



Somerset Federation of Gardening Clubs

Issue LIX

Autumn 2019



*The winter comes, I find a patch of green,
Where robins, by the miser winter made.
Domestic, flirt and perch upon a spade;
And in a little garden - close at home
I watch for spring - and there's the crocus come!*

Winter in the Fens - John Clare (1793 - 1864)

www.SFGC.org.uk

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Introduction



This is my first introduction to the newsletter and I would like to thank Pip for all of his contributions over the many years. They were unique to Pip and I won't try to emulate him as I know I will fail miserably. For those of you who weren't at the AGM in May and maybe haven't heard, Pip Harwood was appointed as President of the SFGC, a popular choice and a post I know he will fulfil admirably.

I was chuffed to bits to have been appointed as Secretary and will do my best to follow in Pip's footsteps as well as bringing something of my own to the position, I hope. Please do contact me if there is anything you think I might be able to help with or need to know. Contact details will be in the newsletter.

A little introduction about me for those who don't know me: I live and garden in Shepton Mallet and am a member of Wells & District Garden Club. Shepton Mallet didn't have a club at the time, though they now have a thriving one, but Pip had already collared me for secretary of the Wells committee. I retired four years ago from product development in the food industry and am also a cheese judge and recently judged the Champion at Frome Show. Pip was curious to know if the same sort of shenanigans went on with cheese shows as sometimes goes on with flower and vegetable shows (I'm sure I don't know what you mean I hear you cry!). I told him we once had an exhibitor leave in handcuffs after threatening a judge with a cheese iron (he had been on the cider!) but that has never happened to me fortunately! Needless to say I am a keen gardener and although my garden is much smaller than I would like, it is fairly crammed with flowers and has a pond, vegetables and fruit. It is on heavy clay and windy but south facing so I am lucky in that respect. I am also very keen on wild life and have resident hedgehogs. Enough of me.

I would like to thank the ladies and gentlemen from Clapton, Wayford, Drimpton & District Horticultural Society for all their efforts in making the AGM in May a very enjoyable evening. I know how much planning and work goes into organising such a thing.

Sally Hawkes has been very busy revising and compiling the new Register of Speakers and Judges and as I write this is almost ready to go to print so hopefully you will have received these by the time the newsletter goes out. A phenomenal amount of work goes into this, as every speaker has to be contacted, and as a club secretary I know how very useful it is.

Autumn is now well on its way and an excellent time for reviewing the garden. I have all sorts of plans, more vertical planting with clematis up obelisks, some plants definitely not the 'right plant right place', to quote the late Beth Chatto. (Though apparently she never said that according to her biography, which I can recommend). So lots of digging up, splitting and replanting. And mulching and mulching and yet more mulching...

Since it will be getting on for Christmas when the newsletter goes out, I would like to wish everyone a happy one and a prosperous New Year.

Wendy Williams



Wildlife captured in Wendy's garden before the winter set in.

To all Clubs - Database

Just a little reminder that should your committee alter during the course of a year which may affect details of your main contact, do please let me know as soon as possible, so that our database is always kept completely up to date.

The following full details are required: The main contact name, the Club/Society, address, telephone number & email address if applicable. When updating your details, do please also indicate whether the contact requires correspondence by post or email and whether they give permission to publish those details (either telephone no. or email address) on the SFGC website, the latter of course is for Data Protection requirements.

A Club Details Form for this purpose can be found on the SFGC website, at the bottom of the Membership page.

Thank you for your co-operation,

Mo (Plomgren)



Chairman's Corner

Once again, time moves fast and months fly by as it only seems like yesterday we held our AGM in Drimpton! Into almost autumn as I write this, I've been reflecting that this year for gardeners, the weather has had its ups and downs, with a lot of wet weather earlier in the year and an amazingly warm spell through June and July to August, although here in Holford situated high above sea level, we do not have the excessive temperatures that those in towns and the larger cities have experienced, so unlike those suffering with the humidity of a sultry night, we are fortunate to have had the fresh cool air down from the hills! However, as I said above, autumn is approaching and we have a depression out

over the Atlantic bringing with it windy wet weather, however, the rain is much needed in some parts of the country. Some areas in Europe have suffered with high temperatures causing drought, especially in Germany with thousands of acres of forest dying and being cut down.

