

Evening Outing - a **Sparkling Summer Soiree**.

Rowans Garden Centre was the setting for our evening meeting this year. Although the weather was not cooperating, we had a very enjoyable evening. We assembled in the café area at Rowan's while it poured outside, to hear a talk from co-owner Alison Pao. She took over Rowans seven years ago from Mike Rose, who some of you will remember. She became interested in garden design and planting design and studied at Capel Manor. When she and her husband moved here, she asked people where they bought plants and was told "Rowans".

She helped Mike and when he decided to retire and put it up for sale, there were two bidders. By happy chance, a friend of hers met the other bidder, introduced them and they have worked ever since as a partnership to build Rowans into a successful business.

Alison told us that all her staff are RHS trained and passionate about plants. It is a very seasonal business, and getting staff is not easy here. They grow all perennials and shrubs themselves, importing house plants from Holland and other plants from UK specialist suppliers where possible. Summer bedding comes from Windsor. (No, not there!) They are the only stockists of the original Peter Beales roses, which are stunning and very hardy and disease resistant, and mostly fragrant.

As the rain had stopped we went out to look round the garden. They make up all the hanging baskets on site and can tailor-make ones for your requirements. At the moment they are growing their own interesting lavenders in a trial bed. Everyone was taken by a beautiful deep blue one with an amazing perfume. It will be on sale next year. We toured the polytunnels, selected plants that had caught our eye, and returned to the café where Briony and helpers had prepared delicious strawberries and cream. Prosecco helped them go down nicely, and Alison gave us chocolate brownies to complete the feast. We left just before the rain started again, having had a thoroughly enjoyable evening.