



Somerset Federation of Gardening Clubs

Issue XL1

Spring 2011

Points of Interest

Chairman's Corner

From Peru to Wells

A Peek too Far

Desert Island

Postscript

Ants, Emots or Pismires

Final Cuttings

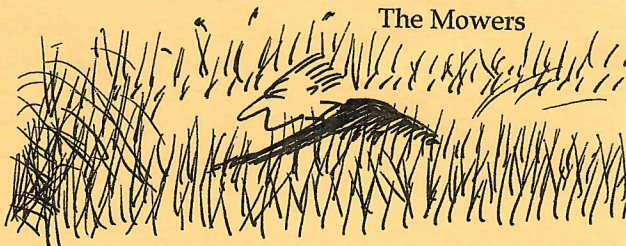
No scene that turns with Engines strange
Does oftener than these meadows change;

For when the sun the grass has vext,
The tawny Mowers enter next;
Who seem like Israelites to be ,

Walking on foot through a green sea,
To them the grassy Deeps divide,
And crowd a Lane to either side.

Andrew Marvell 1621 – 1678.

The Mowers



Somerset

Federation Committee Members

President

Mr John Starnes 01935 881308
 Stoneleigh, Duckpool Lane,
 West Chinnock,
 Crewkerne TA18 7QD

Mrs Judy Combes 01935 881936
 6, Ridgway, West Chinnock, Crewkerne
 TA 18 7PY

Mr John Dunster 01934 822069
 51, Somerville Rd
 Sandford, Bristol BS25 6RR

Chairman

Mrs Lyn Spencer-Mills 01460 76389
 Hooper's Holding,
 Hinton St George TA17 8SE

Mr Ted Gill 01934 628758
 Flat 2 Crescent View Court,
 40 Upper Bristol Road,
 Weston-super-Mare BS22 8DA

Vice Chairman

Mr Nick Rigden 01278 671376
 Cridlands West, High Street, Spaxton,
 Bridgwater.

Mr Erl Plomgren 01278 741152
 Lady Charles House, Holford,
 Bridgwater TA5 1RZ

Secretary

Mr Philip Harwood 01749 679182
 Fernville, Bath Road, Wells BA5 3HR

Mrs Mo Plomgren 01278 741152
 Lady Charles House, Holford,
 Bridgwater TA5 1RZ

Treasurer

Mr Bill Thomas 01934 822627
 Littleton, 3, Littlefields Avenue, Banwell,
 N. Somerset BS29 6BE

Mrs Barbara Rahn 01749 675753
 1, Dells Court, St Thomas Street,
 Wells BA5 2UZ
 Mrs Marie Wheatley 01935 881421
 Yeoman's Wake, Higher Street,
 West Chinnock, Crewkerne TA18 7QA

E-Mail Addresses and Contact: If you are willing to receive information and newsletters by e-mail please send your address to : sfgcjudycombes@sky.com

Or by post to : Judy Combes, 6, Ridgway, West Chinnock, Crewkerne TA18 7PY.

Please let the Hon. Sec. if the contact is not the correct name and address.

Hon. Sec. apologies if we have it wrong.

Please also send names and addresses of any speaker or judge you would recommend who does not feature on our list.

A Garden should be rather small

Or you will have no fun at all

Reginald Arkell

Introduction

New Years Day 2011. A New Year's Resolution. I decided I would aim to do one half hours work in the garden each day. A reasonably modest target I thought and wondered whether 15 minutes would be more achievable, if not 10, or even 5.... Now as Spring trundles along around a very elongated corner, I calculate that I have managed just about 30 minutes in total. As always, these intentions are happily short-lived; a bit of guilt hangs about but not for long in my case. It's quite a relief to forget these grandiose plans and aim low.

Back to January 1st. Ambling around the garden I make a count, as every year, of all the blooms on any flowering plant, cultivated or wild - they all count in my book. Neglected patches often provide shelter for a timid, precocious blossom, a pathetic primrose, daisy, celandine, a wilting rose. I find nothing. A bleak Siberian dearth. Except for one, small panicle on Laurus-tinus just emerged. Straightaway, this was plucked and popped into a small vase. On a dreary, dark day a week later, my wife and I visited Stourhead Gardens. Eyeballs peeled, I peered, scrutinised and inspected the display. To my huge satisfaction we saw nary a bloom. Fernville 1 Stourhead 0.

