

HARTLAND ABBEY NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2010

We have had a busy summer which as usual has gone in a flash. May was particularly busy with four different film crews filming very diverse subjects! We started with Kirsty Allsopp and Phil making a new series on Kirsty's Homemade Holidays which start at Hartland Abbey. Whether or not it will appear on the teli we don't know as Hugh and I were in it and they asked us the same question three times while they filmed from different angles. Both being rather self conscious we felt we sounded utterly stupid by the third time over! So we will see...



Two days later, to our grandsons' huge excitement, Top Gear was filmed on the cliff. It was supposed to be a picnic at the end of a mad journey from London to Cornwall in homemade camper vans but Jeremy Clarkson had forgotten to put his handbrake on! Thomas and Eddie Stucley and their friends were allowed out of school for the morning to watch this apparition going over the highest bit of the cliff and landing in smithereens on the rocks below. To them it was the best thing they had ever seen! Jeremy Clarkson, Richard Hammond and James May were completely charming and spent a lot of time talking to the children and others watching from Hartland Quay. It made a day they won't forget for a long time. Sadly Hartland wasn't actually mentioned as they were supposed to be in Cornwall; it would have been good publicity for Hartland Quay.



During this time we had a German walking party who stay for a week in the Abbey annually. They love the area, walk miles and visit gardens in the area; we always look forward to their visit. They were amazed at the interest Top Gear had generated locally but we have since heard that eight million people in this country regularly watch it; I am afraid we are not part of that total! But that particular instalment was fun to watch.



It was wonderful weather throughout May and June and the gardens looked stunning, thanks to Joanna, Nigel and Dave working so hard. Joanna did such a fantastic job keeping the gardens going through all the awful weather in August; sadly our autumn display in the Walled Gardens isn't quite as good as usual as we lost all our *salvia uglinosa* in the cold weather and the *verbena bonariensis* was swamped in the August rain. The new walk to the Gazebo running above and parallel to the track leading to Blackpool Mill has been a huge success and was absolutely beautiful when the bluebells were out. We were asked to stay in SW France at the end of May and while it was beautiful weather here, we froze there! We hate to leave here in the summer as every moment is special. Typically though, as soon as the schools broke up so did the weather.

We then had a German film crew here filming for the Arte programme on ZDF television, the equivalent of BBC2 here. When they visited us previously there was no mention of us being in it but no sooner had they arrived that they asked us to be filmed doing extraordinary things like picking rhubarb and making rhubarb crumble! My husband had a much nicer task, being filmed clearing undergrowth from the old Summerhouse which we are restoring in time for the 2011 season. He had to make a bonfire, I had to make rhubarb crumble! I can't tell you how awful it is to cook something with a television camera focusing close up on hands which spend their time gardening! I make crumble very often as it is a family favourite and we have a huge amount of fruit stored in the deep freeze, so a cheap and easy way to feed everyone! Of course, because I was trying so hard to make it look and taste especially good it sunk into an awful mess; I am very worried that the German population will now think of 'English crumble' as something perfectly horrid! My husband's bonfire didn't start either as it was damp and when it did all they could film was smoke! But it was great fun, although exhausting with two full days filming; they were charming and we hope it might bring in more visitors. We certainly wouldn't have done it for English teli but because it was foreign we hope none of our friends will ever see it!



Our 'filming season' finished shortly afterwards with a short appearance on Martin Dory's Campervan Cookbook programme. He spent the night in his van at Blackpool Mill and cooked what he had caught. He is a charming local surfer who has made a lucky break and we wish him well. The programme comes out in the winter on the BBC. .

My husband chaired the Wessex Region Historic Houses AGM at Avington Park in Hampshire which was a fascinating house. It is very beautiful and the unique thing about the HHA is that all owners do something different with their houses to keep the roof on. The overriding theme is that we are all passionate about holding on to our



houses through thick and thin and we will do anything we can to keep it in the family for future generations. We choose to open to visitors, Avington is not open but has weddings nearly every day! We do weddings too but relatively few which we feel makes it so much more special for the couples. The Gazebo and Summerhouse have been particularly popular this summer with the weather being very kind to most but one lovely couple and their dog had a very wet wedding in the Gazebo; it was particularly moving as there were just the three of them and all were incredibly happy with the dog wagging his tail all the time! We are lucky here with extremely nice Registrars who make each wedding particularly memorable.

