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85

Gardens

The art of nature takes root at Chelsea Physic Garden



Derwent May

Chelsea Physic Garden, alongside Chelsea Embankment and the Thames, is not laid out specifically for beauty. It was founded in 1673 as a garden for medicinal plants, and now has an amazing collection not only of plants useful to man in all possible ways, but also instructive beds that are set out to display the botanical relationships of plants. You might call it a four-acre, green Google.

However, the beds sit among trees and bushes, and nowadays it is a very charming, restful place. Until October 31 it also has an exhibition of sculptures by 20 artists, called *Pertaining to Things Natural*. The works have been scattered tactfully among the plants, and, as the title suggests, they are all supposed to have some relationship with nature, and to improve our relationship with the natural environment.

Some go straight to the point by dramatising nature, and these are

among the best. Peter Randall-Page has an arresting piece called *Parting Company II*, which is carved in golden limestone, and lies in the middle of a lawn. It looks like a giant seedpod that has just broken into two pieces in order to release the seeds, and suggests what a momentous event this is.

William Peers has an enormous vertical sheet of undulating Italian marble that catches the light beautifully in its hollows, and makes one look again at the graceful shapes of the bushes around it. It also evokes the idea of some mysterious figure that is gently pushing it from behind.

David Worthington, vice-president of the Royal British Society of Sculptors and the curator of the show, has a large sculpture in Iranian red travertine of the stamen of a flower, thrusting the grandeur of its form upon one. It is in a hothouse where exotic butterflies fly around it. By contrast, in another glass house, Tessa Farmer emphasises the violence of nature. In her little bell-



Salvia, above, by Julian Wild; and *Parting Company II*, left, by Peter Randall-Page

like vitrines, we see dead insects armed with minute swords attacking a cactus, or climbing over a dragonfly in mid-air.

James Capper draws an analogy between man's and nature's instruments with his sharp, rusting steel tools that could be curving claws.

James P. Graham's *Golden Cage* is an impractical dream-cage, consisting of widely separated strings of gold wire that are threaded through lumps of volcanic rock, but it is very enjoyable to contemplate.

The accompanying information sheet argues that works like these offer "fresh ideas to the environmental debate", but I think "ideas" is the wrong word. In these socially conscious days, conceptual artists are always talking about the contribution they make to understanding current issues, but they never seem to contribute much. Better just to let art stir one's feelings and perceptions, as some of these works certainly do, without claiming any unnecessary social pretensions for them.

Wildlife returns to riverbank made famous by Constable

Deborah King

The Stour Valley, the inspiration for some of Constable's best landscape paintings, is now home to a wonderful new wildlife garden.

The RSPB has transformed an area roughly the size of three tennis courts in Flatford into the society's first dedicated wildlife garden with the aim of encouraging visitors to adopt some of the tricks to attract wildlife into their own gardens.

Plans for the wildlife garden began in 2001 shortly after the deaths, just one year apart, of sisters Sylvia and Margaret Richardson who ran a tearoom in Flatford for years. They bequeathed the land, which included two water meadows, an agricultural field and the site of the old tearooms, to the RSPB with instructions to use it for "the positive benefit of wildlife".

In the years that followed, legalities and consultations delayed the process and, meanwhile, the garden was taking on a life of its own. "When the land was given to us it was extremely overgrown with massive cherry laurels, leylandii, rhododendrons and Japanese knot-

weed," Shirley Boyle, head gardener and project officer, says. "There's a notion that a wildlife garden has to be neglected and wild with brambles and nettles but that's not really the case."

A competition was launched to find a suitable project, and the garden designers Catherine Heathcington and Alex Johnson were chosen to develop their winning scheme. "They collaborated to reach a final design that we felt was the best at bridging the gap in people's minds between what they have in their gardens and what they are prepared to have and what is a really good habitat," Boyle explains. The sloping site was a particular design challenge.

The area was cleared and landscaped, paths were laid, fences were erected and planting began in earnest before it was officially opened last August. It has matured remarkably well and the result is an attractively colourful garden with various areas, including a bog garden, woodland, orchard and wildflower meadow. Information boards offer advice on how small changes in the garden can make a huge difference to wildlife. Visitors are greeted by a border



Visitors to the RSPB's Flatford garden will learn tips to attract wildlife at home

display of Michaelmas daisies and *Sisyrinchium striatum*, both of which are magnets for bees and butterflies. The path is edged with dead wood and there are hedges of woven hazel fencing which is a wildlife corridor for insects.

