

## WHPS Trip to England—Part I, 9 Days, 27 Gardens

### June 9, 2004—In the Beginning

I traveled from Riga, Latvia, via Amsterdam, to London's Heathrow Airport. Had to transfer to Gatwick via the National Bus Service. The fare was 17 pounds (\$34) for a 45-minute ride—just the first indication of how much the dollar had lost to the pound since our WHPS visit two years ago. Prices generally in London, and to a lesser extent the countryside, were outrageous (\$9 for a Big Mac?!). Enjoyed a late dinner at the Copthorne Hotel near Gatwick with Georgene Stratman and Kay Allen who had also arrived that day.

### Thursday, June 10

#### Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew —the Warm-Up Garden

I left the hotel at 8:00 a.m., having agreed to meet a gaggle of WHPS members who did not feel that 27 gardens in nine days were quite enough. After a series of disastrous train miscues (accurate information about the local trains is very difficult to ferret out, and even when you accept what meager information is offered, it turns out to be wrong), I arrived at Kew Gardens at 10:00 a.m., about 30 minutes late. Kew is located on the banks of the Thames River, about ten miles south of London. Met up with my niece Betsy (studying in London) at the entrance gate who, the poor thing, was totally uninitiated to the world of the plant nut. We enjoyed the hour tram ride around Kew, which hit the highlights, a must for first-time visitors, as many of the attractions in this 300-acre garden are spread pretty far apart. Finally met up with the rest of the WHPS crew, having spotted them from the tram—Ed Hasselkus, Jeff Epping, Joan Severa, Ann Hasselkus, Marlette Larsen, Barbara Obst, Eleanor Rodini, Jane Gahlman, and Shari Voss. We found them debating about where to go for lunch, of course. Don't remember much about the lunch except for the delicious loaf of Latvian black bread I shared with the group from my earlier travels.

The 250-year-old Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew was founded by the mother of King George III, Princess Augusta, in 1759. In the late 1700s, King George and Queen Charlotte enlarged them by combining the royal estates of Kew and Richmond. It is hard to believe that Queen Charlotte found time to "garden" with 15 royal children!! I do recall seeing Queen Charlotte's cottage somewhere on the back 40 of the grounds, where the children were often banished with their nannies for much of the day. King George was responsible for the famous pagoda—163 feet high. At the time it was built in 1762, it was the tallest building in England. Originally gold gilded with 80 fanciful glass dragons, subsequent royals, who were a bit short of cash, stripped it of its lavish adornments. Ascended by a spiral staircase (no longer open to the public), you can imagine the difficulty of the ascent for the women and men of the 18th century, given their attire. King George III did provide refreshment stations for the climb. Just imagine the British royalty enjoying a coveted invitation for one of these pagoda parties at the same time the King was orchestrating the suppression of the revolt in the American Colonies! The pagoda did survive a German bomb attack in WW II. Ironically, English engineers had cut holes in each of its 30 floors to practice dropping the models of their newest bombs, designated for German cities.

The new director of Kew, as of 2003, is Sir Peter Crane, the former director of the Field Museum in Chicago (1992-1999). There were lots of new features in the garden, giving it a more hands on feel, similar to the exhibits at the Field Museum. (I've always wondered if kids really learn anything, or do they just play with all those buttons and toggles?) New features included a living willow furniture garden, some very modern "idea" gardens by graduate students in the school of horticulture, and a tree top walk through the collection of enormous redwoods and English oaks (*Quercus robur*). The living willow furniture garden—chairs, wine rack, lamps, magazine rack, tables, etc.—was obviously a big hit, judging from the wear and tear on the surrounding areas of grass.

We marveled at some of the original plantings dating back to the time of King George, including ginkgos and oaks. Kew lost hundreds of trees during the big hurricane of 1987, but they have done a great deal with the new open spaces created by the storm, with many new benches on which to sit and people watch.

The glass houses are a Kew hallmark. These imposing 19th century Victorian structures included a temperate house, palm house, tropical house, and a small water lily house (wow factor here was big lily pads of *Victoria amazoniae*). In late afternoon we enjoyed honey ginger ice cream with tea. Later, a few of us enjoyed fish and chips in the village of Kew before returning to Gatwick and the Copthorne.

