

Somerset Group Newsletter



20th Anniversary Year!

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<http://hps-somerset.btck.co.uk/>

Photographs

Front Cover – The Priory © Liz Buckingham

Chairman's Letter – Roy Stickland & Mike Werkmeister at East Lambrook © Stuart Senior

The Three Muses © Sandra Macqueen

Visit to The Priory and Ridley's Cheer © Liz Buckingham

Gardens of Guernsey © Roy Stickland

2013 Programme © Stuart Senior

Chairman's Letter

There is always a certain amount of overlap between my Annual Report to the AGM and the Chairman's Letter for the Winter Newsletter, and I suppose the big link this year might be encapsulated in the words, "whatever happened to Summer?"

It is a perpetual national pastime to complain about the weather and 2012 has given us plenty to complain about. But instead of complaining let's take a look at what has done well in this cool and very wet season. I often jest that the only purpose of lawns is to keep the flower beds apart, but I have to say that the grass here at Shipham has never looked greener or lusher and it has made a huge difference to the overall appearance of the garden. Quite large areas that previously sat too low and were very uneven I raised, by the addition of fresh soil, by anything up to 8 or 9 inches and seeded only last September. They have established so well that they are now indistinguishable from the rest.

This was the first year that we had the courage to invite groups of people to see the garden, and quite apart from the repeat of our Plant Swap in August, it looks as though we shall be doing it again in 2013. It was gratifying that the grass was not looking brown and threadbare for these visits, as it has done over the past few summers.

But what about the far more important contents of the garden? A couple of examples spring to mind. First, the phloxes. They grew far higher than usual: "Blue Paradise" was 15" – 18" taller, flowered earlier and lasted longer than usual, making me realise all over again what a superb herbaceous perennial it is when it gets the right conditions. Moreover it was conspicuously free from any sign of mildew. Because I regard them as autumn flowering plants, I associate them with the asters, heleniums and heliopsis. But in a way this is a bit of a mistake, because those other plants tend to prefer a drier, sunnier existence than the phlox. Consequently, although they grew well through the summer, they were later coming into flower and the flowering was unimpressive and short lived. The same has been true of the chrysanthemums.

Our soil here is thin and very well drained, though slowly we are building up the humus content and it is gradually getting better. In the past I have found crocosmias very disappointing, with large clumps showing no flowers at all. This year they have responded well to the wetter conditions and the flowering has been the best we have seen. It has also been a good summer for the establishment of newly planted trees. Two Wollemi Pines that had been in pots for 2 or 3 years were planted out in April and both have made wonderful new growth and have finished the season in robust health that promises well for the future. It has also been good to see established birches come through the year unstressed by dryness, whilst the ornamental cherries have looked good to the last, putting on a fantastic show of

autumn colour. Most recently it was the very high winds and driving rain that ended this wonderful display.

So it hasn't been all bad, has it? The gardens we have visited this year and which I referred to in my annual report have all had good things to offer and with this newsletter we can begin to anticipate the visits planned for next year. Once again we hope we have an interesting programme lined up for you. The highlight for next year will be our 20th Anniversary celebration with Roy Lancaster as our guest of honour. Roy will be with us again at the national event at Cannington in September, which will be open to members from all over the country. We have moved our monthly meeting that month to Cannington in order to make it easier for our members to participate in both events.



I do urge you to book your places for the Anniversary lecture at Horton on 29th June which we will be opening up to the public. There is of course no additional charge for the Cannington lecture on 14th September which will feature Diana Guy talking about Cottage Gardens. Booking for the Roy Lancaster session in the afternoon will be managed by the national HPS team: so keep a look out! The details of these and other events are set out elsewhere in this newsletter and I hope we shall all find 2013 an active and stimulating year.

And I can't end without mentioning that our collaboration with East Lambrook continues with the Early Spring Plant Fair which has proved so popular that all the available pitches had been taken up by the nurseries within 24 hours of the invitations being issued! All we need now is a good Spring to encourage growth and we could be in for another spectacular success. (And remember, we need your quality plants for the HPS table!)

