

## February visit to West Dean Gardens

Our first garden trip of the year is usually to Highdown to see the snowdrops and hellebores. This year as Highdown is closed until the Autumn we planned to go to West Dean gardens.

After weeks of rain and countrywide floods our day dawned overcast but, it was not **actually** raining. However, by the time our carful of five arrived in the car park, it was very cold and raining sporadically. So, there were only about 16 intrepid members who braved the elements.



This was my first visit to West Dean and I was completely blown away (not literally!) First of all by the setting in a downland valley complete with fluffy white sheep and also by the stream running through the gardens. Pip told me that it is called the Winterbourne (bourne = stream) and that it only flows in the winter. It was certainly flowing in full spate last Wednesday and the small waterfalls were spectacular.

The snowdrops were passing over but the hellebores, of many colours and which had had their leaves removed to expose their beauty, were wonderful. There were also swathes of our native wild daffodil, narcissus pseudonarcissus. There were some beautiful plantings, black grass, *Ophiopogon planiscapus* 'Nigrescens' and yellow and orange dogwood together were particularly striking under the grey skies. (See collage).



Sue was taken by the *Stachyris praecox* with its chains of lemon flowers - (must get one of those!)

We even saw a bee on some *chionodoxa*! Our visit ended in the café and I can heartily recommend the peach and fig cake.



My first visit to west Dean, but certainly not my last – I would love to see the wisteria pergola in May, the apple and pear blossom on another pergola, the kitchen garden, the herbaceous borders... – I will have to get a season ticket!

Masha White