## Friday, June 11

### Max is on the road again!

Met Franki and Max at the Hilton Hotel at Gatwick, south terminal. Amazingly, we were on the road by 10:30 and rolling towards Co. Essex, NE of London. It was the site of Hyde Hall, the only RHS Garden we had not visited on previous WHPS trips to England. Perched on a hilltop in the generally flat, eastern-most area of England known as East Anglia, the eight acres of garden could easily be seen from a distance. Hyde, literally an old English word for farm, literally referred to the old farm hall building. Dr. and Mrs. Robinson purchased it in the 1950s. They developed the farm and its extensive outbuildings into their private garden, before donating it to the RHS in 1993. Described as a bit of Tuscany in England, the sweeping panorama from the hill top was reminiscent of Italy, though rather than Italian cypresses marching across the landscape there were copses of oak. This was a relatively small garden, and after taking a light lunch in the thatched barn restaurant, we proceeded to explore the grounds. Almost immediately we entered the spectacular dry garden (only planted in 2001, after a site preparation of large rocks and gravel). It was modeled after the well-known Beth Chatto Garden nearby, and suitable to the climate of East Anglia, the driest part of England (24 inches of rain a year). The golden torches of verbascums (mulleins) were dotted dramatically throughout. The cistus were in full bloom, and I will never forget the use of grasses, particularly the stipas—the tall *Stipa gigantea* and the shorter and narrower columns of *Stipa tenuisima*. There were lots of low growing blue campanulas (*C. poscharskyana*) in full bloom amid the small blue and silver junipers used as accents throughout. There were many gorgeous penstemons in full bloom.

Near the entrance was the Queen Mother's Garden, created after her death (like so many across England) as a remembrance garden. My favorite was by far the Hill Top garden, with its combination of herbaceous and woody plant borders. I will never forget the shrub rose walk, which was in its full June glory, from which erupted magically 400 (yes 400!), 8- to 10-foot tall pale pink spires of *Eremerus robustus* (foxtail lily) which towered over the roses. Ironically, in a telephone conversation with Mrs. A. Hort Hound later that night, she stated that she had been out staking these in my own front garden (minus the shrub roses) as the recent rains had toppled them onto the front walk. Alas, I might add, my wife's name for these magnificent lilies was something with more phallic connotations, reflecting her unconcealed disdain for them ("way out of scale, etc."). The herbaceous border, designed by the long-time gardeners at Sissinghurst (Pamela Schwerdt and Sibylle Kreutzberger), was stunning. Back by a solid hedge of yew, it was interrupted by buttresses of the yew hedge, which subdivided the border into individual galleries. Each section was its own painting and had its own color scheme, beginning with harsh yellows and reds and ending with the pale lavenders, purple and white. All in all, it was a rather inspiring interpretation of the Gertrude Jekyll color scheme for the herbaceous border. A farmyard garden next to the main hall featured a very large pond, at one end of which was a remarkable water feature—a small tank (4 x 6 feet) from which rhythmically pulsed a small 18-inch waterfall creating the sound of ocean waves. In addition, the water ran around each side of the tank in two bubbling rills whose sound bounced off the brick walls—each side playing a different tune. There was a very nice garden center with a large collection of plants for sale, including all of the Stipas I had admired.

We were off by mid afternoon for the town of Lavenham and the Swan Hotel, where we had stayed on the first WHPS trip to England in 1998. This 14th-century building has served as a hotel since the time of Henry the VIII, and is located in one of the most scenic Tudor villages in all of England—over 300 buildings dating from the 15th and 16th centuries made of wood beams, lathe and stucco. They were having a mid-summer festival that included outdoor Shakespeare plays and a jazz festival. There was also a lecture about the historic buildings of the town, which a number of WHPS members were lucky enough to attend.

Everyone enjoyed finding their room in the hotel, arrived at by winding up and down staircases, as well as ducking ancient oak beams supporting the narrow passageways—a real rabbit warren, so to speak. We were treated to an elegant dinner in the dining room, which featured lamb shank (delicious—melted in your mouth) and an apple crème brulee for dessert.

It was here that I learned that Max, our fabled bus driver, had left "the road" for the Durham Coach Company and was now in management. Now, for the first time since November 2003, he was driving a coach, because the WHPS was so much fun.

## Saturday, June 12

### Beth Chatto says Hello

After a full English breakfast in the 15th-century dining room at the Swan, we were off to the first garden of the day, The Priory in nearby Suffolk. Its nine acres were gardened by Mr. and Mrs. Henry Englehart, who greeted the coach (along with their black lab and a miniature dachshund) on its arrival at the entrance to their 100-year-old "farm house." Actually, we were told it had never been a priory, the name being a somewhat fanciful invention of a previous owner.