Roy Stickland

The Three Muses



We've lost three very hardy Hardy Planters from the Somerset Group over the last eighteen months. All of them were very knowledgeable plantswomen. Florence Thomas has just had her ninety-seventh birthday and has moved to Guildford to be near her daughter. It is sad to see her with no garden or plants but she feels safer and her daughter is a member of the society over there. Phyllis Cram sadly died this summer just after she contributed plants to the Plant Swap which she was sad to miss. I believe Stuart picked up a Black Walnut tree, *Juglans nigra*, for his Arboretum at the Swap and she was very pleased about that. And Daphne Jeffree was enjoying her membership until shortly before she died. I'm sure I'm not alone in missing their enormous enthusiasm and interest in life along with their knowledge. This photo was taken on an HPS outing just a few years ago.

Sandra Macqueen

Group Plant Sale, 27 April

Members can contribute to the plant sale in two ways: (a) take a table in your own right, or (b) grow plants to donate to the Group table. If you want your own table, please contact me (details on back cover). The charge will be £5, payable on the day. This will be waived if you commit to donate all your takings to charity. There are only 16 tables available, and it's first come, first served. If you have plants to donate to the Group table, just bring them along on the day. We will also need plants for our Group table at the East Lambrook plant fair on 30 March so please bear this in mind when you plan your propagating!

Roy Stickland

Visit to The Priory and Ridley's Cheer

THE PRIORY



From a spine-tingling drive down a Wiltshire country lane we arrived at a beautiful stone priory owned by Frenchwoman and gardening writer Anita Pereire. When Mme Pereire moved from Chartres to England some thirty years ago she bought the derelict Priory. It was a blank canvas with grass up to the front door and only a ha-ha preventing the cows from grazing right up to the house.

Today, the garden is a profusion of roses within a strong formal structure which divides it into distinct parts. Mme Pereire derived her inspiration for the garden from sitting in the alcove of her back door and visualising a path leading away from the house towards the ha-ha. This central rustic path forms the backbone of the garden – planted with an avenue of beautifully trimmed silvery lollipops of *Pyrus salicifolia pendula*, in between dark green bushes of Chinese Box (*Atalantia buxifolia*), while on the ground lime green *Alchemilla mollis* froths between *Geraniums* 'Johnson's Blue' and 'Kashmir White' which spill onto the path.



The yew and box parterre was the next area to be planted. Tightly clipped spheres and cones edged by low hedges of box and yew bestow formality while white *Rosa* 'Kent', and pink *Rosa* 'Ballerina' grown as standards with the 'Fairy' in between is evidence of the flair of Mme Pereire and the skill of her French gardener Marcel.

Beyond the parterre is a water garden with floating pink and white lilies and stepping stones. Candelabra primula, irises, gunnera, rodgersia, hostas and ferns mingle, shaded by a spreading horizontal conifer. Behind the water garden is the white garden, a little late flowering this year due to our wet English summer.



Mme Pereire's passion for roses is apparent. She has two more rose gardens. Surrounded by a 10 foot yew hedge is a stone paved garden with low natural stone walls forming raised beds for the roses. A mix of modern roses and hybrid teas in the beds are complemented by nepeta spilling over the paths. A summer house in the garden is clothed in a montana clematis while the trees planted here have pruned 'arches' so they can be seen through. At the rear of the rose garden a high thuja hedge has gothic shaped windows clipped into it revealing the wild garden beyond the ha-ha.

The ha-ha has become a sunken garden with shrubs and of course roses under planted with Mme Pereire's favourite geraniums. Further into the wild garden, along a mown path, birch and other trees are interspersed with several varieties of subtle species roses.

I asked Mme Pereire the name of the deep pink, intensely scented climbing rose outside the door to the terrace – 'Madame Isaac Pereire' came the reply. It is one of

her favourite roses and was named after the wife of a French banker, her late husband's great, great (I think) grandmother!

RIDLEY'S CHEER

Our intrepid coach driver braved yet more winding lanes to Ridley's Cheer, a garden created over forty five years by owners Anthony and Sue Young. Originally half an acre the garden has been expanded over the years and now covers 14 acres.

The Youngs began by planting specimen trees, some of which are now 50 to 60 feet tall, including fernleaf beech, weeping silver lime, oaks and a variegated liriodendron. In all they have planted over 4,000 trees.