Our world's climate is definitely changing, either through natural evolution or what we as a race are doing to our planet, I do know that we're not helping. As I write this piece for the newsletter, news is coming in about devastating fires burning uncontrollably in the Brazilian rainforests, the 'lungs' of the world. There was a meeting of the G7 (the seven richest countries in the world) where they all decided they will contribute 20 million euros to help Brazil. I am sure there are far more resources available to help control this catastrophe, but I suppose this is indicative of 'our couldn't care less attitude' to the environment. We hunt our wildlife almost to extinction, elephants, rhinoceros especially for their ivory and horns and now I hear that Japan is to start killing whales again. I don't think we will learn until everything is gone and we use those words I vehemently hate to hear.... 'if only'.

Whilst walking a forest trail last year just outside Canberra, I came to a wooden bridge spanning a lake and wetlands, written on the first board were the words... "This generation spent little or no time thinking about future generations, but they will spend a lot of time thinking about us".

I have now for the time being climbed down from my soapbox, but I am sure (I hope) most of you out there will agree with all that I've written, we live in a beautiful world, we must care for it as best we can!

Well....onto other things...I now with the greatest of pleasure congratulate Pip Harwood who after thirty years as secretary to the Federation, was at our AGM voted unanimously to be our new President, well done Pip, I look forward very much to many years of us working together. Wendy Williams has stepped into the secretary's 'shoes' and I also welcome Neil Garnett, both of whom will I am sure, be a great asset to our committee.

I would like to thank our host John Wright and his team from Clapton, Wayford & Drimpton Garden Club for the successful AGM that was held in Drimpton Village Hall in May, it was an enjoyable and happy evening, thank you all very much indeed for your hard work in organising this event.

It only leaves me now to say - because this will probably reach you not long before the festive season, a very Happy Christmas together with my best wishes for a peaceful, prosperous and healthy 2020, not forgetting in anticipation, to watch those seeds, cuttings and bulbs grow - and that they all come to fruition for your enjoyment.

God Bless

Erl



Speakers and Judges List

You should all have received a brand new speakers and judges list, I hope you find it useful. There are thirty seven speakers who have joined the list since it was last published. We have had a similar number of withdrawals.

Please, please, please could you be sure to destroy previous lists.

It is often distressing for speakers and their relatives to keep receiving requests long after their names have been withdrawn.

Finally we rely very much on your recommendations so thank you to all those of you who have sent names to us.

Sally Hawkes

When planting your cats make sure to space them 6 inches apart so they have room to grow.



2020 Federation AGM

Just a gentle reminder to put the Federation's AGM in your diary for next year.

The date is Tuesday 19th May and will be held in the Holford & District Village Hall, kindly hosted by the Holford Gardeners Group. Timings etc will be sent out nearer the date.

Trials and Tribulations in The Pig Garden

In the early summer of 1993 we moved to an old farmhouse that had enough land for the garden we had always wanted. There were a few walls around spaces that must have once been barns or cow sheds. One such space was a bit of a suntrap, surrounded by walls on three sides. This was where we decided to create an area to relax.

The first job was to clear the somewhat uneven ground and get rid of weeds and brambles. We fenced off the open end, built a straw shelter with a corrugated iron roof, and bought a pair of Large White weaners to do the job for us. This part of the garden would be referred to from then on as the 'pig garden.'

The following spring we had a freezer full of pork, home cured ham and bacon, and a well dug and fertilized area in which to create a garden.

