



GARDENING GROUP VISIT HODSOCK PRIORY



It was a small but valiant group of gardeners who set out to defy the gloomy weather forecast and visit Hodsock Priory near Blyth in Nottinghamshire to see the snowdrop display. The rain had started in earnest by the time we reached the priory, and we were met by the sight of men hastily shovelling grit and stone into the mud – and this just so we could get into the carpark! After hastily donning boots and wellies we scuttled into the de-luxe style, heated marquee to scoff cake and have a welcome hot drink, while watching the rain get even heavier.

However after relaxing over our drinks, it was best foot forward, and so, armed still further with large umbrellas, we set off doggedly. Though actually, the rain had eased by this time and we walked through the woodland garden with little discomfort to spoil our pleasure at the wonderful display of snowdrops. We even tried to distinguish the different types. We managed about four, but galanthophiles, (snowdrop experts), I am sure would have found many more.



And not only snowdrops, the daffodils were also out, and some of our members were pleased to discover the wild ones, *Narcissus pseudonarcissus*, among them. As we entered the formal gardens, the much admired sight of the Japanese apricot *Prunus mume* told us spring was definitely around the corner. And the rest of the garden was a delight. Spring bulbs abounded and looked perfectly at ease in the naturalness of the gardens. We saw iris, cyclamen, leucojum, crocus and even our first bluebell, fully out, nestling in the shelter of a hedge.

Everywhere, the trees and shrubs were budding, and some of the early spring flowers caught our attention. The tiny red spider like flowers of the Persian ironwood, *Parrotia persica*, were in full bloom, as was the winter flowering honeysuckle, *Lonicera purpusii* 'Winter Beauty', planted abundantly round the garden and delighting us with its lovely perfume.

The early flowering clematis, *Clematis cirrhosa* 'Wisley Cream' also demanded our attention as did some of the early flowering rhododendrons. We browsed happily

around the gardens until another heavy shower sent us scurrying indoors. Luckily it was lunchtime so we enjoyed some excellent homemade food and browsed around the shop until the shower passed and finally – a brief glimpse of sunshine!



After lunch, we adjourned to the woods again, this time to gather round the campfire, where George Buchanan, manager of the estate, gave us an amusing talk about the history of the Priory and its owners, one of whom managed to gamble away the equivalent of tens of millions of pounds and had to sell the house to pay all his debts. His final bet was allegedly whether a pat of butter he flicked up with his knife would stick to the ceiling. Unfortunately he was so drunk the butter didn't even reach the ceiling!



So having been cheered by some amusing tales and a garden whose plants were beautiful and uplifting enough to shine through even the most dismal of days, we wandered back through the woods admiring the combination of beech trees with the snowdrops. We then headed towards our final destination,- the plant sales area, where, duly inspired, we searched for plants to brighten our own February gardens and herald the spring as effectively as they had done at Hodssock.