

U3A Gardening group Wed. May 6th.

North Cornwall was clothed in thick mist, but by the time we reached St. Neots, near Liskeard it had disappeared & the grey skies had brightened.

Fourteen of us were met at Northwood Water Gardens by Mackenzie Bell (Mack) & sat comfortably in the small art gallery opposite the house. Mack gave us a very interesting talk about the history of the house & gardens with some enlarged photos passed round to illustrate some of his dialogue. The house was originally built in 1730 to process china clay & the (now) walled gardens behind the house were settlement beds for the clay slurry. The house had many uses over the years including a pig sty! It eventually fell into ruin until a previous owner, decades ago, built the house as seen today, using granite from the ruin.

The gardens have been well planted & landscaped over the past 30 years.

Mack, Justin & Nick (the present owners) were searching for several years for a suitable property on which to express their love of gardening & art. In 2004 they found Northwood Farm.

Mack then walked with us around the garden, pointing out features & explaining changes & developments they had made. There is a sensitive balance between cultivated & wild areas. Some examples are areas of peat bog retaining sedge & abundant yellow iris, many sculptural mature willows with trunks & branches covered in moss & the two new ponds from the diverted streams which are havens for wildlife & support many plants which like a damp environment. These ponds & stream culminate at the lower end of the field where they have made a small lake with a delightful island covered with plants with sculptural granite rocks & a romantic old arch. This lake is also a wildlife haven, swarming with tadpoles.

Everywhere you look there are artistic combinations colour, some of the most striking being many red Japanese Maples (Acer), mature rhododendrons bursting into flower & beautiful pink Pieris. All these are complimented by so many different shades & shapes of greenery including the huge water loving Gunnera.

The whole garden is very wildlife friendly so attracts many birds, pond life & mammals. Mink, Roe deer, foxes, badgers & even otters for whom they restock the ponds with carp each year!

They are developing a vegetable garden & hope to become self sufficient in veg., soft fruit & cut flowers. They garden organically & luckily are surrounded by land farmed organically so there is no risk of chemical run off into the streams.

At the end of our much enjoyed walk we were invited back to the gallery where, surrounded by Mackenzie Bell's beautiful landscape paintings, we enjoyed tea & Justin's delicious carrot cake & victoria sponge!