We began by digging a large hole and creating a pond. Living near the Somerset coast our garden consists of a layer of soil of varying depths over limestone pavement, think Kilve beach with soil. This means we have an unlimited supply of stone. It is extremely hard work getting it out of the ground, but well worth it. This allowed us to surround our pond with flat stones, create a patio and a raised bed along the south facing wall for Mediterranean plants. We planted a quince, and a *Ceanothus arboreus* 'trewithen blue', a few smaller shrubs and perennials and put up an arbour for a bit of shade and support for a *Rosa banksiae*.

The garden blossomed in the warmth and shelter of the walls and became a favourite area to sit and relax. The pond filled with wildlife, the quince produced fruit and the *Ceanothus* grew into a large tree. All was well until one day whilst weeding in another part of the garden I heard a loud rumble and, rushing to investigate, I found one of the walls in the pig garden had collapsed. A few weeks later the *Ceanothus* which had given us so much pleasure blew over, taking with it another wall, the arbour and finally landing in the pond.

We knew the walls should have been properly capped but had never got around to it. Life here has been a series of steep learning curves. There was much else going on at the time so that part of the garden was left to its own devices, an ignored embarrassment.

Then last year, I agreed to open our garden to a local garden club the following July. I went home that evening and broke the news, joking that we had a year to sort out the pig garden. We surveyed the scene. In the intervening six years ivy and nettles had taken over the rubble and the *Rosa banksiae* had smothered nearly everything else. We were twenty plus years older but retired with more time. Perhaps it was a job for the following spring!

In May this year realizing time was short we returned to the pig garden with chainsaw and loppers. Having cleared the vegetation we could see that one end of the south facing wall was in a very poor state. The ground behind the wall being several feet higher, it seemed the obvious place for a set of steps. The other wall needed completely rebuilding. With a skip full of rubble and several tons of sand and cement Mike set about the walls, while I took on the lesser task of the garden.

To our relief we finished around a week before we opened the garden. It was amazing just how much of the original planting had survived and sprang back to life, in particular a Christmas box which had been completely buried in rubble for all those years.

My father used to say " it's a good job people come to stay from time to time or no jobs would get finished in this house. " Maybe the same is true of the garden.

Sally Hawkes



A Letter from Canberra

St Augustine once said *to sing well is to pray twice*.

Chairman Erl suggested I write about the The Llewellyn Choir in which I sing bass. Perhaps he was guided by St Augustine (we did sing together in church at Minehead) or was suitably impressed with the Australian National University's School of Music and Llewellyn Hall when he visited Canberra last year.

Canberra has a richness in things musical. With a population of over 420000, music is integral to our social and cultural development. No doubt our British heritage helped.

Most public and private schools have Music Departments with some attracting Canberra's top professional musicians as vocal and instrumental teachers. Several are at Academy standard and prepare students for tertiary music education.

The Australian National University is Australia's top ranked university and is in the top 20 globally. ANU's School of Music is the fastest growing in Australia, offering the flexibility to study performance, composition and music technology.

There is now a wealth of bands, singers, orchestras, symphonia and choral groups across the music spectrum in Canberra.

The Llewellyn Choir



© Peter Hislop, Canberra

Founded in 1980, The Llewellyn Choir is recognised as one of Canberra's leading auditioned amateur choral groups. Under the baton of Music Director Rowan

Harvey-Martin, with Répétiteur Anthony Smith, we have given critically acclaimed performances in recent years, including Mozart's *Requiem*, Handel's *Messiah*, *Beethoven's Mass in C* and Verdi's *Requiem*. The Choir has also performed overseas.

Singing these sacred choral works is special but The Llewellyn Choir also performs other works, some challenging but all enjoyable. Last year, we presented Will Todd's *Jazz Mass in Blue* and we're currently rehearsing Dave Brubeck's *Jazz Mass To Hope! A Celebration*.

Our 40th anniversary next year will see us performing Brahms *German Requiem*, a major work for orchestra and choir.

Bill Upton

August 2019

Community Choirs in the U.K.



Singing, along with gardening, is renowned for making people feel good, keep fit and active. There is nothing better than belting out a good song among friends.