With the acquisition of more land in 1989 they developed a small arboretum at the back of the house planted mainly with species and cultivars of Oak, Acer, Magnolia and Birch. In 1996 they seeded a three acre wildflower meadow with native species including the semi parasitic yellow rattle to suppress the more vigorous grasses. A heavily fortified kitchen garden and fruit cage has been established at the entrance to the wildflower meadow offering some protection from the no doubt abundant wildlife!

The former potager, sheltered behind a high beech hedge, in the formal garden now contains herbs, roses and tree peonies.



The formal gardens are landscaped with sloping lawns, stone walling and box hedges in cubes, obelisks and pyramids. There is a varied collection of shrubs and trees including acers, magnolias, deutzias, daphnes and hollies as well as bulbs and



perennial plants. In the lawn by the conservatory there is a striking standard *Wisteria venusta* 'Alba' with a twisted stem, chosen for its short white racemes.

Above the house, a mown path cuts through a small wildflower meadow with towering viper's bugloss and ox-eye daisies and planted with walnut trees.

The most recent development in 2009 has been the creation of a dewpond, not altogether successfully, as it contained very little water, at the farthest corner of the site.

Tea and cakes in the conservatory was the finale for a lovely day out.

Liz Buckingham

Subscriptions for 2013

A reminder that subscriptions for 2013 fall due this month. The rates are £8 for joint and £5 for single membership. Thank you to those who paid at the AGM and to those who pay by standing order. For those who prefer to pay by cheque, the usual payment slip is included with this Newsletter. I shall be at the 12 January lecture if you would like to save the cost of an envelope and stamp. Alternatively, for those of you who are adept at internet banking, you can do a BACS transfer direct to our bank account:

Bank Branch:	NatWest, Bridgwater
Sort Code:	60-03-27
Account name:	Hardy Plant Society (Somerset Group)
Account number:	46429956

Please remember to quote your membership number.

Under the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998 it is necessary that I advise you that, for the purposes of record only, details relating to your membership are stored electronically. If you object to your details being so recorded, please notify me without delay.

Stuart Senior

Gardens of Guernsey

The gardens of Jersey are fairly well known; those of its Channel Islands neighbour, Guernsey, rather less so. In part this may be because there are fewer of them offering access to either public or private visitors. But there is a compensating factor in that the tiny neighbouring islands of Sark and Herm make attractive visits.



The island of Herm is just one and a third miles long and half a mile wide; it has a resident population of 63, a manor house and church, a single hotel, a pub/restaurant and a couple of cafes. The focal point of the gardens lies around the hotel on the sheltered side of the island where the benign climate enables a variety of exotic and tender plants to be grown in the open. This includes more than a dozen Aloes, Agaves and Aeoniums, Furcraea, the False Banana *Ensete ventricosum*, Strelitzia, Proteas and the lovely *Jovellana violacea* with its soft lilac, pouched, calceolaria-like flowers. In a masterly Gilbert & Sullivan-esque touch the Head Gardener explained that he is also the island's policeman, first aider (including use of a defibrillator), ambulance driver, fireman, and health & safety officer!



Back on Guernsey, right in the heart of St Peter Port is Grange Court, with its relatively narrow front on the main road concealing an immaculate 2 acre garden. The formal rose garden contained the healthiest and most vigorous roses I have seen in a very long time. It is backed by the stone wall shown in the picture – possibly a relic that it would have been sacrilege to pull down, but more likely a deliberately built folly.



On the other side of the wall a Brugmansia of some 12 feet height and width, was dripping with its long red trumpet flowers, attended by a wealth of bees and other insects. In the less formal areas, expertly chosen shrubs provided a satisfying mix of shape, form and foliage colour and texture. This led through to a restored Victorian vinery, which, although it still contained vines, was largely given over to

a collection of cacti and succulents planted in raised gravel beds. I'm sure this will mature into a stunning display, but it seemed from a purely personal perspective an extravagant use of a huge space that could have been used for far more exciting purposes. Nevertheless, as with everything at Grange Court it was conceived and executed with precision and huge expertise. Great attention is paid to cultivation with lavish use of garden compost and mulching.

On the other side of St Peter Port, La Petite Vallee comprises three acres of diverse compartments and styles. Here the emphasis is on informality, but with an eclectic and interesting choice of plants. A rill flows down a staircase and along the lower terrace before winding around the garden into a lily pond.