The garden had fine views over the Constablesque countryside and the valley of the River Box, including the tower of the gothic church at Stoke-by-Nayland. This church was painted by John Constable himself in 1836, and hangs in a gallery at the Art Institute in Chicago. The Englehart family had been gardening on this spot for three generations, and it had a very lived in, tumbled look to it (read slightly unkempt—some rough edges). The most spectacular feature was the walled garden with a medley of colorful poppies and mulleins, all in a sea of pale lavender *Geranium pratense* (? species). An adjoining greenhouse held a fine collection of geraniums and some ancient gnarled fuchsias reaching up to the roof. The roses were in full bloom, emphasizing their importance to the English garden, and reason enough to schedule a tour in the month of June. There was also a Chinese bridge leading to a red Chinese tea pavilion in the pond garden below the house. We encountered our first rain showers here, but we managed to retreat to several covered areas, where we enjoyed some delicious shortbread and oatmeal honey cookies. Our time in this garden ended all too soon and we were off to Colchester and Beth Chatto's garden in the village of Elmstead Market.

Beth Chatto's was a repeat for these trips, the WHPS having visited it for the first time 1998. We admired the hedge of Leyland cypress that had grown up in the interim to separate the spectacular dry garden from the parking lot. It did diminish the impact of the dry garden for the first-time visitor, with its riot of colorful flowers and puffs of grasses waving in the East Anglian wind.

We were greeted by David Ward (yes, as in *Pulmonaria* 'David Ward'), head propagator for the extensive retail nursery on the premises. David led us around the seven-acre extensively planted garden for an hour or so. We started out in the dry garden, now Beth Chatto's signature garden. The *Stipa giganteas* were repeated throughout, and their response to a persistent light breeze gave the garden a great sense of motion. I was struck by the towers of white foxgloves that appeared everywhere in the garden as a stunning accent plant. In the largest pond, I found a clump of *Iris lavegata* 'Variegata' with its large royal blue flowers and striking green and white foliage. We had all admired this plant in the stream garden at Charles Cresson's in Swarthmore, PA, on our visit to Philadelphia in the spring of 2003. Of course, I made a beeline for the retail nursery, where all I found was the label indicating where the plant was before it had sold out. This is the number one plant on my wish list at present and I was somewhat disappointed. I probably would have gone through the customs hassle to take it back to the U.S., as it would be easy to bare root.

We wandered through the pond and woodland gardens, admiring the extremely artful plant combinations—Beth Chatto's hallmark as a gardener. (See her many books, which illustrate this artistry—**Green Tapestry**, **The Dry Garden**, **The Woodland Garden**, and **The Damp Garden**. All of us were busy playing shutterbug as we dreamed of repeating these combinations in our gardens back home. I was stuck by some very large, well-placed clumps of hosta (including 'Krossa Regal' right near the entrance to the water garden). This same area included the largest clumps of Bowles Golden Sedge (*Carex elata* 'Aurea', three feet by five feet) that I have ever seen. Also, an enormous clump of Aruncus (goatsbeard) dwarfed the human figure. After picking up a Brie cheese, grape and celery salad in the little restaurant, I munched my way around the plants for sale in the nursery.

Just before leaving, Beth Chatto herself appeared at the garden's entrance looking for the "little American group." All she found were Bob Berend and Dorothy Anderson playing hooky from the rest of the group. Bob was reading a copy of the *London Times*, and Dorothy was taking a smoking break!! Needless to say, these were not the most representative WHPS folks to make an impression on Beth Chatto, gardener extraordinaire and holder of the RHS Victoria Medal of Honor. Fortunately, most of the WHPS group quickly reassembled and we were treated to a 15-minute conversation with her. She was the charming, unassuming, delightful lady we had remembered, without any of those English airs!

Our final garden of the day was but half an hour away—Glen Chantry, Essex. The HPS members in the Essex-Norfolk area had recommended this garden to us. It was the not-to-be-missed garden, as advertised, with a series of well-edged island beds crammed with carefully, color-coordinated perennials and woodies. The owners, Sue and Wol Stains, had been gardening on this site since the 1970s, and we found them in the covered shed serving as the retail shop for the nursery, entertaining customers as well as dodging the rain showers. Their specialty nursery was noted for its unusual plants with only the "finest cultivars," and this was reflected in the plantings of the garden. There were lots of "what is this?" among the trippers. Interestingly enough, none of the color schemes included hot colors, focusing primarily on whites and pastels. I am afraid Christopher Lloyd might have disapproved of the complete absence of "hot tropicals."

