

# A seasoning of our work

Gardens & Estate

## Weather

Very wet and windy start to the month.  
Cold, frosty month end.

November	summary	2010
Temp °C	max / min	14.3 4.5
	average max / min	7.1 2.1
Wind mph	max average in day	15.3
Rain	dry days <1mm	8
	mm	max on one day
	mm	total for month
	inches	12.32

## Activities

November 2010

### In the gardens

- Last of the **apple harvest** brought in to store for winter. An excellent crop this year.
- Ruth Charles (Garden Team) produced **house flower arrangements** whilst Maureen Hadwin (Housekeeper) away on sick-leave.
- Time of year for leaf removal and collection. 12 tonne bags of leaves were retained to create **leaf-mould**, the rest being distributed within the wood and garden to return to the soil. Most leaf-raking currently done manually, existing leaf-blower being old, noisy and smelly. Staff not pushing for a new machine, but may find this task less time-consuming if a suitable, light-weight replacement can be found.
- Also time for general garden tidying & **cutting back**. Top growth would be left to help protect plants in a garden closed to visitors in the winter, but current need to keep up appearances remains until public perceptions of a garden in winter might change. This year, an experiment using a light-weight Austrian scythe in the Cornfield was tried, to help speed the clearing of top-growth in this quite extensive herbaceous area. This seemed to work well and create an acceptable result.
- Although **composting** continues throughout the year, this was the last bulk shredding of garden materials for the year, to create a hot, aerobic compost before microbial activity slows for the winter.
- With the seasonal decline in plant growth comes a busy time for **repair, renovation and improvement** of facilities and systems for better efficiency. Proposed projects for the winter include – re-building the Professor's Garden footbridge; major tractor overhaul; creation of various new areas for undercover storage of machinery and estate materials; clearing vegetation from path edges to reduce summer maintenance work.
- To reduce the need for path edge trimming in summer, Dave Charles (Garden team) is removing young trees and ferns from path edges in the Fern Garden. He is also **thinning saplings** in certain garden areas to improve to growth and appearance of remaining trees. This is the challenge of presenting our gardens to visitors within their setting of ancient woodland – an unobtrusive woodland manicure is required!
- A **badger-flap** has been created to allow a long-established badger route from the meadow through the Lower Garden to continue, whilst preventing access for rabbits into this area.

apple harvest

leaf-mould

cutting back

composting

thinning saplings

badger-flap



## Around the estate

- The **historic sycamore** above Ruskin's Harbour underwent crown reduction to reduce loading on remaining boughs after it lost its top in late summer. Local assistance being sought with sonic testing equipment to verify the extent of internal rot. This should inform of the need for further reduction of trunk height to conserve the root plate and prevent complete collapse of the steep bank on which it sits.
- Cold weather work has begun on the rolling programme of *Rhododendron ponticum* control. This year, large old plants on Crag Head & re-growth in the Northern Woods are being targeted to prevent further spread of this invasive species.
- Repair work was begun on the rotten tops of the **jetty piles**. Despite initial investigation, the unusual end-grain rot was revealed to be more severe than at first appeared. Marine construction engineer, Richard Marsh (LMC), recommended on-going condition monitoring of piles at water-level and replacement of jetty in about 3 years. Remedial cosmetic 'splicing' repairs and capping of pile-tops to prevent further rain ingress will be done before next season, as conditions allow.
- Heavy rainfall and quick run-off from the steep ground always brings **water management** challenges to Brantwood. Despite regular maintenance of drains, channels and becks there was much unblocking, clearing of overspill leaves, sticks and rocks to do and emergency sand-bagging to protect the museum hallway from flooding.
- Due to a growing use of **wood-fuel** at Brantwood, an additional firewood store has been created to allow 2 year's of drying for wood cut and seasoned from the estate.

## With other partners

- After juicing sessions of sub-standard apples this autumn, investigations as to the possibility of a Coniston juicing day for 2011 and the economics of selling a Brantwood apple juice are being made with the **South Lakes Orchard Group**.
- Support to the active local water-consciousness and quality group, Coniston and Crake Partnership, maintained. Our involvement includes regular '**Riverfly**' surveying of Beck Leven for biological health, use of appropriate cleaning materials in the house and being part of the core group to help raise awareness of the values of water in the widest sense. In return, this group has helped us to access essential advice on managing the environment and condition of our historic harbour.
- Provided a study visit of Brantwood's cultural and environmental educational potential for a group of European Head Teachers as part of a week's programme organised by Low Bank Ground OEC.
- Made a short presentation to the Guild of St George on the extent, variety and potential for projects in Brantwood gardens and estate
- Provided a study visit for University of Cumbria literature students, looking at the practical manifestation of Ruskin's philosophies in today's landscape.

## Brantwood Soil Life Project

- Practical work – Manure Concentrate was laid-down, to assist and enrich a balanced composting process. This involved stirring organic cow manure, crushed egg-shells, rock dust and the 6 **biodynamic compost preparation** herbs for an hour and placing the mixture into the 'Cow Pat Pit' where it will remain 'making' until the summer.
- Communication work – a series of winter gatherings were planned to continue support of local projects inspired by the Soil life Project - 2011 planning days, a New Year's Eve Three Kings preparation making and the winter intuitive Observation of change and evolution within the Project hay-meadows.

## Proposed Master's Degree in Ecology of Method and Practice: Environmental and Social Education

- Preparation was made for my meeting in December with Dr. Aksel Hugo, Director of the programme at Rudolph Steiner University College, Norway.

historic sycamore



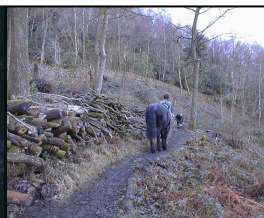
jetty piles



water management



wood-fuel



'riverfly' survey



a compost preparation

