

WHPS Goes to England

This past June a group of WHPS members spent 10 days visiting gardens in Cornwall, England. Later this year, WHPS contributor “A. Hort Hound” will provide a full wrap-up on the trip; but in the meantime, we thought you’d enjoy the comments of some of the other members who took the trip.

From Cathie Richards: This was my first trip with the WHPS to England (and I would do it again!); however, this was not my first trip to England, as I had been there a few times before but the trips were not gardening related. All of the gardens we visited were outstanding in their own way, but I think my favorites were those that were planned and cared-for by the owners of the property—in other words those not tended to by a head gardener and those under him. While these gardens were lovely and preserved the original intent of the landowners, they lacked the personal investment and touch of the individual gardener who gardened out of interest in gardening and delight in plants. The most fun adventure was on the bus, driving down the narrow country lanes—they nominally are two lanes, but with a large bus(coach), we took up nearly the whole road!! Meeting the hay wagon on one of these country lanes, and having to back up for nearly a mile with Frank directing, was an event I shall never forget! My memories of the trip go far beyond the gardens we saw—there were the individuals we met along the way, the wonderful hotels we stayed at, the spectacular meals we enjoyed (too much!!). Frank Greer along with his travel agency in England did an outstanding job of planning and organizing. The bus driver we had was terrific, as well—good-natured, calm and helpful.

From Keith Anderson: The most outstanding garden was Cothay Manor. The owner/guide was obviously very involved in the planning, execution and maintenance of the garden. She had charming stories to relate regarding the making of the gardens and the people that had come through over the years. Many beautiful gardens in one! One of the plant combinations I’d like to have in my garden is the Rose centranthus and purple foxglove (wild in England). What was the funniest thing that happened on the trip? While walking through the vast landscape garden of Painshill Park, I was walking beside Becky Oftedahl. The scale and beauty of the 250-year-old trees and landscape was overwhelming. At one point, almost musing to herself, Becky said, “And to think, he (the original owner) did all this with money he didn’t even have.” It was true! Our guide Frankie made a big deal of describing English “Cream Tea” as we approached one garden where they would have it. A very English tradition of tea, scones, rich clotted cream and strawberry jam. We enjoyed it at that garden and a few more times throughout the trip. Yum!

From Peg Luby: I’ve been to England several times, but this was my first time with WHPS. I loved Lamorran on the Roseland Peninsula. It had a Mediterranean feel and you discovered something wonderful either looking in front or behind you as you traveled the path to the water. There were several plants I’d love to have in my garden. If I have enough sun there were several I noted at Bosvigo, a wonderful home garden: *Astrantia major* ‘Hadspen Blood’; Black lace elderberry; *Thalictrum minus*. Early in the trip I dropped my brand new digital camera in the toilet!! But as a result I felt very liberated, not having to take pictures of every wonderful thing I saw. And so I often joined Ed Hasselkus, who was also not taking pictures. As a result I probably learned a whole lot more. The people on the trip were great. The Meudon Hotel was a gem, both for the accommodations and the wonderful food. Also, I was pleasantly surprised that the English pub food was so good. (I’ll bet you can tell I’m a dietitian!)

From Eleanor Rodini: This was my second trip with WHPS to England, the last one being to Wales two years ago. In some ways I thought Cornwall was more beautiful than Wales—certainly it was milder in temperature and less wild in feeling. I loved the way the undulating hills were divided by the thick, dark hedgerows. I cannot really choose a favorite garden. I found the large estates like Wakehurst and Painshill Park, while full of wonderful trees, shrubs, and even flower beds, too overwhelming and “remote.” I preferred the smaller gardens, ones that I could relate to in some way. I especially liked the gardens where one felt the interest and passion of the owner/gardener, such as Cothay Manor, where the owner was so worried about her young locust trees and asked Ed for advice. The owners of the Manor House, which was being restored to the original Gertrude Jekyll, were also intensely involved. Though hardly small, I also loved Lamorran, where the head gardener gave us a tour and really cared about the garden. I’ve never seen a more impeccably maintained or lush estate. Many of the plants we saw would not survive in Wisconsin, but I did make note of a few cultivars I would like to try to find. And at Sticky Wicket, a garden as whimsical as its name, I saw a combination of a pink Geranium and purple Cimicifuga that took my fancy. Perhaps the garden of the Meudon Hotel, where we spent four nights, was as pleasant as any we visited. The path down the ravine to the tiny beach was full of tree ferns and huge Gunnera. I have a fantastic picture taken from underneath. The leaf looks like a enormous scalloped umbrella. Perhaps the funniest incident on the trip was when our bus was driving down a very narrow lane, with walls and thick hedges on either side, and encountered a fully loaded haywagon coming up. As the driver of the haywagon had no rearview mirror, our bus was the vehicle that had to back up. It took a good 20 minutes to achieve this and Frank had to go out and assist our bus driver as he inched his way back up the hill.