

St Mary's Pembridge and Westonbury Mill Water Garden Water Garden



A riot of colours at the Red Lion in Pembridge

In May 2011 we wrote about our visit to [Shobdon and Pembridge](#). Indeed it has proved to be one of the most popular of all the 'trips out with a religious connection' on the website and therefore we decided to return to savour once more the delights of the church architecture at **St Mary's** - and visit what turned out to be one of the most (intentionally!) eccentric English gardens we'd ever been to.



Martin in Pembridge High Street, which features typical black and white architecture.

Pembridge is at the heart of the Black and White Village Trail in north-west Herefordshire. The trail is well promoted and there's an excellent leaflet available that features thirteen villages between Kington in the west, Leominster in the east and Kinnersley in the south.



St Mary's Church is right in the centre of Pembridge up a steep slope and surrounded by a beautifully kept churchyard. The most unusual aspect of

the site is the separate bell tower, built with extremely hefty walls and reputed to have been used as a refuge when the town was besieged by invaders from Wales in turbulent medieval times.



St Mary's Church door

The tower isn't the only part of the church that's well built - as with many churches of the medieval era the church door is especially solid, adding a note of reassurance and permanence to the building.



A little bird nesting in the porch at St Mary's

So welcoming was the architecture that a member of the local avian community has taken up residence in the vaulting (see above). Judging by the evidence on the floor below the nest, it has clearly been there some time without disturbance from churchgoers!

The inside of the church is featured in our [previous article](#) so we won't add to it here, except to say that visitors in need of spiritual refreshment of

a different variety after their visit will find what they are looking for at The Red Lion, situated at the foot of the churchyard.



Pembridge High Street, wide view



Information board about the dendrochronology project regarding Pembridge's medieval black and white buildings.

Wandering down from the church and along East/West Street (ie the main street) there are many notable examples of black and white buildings. 21 of these were part of a dendrochronology (timber dating) project in 2004, through which it was established precisely when they were built: it was found that the dates ranged from the 13th to the 16th centuries. Although the church is mainly 14th century, some timbers are variously dated between 1207-1214.

There are two very attractive parking areas in Pembridge. The first is off East Street, it leads to a public park and it also has toilet facilities. The other is just by the bridge over the River Arrow and is especially well frequented by people with cars carrying cycles: it has a picnic area by the river, with a number of tables.

We'd picked up a bunch of leaflets about attractions in this area during a recent visit to Hergest Croft and our next destination was **Westonbury Mill Water Garden**, around 1.5 miles west of Pembridge on the A44 in the direction of Kington. The attraction has been built by retired hydrogeologist and water engineer Richard Pim who decided to create an unusual garden combining the skills he acquired in his career with his love of plants.



The folly tower, featuring gargoyles



Gargoyle on the tower



Mural of the mill and gardens in the folly



The lake

Passing through the tea shop where you buy your tickets, you pass over a bridge spanning a stream and ahead of you is a beautiful man-made lake complete with landing stage and white rowing boat moored by it. There's a folly tower to the right, which draws water up from the stream, that cascades through the head of a gargoyle and a face built on to the side wall; a mural of the gardens can be found inside the tower.



The wine bottle-walled dome.



The outside of the dome

Passing by the lake there are several attractive vistas to be seen, featuring arrays of rare flowers. The bog garden is particularly unusual with its vast bed of giant-leaved plants. Walking by the beds of ferns and flowers, a strange dome comes into view on the far side of the garden. On close inspection it's made from around 5000 wine bottles of different colours, resembling the effect generated by the Selfridge store in Birmingham, yet with a myriad of bottle colours rather than silver discs.