Community choirs in the UK are not for the 'professional singer' (although they are welcome) but for anyone who enjoys singing no matter what their ability.

I belong to a Community Choir in Watchet, West Somerset and we meet every Monday evening for about an hour and a half followed by some of us retiring to a local Bowls Club for a few drinks and a natter. We perform in public at events ranging from the Town Fete, singing on the esplanade to singing at a Care Home for the residents (especially at Christmas). No one is pressured to perform and everyone can pick and choose where and when they would be willing to join in.

Why not have a look and see if there is a choir in your area - you may enjoy it.

David Talling



One-upmanship in the Wild Garden



There's been trouble in the borders. Holes dug and deposits made next to my precious Hog's Fennel.

This happened on a succession of nights. Recalling the old army slogan: *Engage closely with the enemy*, I set up my camera trap. Last time I did this, my granddaughter was on hand to do the job. The resultant film showed activity from one pigeon and the milkman. Nothing untoward there. This time it was going to be different .

Next morning the evidence was conclusive. Yes, there was the neighbour's cat looking guilty as all cats do when caught unawares but nergling around in what I call the lawn was Old/Young Brock.



It's a curious thing but when I came across the image, my approach changed somewhat. I began to have feelings of a rather touching intimate relationship between us. I no longer felt an urge to reach for a twelve bore or to lay down a mantrap.

Here was a nocturnal visitor doing what nocturnal visitors do. And have been doing around here long before we came along.

Pleased with my photographic evidence I sent the pictures across to Australia to my family settled in Canberra. My son lives on the other side of the city from our own correspondent, Bill Upton.

The children were appreciative of our Mendip wildlife and returned some photos, saying: How about these?

This is where the Upmanship comes in. His pictures showed a possum in a stand off with a fruit bat in a persimmon tree!

My son was one up on my offering.

OK, so all I had was a badger and next door's tom but I felt the need to instigate a Counter Gambit. Unable to compete with this exotica, I sent a couple of photos of his old mum and dad.

Pip H

Copies of Stephen Potter's *Lifemanship* and *Gamesmanship* are still knocking around secondhand book dealers.

They deal with the art of coming out on top, without actually cheating.

Isn't it wonderful what the Good Lord can do with a little help?



Maybe so...but you should have seen it when 'Ee 'ad it all to 'Imself!

Spring 2019 Crossword Answers

Across

- | | | | | |
|-----------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Onion | 4. Alpines | 7. Iris | 9. Humus | 10. Edge |
| 11. Sloes | 14. Rowan | 15. Aster | 17. Lotus | 18. Patch |
| 20. Paths | 21. Spades | | | |

Down

- | | | | | |
|------------|-----------|-----------|--------------|------------|
| 2. Olives | 3. Manure | 5. Plum | 6. Eggplants | 8. Hemlock |
| 12. Tomato | 13. Larva | 16. Slugs | 18. Pea | 19. Cos |



Up the Amazon in a Leaky Canoe



The flat-bottomed rain clouds were kind to us on the day of our trek into the jungle and the dense canopy of trees in the Tapajos Forest sheltered us from the heat of the day.

Two guides, both with machetes, escorted us along a narrow path that led into an amazing natural larder come chemist shop come wildlife habitat. The machetes they assured us were to chop away fallen branches that may lie across the track and we discovered that they also came in handy for tapping tree sap, cutting vines for their contents, signaling and best of all chopping open a brazil nut husk to reveal 17 smaller nuts within that tasted delicious.

Having been born and raised in the rainforest, the guides were quick to share their knowledge and message that, if left alone then nature will provide.

Ants that contain a natural insect repellent and quinine bark that helps combat malaria...trees with sap containing milk of magnesia for tummy upsets, natural antibiotics, painkillers (especially good if the odd snake or bullet ants take a bite or two)... trees with resin that can be burnt to provide light and smoke to deter insects....rubber sap, the end results of which we are all familiar, vines that contain water and another fun one that can be smoked like a cigarette but with enhanced effects!!