Recently a bank vole was seen munching on valerian, a highly scented plant with pink and white flowers. "There are also log piles to attract beetles which in turn attract the birds.

Further along is a wildflower meadow with its array of thistle-like

knappweed, poppies and ox-eye daisies and also a small orchard of heritage varieties offering an early source of pollen and nectar, then fruit. The grass here is peppered with tiny, bright-red flowers of scarlet pimpernel.

Another area mimics woodland with spindle, hazel, primroses and guelder roses growing beside the path. The garden contains about 40 per cent of native species and, as requested by the sisters, an easy-access track runs through it. www.rspb.org.uk/reserves/guide/ff/flatford

Court Circular



Clarence House

13th July, 2012

The Prince of Wales this morning unveiled a Memorial to Government Communications Headquarters and, as Colonel-in-Chief, The Parachute Regiment, also unveiled a Memorial to the Regiment and Airborne Forces at the National Memorial Arboretum, Alrewas. His Royal Highness was received by Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Staffordshire (Mr Ian Dunsen).

The Prince of Wales, Colonel-in-Chief, The Parachute Regiment, this afternoon received Major General Jonathan Shaw upon relinquishing his appointment as Colonel Commandant and Lieutenant General Johnathan Page upon assuming the appointment, and received Lieutenant Colonel John Handford upon relinquishing his appointment as Regimental Lieutenant Colonel and Lieutenant Colonel Martyn Wills upon assuming the appointment.

His Royal Highness, President, The Prince's Regeneration Trust, this afternoon held a Meeting.

The Prince of Wales, Patron, this evening held a Meeting for the University of Wales Trinity St. David's.

St James's Palace

13th July, 2012

The Duke of Kent, President, Commonwealth War Graves Commission, this morning laid a wreath and Stone of Remembrance at Saloniki Lembet Road Cemetery, Thessalonika, Greece.

His Royal Highness afterwards visited Monastir Road Indian Cemetery, Thessalonika.

The Duke of Kent this afternoon arrived at Gatwick Airport, London, from Greece. Mr Nicholas Marden was in attendance.

Service appointments

Royal Navy

Commanders S. J. Woodcock, OBE, Royal Navy, to be promoted rear admiral and to be Naval Secretary and Assistant Chief of Naval Staff (Personnel) with effect from 11 September 2012 in succession to Rear Admiral D. G. Stee, CBE, who has been re-appointed.

Army

Appointment

Brigadier R. P. M. Weighill, CBE (Late Royal Regiment of Artillery), currently Head Joint Force Plans, Joint Force Command Naples, to be Deputy Chief of Staff Plans, Joint Force Headquarters Naples, in the rank of Major-General, in July 2012.

Retirements

Brigadiers: M. G. Hickson, Late RLC, 09/06/12; A. D. C. Clacher, Late RLC, 29/06/12.
Colonels: J. A. Ensor, Late REME, 06/06/12; J. W. Mitchell, Late RE(SVY), 11/06/12; N. F. W. Hile, Late RA, 12/06/12; L. S. P. Mans, Late PWRR, 19/06/12; C. W. Owen, Late Kings, 21/06/12; A. D. Mathewson, Late SG, 25/06/12; W. Mead, Late RLC, 25/06/12

Church news

Bishop of Ramsbury

The Rev Canon Edward Condry, Residential Canon, Canterbury Cathedral, and Director of Education (Canterbury), to be Bishop of Ramsbury (Salisbury).

Archdeacon of Ipswich

The Rev Canon Ian Morgan, rector, Ipswich St Mary at Stoke with St Peter and St Francis; and Church Urban Fund link officer; and rural dean, Ipswich Deanery (St Edmundsbury and Ipswich), to be Archdeacon of Suffolk (same diocese).

Dean of Truro

The Ven Roger Bush, Canon Residential, Truro Cathedral, and Archdeacon of Cornwall (Truro), to be Dean of Truro (same diocese).

Barony

The life barony conferred upon **Beeban Tania Kidron** has been gazetted by the name, style and title of Baroness Kidron, of Angel in the London Borough of Islington