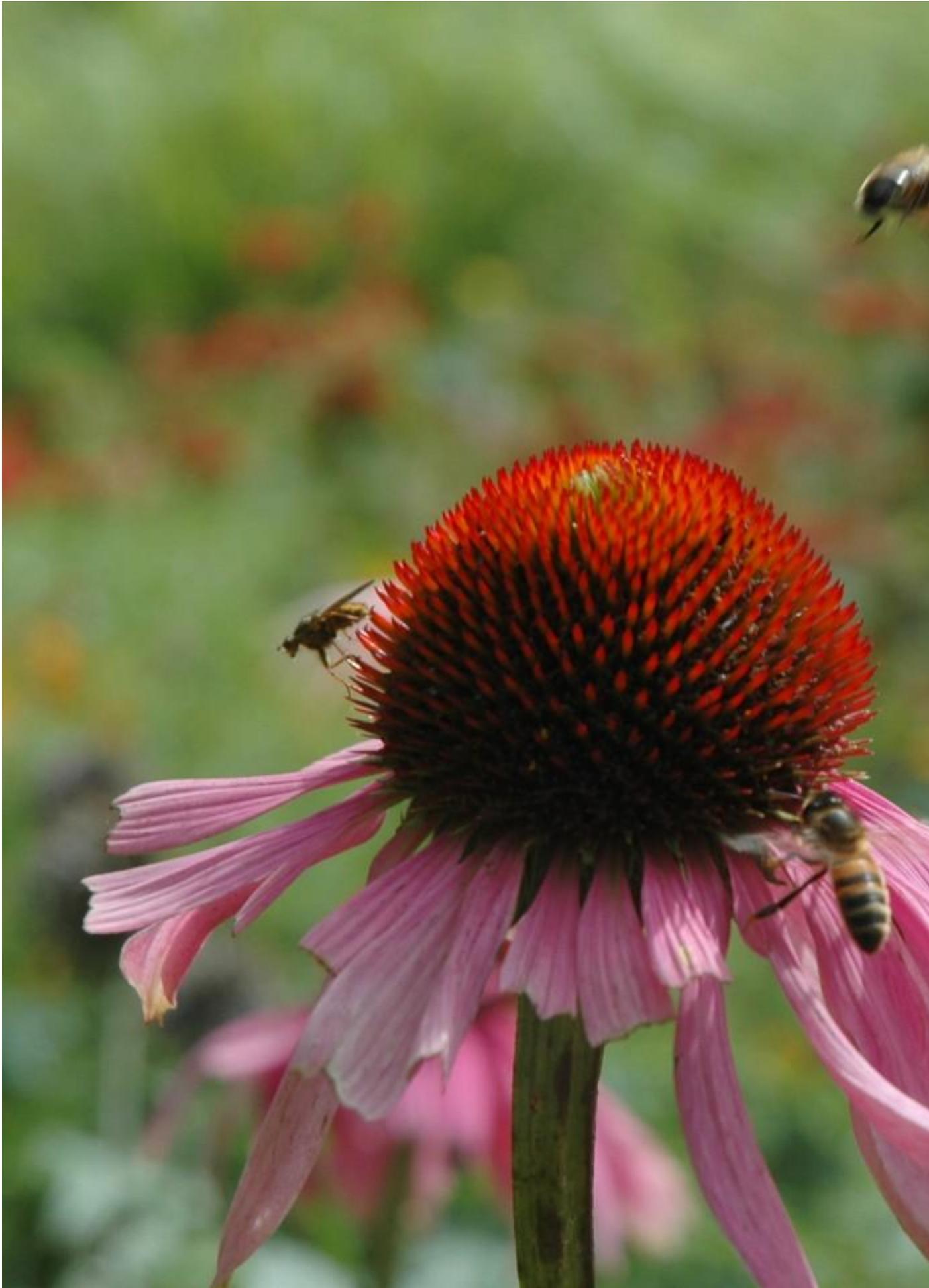


The water- powered cuckoo clock under construction



Gunnera Manicata in the bog garden

Near the bog garden is a great example of the eccentric nature of the garden. An old barn has been converted into a water-powered cuckoo clock. At the time of visiting in August 2012 it was still under construction but the mechanism is on view and it will be a lovely quirky feature when finished.



Bees love the unusual flowers in the plant sales area.

Walking on towards the fields, there is a large vegetable garden area irrigated by a long drainage canal. The earth from the canal has been excavated and used to build a giant mound which you can ascend to become your very own 'King of the Castle'! Difficult to resist!



The mound - Usain Bolt definitely has a lot to answer for!