The buttressed kapok provides shelter and natural fibres...a tree from which dugout canoes are made and another which when struck with that machete resonates, sending a signal that can be heard for miles and the noise also sets the birds calling...the guide could answer them.

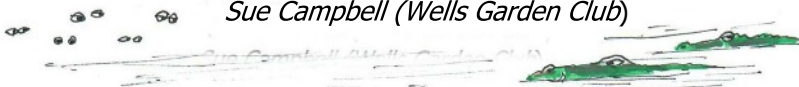
Fruits are abundant and if the animals consume them, then they are edible for humans, fungus digests fallen leaves, returning nutrients to the ground.

There are 1,700 species of birds in the rainforest, although they are largely heard but not seen since they occupy the canopy and the clearing for soya bean production is reducing their habitat...David Attenborough wouldn't be happy!!

As for the leaky canoe, the trip into a flooded area was amazing since there were birds darting into the trees, squirrel monkeys jumping around and some keen-eyed folk spotted a sloth, happily there were no snakes, nor crocodiles to be seen.

I was reassured to see the lad on the outboard motor was steering with one hand but baling out water with the other.

Sue Campbell (Wells Garden Club)





'Funny' - Words from the Gardener of the Front Garden!



Funny isn't it, when we moved here many years ago, I was informed that the front garden is 'mine', the back garden is 'his'..... although I have the responsibility of the 'front', it is - fortunately - smaller than the back! Funny isn't it though, that I spend most of my time in the back garden - which is 'his', weeding, cleaning the greenhouse, potting up, sowing seeds & cuttings, pruning, dead heading, sweeping, watering, making the tea and tidying the garage which in reality, is a large potting shed/ glory hole (the car remains outside!) So when I ask for help in the front garden, 'can you give me a hand with this' (a removal of a very overgrown clematis that had spread so far cross the garden path, visitors and especially the postman needed a machete to cut their way through) I was told... 'No, it's the front garden!'.... 'mmm...I thought'. So without any delay, I threw every ounce of strength (& bad temper) I could muster and literally took an axe to the deed, cutting back here, slashing back there, Louie (our little cocker spaniel) having a bean feast with all the wood and sticks he could chew and bury...until the patch of border was bare, except for the stump, and the remains of a stake which is completely embedded into the hard ground, all in all, looking like a lonesome pine in some desolate prairie! 'Look what I've done' said I... 'mmm,' he murmured & raised his eyes....I could tell he was not well pleased. 'I have plans for here' I said, 'reduce the flower bed, increase with nice paving from the front door'the response was still raised eyes and a murmured comment 'it's the front garden, so if you want to do that, up to you....' and off he walked. I decided to keep my thoughts to myself!



A couple of days later, 'he' said we should get another water feature for the pond (back garden), I agreed and an ornamental 'Koi fish Pond Spitter' was

chosen, purchased and delivered..... 'come and look' he said sometime after, 'what do you think?'.... 'very nice' I replied....he said 'I'll need some help to get it into the hole, concrete it into the stonework' - hesitation - 'perhaps you could?'..... ..more hesitation... 'Mmmm' I thought... and as I walked away I then murmured over my shoulder 'not sure about that, after all it's the back garden!' Silence!

Summary: an amount of cash has mysteriously been deposited into my own bank account, paving has been ordered for the front garden and a workman doing the job imminently...

Funny isn't it.....!

Mo (Plomgren)



The Bevin Boys

My wife and I attend a Memory Café in Minehead biweekly and we often have speakers who prove to be both informative and entertaining. One such speaker, Jasper Ford, gave a very enlightening talk about his time spent as a Bevin Boy from 1943 to 1948. He died recently, in his 90's, but was conscripted as a Bevin Boy as an 18 year old. Yes, I did say conscripted because that is what happened. He had been a member of the Air Training Corp and when conscription time came he fully expected to join his comrades in the RAF but to his amazement he was sent to work down a Welsh coal mine. We often forget the service these men gave to their country, with some dying for their country down a mine, yet they were treated very badly.

