

# Professional Gardeners' Trust Award for attendance at the Walled Kitchen Garden Network Forum 2017 by Jane Armstrong.

## Background

Since 2015, I have been working at a private estate in Northumberland where I am responsible for the mainly 18<sup>th</sup> century walled kitchen garden, which contains a wide variety of fruit, vegetables and ornamental borders. An early Victorian conservatory is re-supplied from a glasshouse in the walled garden that also houses trained fruit and seasonal produce. Since I left the Ministry of Defence in 1999, my horticultural experience has mainly been in Scotland, most recently on a private estate outside Stirling, where I worked in a new, but traditionally styled walled garden.



The Walled Kitchen Garden Network is an informal grouping of national organisations and individuals seeking to share ideas and experience of restoring walled kitchen gardens. Membership is free as contact is internet based ([www.walledgardens.net](http://www.walledgardens.net)), however, an opportunity for face-to-face networking is provided by their annual Forum of lectures and garden visits. The theme of the 23/24 September 2017 Forum at West Dean was glasshouses.

I am extremely grateful to the Trustees of the PGT for the Kenwyn Pearson Award of £150 and my employers, Mr and Mrs Browne-Swinburne, for the financial support enabling me to attend the Forum and evening Reception (£145 plus travel & accommodation).

## West Dean

Jim Buckland and Sarah Wain gave an inspiring account of their 26 years at West Dean during which the 'genteel decline' of the walled gardens was dramatically reversed through pioneering restoration to create an award-winning public garden. Their hard-won knowledge and experience influenced subsequent restoration projects, such as at Heligan. It was fascinating to see the 'before' and 'after' images, to hear about the involvement of traditional craftsmen from West Dean College (based in the main house) and the dedicated research required to identify and develop the appropriate plants, cultivation techniques and infrastructure. Also, their challenges such as: incorporating 'modern' techniques such as bio-mass heating within an historic environment; sustaining maintenance programmes despite declining financial support, the labour-intensive nature of the garden and the increased rainfall. There were some things which, with hindsight, they would have done differently, notably, the decision to paint the glasshouses.

## Restoring and constructing wooden glasshouses

Simon Harrison (Victorian Glasshouse Company) gave an overview of the range of projects and problems encountered by his business. He suggested reducing the high cost of maintaining painted glasshouses by using hardwoods, such as iroko from West Africa. Iroko, called 'poor man's teak', is orange but soon weathers to an ash-grey and doesn't require

oiling or painting. A new wooden glasshouse, however, requires 7-8 coats of paint (contributing 30% of the overall cost) and repainting every 4-5 years.

### Metal Glasshouses

Chris Sawyer (Alitex) summarised the evolution of glasshouses from the earliest orangeries to cast iron glasshouses, such as the Great Stove at Chatsworth and 'off the shelf' products of Messenger & Co. He highlighted the benefits of using polyester powder coated aluminium, which doesn't need repainting and although it is guaranteed for 10 years, the science suggests a lifetime in excess of 60 years.

### The Working Garden at Trotton

Ben Pope outlined his experience of a private one acre walled garden redesigned by Arne Maynard to emphasise the romantic sense of place whilst enabling about 75% to be used in the production of edibles and cut flowers. He described the different elements of the garden and how they had been tweaked for easier maintenance such as the wavy top to the previously cloud pruned box hedge.

### Visits

#### West Dean – led separately by Jim and Sarah

The tours focused on the maintenance and use of the glasshouses, highlighting key chemicals, equipment and processes. Tips included: cleaning of the glasshouses with Verritex-Pro; steeping washed pots and canes in Hortiscept for an hour; and creating fleece 'boats' for housing the initial application of predatory mites against red spider mites. Pears were trained along bent brown electric cable to create wonderful curves.

#### Fittleworth – led by Head Gardener Mark Saunders

This unusual walled garden straddled the old drive between the house and the public road and fruit and vegetables occupied a third of an acre. Mark has environmentally sensitive approach relying on 3-4 inches of well-rotted compost (garden waste and manure from the estate horses) to 'boost' soil health instead of strict rotation of crops. Asparagus beetle was controlled by the high population of sparrows, and hoverflies attracted by the marigolds controlled aphids.

#### Whithurst Park – unguided

Although this walled garden was only ten years old, it was laid out in a fairly traditional manor with a mix of ornamental and productive planting. An extensive network of irrigation pipes and net cages had been installed. As a new and secluded garden, some pests such as carrot fly did not appear to have discovered it!

#### Petworth – tour led by Lady Egremont

The 14 acre walled garden was created by Capability Brown in 1760, but reflects the designs and plantsmanship of Lady Egremont since her arrival in 1978. Mainly ornamental, it includes: a John Brookes inspired gravel garden; a sunken garden; colourful herbaceous borders; and pergolas. Her orchard was designed for the blossom as much as the fruit, a

favourite apple being 'Arthur Turner'. The vegetable garden is not strictly organic but is 'no dig' with an application of 3-4 inches of bought-in stable bedding based mulch.

Personal development:

I was intrigued by different methods for combating brassica pests, from a walk-in fine mesh cage to sheep wool 'collars' and organic sprays (either pyrethrum based or *Bacillus thuringiensis*). Although I already use plug trays, I will try the larger size recommended at Fittleworth. I will also try to be more adventurous with training fruit trees into curves and double cordons for tomatoes (as seen at West Dean). I look forward to sampling new sources for seed (Salt Springs and Simpsons) and pots (West Meon Pottery). The personal contacts yielded lots of suggestions for gardens to visit on my subsequent visit to Cornwall and I have already had a visit by one of the other attendees to discuss the glasshouse at Capheaton. I am even more determined to uncover the story of pineapples at Capheaton, so far only a tantalising watercolour of one in 1834 with a girth of 29 inches!