

# Sharcott Manor

near Pewsey

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Many members will have visited this garden, with its wonderful collection of plants lovingly tended by Cosima Armytage. This account is compiled from her description of the way in which she has guided its development over the last thirty-five years.



The house is said to have been originally an Elizabethan cottage, enlarged in 1804 to make a gracious farmhouse. It was added to in 1860 with a rear addition. The entrance was moved from the east to the south side, the old front door being replaced by a large circular cast iron window. At the same time a large bay window was added to the drawing room and a porch over the new front door with a balcony above. The house was occupied in the 19th

century by Col. McCall, who had been in the Indian Army. He brought with him from India a load of great rocks (probably as ballast in a sailing ship, unloaded at Bristol and brought to near Sharcott by the Kennet & Avon Canal). Around them he built the Fernery. He is said to have dressed up in his Indian Army uniform and imagined himself back in Poona, sitting among the rocks.

*Kelly's Directory* for 1911 gives Lieut. Col. Christian Bernard Hunter as living at Sharcott Manor. In 1931 the occupant is given as Mrs Hunter, who was still there in 1939 (this was the last issue of *Kelly's Directory*). Her daughter continued living in the area, moving to a little cottage along the lane.

In 1958 the house was bought by the Horsfalls. The high yew hedge to the west of the house was already there but they put in the other yew hedges and sections of stone balustrade around the grass tennis court. They also planted lots of bulbs, but nothing to give colour once they were over.

In 1976 the Armytages came, bringing horse-boxes full of 200 plants from their much larger garden in Kent. They found a garden full of yews, laurels, aucubas, rhododendrons and other evergreens - a very Victorian shrubby garden. The first job was to clear a way through and Cosima Armytage's children spent many weekends hacking away. The hot dry summer of 1976 killed off most of the rhododendrons. Cosima's aim has been to establish herbaceous and mixed shrub borders to provide colour and interest throughout the year and there are now eleven of them.

The soil is greensand, and the water table in the woodland area is only a spit or so below the surface. This made possible the introduction of many flowering trees and shrubs, including ericaceous lovers. Among these are:

- Magnolia campbellii* subsp. *mollicomata* - mauve goblets
- Magnolia soulangeana*
- Magnolia* x 'Elizabeth'
- Magnolia* 'Lois' - yellow
- Magnolia sinensis*
- Magnolia* 'Susan' - pink
- Magnolia rustica rubra* - dark maroon
- Magnolia* 'Leonard Messel' - small flowered pink
- Stewartia pseudocamellia* - white with yellow centre
- Poncirus perfoliata* - very spiny with large white flowers
- Cornus kousa chinensis*
- Cornus mas*
- Clerodendron bungei*
- Camellias
- Choisya ternata*
- Cytisus battandieri*
- Clematis viticella* 'Polish Spirit'
- Clematis viticella* 'Prince Charles'

- Clematis viticella* 'Minuet'
- Clematis viticella* 'Little Nell'
- Clematis viticella* 'Niobe'
- Clematis viticella* 'Luxurians Alba'
- Clematis texensis* 'Princess of Wales'
- Clematis texensis*
- Clematis* 'Huldine'
- Daphne odora aureomarginata*
- Epimedium* (two just bought from Simon Young)
- Erythronium* 'White Beauty' (huge lot given to her by John Phillips)
- Rhododendron* 'Polar Bear' - white flowers in summer are poisonous to bees
- Other trees include:
- Hamamelis mollis* (under planted with fritillaries and cyclamens)
- Alnus glutinosa imperialis* - cut-leaved alder
- Liquidambar styraciflua*
- Liquidambar styraciflua* 'Lane Roberts'
- Liquidambar styraciflua* 'Worplesdon'
- Ginkgo biloba* (from her garden in Kent)
- Acer griseum*
- Prunus serrula*
- Catalpa bignonioides* (planted in 1998)
- Betula jacquemontii*
- Malus coronaria* 'Charlottae' - violet scented crab apple
- Malus* x 'Evereste'
- Aesculus parviflora*
- Hornbeams clipped as drums (two to the north west of the house)



Across the stream the Horsfalls had planted a poplar plantation. Cosima had 75 of these cut down, leaving just two groups of five (now reduced to three). Within this area

a small lake was dug in 1981. Permission was given by the water authority to fill it with water from the stream (the Sharcott stream rises four miles away at Stowell and flows through the garden to join the East branch of the Salisbury Avon); however the lake is kept filled by natural springs, so this has never been necessary. A new woodland has been created, with 40 trees and 8000 narcissi. There had been a line of elms along the west boundary but these all succumbed to Dutch Elm Disease, while two old beeches remain on the boundary. There were also masses of the small-leaved bamboo *nitida*, but in 2009 these all flowered and then died (this happened all over the country). Her grandson Jeremy helped to clear and burn them (with great explosions!). They are now replaced by hydrangeas.



Along the stream there are clumps of *gunnera* (now being cut and covered to protect them from the winter) There are also primulas, skunk cabbage (*Lysichiton americanum*) and Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*). On the lawn through the yew arch west of the house two *Pyrus calleryana* 'Chanticleer' were planted in 2001. Another grandson William suggested that she ought to have an avenue, so in 2006 four more were planted each side, making a walk down to one of the bridges over the stream. Under the trees are beds of *Lavendula* 'Hidcote' and *Anemone* 'White Splendour'.

Gareth Slater

There was a vine house against the north wall of the garden, but no vine. Now it houses *Brugmansia*, *Plumbago* and *Cymbidium* orchids. Tender plants are moved in during the winter to be kept at a temperature of 45 C. Outside on the walls on each side of the Vine House are roses and other climbing plants:

*Rosa* 'Veilchenblau' - blue-purple  
*Rosa* 'Malvern Hills' - yellow  
*Rosa* 'Rambling Rector'  
*Clematis tangutica* 'Bill Mackenzie'  
*Clematis rehderiana*

And on the wall around the swimming pool *Vitis coignetiae* - brilliant autumn colour. Elsewhere there are climbing roses, cascading out of tall old trees:

*Rosa* 'Francis E. Lester'  
*Rosa* 'Bobby James'  
*Rosa* 'Paul's Himalayan Musk'  
*Rosa* 'Wedding Day'  
*Rosa longicuspis*  
*Rosa* 'Kew Rambler'  
*Rosa* 'Felicité et Perpetué'  
*Rosa* 'Kiftsgate'  
*Rosa* 'Phyllis Bide' (by the arch into the  
*Rosa* 'Open Arms' vegetable plot)  
*Rosa* 'Goldfinch'

Among the bulbs are snowdrops and winter aconites. To cut back on labour, the long border is being planted with greater use of flowering shrubs in place of herbaceous plants.

In Victorian times ferneries were all the rage; now they are quite rare. Cosima has had the glass roof of her fernery remade and it was written up in *Which* magazine a few years ago in an article on ferneries. In September 1980 *Country Homes and Interiors* published 'A Garden in the Making' about Sharcott and in March 2011 *The English Garden* published an article by Lynn Keddie.

