

WALL ENVY

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Sitting here in my dining room, looking out at my garden being battered by yet another downpour and howling gale, it's hard to imagine the lovely weather we had in the summer of 2014. That good weather meant that I was able to revisit some of the local Yellow Book gardens, but also some new gardens, including Halton village's very successful Garden Safari.

Then Kirkby Lonsdale held an Open Gardens weekend. There were about two dozen places to visit; a real mixture in both sizes and styles. I didn't go round them in order, but went straight to one of our HPS group member's gardens. Here I felt the first twinge of envy. As I walked into her garden, my eyes were immediately drawn to the fairly high, old stone wall that wrapped around two sides of her garden. Not the large walls you get in the big houses' kitchen gardens, but nevertheless a feature that lends itself to climbers, offering protection and providing a backdrop. I moved off to another garden nearby, accessed down a little alley, and stepped into a small but beautifully formed garden surrounded by - you've guessed it - lovely stone walls. These were a combination of the neighbouring house walls and the adjoining garden walls. They were planted up with climbing roses, ivy and clematis. It was a glorious sight! I felt even more green with envy.

These were gardens in the older houses in Kirkby, but even when I went to some of the newer properties they had dry stone walls made from the local stone. Some were planted with rockery plants, whilst others were retaining walls. The use of natural stone was a feature in some shape or form in every garden, but it was the walls that got my attention.

Have you noticed that in the glossy magazines on gardening most of the photographs show a wall somewhere in the view? They are good to look at and I feel they are taunting me. This does not help my longing for a wall.

Back to garden visits. In August, I joined the Cumbria Hardy Plant Group on their coach trip to the North East. We went to Belsay Castle and then on to a Hardy Planter's garden at Bolam. At Belsay, part of the garden has been made into a gorge-like area, using huge quantities of rock which form cliff faces, providing shady planting opportunities for some very special trees and shrubs. I liked this but I don't think that would suit (or fit in) my garden, and the neighbours would certainly object! After lunch, we went on to the Cottage Garden at Bolam owned by Heather Russell and her husband. It's a modern, artistic garden full of unusual plants, with something different around every corner, but the thing that took my breath away was the magnificent feature she had created with the old stone wall that had belonged to the big house. A long length of very high wall that sheltered the garden from the Northumberland weather had been planted with many varieties of *Clematis viticella* and other treasures, and was in full bloom! My 'wall envy' that had been slowly developing suddenly erupted. I had to find a cure. I had to have a 'wall feature' of some kind in my garden. But what?

My garden is surrounded by hedges, mainly old hawthorn. One side is beech and other parts are privet. The hawthorn hedges are the remains of the original field boundaries. Some lengths of these became very thin and gappy at the base, so they were replaced by low breeze block walls (that stopped the dog from escaping into next door, but did not stop the fox from jumping over). They have never been made into a proper feature, just skimmed and painted. The paint is now flaking off and it looks a mess. There is a climbing rose against part of it, with a clematis scrambling through it. Not a lovely, high, old stone wall, but this will be my starting point to try and cure my 'wall envy'.