



Our speaker, John Hallett, was a good speaker on the subject of Sir Edward Heath's house and garden, Arundells in the Cathedral Close. The room was buzzing with chat and anticipation as members and visitors made use of the time before the talk to view the plant stall. John was pleased to be at the club as he purchased lots of our plants at bargain prices.

The garden at Arundells consists of two acres and at the back, runs down to the river Avon that separates it from the Elizabeth Gardens. The front garden has a spectacular view of the Cathedral and John explained that the whole of the land area of the Close had been owned by the Cathedral and that there had probably been a dwelling (for clergy?) on the site of Arundells since the Cathedral was built there after abandoning the Old Sarum site. Most of the property in the Close is leasehold but Sir Edward's solicitors found a loophole whereby he could purchase the freehold. The name 'Arundells' is the family name of the one - time occupants of Wardour Castle. It was occupied by their family members from 1752 until 1803.

Sir Edward moved into the property in 1985 and lived there until he died in 2005. Two changes had to be made to the garden for him, and both were to improve his security. Although his Prime Ministerial duties were long over, (he was Prime Minister 1970 – 74), concern for his ongoing security provoked these decisions. Firstly it was decided that the river boundary of the back garden must have wrought iron railings and secondly that the placing of shrubberies, trees and flowerbeds must be such that there was no direct line of vision from the river to the house so that Sir Edward could have privacy as he moved about in his house. He loved the peace and tranquillity of his garden and this was the first home that he had ever chosen and owned.

For visitors, this is a lovely garden to explore, the curving beds and shrubberies give secret areas to enter. One such has the beautiful Victorian bronze figure of a girl with a begging bowl. The bowl acts as a birdbath or feeder. In another space there is a rose arbour surrounded by box balls. The curving beds and mature trees make the garden seem intimate but, in fact there is lots of space for a marquee. This is used for a variety of events held to support the upkeep of this house and garden and if you have the chance to go I can recommend them. The setting is just right to wander the garden after an interesting event and delicious afternoon tea!

Dorothy Richards