

## **Nuffield Horticultural Group head for the South West**

**Enjoying brilliant sunshine in late September, the Horticulture Group, comprising Scholars, potential scholars and guests, met for its sixth tour in the South West.**

Starting in the Bristol area, the group stayed in the Redwood Hotel and Country Club situated in the woods of Abbots Leigh, not far from Brunel's suspension bridge. However, although the hotel boasts an extensive range of leisure facilities, there was little time in the packed programme for the group to make use of them.

A dinner on Thursday evening, sponsored by Avoncrop Ltd, started the event. Deloitte Food and Farming partner, Mark Hill, along with his wife, Liddy, joined the group as guests.

A comprehensive presentation from Green Fuels Ltd at Stonehouse, near Stroud, showed the group the possibilities of turning cooking fat into bio fuel. The company, that claims to be the largest of its' kind, supply conversion units from domestic to semi-industrial.

After negotiating a 10 mile M5 traffic jam, the next stop was at Martin Thatcher's [2005] superbly modern cider factory.

John, Martin's father, explained how a very high percentage of the apples pressed were grown by them and that the wet summer had produced plenty of fruit.

A guided tour of the factory showed how a very substantial investment had paid off and how Thatchers Cider was a mix of high tech and strong traditional practice. The tour ended with some excellent, single variety tasting and some serious retail therapy in their on-site shop.

A short journey to Lady Farm Garden at Chelwood provided the perfect evening with the sun setting over a 13-acre garden that looks at its best at this time of the year.

Saturday started with a quick dash down to Bridgwater to see the 15 acres of protected strawberry production of Team Green Growers Ltd.

This is a family business that grows strawberries to supply most of the major supermarkets. Picking was in progress from table top bags under both polytunnels and glass.

A pit stop at the new, large Puxton Park farm shop and play barn near Weston-super-Mare gave the group the opportunity to see a start-up project on a green field site and grab a bite to eat at the same time. The exceptionally large shop strongly supported local producers and communicated this well.

The penultimate visit to my own [1980] Cleeve Nursery and Garden Centre showed a contrasting approach. Home-grown container-grown shrubs, ferns, grasses and perennials, as well as field grown specimen shrubs, are sold through the centre. Much use is made of colour co-ordination, fashion and inspirational displays in an attempt to attract younger buyers without alienating an existing older clientele.

The final visit was to the University of Bristol's new Botanic Garden where the 'Evolution of Land Plants Collection', 'Flowering Plant Phylogeny Collection' and 'Floral Diversity Collection' created most interest.

**Alan Down, Cleeve Nursery**

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