At the beginning of the war the government underestimated the value of strong young miners and conscripted them into the armed forces. By mid 1943 the coal mines had lost 36,000 men. The situation was desperate as coal was needed for industry and Ernest Bevin, Minister of Labour and National Service decided that something had to be done to replace the miners lost. Volunteers were asked for but did not come forward so a proportion of conscripts were sent down the mines. To make it random, each week a number between 0 and 9 was pulled from a hat and those whose National Service number ended in that number were directed to work in the mines.

The Bevin Boys were given just 6 weeks training, comprising of 4 weeks in a classroom and two weeks on the job. Being of military age and not in uniform caused many to be stopped by police and questioned about avoiding call up. They were also assumed to be conchies (conscientious objector).

The scheme was wound up in 1948 and the Bevin Boys had to work on in the mines until that time, well after the time members of the forces had returned home. They also had no job to go home to, unlike those who returned from active service and had no recognition of their war effort. Not until 2007 when Tony Blair announced that the Bevin Boys would receive a Veterans Badge similar to the HM Armed Forces Badge awarded by the Ministry of Defence.

Without these men we would not have been able to keep the Steel Mills and furnaces going and we would probably have not won the war. We owe them a great debt.

Some notable Bevin Boys

Nat Lofthouse - footballer; Eric Morecambe - Comedian; Brian Rix - Actor; Alf Sherwood - Footballer; Lord Hamlyn - founder of Hamlyn publishers and Music for Pleasure record label.

David Talling

Holford

The Gardening Year- I've Cracked It!

My gardening year 2019 started off really well – as long as I don't mention the Brussels sprout plants which had remained totally sproutless through the autumn and winter; or the continual attempts by (it must be) a badger to destroy my lawn; or the several instances of seed packets containing seeds of completely different varieties from those indicated on the packets. Things were still going really well by late spring – as long as I don't mention the spectacularly poor germination of some of the seeds I had bought, sweet peppers in particular; or their spectacularly poor development thereafter; or the realisation that last summer's drought did finally take its toll on a few garden plants. The gardening year continued really well into the summer – as long as I don't mention the fact that a very ingenious blackbird managed to get inside (and out again, which was even more astonishing) the netting carefully wrapped around my gooseberry bush and then gobbled up a fair percentage of the crop; or the seemingly vast amount of asparagus I denied myself because of my refusal to cut any after the end of May; or the half dozen or so broad bean plants that just turned up their toes and died.

Yes, by early August, I was really on top of things: the garden was looking good with all the roses giving a lavish display and all the fragrant things delighting the nostrils more than usual in the exceptionally warm weather. Although requiring endless watering, my allotment had already produced copious amounts of soft fruit and green vegetables and there were plenty more to come. It would be a bumper year, I thought. I had even begun to think about what I would enter in the forthcoming village show. And then I was suddenly stopped in my tracks. Literally. A trip. A fall. A&E. A completely new hip. Then home but housebound. Oh, well, it certainly resolved the dilemma of what to show in the show! I was very much a no show.

But then a small army of neighbours (they must have had a chat amongst themselves) started to pick up where I had so abruptly left off. My greenhouse plants have been regularly watered and now, in early October as I write this, I'm able to continue picking tomatoes and cucumbers. There began a steady march of fruit and vegetables all the way from my allotment to my back door: raspberries and plums; French beans and lettuces; cabbages and fennel. My entire crops of garlic, onions, potatoes, sweetcorn and carrots have been harvested and brought home so that I have been able to prepare them, little by little, for storage during the winter. I have been assured that the 20 or so pumpkins that are ripening on my plot will be brought up to my garden in good time for the children's pumpkin carving event in the village hall at the end of October! I have also been assured that further crops on my allotment will be harvested for me as and when they become ready. Over the past couple of days I have ventured out in the car on short journeys, pretending that it really isn't painful to operate the clutch pedal, and I'm now planning to drive to the pull-in

at the top of the allotment hill so that I can at least collect my crops that others are harvesting for me.