They had a magnificent rock garden in front of the house, as well as a large terra cotta patio that just cried out for pots of plants, strangely enough, of which there were none. To a pot fanatic, this was a travesty. All this prime space and no pots?

Sue and Wol were just a bit stuffy. They informed me they had been in the school-teaching business but had never had children of their own. As a matter of fact, I was admonished, who would want any if you had to teach them all day long? I eagerly inquired about *Iris lavezata* 'Variegata', which I had not seen anywhere in the garden. Wol was kind enough to tell me that they did not have the plant for sale at the moment and when they did, it never stayed in stock very long. He then went on to extol its virtues—large royal blue flowers and the green and white variegation which persists for the entire growing season (sigh!).

There was a charming white garden, flush with white roses and white martagon lilies, foxgloves and white delphiniums. There were two fantastic sculptures of nuns, constructed with multi-layered poultry netting (i.e., chicken wire). The kitchen garden, which was meticulously maintained (and off limits to mere mortals), had a central rectangle of knotted boxwoods, which progressed up to a giant, charming scarecrow which appeared to be made of rebar. There were also those large terracotta rhubarb blanching pots dotted about. We observed a brief respite from the passing showers of rain in the little shed which served tea and instant coffee from a machine (ugh!). No homemade little cakes and cookies here either! Sue told us that she maintained this 2.5-acre garden without help, except for the edging and the lawn mowing. Actually, none of us believed this for a minute. This engendered banter between Jeff Epping and Nancy Ragland, as Nancy had decided that perhaps Jeff could maintain the gardens at Olbrich by himself if he just worked a little harder!!

Soon we were on the road to Lavenham across the English count. We were all wowed by the late evening sunlight bathing the ornate gothic church and the charming half timbered crooked houses of Lavenham. The Swan had been taken over by a large wedding party in our absence, and after a brief repose, we reboarded the coach for a dinner at a lovely private golf club nearby—Hintleshan Golf Club. While waiting for our meal, we all enjoyed watching the wood pigeons, pheasants, rabbits (and an occasional fox) who appeared to have taken over the links that evening. We also learned what a "Stud Bar" was—an area for the imbibing drink while wearing your cleated golf shoes!!!

We had a delicious dinner (I had the salmon) and returned to the hotel by 10:00 p.m., after a charming evening that included a dinner guest, a cousin of Ed Hasskelus who lived nearby. She was a gardener and had gardened on the same property for 50 years. In describing her garden to us, she went on so about the roses now in full bloom that we threatened to pay her garden a visit the next afternoon if she did not keep quiet. She then informed us that Ed only had her "email" address.

### **Sunday, June 13 Suffolk, Norfolk...and Amazing Yews**

In the morning we took off for the first garden—Sommerleyton (pronounced summer-layton), near the coastal city of Lowestoft on the North Sea, county Suffolk. The scenery was beautiful as we crossed the fens of East Anglia, whose drainage canals were occasionally assisted by windmills (Dutch style). We were taken with the small country churches with rounded twin towers that sometimes had thatched roofs. There were also many thatched homes, the thatch being made from a much thicker reed than that typical of the Cotswolds. The entrance to the estate was marked by a Hansel & Gretel gatehouse with thatched-roofed turrets. We were met by the head gardener of 27 years, Bob Coutts (dressed in a shirt and tie!) who toured us around the garden for over an hour. It was started in the middle of the 19th century, and near the entrance were some remarkable glass houses designed by Robert Paxton. (He also designed the Crystal Palace and the glass houses at Chatsworth visited on our 2002 trip.) The one nearest the entrance had a remarkable ridge and furrow roof and was the last of its kind extant in England. Mr. Coutts explained the workings of the 150-year-old glass house, including its original ventilation, heating and watering systems. The houses were originally designed to grow grapes. Like some we had visited in Scotland in 2002, dead farm animals were typically buried under the houses for their beneficial compost. Obviously, this was before the age of garden visitors! Now they held a remarkable collection of thick-trunked abutilons (parlor maples), oleanders including an impressive double flowering one, grapevines and a large espaliered fig tree.