The Abbey this summer has been full of pitter patter feet of the grandchildren. They now range between Thomas



who is ten down to Billy who is one, eight in all with another on the way! They are a joy to us and we realise how lucky we are to have a close family. I seem to have spent most of the summer in the kitchen as we have had eighty five friends and family staying in August but it has been enormous fun with lovely picnics on the beach, even in the worst rain and gales! We always try to get everyone outside for most of the day whatever the weather as it makes the children sleep better! I have only been to a supermarket twice as we have all our own meat and vegetables, with fruit as well in August. Hartland village is wonderful with all the basics, a bit more expensive but you buy a lot less than in a supermarket. We also like to support local businesses which are very good to us and without them we would be stuck.



Our brother-in-law, David Cobbold, who is married to Hugh's third sister, Christine, was staying here just before he was the guest on 'Desert Island Discs'. They live in his family home, Knebworth House, and apart from being open to the public have, over the years, had some amazing pop concerts including The Rolling Stones and Genesis who also stayed in the house. They have met fascinating and extraordinary people but he now has Parkinson's and spoke movingly on the wireless. It was emotional for us all to hear him; he chose some wonderful music. He sits in the House of Lords as a Cross-bencher.

Now the season is coming to an end we are thinking to the season ahead. The Summerhouse project is really exciting; my husband has done a fantastic job clearing and restoring a lovely path leading to it from the track to the beach and we will put a table and chairs in it for visitors to enjoy. The Shrubbery will have a new zig zag path leading upwards through the bluebells with also a new path just above the hydrangeas. Now we have to plant some rhododendrons, magnolias and more hydrangeas which love it there and are such a wonderful blue. We want to put in a new bathroom upstairs for no 3 bedroom, bathrooms here are very rare species! We plan some exciting exhibitions for 2011 and are constantly finding more fascinating family possessions and early photographs to exhibit.

Just to end, one of the most entertaining and moving moments this summer was when one of the 'old girls' from The Monkey Club, evacuated here during the War, turned up. We heard some wonderful stories of the eccentric headmistresses, the sadness when Sir Malcolm Sergeant's daughter died of polio and another girl went over the cliff when her bicycle brakes failed. But mainly laughter at the funny stories of the huge discomfort in the Abbey in the War, of others billeted at Hartland Quay Hotel which had been condemned and others in a cottage with a mud floor; these were all girls whose fathers' had paid huge sums of money for their daughters to be educated young ladies and were very shocked when they turned up to inspect their daughter's living accommodation!

Lastly huge thanks to our wonderful staff of Carol, Dave, Joanna, Leighton and part time Nigel. All work so hard, probably doing the equivalent of five jobs each in the National Trust! Being a private business we do not have the luxury of membership subscriptions etc and the money that individual visitors pay to come here goes straight into maintenance and wages. Huge thanks also to our wonderful team of Stewards led from the front by Mary Heard, our very special Administrator who has been here for more years than I should divulge! Longest serving are the adored Peter and Betty Coe who have been here for 24 years since we first opened and are sadly making retiring noises. Sue Macdonald and Nancy Johns, who previously ran Hartland Quay Hotel (NOT when it was condemned!), run a fantastic tea room in aid of St Nectan's Church with a wonderful band of volunteers; we thank them for their very hard work and dedication to raising Church funds.

We are always interested to hear where you heard about Hartland Abbey, where you have come from and whether or not you have found your visit enjoyable.. We are also interested to hear what we could do to improve your visit. Please tell us, we would much rather be told than you go away and tell others if you have not had a good time. Thank you so much for supporting us and helping us to keep this old house going! Best wishes and a safe journey home. Angela Stucley Sept 2010.

DATES FOR 2011

**SNOWDROP SUNDAYS DAFFODIL DAY BLUEBELL
DAYS**

**FLOWERFESTIVAL ATLANTIC COAST EXPRESS MG
MOTOR RALLY
6th AND 13th FEBRUARY
20th MARCH**

**GOOD FRIDAY 22nd APRIL, EASTER MONDAY 25th APRIL,
SUNDAY MAY 1st, MONDAY MAY 2nd FRIDAY 17th -
TUESDAY 21st JUNE**

ND
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SUNDAY 19th JUNE