

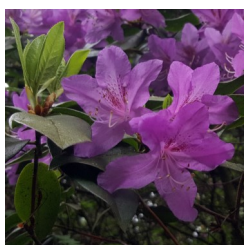


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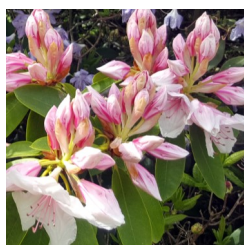
*FOVG Valley Gardens Watch  
during the Covid19 restrictions*



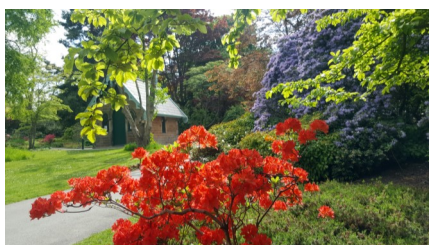
***This week:*** We can all spend more time in the gardens and enjoy sitting on the benches again **Hurray**. Can you work out where the **buttercup meadow** is? **A pair of Mallards** are settling in around the boating pond, maybe because there are also hundreds of tadpoles which Simon and Nick were trying to save this morning by rushing through the regular cleaning session. I observed two Drakes trying to mate simultaneously with one female on the pond, both in the water and on the side; she seemed quite pleased to escape after her 'ordeal'. **Rhododendrons** are now in full flower and I have enjoyed exploring at the top of Ebor Rise and into the Pinewoods discovering some beautiful mature shrubs hidden amongst the trees. Finally Liz Chidlow reflects on the restoration of the **Peat Garden Rockery**.



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***These wonderful Rhododendrons,*** I don't know the varieties I am afraid, could all have been raised by Bill Bishop from seed in the Council nurseries when, in the 1950's, he brought his passion for Himalayan plants to Harrogate. Nos 1. 4. 5. 6. 7. & 8 are all pictures of large mature shrubs either in the gardens, along Valley Drive side or up in the Ebor Rise area. The beautiful pink variety (2.) and the large blue/mauve in (3) are planted together. Some early varieties are already over and a few are yet to come. Together with more recent planting Valley Gardens has a collection to be proud of. Some of the shrubs up the hill are over 20ft tall with their blossoms up among the trees, planted in groups of complementary colours. It is a delight to come across them when scrambling through the woodland on minor pathways. Apparently some of the best varieties were lifted for a woodland display every Spring Flower Show. Should we be talking to HASAG about some clearing around them so they can be fully appreciated?



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## *Rock Garden in the Peat Garden*

Ever wondered why the small rock garden near the Pump Room looks like it does? We never discovered whether James Backhouse and Son Nursery in York, a Company famous nationwide for rock gardens, created it over the brick reservoir in Edwardian times 1906/7.



*This is how the rock garden looked in 2013 before work was commenced, and when the reservoir was revealed.*



*Taken this spring*

During restoration the slopes were made less than 33° for stability because of the reservoir, but we also respected the Backhouse's passion for the natural environment and aimed to mimic a rocky alpine setting falling to an alpine meadow area using local Millstone grit and plants from alpine regions. On the top we have Sempervivum and gentians (see right), and then cascading down the slope's alpine plants such as saxifrages, rock roses, primulas, thrift and phlox to sedum and hellebores at the base. The gentler slope comes down through several dwarf pines and rhododendrons to the meadow area where in the Spring you find drifts of cowslip, pasque flower, fritillaria and Aquilgia (photo in previous issue). This style of planting fits with the idea of the Peat Garden being based on an informal or wild garden style spearheaded by William Robinson in Victorian times, so it matches well with the gothic Pump Room built in 1858.



## *Surprise, Surprise!*

You often get surprises when you restore Gardens. When we dug out the ground to restore the Rock Garden by the Pump Room we not only uncovered the brick reservoir and its north facing valve box, but also a chamber on the south side of the reservoir which was linked to sulphur spring well No. 43 near the nearby willow tree. Strangely we also kept removing many dead branches. The latter puzzled us until we read an old book in the library about Harrogate's Spa Heritage. This told us that owing to the boggy ground difficulty was experienced in constructing the brick reservoir. This was overcome by constructing the foundations on loads of twigs and branches embedded in cement! **Well I never!!**

NB. This method, without the cement, was deployed by the Bronze Age people 3500 years ago at Flag Fen to build a causeway which stretched for nearly a kilometre across the fen near Peterborough; so nothing new!