

S.W.Branch visit to Wick Farm Gardens, Holsworthy
and Heanton Satchville, Huish, Merton nr. Torrington

Seventeen members of the South West Branch ventured into mid Devon to view two very different gardens.

WICK FARM GARDENS.

Martin & Jenny Sexton have transformed a Victorian farm house and its gardens over the past ten years or so, when they moved up to Wick Farm from a farmhouse not far away in the valley below them. We were greeted by our hosts in the courtyard to the side of the house that led down some steps into a converted extension where we found a magnificent spread of food with coffee and tea. This very long room with a kitchen at one end, a table all the way down the middle and a seating area at the end is so long, in fact, that the floor above is a short mat bowling alley!

After our feast we set off into the gardens around the house which Martin & Jenny have made into rooms, each with its own character. Going through a damp high walled enclosed space ideal for the ferns growing there, we came out onto a lawn with a central bed. There was much mixed planting including azaleas and rhododendrons in flower. We then passed by a lovely bed of white tulips and forget-me-nots which had been in flower for several weeks and were still looking good. This led into a dark wooded space with a Japanese theme. Glowing in the darkness was a fine Rhododendron 'Phyllis Korn' which was well placed and very healthy.

Through a short woodland path with bluebells, we came out into the open and crossed the front of the house to the entrance drive. Martin pointed out the arboretum and lake that he had created on the other side of the road, and we crossed over to explore.

Created about seven years ago, the lake was looking mature without a sign of weed, thanks to the ducks. The level was somewhat lower than usual due to the very dry weather lately. The trees and shrubs were beginning to be of a size with rides and paths in the grass that have been kept mown between them. There were four Paulownias in flower at eye level and so no cricking of necks as is usual. There were various follies - a crenellated gazebo with a comfortable sofa, a circle of standing stones, another wooden house with another sofa and various statues. In fact everywhere there are statues of all kinds placed within the garden rooms, and these give the garden its unique character and, in some cases, humour.

We left Wick Farm and headed for the village of Meeth the other side of Hatherleigh, where we had pre-booked lunch and menu at the Bull & Dragon pub. This was an opportunity for socialising and relaxing, which is an important part of these trips.

HEANTON SATCHVILLE

After lunch we made the short journey along the road to Heanton Satchville, the main seat of Lord Clinton. Entering the park by way of a small gated lodge, we followed the long drive to the house while enjoying the wonderful mature parkland trees, some very ancient, but also some younger and newly planted to ensure continuity.

Parking in the courtyard in front of the house, we were welcomed by Lady Clinton and Paul Hipkin, Head Gardener, and three other gardeners, who were deputed to accompany us on our tour. In fact Lady Clinton came with us for the whole time as well.

We gathered in front of the house, with views over the park and the Devon Red cattle; a special interest of Lord Clinton's. The herd had been decimated by Foot & Mouth, but has been built up steadily since then. In the distance was Dartmoor.

To the other side of the frontage was an immaculate and very large lawn at the end of which, beckoning us, were flowering azaleas and numerous Rhododendrons, including several enormous Loderi varieties scenting the air. Paul had been hoping for some help in naming the Rhododendrons, some of which had been planted in the 1960s and we tried to oblige. In many cases the discussion that ensued was more productive and stimulating than finally arriving at a name which may or may not have been correct!

Through enormous and ancient trees we walked, wondering at their size and form. The new Spring leaves added delicacy and colour to the massive Oaks and Beeches. A curving path led to a wooden gate, through which we walked into the woodland. Just the other side of the gate was a very effective stand of white stemmed Birches with bluebells and Shuttlecock ferns within. Beyond this, a very large and beautiful group of three probable Naomi Rhododendrons was flowering profusely as was a large and open bush of R. Moonstone. A large clearing to the left had been the site of three trees including an old Monkey Puzzle which had been the subject of much debate in the family. Nature made the decision for them by felling it and its two neighbours in a recent storm. With their enormous stumps ground out, this had become a planting opportunity, with the light let in.

More woodland paths led to large bushes of Rhododendron yunnanense in its white coloured form speckled with delicate flowers and orange speckling at the throat. This was much admired, and cuttings were taken with permission, Paul even lending his secateurs for the purpose. It was nearing tea time, so we made our way along a mixed border against the Kitchen Garden wall, again beautifully maintained.

Through a door and down some steps by a wall, there was a surprise; a short and sheltered bed with very interesting plants, including a lovely group of yellow and brown slipper orchids, *Philesia magellanica*, *Fothergilla minor* and other select specimens.

Beyond this we aimed for the Stable block and its main refectory room which had a long central table laden with an enormous and delicious tea. Lady Clinton kept pressing more and more food on us and would not take no for an answer!

We gave a donation to Devon Air Ambulance, and thanked Lady Clinton for her generosity, Paul Hipkin and the gardeners for showing us round, and the tea ladies for preparing a feast of a tea. We happy band left with memories of an afternoon spent in a wonderful, inspiring and beautifully maintained garden.