



Jane Epstein in her beautiful Hampstead Way garden

The centenary garden

throughout the year. The archive photograph dated from 1917 suggests that the first owner of the house may have been a keen gardener so Jane is following in a long tradition.

Jane moved into Hampstead Way in 1972 but the garden then was very different. "One of the previous occupants was a chimney sweep who loved prize dahlias," reminisces Jane. "He used soot to fertilize the dahlias and I can still see traces in the soil." Over the intervening 37 years, she has replanted and re-designed everything in what she calls her 'pocket handkerchief' of a plot. Every inch of space is used to great effect; borders crammed with bulbs, annuals and perennials chosen for year round interest surround a tiny patch of grass and a little patio covered in pots.

"The garden has just evolved," says Jane. "I've never had a vision of my garden other than I love cutting flowers for the house and I try to always have something I can pick, even if it's just a sprig of wych-hazel. I love winter shrubs that blossom on the bare branches and lighten the gloom and doom of the darkest time of year. As well as the wych hazels there are the daphnes, Ionicera, camellias and rhododendrons.

"My love of gardening began with my granny. She had an acre and a quarter in Brondesbury and knew every little corner. With great patience, she would teach me the names of all the flowers and I grew to love them as she did. I remember the pond full of newts which was very exciting and my parents being cross when I came home covered in mulberry juice!"

Jane has a refreshingly relaxed, easy approach to her garden. She likes variety and eschews the current advice to plant in threes and colour code your borders. "There are fashions in gardening which I always tend to resent a little bit, but I'm very easily tempted if I go round a nursery and I'll always find a corner for a new treasure – I just love plants." She is fascinated by the variety and forms of nature and the way the garden takes over. "Plants do move. You plant a clump of something and suddenly there are bits all in odd places. They never stick where they're supposed to stay. If things don't survive, I just say 'Well, that's the way it is' and go on to something else."

Jane's garden is a very private space; she does not go in for competitions and won't open her garden to the public, although last year she was awarded a



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London Gardens Society Pride in London Certificate because a friend entered her front garden for her. She has a gardener to help with the heavy work (mainly tree-pruning and hedge-trimming) but does everything else herself.

Jane likes to maintain a balance between the needs of her plants and encouraging (carefully selected) wild life into her garden. She gave up on nuts (they encourage the squirrels) but plenty of birds appear on the feeders: sparrow-hawks, green and lesser spotted wood-peckers and long-tailed tits together with the usual blackbirds and robins.

Bumblebees and ladybirds are welcomed; slugs get pelleted and greenfly on roses are lightly zapped. Mint, thyme and rosemary attract the bees as well as supplying delicious herbal teas which Jane is very fond of.

Jane is an active member of the Horticultural Society. With Lorraine Wilder, she arranges a programme of talks and coach outings throughout the year. You can join her on a trip to Hidcote Manor and Kiftsgate Court on 3 June, or to Great Dixter and Sissinghurst on 23 August (see What's On for more information).

ANNE CRAWLEY

Walking along Hampstead Way on a fine Spring morning, shoppers are stopped in their tracks by the exuberant beauty of Jane Epstein's garden. In January, the garden is a sea of

labels decorated by clumps of snowdrops. Slowly a wonderful tapestry of spring bulbs and alpines unfurls – an apparently artless mix carefully orchestrated to provide colour and scent

Rain disappoints but interesting

Rainfall in the first four months of the year would at first sight appear to be very unexciting. The total from January to April was 9.25 inches, which is almost exactly the average for the period. These records, taken in Mill Hill until 1996 and then in the Suburb, stretch back over thirty years. So a proper average, calculated in the correct way, can at last be given. Although the Mill Hill measuring station is about four miles North West of the Suburb one, and summer storms can easily affect one place and not the other, on the whole the North London description gives a meaningful idea of what occurs with our rainfall.

So looking at early 2009 precipitation does result in some interesting points. To start with, we had snow on 5 January and, again, on 1 and 2 February. Together with the snow in October last year, this is more than we are now accustomed to. Even light snow flurries do not fall every year. For snow that lies for at least a day, we must go back to the end of January 2005 or, more memorably still, the fall that produced the local, as well as more widespread, traffic chaos at the end of January 2003. This

year about eight inches of snow resulted in 0.4 inches of precipitation, which disappeared fairly quickly. But it did give the media a good stick with which to beat authority.

