

## TATSFIELD GARDEN TOUR 2014

Once again Tatsfield Horticultural Society laid on a splendid afternoon with such a variety of gardens to visit on Sunday 15 June. Unfortunately, my husband was unable to join me this year so I employed the assistance of two pensioners, more commonly known as my parents, to accompany me and to assist with possibly the youngest member of the Horticultural Society, my four month old son, Edward.

The day didn't get off to the greatest start. Whether you could call it baby brain or just sheer ignorance on my part, I managed to overlook it was also Father's Day. A hasty call to Andrew on Sunday morning ensured a delicious meal, as always, at the Bakery, so with our tums full, off we set on what we knew would be a fun and interesting afternoon.

Although the weather was decidedly fresher than had been the previous few days this did not seem to deter visitors from the village and also those further afield who had found out about the tour through the website.

First stop was **Furze Corner on Approach Road**, the home of Jan and Aslam Akhtar. What a variety of things to see. There were gates leading everywhere which gave the feel of different segments to this superb adventure garden. A fabulous double swing hung down from the garden tree which the visiting children enjoyed on the beautifully mown lawn. To the rear was a spiral staircase leading up to a tree house and tree top viewing platform with views over neighbouring land. Closer to the house an outdoor pizza oven and table tennis table were situated. What fun the children in this household must have. Bees and chickens were also present as were raised vegetable beds made from sleepers which contained lettuce, strawberries, sweet peas, rhubarb and a herb garden. Quite the self sufficient home. The Shepherd's Hut was an unusual addition to the site which housed a wood burner and futon which I can imagine provides some quiet time away from a busy household. It was pointed out to me by a fellow visitor that the Hut was on wheels and how convenient it would be to move it further afield. I think she was doing some research in readiness for her husband's birthday present!



Second on the list was **3 Grove Place in Grove Road** which is the residence of the charming Pat Coombe. What a lovely oasis of peace and quiet whilst located in the centre of a bustling village. The sound of the water trickling in the pond was most therapeutic especially when coupled with watching the koi swim majestically through the waters. To the side of the pond was the most



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stunning fuchsia plant with an abundance of lovely pink and purple flowers. I can imagine myself sitting in the lovely conservatory on a summer's evening listening to these gentle sounds and feeling miles away from anywhere.

Next we dip down from Grove Place and into Goatsfield Road to Karen and James Longley, the owners of **Dell Cottage and Meadow Bank** where you could easily have spent all afternoon. There was so much to see and to learn. For example, did you know it is very difficult to know the sex of ducklings? Apparently, when they are eight weeks old the females quack so you can work it out by the noisy ones. Some things, I see, are universal across the animal species! There were also a number of apricot Call Ducks who, we are told, are not good for those with close neighbours as the females are terrible chatter boxes and can be highly vocal - see my previous comment. Also residing at the Longleys are a number of Mandarin Ducks, which are one of the few duck species not hunted for food, owing to their terrible taste. For me, personally though, the highlight was the British Saddleback pigs who were born on 27 March this year - what sweet little chaps they were.



Onward now up the hill to **Maesmaur Road and to Pine Lodge** where Christine and Paul Jackson reside. As many of you will know, most of the gardens on the west side of Maesmaur are very steep and the Jacksons have used this to their advantage, incorporating a fantastic tier system. There is a stunning sitting area on a platform under the most beautiful purple magnolia tree and from this position the sun beams through the tree tops towards the end of the day. It had a Mediterranean feel and I imagine many a relaxed evening has been spent on this terrace where you also had a perfect view of the bees taking the nectar from the foxgloves below before returning to the hives at the bottom of the garden. Interestingly, the Jacksons have discovered a number of items in the garden, believed to have been a dumping ground from the Colegates Es-

tate from years gone by, including a silver plated engraved pot marked 1776 and a 1950s ceramic doll's head. On offer were tea and scones with homemade strawberry jam from their allotment. Yummy. It's easy to see how they managed to raise nearly £45 for Diabetes UK with this lovely offering.

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Just a short walk for the remaining two, both on Ricketts Hill Road. **High Mead** is the home of Sue and Neil Warren and one word could quite easily suffice: "Wow!" They know how to make you feel green with envy! I understand that the plot contains some of the oldest, and if I may add, most beautiful trees in the village. This setting is just stunning with the most amazing mature trees including an Indian bean tree, a juniper tree and Stryax japonica as you enter the delightful sweeping driveway. There is also a superb copper beech in the rear garden. The lawns are beautiful, the patio inviting and the vegetable garden and sweet peas flourishing. I think the modern phrase I'm so frantically searching for is "wel jel".



The last, but by no means least, on the list was Alex and Guy Deterding's house **Heath House**, a short walk from High Mead. Guy informs us that he has been focussing on making the garden lower maintenance to attract more wildlife especially bees and other insects. This he has achieved judging by the buzzing within the bushes. The main attraction for me was the number of very old apple trees of fantastic shapes and sizes which created real character to this garden although I must add I have also never seen such huge artichokes in all my life.



With the final visit complete we returned, wearily, home. With all that fresh air I was convinced Master Edward would sleep comfortably through the night. I'm sad to report that this was not to be. My parents, on the other hand, were out cold!

On behalf of all the visitors, thank you to those who opened your gardens to us. So much work went in to it and it did not go unnoticed and thank you also to

the Horticultural Society for, once again, arranging such an enjoyable event.

I'm already looking forward to next year but I would find it cheaper if the date was moved from Father's Day!

**Nichola Stokoe**