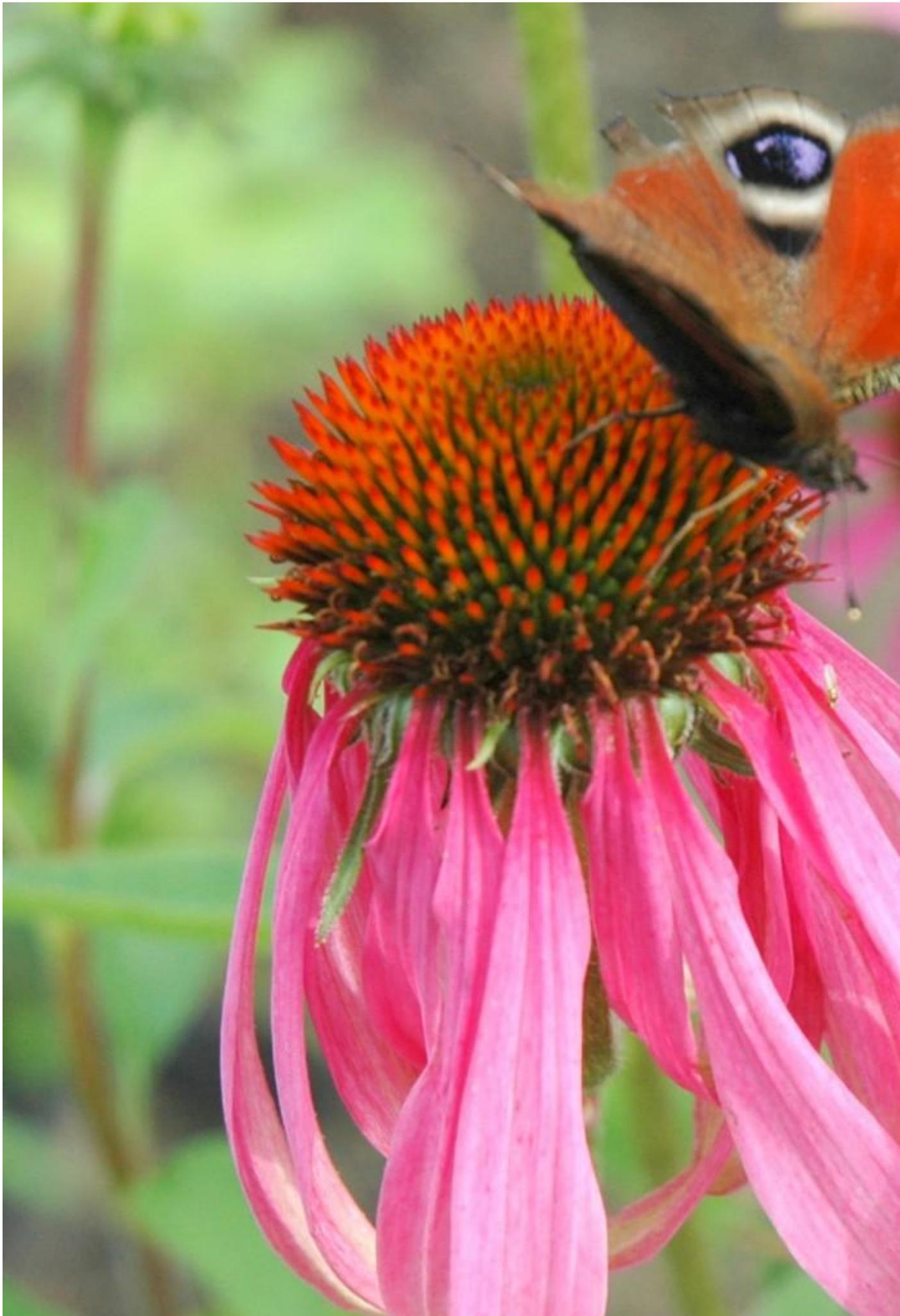
Delicious cakes on sale in the cafe

Returning to the entrance there is a wonderful **plant sales area and cafe** with delicious cakes. This was certainly one of the most unusual and delightful gardens we've ever been to and fully worth the £4.50 pp entrance fee.

The trip out to Pembridge takes around an hour and a quarter, so this is definitely a whole day outing combined with the Water Garden (and/or Shobdon).

Martin and Magda Jones August 2012

Other memorable sights in the garden...



A peacock butterfly with an unknown flower - enthusiasts please give us the name!



Loosestrife



Cypress leaves in the bog garden



Kingcups



Carex riparia in the bog garden