CADHAY HOUSE, OTTERY ST MARY, joined by Dave & Alison the gardeners. Listed by Country Life magazine as one of the top manor houses in the country, the Elizabethan Cadhay House also has gardens that are worth more than just a passing visit. Superb herbaceous borders lead to the lake. You may wish to take a one hour house tour for an extra charge of £4.

Directions

On B3178 between Newton Pophelford & Colaton Raleigh, take turning signed to Dotton, then

Cost immediate R into small lane.
£8 to include Garden Tour, morning coffee & a cold lunch. Contact Helen Brown on 01404 850941.

Details of the following will be given in the Summer Newsletter

Tuesday 16 June

VISIT TO BRUSHFORD BARTON & LOWER BRAGGAMARSH

Monday 3 August 2.30 pm

VISIT TO AVENUE COTTAGE, ASHPRINGTON

Tuesday 8 September 2.45 pm

VISIT TO HIGH GARDEN, KENTON

MEMBER'S DAY, 2009

There has been much consultation recently about the future format of Members' Day. There is a dearth of sensibly priced venues nowadays and many other suggestions have been made. The hope is that we will be able to arrange a day for the early summer that does not clash with all the other plant related events going on then. There will be details of this in the next newsletter. Of course, your suggestions would always be warmly received. Please do email me on Felicity@thedudbridges.com, or write to me at Cotley House, Dunsford, Exeter, EX6 7BH.

I would like to add that the AGM at Rosemoor in November was a delightful day with a walk led by Jonathan Hutchinson in the afternoon a great success. Rosemoor looked after us extremely well and the lunch arrangements seemed to suit everyone. This is an arrangement that we would like to repeat if possible.

Felicity Dudbridge

Four new National Collections were awarded at the latest meeting of the Plant Conservation Committee held in August 2008.

Mrs A Milner *Iris* (Introductions by Arthur J Bliss) GLOUCESTERSHIRE
Mr D Victor *Pelargonium* Section *Hoarea* NATIONAL
Miss N Green *Gunnera* NORFOLK
Mr D Clavell-Bate *Nepenthes* CORNWALL

THE NATIONAL COLLECTION OF THE FAMILY RUSCACEAE HAS BEEN RENAMED

The genus *Ruscus* should really be on the NCCPG 'missing genera' list because of its limited ornamental value and would still be if Peter Yeo from Cambridge had not researched the genus in the mid 1960s and described two new species. Cambridge Botanic Garden were then in the position of growing all the species and their National Collection was the first.

Following much scientific research over the years the concept of the family Ruscaceae, to which the genus *Ruscus* belongs, has changed, it has been made very much bigger. My collection contains all three of the original genera, *Ruscus*, *Danae* and *Semele*, the last two having a single species each. The Angiosperm Phylogeny Group (a group of professional research botanists) have put a lot more genera into the family, genera such as *Polygonatum* and *Maianthemum* (which now includes *Smilacina*), making the family go beyond my specific interest. A decision was made to cut *Danae* and *Semele* from the collection (though I will still grow both) and concentrate on the six basic species of *Ruscus*. *Danae* has a single species, *D. racemosa* and *Semele* also has one, *S. androgyna*, unless you believe some of the literature, in which case you need a yet to be invented, hand-held DNA testing kit to be able to distinguish them. The National Collection is now just *Ruscus*, my original interest.

The genus is one where the species fall into two clear groups. The British native butchers broom, *R. aculeatus*, is prickly and has branched stems and there is one related species. The other four species look and feel different, mainly as there are no prickles but also as the stem is not branched. These are used as foliage with cut flowers (as is *Danae*). What look like leaves and carry the flowers are flattened lateral shoots called cladodes the spine being at the tip, the tiny leaves are at the base of the cladodes and soon wither. All the green parts carry out photosynthesis like the foliage of gorse and the various broom species where the true leaves wither after an initial flush.

