



SOMERSET BONSAI SOCIETY

13 October 2024

Welcome to my report on our trip to the 2024 Heathrow show. Following our debut at last year's show, we were invited back to participate in what must be one of the most enjoyable and eclectic bonsai shows in the UK. Why so enjoyable, you ask? Well for one thing, the atmosphere is very friendly and despite us all wanting to win a trophy, everyone is willing to help each other and there is genuine interest in what trees and accents people are showing. Most of the questions I got asked came from other club members rather than from the public. The venders were also on top form and even in these difficult times, there was never any pressure to buy, just to chat about trees, and pots, and tools, and tables etc!



Saturday afternoon and the exhibits are starting to arrive.

So, onto the show. The show is held in Bracknell Leisure Centre, which for those of us living on the Western edge of Somerset means a journey of four and a bit hours. Not something we really wanted to do on the day of the show, so Pam (the apprentice) and I decided to make a weekend of it and booked a hotel just up the road from the venue. The plan was that we would take half the display with us and set up on the Saturday afternoon, go and have a leisurely meal then an early night. Ade would join us at 8am on the Sunday, with the rest of the display and we would then have a couple of hours to set up. With 41 clubs and a similar number of venders attending, setting up is a busy affair. Everyone jostling for access, and trying to grab a trolley, note to self; "buy collapsible trolley and bring next year". So, the more you can do on the Saturday, the more enjoyable the Sunday will be.



Well, half of our display has arrived!

This year we had put a bit more planning in and had selected the majority of the display items at our October meeting, a few days before the show. We did bring a couple of extra trees and accents just in case nature stepped in and decided to defoliate a tree or worse! Luckily, our first choices remained show ready, although my Trident maple refused to show any Autumn colour other than green. In fact, as I look out onto my garden, I can see that it is still mostly green with only a few red leaves. My other Trident which I took last year has lost all its leaves, go figure as our American cousins' say!



Ade making the final adjustments to our display

Once the display was ready, we could relax and have a look around the venders, before the public arrived and it all got a bit crowded. Pam and I had decided that we would look for some different pots for a few of our established trees, however after looking at several hundred pots we conceded that the trees would have to wait for their "new shoes". Luckily, I came across Barry Walker and his exquisite "Bespoke

Bonsai Stands" and was able to spend some of the housekeeping on half a dozen lovely tables. Look out for them at next year's show and for Barry.



The doors are open and the public head straight to the vender's area

Once the doors were open, it was time to meet the public. So, we took it in turns to stand by our table in the hope of answering any questions and encouraging people to vote for our display, having a coffee in the member's area and wandering the hall talking to other clubs and looking for things to buy.



Lots of autumn colour on show – Twickenham Bonsai Society

In my introduction, I said that this show is eclectic. Why so, you may ask, well there is no pre-selection of trees by the organisers. Each Club/Society is free to display whatever trees and accents they like. This results in a wide variety of species, styles and accoutrements, showcasing what bonsai is really all about. Not just lots of expensive

imported trees in antique pots, but trees that beginners or people thinking about taking up the hobby, can relate to.



Our neighbours down in Exeter put on a nice display

Whilst we were perusing some of the other displays, Pam made an interesting point about the lack of information on some of the trees. Some people had signs giving the species and common name of their trees but unlike the Swindon Show, there was nothing about the history of the trees. So, I think that we may provide some background info on our trees next year and see what interest that provokes.



The Somerset show team proudly show off their new society shirts

As the day progressed, we did some more chatting, gave out more voting slips to interested people, drank more coffee and bought some more things, including tables! Then it was time for the "Prize Giving". Sadly, we didn't make it onto the podium.

However, our friends at Staverton and Exeter did, so well done to them. The results were:

Favourite top three club displays as chosen by the Visitors:

- 1st Place - The Bonsai Boys
- 2nd Place - Staverton Bonsai Group
- 3rd Place - Exeter Bonsai Society

Favourite top three club displays chosen by Exhibitors:

- 1st Place - The Bonsai Boys
- 2nd Place - Staverton Bonsai Group
- 3rd Place - UK Mini Bonsai Group

If you would like to see pictures of their displays then head over to the UK Bonsai Association website or search 2024 Heathrow Bonsai Show on YouTube, where you might be lucky and spot us in our new Society polo shirts. Nice!



And finally, our display in all its glory.

'Til the next one, stay warm and keep doing bonsai.

Alistair