The kindness and thoughtfulness of my neighbours – particularly my allotment neighbours – during my immobility predicament has been overwhelming. But that's what gardeners do. That's what gardening does for us. We may tend a garden and/or an allotment on our own but, in the general course of things, there are always seeds to be swapped, cuttings to be given, information and knowledge to be shared, excess of crops to be handed out, the other end of something longer than your arms to be held while it's fixed or tightened or lifted off the ground. Gardening is mostly a communal activity. You only have to read the frequent stories about people coming together to create a garden to improve an otherwise ugly and neglected area: they start as individuals and become a community.

Vee Cockerell

West & Middle Chinnock Gardening Club



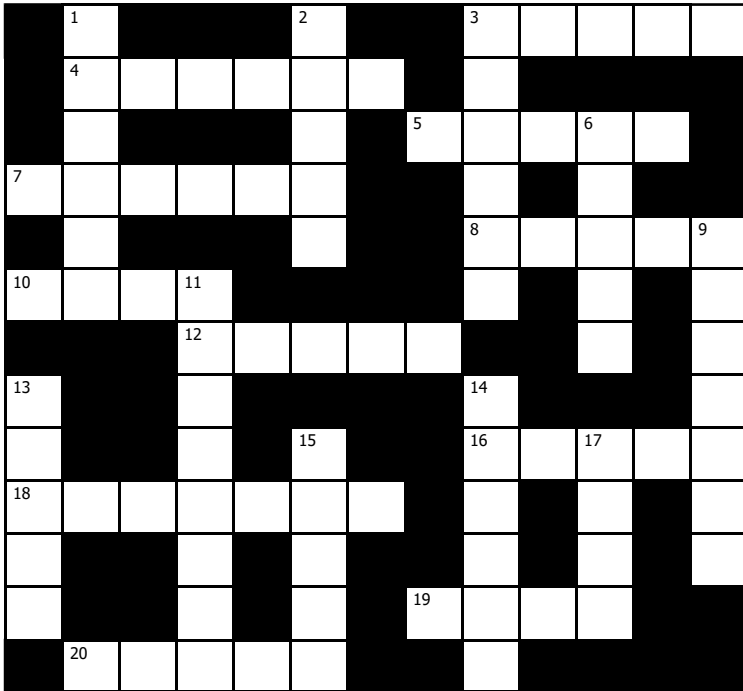
In the old Almanacks we have this Sign of the Weather expressed:

When Clouds appear like Rocks and Towers,
The Earth's refres'd by frequent showers

In the Decay of the Moon,
A cloudy Morning bodes a fair Afternoon.

The Shepherd of Banbury's Rules - 1670

Gardening Crossword



Across

3. They buzz around in football jerseys
4. Suitable for crops.
5. Looks embarrassed when left in the shrubbery
- 7 Flower a learner will long for.
8. Rosies willow form.
10. Part of a tree one catches on.
12. If I leave a pip in the beer you can eat it.
16. It grows up and not out on the left hand side.
18. Our beds contain not even one whole plant,
19. Live on half a diet of vegetables.
20. Timber of popular choice.

Down

1. Cut the grass around everything but this plant.
2. Fruit of where there is a bad lose out east.
3. A batty sort of tree.
6. Shoot in the garden for falsifying coins.
9. Has certain regrets about trees.
11. He possibly garnered what he grew.
13. That straggly bush right in the middle
14. Plant 150 more than necessary.
15. Gardeners use it a great deal around mid Wales.
17. In hope at least one can use it as a mulch.