The distribution of *Ruscus* (below, excluding the Atlantic Islands) centres on the Mediterranean, Black and Caspian Sea basins extending into northern Europe and out to the Azores and Madeira. Two species are isolated from the rest. The *Parrotia* woods round the



southern shores of the Caspian have the butchers broom relative *R. hyrcanus*, it has its branches in one whorl not staggered up the stem. In the laurel forests of the small island of Madeira is the rare *R. streptophyllus*, but as the forests are felled the *Ruscus* dies off.

I started to grow *Ruscus* after identifying a completely unknown plant while a gardener at the University of Exeter and it was Peter Yeo's scientific paper from 1968 which allowed the final identification of *R. hypophyllum*. This is a somewhat tender north African species and was growing at the base of a large evergreen oak. The bulk of my collection came from Cambridge but plants also came from Kew and private individuals.

Various friends regard them as hideously boring and I have difficulty in disagreeing because of the similarities between them but they are used for commercial cut foliage, they have bright red berries in the right circumstances and do grow in the darker, drier places in the garden. With limited space the most commonly grown and most worthwhile is butchers broom, *R. aculeatus* but if you can get it *R. hypoglossum* enjoys shade. *Danae racemosa* is also well worth growing, though is a little difficult to get. The

commonest species grown is our native butchers broom. Like most of the genus, male and female flowers are on different plants, so if fruit is required you must trust your nurseryman to sell you the right plants. Butchers broom has produced plants with both male and female flowers, these hermaphrodite plants have been taken into cultivation and should fruit reliably. Some have been named but I have not grown any of the newly named cultivars, the catalogue descriptions make them seem identical. 'Wheeler's Variety' I do grow, as a gift sent from Plant Delights in North Carolina, USA, the fruit was so heavy in 2008 that some weaker stems arched with the weight. *R. hypoglossum* is listed by four nurseries in the 2008-2009 RHS Plant Finder, none however specify if the plant is male or female. I have only seen a male plant in cultivation, at Joan Loraine's garden at Greencombe, Porlock where it was producing copious amounts of pollen. My own female plants have started to fruit since the close planting of the male plant.

The only other cultivar of note is *Ruscus aculeatus* 'Lanceolatus'. I first saw this plant at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. They had received it from C. Sprenger a nurseryman of Naples on 6 April 1904, the garden still has the original 1904 catalogue, *Hortus Botanicus Vomerensis*. There had been confusion between this and *R. aculeatus* ssp. *angustifolius* (also known as *R. ponticus*). *Ruscus aculeatus* 'Lanceolatus' is unusual in that the cladodes are long and very narrow, where the length is 5 or more times longer than the width, in the range 18-35 x 2.7-5 mm. The cladodes of both subspecies of *R. aculeatus* are generally shorter and wider and always less than 3.5 times longer than wide. It is female so should produce fruit if pollinated by any form of *R. aculeatus*. The full story and my investigation was published in 'The New Plantsman' December 2001, 8:4 (239-243).



Ruscus hypophyllum Photo: Vlasta Jamnický, taken at Plitvice Lakes UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, Croatia



look like giant 'leaved' butchers broom with a weak spine at the end of each cladode. The biggest problem is the time scale. On average, from pollination to mature seed is 18 months with germination from 18-36 months. In the future if any are worth naming those names will be published. The interesting question is why have no hybrids been found where butchers broom grows alongside other species? But I don't have an answer.



Ruscus streptophyllus
from Curtis's Botanical Magazine 46: 2049 (1819)
with thanks to Devon County Library Service

Six species and a few cultivars don't make it the biggest National Collection but that was not the reason for trying to hybridise the species, it was more along the idea of 'will it work?' and it did. The garden problem of being single sexed, i.e. needing both sexes close by, was a great help in hybridising as normal isolating procedures can be very fiddly due to the flowers being so small. The four species which are non-prickly each occupy their own geographic area so hybrids could not occur between them in the wild but it has been possible in the garden. The result is something of a mess, a mix of minor specific differences. *Ruscus aculeatus* overlaps with three of them but no confirmed hybrids are known, again, forcing them to hybridise in the garden has been productive, producing various amounts of seed and resultant plants intermediate between the parents that overall

Division is the best way to propagate, particularly where more than one species is grown. It gives big plants quickly and only a few stems per division are needed if a large number of plants are required as long as there is sufficient root. I tend to use 'long toms' to pot them as they have a good depth and are suitably narrow. Although the prospect of a chance hybrid is exciting from seed raised plants, division is essential to produce progeny genetically identical to the parent which is important for any sort of conservation. It can be the case that plants offered as a species are actually a hybrid, which is how original entities of any sort become lost to cultivation. If wild origin seed, as I was lucky to have from the Crimea, is not available then care does need to be taken if pure species are needed.

