

July 2011

Last month a coach full of Gardening Club members made their way to the Isle of Wight to spend a long weekend looking at gardens. Our first stop was on the way to the coast and we all enjoyed the magnificent gardens at Mottisfont Abbey. Home to over 300 old fashioned roses plus numerous rose varieties chosen by plantsman Graham Stuart Thomas, this garden has matured beautifully since it was created in 1972. We will never forget the fragrance which hit us as we entered the walled garden. Do visit this garden, preferably in June when the roses are at their best.

Eventually we arrived in the Isle of Wight and stayed in a very good hotel in Shanklin. Nothing was too much trouble for the staff who made us very welcome. From here we set off each day to explore the island's gardens. Our programme was varied - we enjoyed the formality of the Victorian parterre gardens and terraces (and the cream teas!) at Osborne House, the eccentricity of the Colonel and his lovely family who showed us round Nunwell House with its equally eccentric garden. Then there were the donkeys at Carisbrooke Castle who attracted almost as much attention as the Princess Beatrice garden designed by Chris Beardshaw and full of Edwardian-style plants.

Sunshine lit up the magical gardens of Mottistone Manor which are full of surprises – shrub-filled banks, hidden pathways and colourful herbaceous borders. As it is the most southerly National Trust garden a Mediterranean-style planting scheme has been adopted. Another much-appreciated treat was the traditional teagarden!

All too soon we were crossing the water to wend our way home. One final garden to visit – West Dean, near Chichester. Here we saw an exquisitely restored walled garden – probably the foremost example in the UK. There were wonderfully-restored Victorian glasshouses full of well-presented treasures, immaculate row upon row of vegetables, splendid obedient fruit trees and bushes grown on single stems against walls or along imaginative frameworks. Then there was a magnificent pergola with roses, honeysuckle and clematis scrambling with gay abandon over the many pillars, designed by Harold Peto for crinolined ladies to wander along whilst bathed in the heady scents!

A truly wonderful weekend – but don't take my word for it - speak to anyone who accompanied us on our weekend and you will hear the same clearly there is only one action to take – join the Gardening Club and enjoy the many different experiences on offer!