

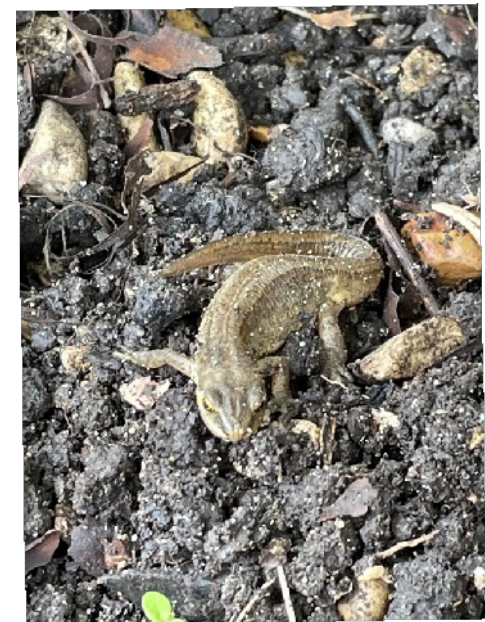
Waterperry House and Gardens Newsletter 2021

The year started with us in lock-down once more. The snowdrops looked great but no visitors got to see them except via a video we posted. The upside was we got jobs done that would have been difficult in normal times: put drainage under paths, planted more hazel for staking, completely rewired the teashop and remained socially distanced throughout it all.

[These photos are all in date order as stored on my phone and are of varying quality but should give some idea of what the year was like from this point of view].



The village takes traffic calming seriously and came up with a plan to make scarecrow effigies. Mark Nicoll joined in with artistic gusto and created the "devil child". In the end I had to ask him to take it away as it was scaring the visitors. Helping natural bee-keeper Doctor Eric catch swarms is always fun and a little bit alarming at the same time. He calls the bees 'girls' and often calls them 'silly girls' when they fly towards his hapless, unprotected, volunteer assistant. Adrian's alpine collection expands relentlessly with another bed for the collection built this year. The natural world is close here and full of wonder and charm.



We put the marquee up again outside the teashop as we had done last year and this worked well for us.

Although we had plant supply difficulties some great displays were done in the plant area and sales were good.

We tried the 'no dig' technique at Waterperry for the first time and it worked really well.

This was one of those amazing years when the gardens looked good in every season.

We celebrated Gordon Dempster's 90th birthday on 3rd June. Gordon has worked here for much of his life and his motto is "if it's good for Waterperry then it's good for me".



It was a great year for roses. All the roses. The dome roses and the climbers Rosa Banksia and Paul's Himalayan Musk were splendid. A dynamic tree brace was put in on the Robinia. Tree surveys are one of those things you have to act on straight away if you have one. They can result in huge expense and this year we had to take down a lot of ash trees. Happily the statistical chance of being hit by a tree is very small. The chance of breaking your ankle because of a mole hole is much higher. Moles are such beautiful little earth swimmers and I wish we didn't have to kill them.

I got the chance to take the core garden team to the press day at Hampton Court and we shamelessly celebrity spotted all day. Outdoor cinema came to us this year and there was a little bit of a clash of timing with the meditation initiations but all was fine in the end. The music of Romeo and Juliet, The Greatest Showman and Mamma Mia drifted across the grounds for three evenings.



Celebrating Ceramics was a great success with lots of visitors opting to see the gardens as well as the excellent standard of work on display.

During the summer we hosted many smaller events also such as the Secret Garden ballet on the front lawn, Moonrakers folk night in the amphitheatre and many more.



The opera festival in August was better than ever. Accessible, innovative and adventurous.

The old van had served us well but had started to give some scary driving experiences so we got a new one. The waiting time for a white Transit box van was eight months so we came up with a colourful solution. (Spot the sign-writer's typo which is changed now).



We managed to have a celebrity wedding in the house in September.

This year the gardens seemed to become famous rather than just well known. We had the morning weather forecasts for the BBC here on 7th September, numerous articles in gardening magazines and national papers and were consistently spoken about as one of the top gardens in the country to visit.

One memorable day I absentmindedly agreed to a sustainably sourced, organic clothing company coming to film here without reading all the details carefully. On the hottest day of the year we had two rather beautiful young ladies walking up and down the gardens modelling underwear. I did not get any complaints from the visitors.

The new dahlia beds in the walled garden were a great attraction this year.



Sula Maddy, one of the great ladies of Waterperry Gardens, passed away in September. At her funeral a poem she had written was read out. I was the man who made her change her book cover. She was a fantastic lady and made sure she got the final word. The Chelsea Flower show was in September unusually this year and the head gardener, Pat Havers, and I had to go to the President's drinks do. We found the Waterperry Asters and did some celebrity spotting but both agreed that nothing there could top our garden. We also had Prue Leith's Great Garden Plot and Honda film here. On 1st October Gardeners Question Time had a section on the gardens where Matt Biggs was brought to tears by the beauty of the herbaceous border. On 7th October ITV did the morning weather forecasts from the gardens.

LAMENT FOR A BOOK COVER

A poem by Ursula Maddy

*I wrote a Book about a School
Where use of every garden tool
Was taught to great effect,
The care and properties of soil
And plants - and pests, combined with toil
To train a Green elect.*

*So, having written of this School
I gave it, after careful thought, a cool
And quiet reflective Cover,
Where beauty of the place was plain
As girls with muscle power and brain
Could learn and help each other.*

*But now O tempora, O mores,
I find a very different score is
Just all the modern flavour,
And, for its latest Third Edition
My quiet reflective erudition
Did not find instant favour.*

*And, coming hotfoot from the Press
I found it in another dress
Of very different colour,
To catch the eye with gaudy border,
With loss, to me, of that quiet order
I realise was much duller.*

*However it's not mine to say
If this is right. Perhaps it may
Help fill the tills. I only know
In changing times what stays the same,
The Gardens happily remain
Where love and Knowledge grow.*



In autumn we had a bountiful harvest of pumpkins from the walled garden and the childrens' half term hunt was a big success. The reindeer visited us during our first Christmas market weekend and they were hugely popular once again.



The Christmas season is going well. We have had our first snow of the year but luckily not enough to stop the visitors. Jennie's seasonal gift displays have been glorious. Throughout the year the house has of course been used much less than usual. Those people that have come on the various retreats that have gone ahead have really enjoyed them. Everyone has had their own bedroom and the sense of space has been enjoyed as well as the importance of physical interaction and good company. All being well the Waterperry Opera Festival will be singing the Messiah in the ballroom this weekend.



Thank you to all the wonderful staff here who have worked so hard this year in the gardens, the house, the shops, nursery and teashop. (Waterperry Gardens Limited will this year be posting record financial results and hitting the dream target I set myself 7 years ago).

Thank you to the gods of the weather who have been generally kind this year.

Thank you to you all who make up this Philosophy School for the gifts of meditation, practical knowledge, service and patience (with which I struggle).

Happy Christmas and New Year.

Simon, Jennie and a toothless little black sausage dog called Maggie.