For the odd dry spot it is worth having one *Ruscus*, if only for its evergreen growth, tolerance of drier soils and shade and with the right plants sealing wax red fruit.

David Cann

DEVON GROUP AGM 2008

The Devon Group are very lucky to have found a new Chairman, John Turner from North Devon, who it is anticipated will bring a new focus to the group. It is the intention to co-opt John at the next committee meeting, as he was unable to attend our AGM because of previous commitments. John is a solicitor by profession and a retired District Judge so he should be well able to steer our Devon Group forward.

At National level also we have a new Chairman “Professor Michael Alder” who, from my brief meeting with him so far, appears to be a breath of fresh air.

NCCPG is re-branding itself and will use the name “Plant Heritage” as the main focus whilst still being NCCPG legally.

Plant Heritage will become the predominant wording on our letter headings and on advertisements etc. Our marquee at The Hampton Court Flower Show has been known as the Plant Heritage Marquee for many years so it is a natural evolution.

The Devon Group is still seeking a secretary: this a very important job as it is generally the contact point for both the public and for HQ so please come forward if you feel you could undertake this task. Fortunately, because of my position as Chairman of the National Shows Committee, I attend both Council and the Board of Trustees meetings so am able to field queries and information in the interim.

On Friday 28 November, the National Collection Coordinators for the South West - that is from Hampshire to Scilly, including the Channel Islands, will be meeting near Taunton with Merci Morris from HQ. The National Collections Scheme is pivotal to the work of plant conservation carried out by our organisation and is continuously expanding. This makes a great amount of work for the coordinators as they are in the front line of ensuring that standards are not only maintained but continuously raised.

The AGM was held at Rosemoor this year and after lunch we were treated to an excellent guided tour of The Lady Anne’s Garden by Jonathan Hutchinson - our thanks go to Chris Bailes for organising the venue for us.

Mike Squires, Vice Chair



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FROM TREVOR WOOD SOME CLIPPINGS FROM OLD PUBLICATIONS

“Fern Stealers

William Mobey & Charles Williams, of Bexley, Kent, were charged at Totnes with damaging Devonshire hedges. The evidence went to show that the prisoners were engaged with a horse & cart in the wholesale removal of Ferns, about 5 cwt. Of roots being found in an outhouse. Previous convictions were recorded, and the Bench inflicted fines – Mobey, £5; Williams, £2 10s.; together with the amount of damage. The money not being forthcoming, Mobey was sentenced to six weeks’ hard labour, and Williams to one month.” - *The Gardeners’ Chronicle* late 19th C.

“Ferns, both British & Exotic, have rarely, if ever, been brought together in such numbers. The main body of them was placed in 2 tents extending altogether nearly 300ft in length, & however fine they were, we cannot but think they would have merited much greater interest had they been broken up be masses of other plants; as it was, the eye became weary of them, & that this was the effect on most of the visitors, the fact that the Fern-tent was less crowded than the other parts of the Exhibition may be taken as proof. In addition to the long tent, there was another of good size wholly filled with a most extensive & remarkably fine collection contributed by the Rev. C. Padley of Beaconfield, Plymouth. This excited much interest,& apart from its merits as a collection, the way in which it was arranged & labelled was worthy of all commendation, for not only could every plant be seen with ease, but each was distinctly named. For this purpose especially printed in gold colours were employed; & the stages of the tent, it may be added, were covered with crimson cloth.” *Journal of Horticulture* 28 Aug 1866, of the Nottingham Floral Fete held shortly before.

