

Looking back, and forwards

Gwladys Tonge

Throughout my gardening life's many different phases I have been totally absorbed and enthused by each at the time, although now I may no longer want, or even like, the plants and features involved. They all inspired me then, and taught me a lot, and hindsight should never make one despise valuable relevant experience.

Ideas about what my ideal garden would be like have been influenced and formed by my earliest memories; many of the plants that thrilled me as a child are still among my top favourites, even though I have learnt a lot more about them over the years. I think one's feelings for plants are equally as important as knowledge.

The damp, shady, mossy corners filled with ferns that I struggle to create in this dry part of England are my tribute to the shady lanes of County Down and the seven glorious Glens of Antrim. I grow *Fuchsia magellanica* and some of its various forms and varieties because they conjure up vivid memories of the lovely fuchsia bushes and hedges in Northern Ireland.

I remember when I was about three years old being taken to a garden with roses dripping and tumbling from arches and pergolas – and every garden I have ever had has honoured that early delight, with more and more rambling and climbing roses, to which I have added honeysuckles, jasmines and clematis. My grandmother grew



© Jane Littleton

Artemisia abrotanum (which she called Lad's Love), *Lychnis coronaria* and *Stachys lanata* (now *byzantina*) and I still grow them, not only for sentimental reasons, but because they are really good, beautiful hardy plants, still popular with modern gardeners.

In spite of their attendant blackfly, the marguerites which were always a feature in those long-ago Ulster gardens gave me a lasting affection for daisies of all sizes, from historic varieties of *Bellis perennis* to the later *Leucanthemum x superbum* Broadway Lights. These are just a few examples and it would be tedious to list more, though there are many, many more.

But even at my advanced age nostalgia is not enough: there have to be new plantings and fresh projects to keep up the dynamism and the sense of adventure all gardens, and gardeners, should have. Above all, I enjoy my garden, and I hope I never lose my sense of wonder at the beauty and complexity of even the humblest plants, nor my sense of humour when pests, diseases and foul weather wreak havoc on my small paradise. 🐞

Gwladys Tonge is a Vice President and past Chairman of the Society, founder of the Bucks, Northants and Oxon Group, writer and Gold Medal winning botanical artist. Gwladys recently celebrated her 90th birthday.

© Jane Littleton



Gwladys has written and lectured about gardening in a small space. Her own garden shows what can be done.