The second house was more rectangular, and was referred to as the peach and nectarine house, as this was its original function. The walls still held espaliered peach trees. The main brick gate to the formal wall garden surrounding the manor house was topped by a matching pair of potted agaves. We were told that new gardeners on the staff were initiated by being asked to water them, only to find out when they climbed up there, that they were made of cast bronze!

We passed through an amazing allee of ancient espaliered apple trees, whose large branches were covered with lichens and mosses like the ones we had seen in the rose garden at Mottisfont Abbey in 1998. From there we entered a 150-year-old cast iron pergola that extended for 75 yards. It was covered with blue and white wisteria vines that were as old as the arbor. Their massive trunks reminded me of the ones in the pergola at the Biltmore Estate in Asheville, North Carolina.

Mr. Coutts then turned us loose in the yew maze designed by William Nesfield in 1846. To reach the small pagoda on a mound in the center, one had to successfully traverse 400 yards of passageways. The variation in the colors of the yews used in the maze was quite striking and secondary to the fact that the original yews were planted as seedlings rather than a single cultivar. The top of the maze was clipped into the shape of a hipped roof, so not only would the snow would roll off but it also allowed the clippings to fall to the ground. The hedge was clipped every August and the clippings were sold for 700 dollars to make Taxol (used to treat breast cancer).

As we crossed the main lawn leading to the house, we were impressed by the 150-year-old cedars and Wellingtonia's (what the Brits call California redwoods) and Mr. Coutts told us once again about the famous hurricane of Oct 16, 1987, that had so devastated the gardens of southern England with its destruction of millions of old growth trees. This had opened up the garden to the cold winds of the North Sea, and he pointed out the damage done to the *Acer japonicas*, but we were all very familiar with winter die-back of Japanese maples! Also in this area was a very large tulip tree from North America that was in full bloom. It was pointed out that the name was due to the shape of the leaves rather than the flowers. A small specimen of a special variegated form was nearby. Another eye-catching plant was the native pokeweed, which had pinkish lavender flowers unlike the white flowers of our North American native.

The manor house had been built originally in the Jacobean style, but subsequently transformed to the Anglo-Italianate style in the early Victorian period (1850). The stone mason who had worked on the architectural details in the façade had also spent 17 years working on the exterior details of the Houses of Parliament in central London. We were then treated to a "Plowman's Lunch" in the manor house, which was basically plates of bread, cheese, cold cuts and vegetables.

After lunch, we drove for about an hour to Bressingham Gardens at Diss in county Norfolk. We had visited this garden on our first trip in 1998, and as PBS was making a television documentary for the U.S. that day, we had not been able to visit Foggy Bottom, the famous heather and conifer garden begun by Adrian Bloom in 1964. There were some shocking changes, as the main garden entrance had been blighted by a very commercial looking tawdry garden center, and a large tented restaurant. Steam trains from the steam train museum (a passion of Alan Bloom, the founder) had run amok, with little steam engines putt-putting around everywhere, spewing out their thick black smoke and offering rides to children and adults alike. As you had to traverse this area to get to both the Dell Garden and Foggy Bottom, it provided an inappropriate, distracting and tacky-tacky introduction to the garden.

We made our way past Bressingham Hall, where, much to our surprise, we found the 94-year-old founder of Blooms of Bressingham (as well as the English Hardy Plant Society), Alan Bloom, sitting on a bench and greeting garden visitors with his trademark long silvery hair and earring. Bressingham's is now the largest commercial grower in England and supplies the bedding plants for the central parks of London.

At Foggy Bottom, we were met by Adrian Bloom, son of Alan Bloom, who gave us an introduction to Foggy Bottom, the lovely garden that surrounds his home. The colors, shapes, and textures of the various conifers were beautiful beyond description. The garden was accented throughout with spires of white foxgloves and some very interesting woody plant material other than conifers, including a *Cornus kousa* (Chinese dogwood) in full bloom and a very nice specimen of *Acer shirasawanum* 'Aureum' (Japanese yellow full-moon maple). We then moved on to Alan's Dell Garden. It had been started in the 1950s, and consisted of a series of island beds displaying an extraordinary collection of perennials. I was taken with a dwarf species of *Darmeria peltata ss nana*, some marvelous new cultivars of Rodgersias with dark pink flowers —'Buckland Beauty' (deep, deep pink) and 'Kuppermuind' (a more coppery pink). We also took note of large ornamental plantings and a more dwarf form of *Polygonatum* (*P. x hybridum* 'Grace Barker', also sold as *P. x hybridum* 'Striatum') with more cream-colored variegation on its twisted leaves. (This was recently spotted for sale at Felly's here in Madison.) I then made a quick pass through the garden center. The prices of pots from Italy, Germany, and the Far East were much more expensive than the same ones we had at home, and the plant material, including the conifers, was very disappointing compared to the quality seen in the garden. And, of course, they did not have *Iris Lavegata* 'Variegata'.

