

## **Woolbeding Gardens – A hidden gem one of West Sussex’s best kept secrets.**

It was a beautiful summers day as we made our way to the market town of Midhurst to pick up the minibus to Woolbeding Gardens. This is a place I have always wanted to visit but it takes planning as the gardens are only open for a limited number of days (Thursday & Friday, Wednesday this year late July and August). There is no car park at the gardens and access is by a park & ride minibus from The Grange car park in Midhurst. So, I was delighted that it part of the Garden Group list this year. We must thank Masha for organising this logistical nightmare as the garden lived up to its name and was indeed a hidden gem.

### **A Bit of History**

Nestling alongside the River Rother, Woolbeding Gardens was acquired by the National Trust in the 1950s by the Lascelles family and from 1972 was leased to Simon Sainsbury. Simon Sainsbury with his partner Stewart Grimshaw restored the 17<sup>th</sup> -century house and worked with remarkable contemporary designers and craftsman to create the elegant country retreat that is still their home today. We were told by the friendly and informative gardeners that Stewart Grimshaw is actively involved with the planning of the garden, what is grown in the vegetable area and has particular likes and dislikes.

In the late 1990s Julian & Isabel Bannerman were commissioned to develop the Longwalk, a wooded Pleasure garden characterised by a series of informal views.

### **Our Visit**

When we arrived at the Grange and had negotiated the Pay and Display machine, we queued for the minibus which quickly whisked us to the gardens. Our first view of Woolbeding was the Entrance Garden, formerly the old farmyard; it had a Mediterranean feel with formal water pools surrounded by African lilies and olive trees.

Some of us then headed for the Orchard café to have a coffee & tea and plan our visit. Others headed off to different parts of the garden and we met up in different parts of the garden urging different groups to visit this part and that part.

Many loved the Longwalk with the ruined Abbey, rustic Hermit Hut and River God. There was so much to see:

**The West Borders** - a palette of blue, white and pale yellow, roses, tulips and forget me knots carefully line the avenue, perfectly framing the view beyond the gates into the countryside. The walls are full of climbing roses and the borders are bursting with bloom in full season.

**The Well Garden** with four immaculate box-hedged beds surrounding the Italian well.

**The Herb Garden** featuring a sundial at the centre and spiralling topiary balls alongside apples climbing up the walls, beds with, lavender, thyme.

**The Fountain Garden**- well hidden within the walls of the formal garden.

**The Orangery** - housing an array of potted citrus and conservatory plants. Designed by Philipp Jebb in the 1970’s, it was the perfect spot to sit a while by the pool.

**Greenhouse Garden** - an exotic jungle like collection of plants and ferns.

**Vegetable Garden** – here we heard from one of the gardeners about Stewart’s involvement and how vegetables are grown for use in the main house, the Vegetable Garden is home to the ornamental Potager made up of around 1,200 lettuces that surround a Topiary Box Swan.

An excellent visit, thank you Masha. Many of us stayed all, day sampling the delights of the Orchard Café on more than one occasion! Definitely, somewhere to return to, perhaps in April or in September before it closes for the winter.

Gillian Henry

