

THE LASKETT GARDENS DAY TRIP

On Thursday 16th July 2015, a dull, though thankfully not rainy day, a coach load of members set off on the long journey to Ross-on-Wye to visit Laskett Gardens at Much Birch, Herefordshire. A break at Chieveley services was planned in, but not the awful diversion through Cheltenham and Gloucester which lengthened the trip somewhat.

Ross-on-Wye is an ancient slightly disappointing hill top market town which has seen better days, but we all found a decent lunch and some discovered The Prospect gardens by the church overlooking the Wye valley, owned by the town since 1870.

[The Laskett Gardens](#) are the largest private formal gardens to be created in England since 1945. In 1973 newly married historian Sir Roy Strong and his late wife, the designer [Dr Julia Trevelyan Oman](#), purchased the early Victorian house set in a triangular plot of four acres, and when money and labour was available, the gardens were created piecemeal. The result is a series of garden rooms, vistas, ascents and descents, fountains, knot gardens, statuary and parterres.

We were all provided with an individual pod to be held onto loading points on 40 posts throughout the gardens to obtain a commentary on that particular area. It is a very good system and much less bulky than the usual large self-conducted tour handsets. Everybody set off along different paths to explore, making for an interesting couple of hours as we encountered friends in arbours, courts, monuments and orchards. Every garden room has a name and many commemorate an event, a friend or an influx of money from a stage production.

Just a few of the 24 garden rooms:

The Christmas Orchard was planted on Christmas Eve 1974 with cross paths and hedges added in the 1990s. The fruit trees are particular to Herefordshire. The urn containing the ashes of Julia Trevelyan Oman, who died in 2003, is in the orchard.

The Silver Jubilee Garden was laid out in 1977 in honour of the Queen and relaid and drained in 2009. There are white and yellow roses with lavender and a sundial from Sir Cecil Beaton's garden at [Reddish House](#), Broad Chalke, Wiltshire.

The 50th Birthday Garden was designed by his wife Juila for Sir Roy's 50th birthday in 1985 and has four little statues of the seasons.

Sean's Pond was created this year and is named after Shaun Cadman the head gardener who, with Phillip Teague, maintains the gardens for four days a week.

Fountain Court is part of a tableau that stretches from the house up to the **Colonnade Court**. Two ancient classical columns act as a proscenium arch framing a sequence of gardens which gradually ascend to the west.

The future of Laskett Gardens was uncertain because after long deliberations, the National Trust [declined Sir Roy's offer of a bequest](#) of the gardens and £3M, considering it not to be of great enough importance. I could in some part see their point in that maintenance is not of the highest – it's a real garden with real weeds – and many winding paths and little steps are unsuitable for all. He threatened to have the gardens destroyed a year after his death, but [salvation has come](#) in the form of a charity called [Perennial](#), Sir Roy will control the gardens until his 85th birthday and then Perennial will take over.

We stopped at [Labels](#), a large outlet store, near Ross-on-Wye for something to eat and drink as Lasketts does not have a cafe, before settling in for the long journey home.

Thank you Eve for three great day trips this year and for the fantastic information that you provide on each outward journey.

Jan Mitchell