As Franki was to say, Foggy Bottom was magnificent, but you could just draw a veil around most of the rest. I doubt if we shall return in the future. Ed Hasslekus, in a private discussion with Adrian Bloom, had learned that the Blooms had sold the garden center and the original nursery along with the name "Blooms of Bressingham," and even the steam trains were managed by a private foundation. They now had to negotiate access to the gardens through the maze of toy steam

trains with their hoards of noisy kids, which all helped to explain the general demise of the operation. Adrian did say that his son (and Alan's grandson) had started a new nursery nearby, called Bressingham Gardens. I expect that this operation will continue to introduce the many fine perennials we have come to expect from the Bloom family over the years.

We departed late in the afternoon for the city of Cambridge. It took us about an hour and a half to traverse the 32 miles, due to the heavy Sunday evening traffic. We were glad to finally arrive at the Felix Hotel about a mile from the city center. This was a modern, sleek hotel built around a late Victorian house with a very large Wellingtonia (California Redwood) on the front lawn. The bouquets of flowers around the inside public areas were exquisite—green calla lilies, yellow-green Eremurus, phalaenopsis orchids and a large pot of blue and pink lacecap hydrangeas.

The check-in itself, however, was rather inconvenient, as each of us had to present a credit card to cover extras in order to receive our room card. Franki had some sharp words with the hotel management over this. We had a delicious dinner of chicken on roasted vegetables that included parsnips, and a walnut apple crème brûlée for dessert. Afterwards, many of us gathered on the open-air veranda for coffee and a harty conversation in the late evening twilight.

### **Monday, June 14 Cambridge and Environs**

Breakfast at the Felix was marred by controversy. We were presented with a menu that only included a continental breakfast. Any element of the full English breakfast was extra! Frankie, who expects nothing less than the full English breakfast, became quite indignant and exchanged some hot words with the hotel management. Eventually we got off to the first garden of the day, after our full English breakfast.

It was very warm and sunny—the temperature must have climbed up close to 80<sup>o</sup>, with a brisk breeze. Fortunately for us it remained dry, though most of the local gardeners all were praying for rain. The first garden was Anglesey Abbey, just NE of the city of Cambridge. It was a very large garden (98 acres), dating to 1926 and originally belonging to Lord and Lady Fairhaven, who had donated the garden and the manor house to the National Historic Trust. Normally closed on Mondays and Tuesdays, we enjoyed a private tour by the head gardener, David Jordan.

We began our stroll through one of the many meadow gardens with a collection of native wildflowers that had self-renewed after the mowing of the lawn had ended ten years ago. The garden itself was a wonderful mixture of the formal and the informal, frequently moving from one area into the next with a sudden, surprise transition. The collection of well-placed statuary was outstanding, of the type you would buy at auction at Sotheby's or Christie's. Many were originals, not copies. There were large expanses of lawn and grand allees of trees—copper beeches, spruces, chestnuts (like those at Windsor Castle), and hornbeams (*Carpinus*). A magnificent D-shaped perennial border, like the one we had seen on a previous trip at Hadspen House, was in full bloom with a stunning array of flowers. This rather small area occupied much of our time. I was particularly impressed with *Achillae grandiflora*, whose five-foot towers were topped with large white umbrels. This was to be one of the finest herbaceous borders we would see on the trip.

Our next stop was nearby at 21 Lode Road in a village of thatched cottages, many of which were surrounded by tantalizing gardens, which we enjoyed peering into. This small garden (60 by 30 meters) belonged to Richard Ayers, who had been the head gardener at Anglesey for 40 years. After a tour of his small but wonderful perennial and shrub garden, we were treated to tea and delicious cakes made by ladies of the village. The garden had many narrow meandering paths of immaculately edged grass. There was a masterful display of foliage and color throughout—a continuous tapestry of plants.