A third garden at St Pierre de Bois on the other side of the island is the three acre Mille Fleurs, occupying a fairly steep valley position with two ponds fed by a natural stream. The slopes are thickly wooded, mostly with the well-known European woodland species, but with occasional non-native surprises.



Near the bottom of the valley the sheltered microclimate favoured tree ferns (*Cyathea* as well as *Dicksonia*), cannas, gunnera and *hedychiums*. In their midst the white flowers of a medlar came as something of a surprise. The more open areas of the garden displayed the herbaceous borders, with roses and clematis festooning arches and doorways, pots with familiar phormium/pelargonium combinations and equally familiar bedding plants.

In a sunny sheltered spot polygala was resplendent, with its profusion of purplish, vaguely pea-like flowers (see below) – a plant associated more usually with the fynbos of South Africa.

It is worth taking a trip to Sark to see La Seigneurie Gardens. Here transport is strictly by horse and carriage (or Shanks' Pony!) and it can be a bit tricky to co-ordinate the schedule to have enough time to view this elegant and interesting, mainly walled garden. We could



have done with quite a lot more time there. Huge mounds of the white variety of *Geranium maderense* (as well as the more familiar pink/magenta form peppered the beds (self-sown no doubt).



A fine specimen of the bizarre shrubby *Salvia aurea* with its strange brown flowers attracted a good deal of attention. The beds were well planted with a range of herbaceous perennials, many of them very familiar to us.

Apart from these gardens, we visited an orchid field on the Lihou Headland on the west coast. There were no great rarities here, but a profusion of the Common Spotted Orchid, the Marsh Orchid and the Pyramid Orchid. These were thriving in a protected site that has been given over to traditional management. May is the ideal time to see them in flower and a spectacular site it is too.

Both Guernsey and Jersey have the advantage of a short flight time from provincial airports and are ideal for short break holidays. Both offer boat trips to the neighbouring smaller islands and there is horticultural interest to be sought out. And of course the pace on the islands is reassuringly sedate.

Roy & Helen Stickland

2013 Programme

Please refer to this and future Newsletters or the website <http://hps-somerset.btck.co.uk/> for further details and booking slips. Location maps or directions will be supplied following booking a place on an event.

All meetings at West Monkton Village Hall are free to members (except Saturday 27th April), but there is a modest levy of £2.00 for each visitor/guest. The Group will have a plant stall and a book stall at most of the lecture meetings listed.

All coach trips and garden visits must be pre-booked with Janet Murley:

Tel: 01884 820840 or email: janet.murley@btinternet.com.

SAT 12 JANUARY

LECTURE

At West Monkton Village Hall, Monkton Heathfield 10.30am for 11.00am.

Colin Crosbie - "Shady Characters"

Colin started at Wisley as manager of the Alpine house and went on to become the Curator.

SAT 9 FEBRUARY

LECTURE

At West Monkton Village Hall, Monkton Heathfield 10.30am for 11.00am.

Marcus Dancer – "Scented Plants"

Marcus is a nurseryman with 18 years experience, growing a wide range of plants. He trained at Hillier's and lectures at the English Gardening School in London. His website is <http://www.clematisplants.co.uk/>.

SAT 9 MARCH

LECTURE

At West Monkton Village Hall, Monkton Heathfield 10.30am for 11.00am.

Ian Nex – "Saxifrages"

Ian has retired from Birmingham Botanical gardens where he was the Alpine specialist.

SAT 30 MARCH

HPS SOMERSET EARLY SPRING PLANT FAIR

At East Lambrook Manor Gardens, 10:00am – 5:00pm.

15 Nurseries will be attending – see website for details.

(Admission £3.50)

SAT 13 APRIL

LECTURE

At West Monkton Village Hall, Monkton Heathfield 10.30am for 11.00am.

Alan & Jill Whitehead - "The Hidden Gardens of Herefordshire"

Alun and Jill have a 3 acre garden and a nursery specialising in Iris and Hemerocallis. They have the national collection of Siberian Iris. This talk will be followed by a visit to their garden and others in Herefordshire on 10 July.

