

LDGA Visit to RHS Wisley – Saturday 24 July

It seems like an age since we have been able to visit Wisley with the LDGA, and for me personally it was the first coach-trip since lock-down. So, it was with a degree of anticipation that I waited at the bus stop with the rest of the early birds, despite the forecast for thundery showers. We were treated to what seemed like a brand-new coach, and Andy our driver for the day, smoothly cut through the light Saturday-morning traffic on the M25 to get us to Wisley in good time for a morning coffee.

From the start, we found that the RHS had been making changes - we entered through a spacious welcome building that I hadn't seen before, as it only opened in June 2019, which led straight out to the gardens.

I had looked at the RHS Wisley website the night before which recommended the roses, the cottage garden, and the lavender as being at their best, so we made a bee line towards the Bowes-Lyon rose garden, only to find that many of the blooms had past their peak, presumably because of the recent hot weather. The Agapanthus were just beginning, although the largest varieties reminiscent of trips to the Scilly Isles weren't yet open. Overlooking the rose garden was a magnificent tree in full flower.



1 *A view of part of the Bowes-Lyon Rose Garden*

On the way we had noticed signposts with helpful fingers pointing to “This Way”, “That Way” and “Somewhere Else”, these together with maniacal laughter from the long grass showed that we were approaching one of the activities put on for the younger visitors – The Mad Hatter’s Tea party, where they could have a picnic and play lawn games such as croquet.

We then came to another new feature, The Viewing Mount. This is a conical hill, set at one of the highest parts of the garden with two spiral paths leading up to a viewing platform. It had been planted with alternate sections of rosemary and lavender, which provided a contrast as the latter was in full flower. The location afforded an uninterrupted view down the avenue running between the deep greenhouse borders to the lake and greenhouse beyond. Rather than following the avenue, we struck out towards another new feature of the garden; RHS Hilltop.



2 *The View from the Mount*

RHS Hilltop is a new building to house laboratories and display more of the collection of specimens. It is also a visitor centre and while we were there a staff member was giving a presentation to visitors in an area set aside for school visits. We focused our attention on three new gardens surrounding it, The Wildlife Garden, The Wellbeing Garden, and The World Food Garden.



3 *A view of the new Wildlife Garden*

As you would expect, the Wildlife Garden had large shallow ponds with deep and marginal planting surrounded by wildflower meadows. I thought that the waterlilies were from the large collection that I had seen before in the Jellico Canal. There were curious structures highlighting the importance of insects in the garden and a demonstration green roof.

The World Food Garden was much more regimented, comprising a large circular area enclosed by a fence and filled with raised and flat flower beds of various shapes with paths between them. There were also some small timber greenhouses making the area reminiscent of a very superior allotment. On examining the beds, the analogy didn't break down as they were filled with a wide selection of food plants presented in top condition. Many were familiar; runner-beans, Brussel sprouts and tomatoes, but there were other plants that I had never seen before such as the wasabi, much used with Japanese sushi dishes, and outdoor pepino melons (*solanum muricatum*) which had fruit in July! There were substantial pumpkin plants trained up the fences which had yet to set fruit so it would be interesting to come back later in the year.

Our next foray was to visit the site of the trial beds that we'd seen the last time we had been to Wisley. Sadly, these were largely abandoned, and we thought at the time that this was a result the pandemic preventing volunteers providing assistance, but we found out later that there is a plan to build an artificial lake on that part of the site, which might explain the change.



4 Beds displaying the Nemesia Angelart Series

Near the old library building (the books have now been moved to Hilltop) we did find a series of trial beds, but these seemed for comparison of planting methods and for examples of individual plants rather than the trials that I was used to seeing. Nevertheless, they were interesting. There were large beds displaying the Nemesia Angelart Series and others devoted to selected cultivars of red roses and of dahlias.

When I'd visited last, the flower show had a specialist section on dahlias, and I wondered if there was a link to these beds. Although many of the plants had yet to flower, those that had were magnificent, surely good enough to exhibit.



5 *Dahlia "Totally Tangerine" looking in top condition*

Although there had been a short period of drizzle earlier in the day by the afternoon the sun was coming out and the day began to get quite warm. To escape the heat, we retreated to the plant centre and the adjacent garden centre to select our souvenirs. Judging by the contents of the luggage compartment of the coach when we returned, we were not the only ones with that thought. The return journey was as smooth and the traffic just as light and we were effortlessly delivered by Andy back to Letchworth. Many thanks to LDGA and to Val for organising the trip.