



HERGEST CROFT GARDENS

Newsletter

March 2011

Winter

We have just had the coldest winter since 1982 with temperatures as low as -14°C or 7°F and continuous snow cover from late November to mid January so it seems a little odd to be writing this looking out through palm trees across a sunny Florida beach! It is going to be fascinating to discover which of the more tender plants that we have been experimenting with over recent years have stood up to the test. No doubt there will be some tragedies but we will not have a complete picture until May or June – what is clear already however is the effect of top cover in protecting the plants growing below them and the tender *Rhododendron edgeworthii* and its hybrids in the Scots Grove look as if they have survived unscathed. Elizabeth and I have just visited the Morris Arboretum of the University of Pennsyl-

vania in Philadelphia where such winters are the norm and it is clear that their palette of plants is much more restricted than ours. Many of the plantings there date back to the beginning of the twentieth century and so are contemporary with those at Hergest and in some cases come from the same sources especially the collections of Ernest Wilson; in their more continental climatic conditions some plants have outgrown their contemporaries here and I was greatly impressed by a huge *Cercidiphyllum japonicum* that is far larger than the British champion in the Azalea Garden. Anyone paying a visit to the East coast of the USA should include the Morris Arboretum – it has a spectacular tree top walk modelled on the one at Kew.

Sycamore Walk

One serious loss that has nothing to do with the snow is the huge sycamore that gave its name to the Sycamore Walk – about 10 years ago one of the huge limbs broke off in an autumn gale leaving the tree unbalanced; I always suspected that the bracing wires that were fixed in the 1970's did more harm than good by restricting its natural movement. This winter another of the limbs fell directly down the Sycamore Walk breaking the Japanese Umbrella Pine, *Sciadopitys verticillata* and damaging other plants. It was clear that the remaining branches were now unsafe but the problem was how to get them down with minimum damage to the surrounding plants; this posed a problem to our most experienced tree surgeon, Keith Boulton, who decided that it was unsafe to climb and take them down piece by piece and the position of the tree meant that we could not get a crane in. This left no alternative but to fell each limb in one piece and drop them as precisely as possible to avoid further damage; a task they described as amongst the most difficult that they had ever done. As you can see they did a brilliant job and the only casualty was a 50 year old tree of *Prunus* 'Ukon' that had to be felled to save more important plants. Whilst it is very sad to lose one of the few veteran trees in the garden it has let light into an area where little would grow under the dense shade so, as always new problems produce new opportunities in a garden.



Felling the sycamore

Spring Bulbs

With a late spring the early bulbs are now at their peak and the unique lake of *Scilla bifolia* on the lawn west of the house with its islands of snowdrops is if anything more spectacular than ever. Early rhododendrons in Park Wood, camellias in the Daisy Border are beginning to open. The earliest bulbs in the Spring Border in the Kitchen Garden are flowering. The yellow racemes of *Corylopsis* species will delight the eye and scent the air. In a word spring is almost with us.

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New Birch book

Dr Hugh McAllister from Ness gardens in Cheshire in collaboration with the late Kenneth Ashburner is in the final stages of producing a new monograph on birches to be published by Kew in the autumn. I have been helping with attempting to identify some of the species and cultivars that grow here and in some cases represent the original introductions. I must say that trying to establish relatively minor differences from bare dormant twigs on a cold January day is by no means the easiest of tasks but in the course of it I have been able to add significantly to my knowledge of the collections here and fill in a number of gaps. A detailed study of this charming genus is long overdue and I am sad that my father, who was fascinated by it, is no longer around to see some of the answers to the questions that puzzled him. One of the problems is that the 'Lady of the Woods' is not over keen on purity and most of the seedlings are, to put it bluntly, bastards, though in many cases very attractive ones. This is why we generally only sell grafted plants of birch so that you can be confident that you are getting the real thing.



Betula globospica

Herefordshire Year in the Orchard

A wide range of organisations in the county are collaborating to celebrate the County's orchard tradition and mark the two hundredth anniversary of the publication of Thomas Andrew Knight's *Pomona Herefordensis* in 1811. Knight was President of the Horticultural Society of London, the predecessor of the Royal Horticultural Society that year and Elizabeth has succeeded him as the second Herefordshire President two hundred years later. We are planning to expand the Autumn plant fair to a two day event on October 15 & 16. More details of this and other related events will be given in future newsletters.

Pat Davies and Sandra Garrett

Pat has now retired as a receptionist after 24 years service to the gardens starting in 1986. We and our visitors will miss her friendly face and helpful manner but since she now has the first time ever life-time season ticket we hope that we will still see her around. Sandra Garrett will be playing a wider role helping with buying for the shop and distributing the publicity.

Plant Sales: There are a wide range of plants and some rare trees .

EVENTS

The Flower Fair

Monday 2 May 10.30am-4.30pm

Events in aid of Noah's Ark Trust

Charity for Bereaved Children

Range of nurseries and craft stalls selling unusual plants and crafts

Rain or Shine Theatre Company

Shakespeare's '*Much Ado about Nothing*'

Saturday 30 July starts at 7.00pm

RHS All About Apples

Saturday 15—Sunday 16 October

For a copy of the Newsletter visit www.hergest.co.uk

The Receptionists, Jill, Sandra, and Melissa welcome any comments

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