TUE 23 APRIL

SELF DRIVE GARDEN VISIT

Plaz Metaxu (Coombe House) & Sampford Shrubs,

Near Tiverton



Plaz Metaxu is Alasdair Forbes's garden, full of meaning, surprise, drama, solitude and mythical references. The owner is a passionate plant enthusiast and there is intimate domestic planting as well as awareness of landscape and mythical references and sculpture. Very much a one man's personal vision which is very much appreciated by many. Sampford Shrubs is a nursery which belies the name by being a haven for many treasures of all kinds as well as the shrubs: for example, the nursery holds an impressive collection of Heleniums. At the nursery we will explore Holbrook Garden which combines a genuinely innovative garden design with real plantsmanship and a relaxed nature-inspired style, full of new ideas.

Visit <http://www.holbrookgarden.com>.

SAT 27 APRIL

At West Monkton Village Hall, Monkton Heathfield 10.00am to 12.30pm.

(Admission £1)

GROUP PLANT SALE

WED 15 MAY

SELF DRIVE GARDEN VISIT

Cothay Manor & Holcombe Court, Near Wellington and Holcombe Rogus



Cothay's evocative, romantic garden was laid out in 1920's and re-planted in the 1990's within the original framework. A plantsman's paradise of 12 acres of magical gardens with a rare blend of old and new. Holcombe Court offers seven acres of very varied gardens: herbaceous borders, trout ponds and a Victorian rockery. A woodland garden has been restored recently and a vegetable parterre has been created within an 18th century walled garden.

THU 13 JUNE

Marwood Hill, Cliffe & The Gate House,

Marwood Hill Gardens covers 20 acres. In addition to three small lakes the gardens contain rare flowering shrubs, a rock and alpine scree, waterside planting, a bog garden, many clematis and many Australian native plants. It also holds National Collections of *Astilbe*, *Iris ensata* and *Tulbaghia*. Plant Sales and Tearoom: see www.marwoodhillgarden.co.uk.

COACH TRIP

North Devon

To learn more about Cliffe see the HPS Journal of earlier this year: Autumn 2012, Vol.33 no. 2. It is 150 yards up a steep hill on the coast road. A cliff-side terraced garden with spectacular views and a diverse range of habitats from Mediterranean to woodland. Colourful herbaceous borders with, Hedychiums, Cannas and Salvias through into autumn. It also holds National Collections of Heuchera and Schizostylus.

The Gate House is also covered in the same edition of the HPS Journal. It is a peaceful streamside garden, with a range of habitats including a bog garden. There is woodland, a large vegetable garden, herbaceous borders, and patio gardens with semi-hardy exotics. It holds a National Collection of Rodgersia.

Marwood Hill and the Gate House are included in the cost of the trip. Because of the access issue at Cliffe some members may not wish to make the climb: those that do should budget for an entry fee of £3.50 on the day.

SAT 29 JUNE

20th ANNIVERSARY LECTURE

At Horton Village Hall, 13.30pm for 14.00pm.

Roy Lancaster

Roy, President of the HPS, should need no introduction. This meeting will be open to the general public so booking is strongly advised.

WED 10 JULY

COACH TRIP

Bryan's Ground, Aulden Farm & Ivy Croft

Herefordshire

Bryan's Ground (www.bryansground.co.uk) comprises three acres of garden rooms, created in 1913, furnished with follies, fragrant flowers and topiary, pools and potager. Paths lead to five acres of specimen trees on the banks of a river on the border with Wales.

Aulden Farm (www.auldenfarm.co.uk) is an informally planted three acre country garden with wildlife in mind. Irises, hemerocallis, grasses and kniphofias. Structure and form and quirkiness!

Ivy Croft (www.ivycroftgarden.co.uk) is a plant lover's garden designed for all year interest with raised beds, mixed borders, trees, alpine troughs and a formal vegetable garden framed by trained fruit trees. Collections of ferns, willows and snowdrops. Tea and cake is included!

SUN 11 AUGUST

PLANT SWAP & LUNCH

At Shipham

FRI 6 SEPTEMBER

Cadhay & Little Ash Bungalow,

SELF DRIVE GARDEN VISIT

East Devon

SAT 14 SEPTEMBER

LECTURE & 50/50 PLANT SALE

At Bridgwater College Cannington Centre 10.30am for 11.00am.

Diana Guy – “Cottage Gardens”

Diana was the winner of the BBC gardener of the year in 2004. She specialises in consultancy and design and runs workshops and courses.