As a galanthophile for more than 50 years, he had collected over 150 different snowdrops, which bloomed from September to April, so all we saw were the labels (none actually bloomed in June as far as I could tell!). There was a striking water feature of polished green Chilean slate that stood about five feet tall, from which bubbled a fountain of water. Richard said this was a gift to himself when he retired as head gardener at Anglesey Abbey. He told us the thatch on his roof was of straw and had to be replaced every 15 years. There were large clumps of *Gunnera manicata*, hostas placed in simple black plastic landscape pots around the patio, including 'Great Expectations' and 'Nigrescens'.

Our final stop of the day was the Cambridge Botanical Garden, a botanical garden in the strictest sense—no wow factor here in general. Founded in 1846 (40 acres, 9 National Collections), the plants are grouped by botanical families and often in the order of having been introduced into England from around the world (in 20-year blocks). There was a large rock garden centered around a small pond, with lots of flowers. I was finally able to identify *Ornithogalum pyranaceium* we

had been seeing all along the trip. The grass lawns were dotted with *Bellis perrennis* (that little prostrate, English daisy). We marveled at a striking yellow wood (*Cladrastis kentukea*) in full bloom—oh, the fragrance! There was a clutch of small glass houses, but as it was so warm, some of us thought they were best viewed from the outside. (I missed the famous jade vine as a result.) By the way, the Latin (Roman) name for Cambridge is Cantabrigiense, hence explaining the name given to plants originating from the Cambridge Botanic Garden such as *Epimedium x cantabrigiense*. Our group's guide was not terribly knowledgeable (didn't even know that yellowwood was a North American tree) and most of us gradually wandered off on our own.

For the remainder of the afternoon, we were turned loose into the historic city, with its 25 different colleges that make up Cambridge University. It was the week of the May Balls (until the calendar was changed 400 years ago, they had actually been in the month of May), which is graduation week and alumni week all rolled into one, with lots of parties, dances, and concerts at the various colleges. (Of course, there was very little drinking.) As a result, most of the colleges were closed, including their lovely gardens that we had originally planned to visit.

Some of us went punting on the River Cam, which courses behind the colleges. The student guides imparted lots of historic information about the university. Many went into Kings College Chapel with its Ruben's altarpiece. A couple of us (guess which ones) hopped on the local train and ventured nine miles south of Cambridge to the village of Shepreth to visit a couple of small gardens. The first of these, the Crossing House Garden, was owned by Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Fuller.

It was a small, intensively gardened quarter acre, located right along the railroad tracks at a crossing station. When the trains went rushing by, you literally expected to be sucked out of the garden on to the tracks. Tiny paths were bordered with dwarfed *Buxus sempervirens* (boxwood). The beds were chock full of every plant imaginable—*Acer erythrocladum*, *Acer shirasawanum* 'Aureum', a very rare split-leafed English walnut, many arums, tiny alpine plants, etc. There was some interesting ironwork, including a collection of boot scrapers and a Scandinavian sleigh bed beautifully planted with annuals.

The owners were a hoot—typical working class folk and passionate plant people who seemed to have visited every rare plant nursery in England. You knew that they were the types always coming back home with a carload of new plants, even though there was not a speck of unplanted space in the garden. Their rose-covered cottage was built in 1850.

In the same village we also visited The Garden of Docwra's Manor. An elaborate and gorgeous iron gate stood at the entrance to the garden in front of a small Georgian manor house, reached by a path-lined with white roses and the spires of *Euphorbia wulfenii* self-sowing everywhere. It was reminiscent of the entrance courtyard at Christopher Lloyd's Great Dixter.

We wandered through four acres of gardens, gradually acquired and planted since 1954 by the Ravens, who were great plant collectors. Plants had obviously been acquired with magpie acquisitiveness from friends, family and nurserymen. There were many garden rooms, with good hardscaping consisting of brick walls and old farm buildings. There was a kitchen garden, orchard garden, woodland areas, and many water features. The overall effect was very cottage like, with lots of roses and colorful annuals and perennials all blending together in a colorful display. I was particularly taken by the walled perennial garden, with its spikes of delphiniums and eremerus, lilies, etc. The garden was closed, but of course we invited ourselves in anyway, and did not regret our decision.

Then it was back to Cambridge on the train. We enjoyed a delicious dinner at the hotel with a very memorable celery sorbet and roast duck on a bed of fruit drizzled with a cinnamon sauce.

To be continued...A. Hort Hound

**Coming in November**  
**WHPS Trip to England Part II—Will I ever find *Iris Lavegata*?**