“It must, however, be admitted that but for the flowers there was little to induce a long stay in the arcades; for the dust was swept up by the ladies’ dresses & the stages for the plants were remarkable for their ugliness. They consisted of bare boards which had once been green, but had become a nondescript between green & earth colour. How different this from the fresh green turf banks of the Regent’s Park”, Of the RHS Show 6 July 1854 at the Society’s Gardens in South Kensington; in the *Journal of Horticulture* of that year.

“The present day craze for spending week-ends in the country has resulted in many an Old Cottage & Garden passing out of the villagers’ hands into the possession of a very different class, to be adapted changed, & added to by their new owners; the

one thing remaining unchanged being their name.” M.R. Gloag. *Book of English Gardens*. 1906.

“During the raid of General Quantrell in Kansas, & the sacking & ravaging of Lawrence, the Confederate force came to the residence of George Ford, whose neat house was surrounded with flowers. The soldiers appealed to their leader to spare the place “as it was too pretty to burn”; he assented, & the house was spared, being almost the only building left.”

Boston Cultivator 1864.

“The dumping of foreign rose trees & other trees is becoming a serious menace to the horticultural industry of this country, & is throwing out of work man who might be employed in the great nurseries of the world’s best rose-growing country. Plats which are now being retailed at 6d. each are second rate.”

The Daily Express 13 Oct 1930.

1850 *White’s Directory of Devonshire*

Here is a Botanical and Horticultural Society, which was established in 1829, and holds periodical exhibitions of fruits, flowers, vegetables, &c. It has rooms and a good library at 263, High Street; and is supported by a long list of annual subscribers. Sir R. Lopes, Bart., is president; Thos. Wm. Gray, secretary; and Mrs. Spreat, librarian.

Devon Agricultural Society, formed here in 1831, has its rooms at 197, High street. It holds periodical exhibitions of live stock, &c., in the Castle yard, and gives prizes for the encouragement of agricultural labourers in habits of industry, cleanliness, and economy. Mr. Rt. Dymond is the secretary.

Cabbages

“The Paignton Cabbage is a very large and valuable kind, cabbaging very early, and frequently weighing from 20lb. to 28lb, The flavour is very superior, not having the least degree of coarseness, although it is so very large. In my opinion there is no other kind of cabbage to compare with it in that respect. It should be grown in a very strong rich loam, the plants to be 3ft. apart every way. I have frequently seen the cabbage in the market divided into halves and quarters for the convenience of the purchasers. The Cornish and Kentisbeare Cabbages are smaller and earlier than the Paignton, but are most valuable kinds, being very early, and not requiring such a strong soil as the Paignton; they may be grown much closer, say 2ft by 18in. These are the principal kinds of cabbage grown in this county for garden purposes.”

DEVON COLLECTIONS CO-ORDINATORS

I have now been SW organiser for the National Collections for a year, I am just about finding my way round the paperwork and thought you might like to know how the system works.

My job is to co-ordinate Collections from the Channel Islands, Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, Dorset, Wiltshire and Hampshire working with the Co-ordinators in those areas and I report to the national Plant Conservation Committee four times a year.

With my 'Devon' hat on I am responsible for processing any new applications for a National Collection, which entails several site visits and checking the paperwork is correct. On my final visit to the prospective Collections, before processing the paperwork at HQ, I take with me the relevant Devon area Co-ordinator so that the link between them and the Collection is established.

Once the paperwork is prepared it goes to Mercy Morris at HQ who sends the plant list out to experts in the relevant field, asking for comments. If all is in order the application, together with the experts' comments on the plants, goes to a meeting of the Plant Conservation Committee for discussion. Such applications are either approved or sent back to the applicant with one of the below observations –

- * further information is required either as to the plants or the site
- * the plant list needs to be more extensive and therefore the applicant should re-apply at a later date
- * the plants have not been on site for a long enough period and therefore the matter will be reviewed in one or two years time when the plants have settled in.

You will note that I do not co-ordinate or visit the existing Collections in Devon, that is done by the area co-ordinators –

- * Helen Brown - East
- * Georgina Craig - South
- * Rita Heaton - West
- * Howard and Sally Wills – North

I meet with the Devon Co-ordinators twice a year and with the SW Co-ordinators once a year.

Edna Squires

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