[See the National HPS website for details of the “In conversation with Roy Lancaster” session in the afternoon.]

SAT 19 OCTOBER

LECTURE

At West Monkton Village Hall, Monkton Heathfield, 10.30am for 11.00am.

Ron Scamp – “Daffodils”

Ron is a specialist grower of over 2000 named varieties of daffodils. The RHS has awarded him the Cory Memorial Cup for his daffodil breeding. His website is www.qualitydaffodils.co.uk/ and he will bring bulbs for sale.

SAT 16 NOVEMBER

AGM & LECTURE

At West Monkton Village Hall, Monkton Heathfield 10.00am for 10.30am AGM and 11.15am lecture.

Stephen Lacey – “What makes a great garden?”

Stephen is a well-known author, journalist, broadcaster, plantsman and garden designer.

All events must be pre-booked

If you would like to book places on any of these events, complete and return the entire enclosed Booking Sheet. As you will see from the Booking Sheet, you can receive the Joining Instructions for each event either by email or by post. To receive these details by email, simply fill in your email address on the Booking Sheet **even if you believe I already have a note of it**. If you choose this option, not only will I email your Joining Instructions prior to each event, but I will also send you an email confirming your booking. If you prefer this option **PLEASE** print your name clearly and remember to advise me of any change to your email address. Should you wish to receive this information by post, **PLEASE** remember to send me **TWO** SAE for **EACH** event you wish to attend.

Janet Murley

Cancellation Policy

A reminder about our cancellation policy. There will be no refund of either coach or pre-paid entrance fees unless a replacement participant can be found. The only exception will be for "serious" illness if the organiser is notified before the visit. Amounts of less than £5 will not be refunded under any circumstances.

Plant Sales Table

I'd like to thank everyone who has brought plants to be sold on the Group's sales table this year. However, the last year or two has seen a drop in the number of plants being donated. This has, of course, impacted on the plants available for sale to members and, as a consequence, the revenue gained by the Group.

For any new members who may be unaware, the plant sales table at our monthly meetings is stocked entirely with plants donated by our members, which may be purchased at a reasonable price prior to and following the meeting. There are often some real gems and rarities available to buy.

I'd be very grateful if you would all consider potting up excess plants from your gardens and bringing a couple of plants each time you come to a Group lecture meeting. And remember that we can now offer "cash back" of 50p for each plant sold at over £1 if members include two labels with their plant. The monies raised from this table and the second-hand gardening books stall really do help us to continue to provide members with great value for money for their membership. The cost of hiring the hall and booking the guest speaker for each lecture meeting is not inconsiderable and at present entry to lecture meetings is free for members. If everyone coming to a lecture could bring a plant or book with them for the tables this would go some way to paying your "entry fee"!

Jane Hunt

A Big Thank You

..... to all members who lend a hand with the refreshments at West Monkton Village Hall. It is much appreciated!

Carol Clements



Somerset Gardens Trust

www.somersetgardenstrust.org.uk

In the 1980s there was widespread concern that historic parks and gardens were being lost or adversely affected by development. Counties were encouraged to set up voluntary bodies which would raise awareness of the issue and would research historic gardens and parks and thereby be alert to gardens at risk.

The Somerset Gardens Trust (SGT) was established in 1991 with the following objectives:

- to promote the education of the public on matters connected with the arts and sciences of garden landscape;
- to preserve, enhance and recreate for the education and enjoyment of the public whatever garden landscapes may exist or have existed in and around the county of Somerset.

Other counties were also setting up Trusts. A central body, the AGT (Association of Garden Trusts) was established to help and co-ordinate the activities of the County Gardens Trusts and to facilitate networking.

Currently the activities of the SGT centre round:

- a programme of garden visits and lectures;
- surveying work done voluntarily by members recording historic gardens, parks and green spaces and advising on their conservation;
- an educational sub-committee which makes small grants and offers advice to schools;
- we also make grants for the restoration of historic gardens;
- a newsletter, produced three times a year;
- monitoring planning applications that might adversely affect parks and gardens.

Our ability to make grants depends on fundraising and so we organise a number of events in the year, including a very successful plant sale at West Monkton. For further details about the Trust and its activities, and how to join, see the website: www.somersetgardenstrust.org.uk.

Mervyn Wilson

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