*Spring 2019 Crossword answers
on page 12*

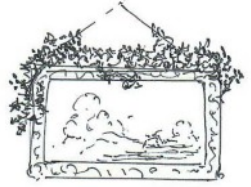
Crossword submitted by John Dunster

Pip's Snippets

December Christmass

Each house is swept the day before
And windows stuck with evergreens
The snow is beesomd from the door
And comfort crowns the cottage scenes
Gilt holly wi its thorny pricks
And yew and box wi berrys small
These deck the unusd candlesticks
And pictures hanging by the wall

John Clare - The Shepherds Calendar



Winter Happiness

I will here lay down an analysis of happiness; and, as the most interesting mode of communicating it, I will give it, not didactically, but wrapped up and involved in a picture of one evening.

Let there be a cottage, standing in a valley, a white cottage, empowered with a flowering shrubs, so chosen as to unfold a succession of flowers upon the walls, and clustering around the windows, through all the months of spring, summer, and autumn; beginning, in fact, with many roses and ending with jasmine. Let it, however, not be the spring, nor summer, nor autumn; but winter, in its sternest shape. This is a most important point in the science of happiness. And I am surprised to see people overlook it, as if it were actually matter of congratulation that winter is going, or, if coming, it's not likely to be a severe one. On the contrary, I put up a petition, annually for as much snow, hail, frost, or storm of one kind or another, as the skies can possibly afford. Surely everybody is aware of the divine pleasures which attend a winter fireside-candles at 4 o'clock, warm hearth rugs, tea, a fair tea maker, shutters closed, curtains flowing in ample draperies on the floor whilst the wind and rain are raging audibly without,

'And at the doors and windows seem to call
As heaven and earth they would together mell;
Yet the least entrance find they none at all;
Whence sweeter grows our rest secure in massy hall'

Castle of indolence - Thomas DeQuincy
Confessions of an Opium Eater - 1832



The Gardener

The Gardener does not love to talk,
He makes me keep the gravel walk;
And when he puts his tools away,
He locks the door and takes the key.

Away behind the currant row
Where no one else but cook may go,
Far in the plots, I see him dig,
Old and serious, brown and big.

He digs the flowers, green, red, and blue,
Nor wishes to be spoken to.
He digs the flowers and cuts the hay,
And never seems to want to play.

Silly gardener! summer goes,
And winter comes with pinching toes,
When in the garden bare and brown
You must lay your barrow down.

Well now, and while the summer stays,
To profit by these garden days
O how much wiser you would be
To play at Indian wars with me!

Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894).



Final Cuttings

It is fitting that Wendy kicks off this newsletter at the start as she takes on the role of Hon. Sec; leaving me, quite suitably, with the End piece. I am inordinately pleased to have the privilege of being President of the Federation and equally delighted to hand things over to Wendy's very competent hands.

When I took over from Alan Eason of Castle Cary in 1988 the Federation consisted of 69 clubs, the numbers rising rapidly. Rode Major was enrolled as number 70 and Henton was a milestone at 100. Success, they say, breeds success and John Starnes, the late former chairman, used to say "we must be doing something right". At well over 220 clubs in and outside the county we are the largest county Federation. Over the years the Federation has not changed its aims in giving support to all those hard-pressed secretaries, programme makers, show organiser's and treasurers who keep going with such steadfast optimism. We have, however, adapted and innovated and this is where I am happy to step aside to allow those who know what a PDF is to take charge.

The only thing that I will stress to Wendy is the fact that she does not have to commit herself to a 30 years stint. Hon. Sec. of the SFGC is not like being the Pope nor the President of the People's Republic of China. I wish her and all the other Hon. Secs. the very best in keeping things going.

We all owe a debt of gratitude, too, to Erl our Chairman who has modernised the Federation and cheered us on in the process. My thanks as well go to David Talling who transcribes my scribbles and to Mo who keeps us all up to scratch.

Have a wonderful winter. Thomas de Quincey may have been stoned for most of his life but he did like his tea and cakes by the fire and winter is the time for tea and cakes by the fire.

Have a good Christmas and even better New Year.

Pip Harwood