Both January and February saw well above average rainfall. In January 3.35 inches fell compared with a mean of 2.83 inches, while February had 3.1 inches compared with a mean of 2 inches. By March, however, the position was reversed with an actual total of 1.39 inches compared with an average of 2.14 inches while April had 1.41 inches compared with an average of 2.16 inches. The winter total from October to March at 16 inches was also average.

So we start the gardening year with plenty of soil moisture and we can probably admit that conditions in March and April have been rather favourable for working in the garden. For true gardeners, of course, the weather is never perfect for longer than it takes to suggest it might be. After all, if the March and April figures continue, we shall have a summer drought. The Suburb will, however, probably look lovely as usual.

DIANA IWI

Centenary apple hunt - Saturday 12 September

As you probably know, when the Suburb was founded in 1907, Dame Henrietta Barnett presented early home-owners with one or more fruit trees for their gardens.

In 1989, when HGS Horticultural Society celebrated its 80th birthday, the 'Great Apple Hunt' took place. The Horticultural Society asked residents to bring apples from their gardens to the Autumn Flower Show for expert identification and very many did. At least 41 different varieties were discovered, many of them from Dame Henrietta's original trees. There were more, but one or two could not be identified.

This year is the 100th anniversary of HGS Horticultural

Society. Once again, the Society is searching for Dame Henrietta's apples to see how many are still in existence more than 100 years on, and how many other varieties have been added since then in this Garden Suburb.

Do you have one or more of Dame Henrietta Barnett's original apple trees in your garden, or perhaps a more modern one? Do you know what variety it is?

You could find out on 12 September by bringing samples of your apples to the Free Church Hall, Northway NW11 to be identified by an expert. In 1989 we found over 40 varieties growing on the Suburb. Perhaps we can find even more in 2009.

Leave your apples for identification at the Free Church

Hall from 9-11am and make sure they are labelled with your name, address and phone number so that we know which garden they come from.*

To help with identification, please try to ensure that they have their stalks and show some colour. Don't not worry if your apples normally ripen later than September. The expert will still be able to recognise them, but it would assist him if you make a note of which month they are at their best.

The apples will be displayed at the Centenary Autumn Flower Show on 12 September between 3-5.30pm and must be removed by the owners at 5.30pm. The expert, Andrew Tann of Crapes Fruit Farm, Essex, will be

glad to talk to residents during the Show.

For more information on the Centenary Apple Hunt, visit the Horticultural Society's website (www.hortsoc.co.uk), or contact Marjorie Harris (020 8455 6507). Details of other Centenary events taking place from now onwards can be found in What's On in this issue.

*In exceptional circumstances, apples labelled as above may be delivered to 48 Erskine Hill, NW11 6HG during the day on Friday 11 September, and placed in the box at the front door. They may be collected from the same place after sundown on Saturday or during Sunday. Any apples not collected after that will be destroyed.

HGSHS Buddy scheme

At this time of year interest in gardens and gardening is at its height. Gardens to visit and admire and our own to be tended and possibly improved. Members of HGS Horticultural Society have organised a Buddy Scheme through which members with gardening experience will visit

those who are looking for ideas or advice with their gardens.

This is an initiative open to all members of the Society, new members are always welcome. Further information and membership details from Sonia Mathias. Tel: 8455 7334; soniamathias@waitrose.com

The Time of my Life

I have to admit that I do not like Alan Ayckbourn's later plays very much and 'The Time of my Life', a 'time play' failed to amuse me. However, the Garden Suburb Theatre had a good crack at it.

In Calvini's Restaurant, Gerry and Laura are holding a family dinner with their daughter, Stephanie and son, Adam and their partners. All seems well and happy. We then see the future before returning to present. In between all the relationships have broken down. Adam is on his own again, Stephanie has a new boyfriend and the parents have managed to stay together.

Three separate venues are seen at the same time and Rusty Ashman's set design managed this well. John Coleman's and Ashley Collins were the warring parents. Emma Pleass and Nick Hastings were strongly cast as Stephanie and Glyn, her partner. Adam (Edward Smith) and Maureen (Catherine Lemmon) almost stole the show. Catherine was very funny. Geoff Prutton as the various waiters was allowed the descent into farce – Alas.

The play, directed by John Woolf, was at times inaudible due to it being set so far upstage.

LEONIE STEPHEN

PIANO WITH TIM

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