Since then of course, things have changed greatly and Stourhead is easily winning the contest at present but while I run the mower over my lawn moss and make the odd savage sally into the overgrowth, you can peruse the contents of this newsletter. And if you don't like what you see, you can do one of two things: write to me and say so or write something yourself. If it's contentious, inflammatory, near libellous or just informative and entertaining, it will be published with much appreciation.

Whatever you do, make a resolution to be idle in your garden and thus allow the grass to grow under your feet.



Chairman's Corner

..... And we thought the winter of 2009-10 was bad ! Last winter really made you wonder about global warming ! On the whole I fear the scientists have got it right and we should not confuse climate with weather. The ice caps continue to shrink, the tides rise and the polar bears are left standing on small chunks of ice like a Fox's mint advert

Regardless of the truly evil winter, spring flowers have struggled through . At the time of writing I even have one clump of large snowdrops which have two flowers on each stem. As I am not a snowdrop aficionado, I have no idea if this is a named cultivar. Please can anyone tell me? My favourite crocus, *tomasinianus*, has spread all over the beds in various shades of lilac to purple, totally ignoring my carefully contrived colour schemes. However, they will have retired to a state of aestivation by the time the "proper" coloured plants show up. I have been looking sadly at my *Beschorneria* this morning and this time I am fairly sure it has gone to meet it's maker. I have not yet dared to take the straw out of the crown of the tree fern.

Yet again we are to be hosted by a different Club for our AGM by Shipham. We are grateful for their kindness and look forward to a pleasant evening with them. Details of this event are elsewhere in the Newsletter and we hope as many Clubs as possible will be able to attend. We are now at the end of our list of volunteers for this event, so please consider if your club could host us next year (or any subsequent year) and let our Secretary know in good time.

Perhaps now is the time to tell you that it is my intention to retire as your Chairman at this year's A.G.M. after a period of seven years. Partly due to increasing age and also a gut feeling that change is a good thing. The Committee are unanimous in supporting a new candidate to succeed me and I hope you will give your full support to Erl Plomgren. He and his wife Mo are recent additions to our committee but have already proved their worth with a lot of hard work and valuable contributions.

Indeed, I have received wonderful support from all members of our hardworking committee, each of them making a great contribution to the overall efficacy of our organisation. I shall miss you all as I stroll off into the sunset !

Lyn Spencer Mills



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2011

Shipham Gardening Club are kindly hosting the Annual General Meeting of the Somerset Federation of Gardening Clubs in their splendid Village hall

THURSDAY 19th May 2011 – from 6 p.m. onwards

There will be a **PLANT & PRODUCE STALL, REFRESHMENTS** and

A TALK BY NICK WRAY. Curator, Bristol Botanical Gardens

Note the date in your diaries and please come along to what promises to be a very enjoyable evening. Shipham lies in the Mendips off the A38.

Directions details at <http://www.shiphamhall.co.uk/directions>

More details with map will follow with the notice of the AGM.

In the meantime you can contact Jenny Humberstone, Hon. Sec.

Shipham Gardening Club 01934 843149

E.mail : jennyhumberstone@hotmail.com

Thank you, Shipham. Now who's next ? We are looking for a venue for 2012.

Watch this Woman !

I know a charming woman
And every time she calls,
She leaves my carpet on the floor,
My pictures on the walls.
She doesn't steal my silver
Or ask me for a loan,
She doesn't use my fountain pen,
She always brings her own.
But show her in the garden,
The treasures you have got,
And if you turn your head away,
She'll pinch the blooming lot !



A garden is a thing of beauty and a job forever

My thanks to Hampshire Federation Newsletter

Somerset Plant Heritage

You must be interested in plants to be reading this newsletter! Had you thought of taking this interest further into the conservation of garden plants? Much is heard these days about the conservation of wild native plants, and quite rightly, but our garden plants, species and cultivars, are also in danger of disappearing. Commercial nurseries are limited in the plants they can hold, and fashion in plants like everything else is fickle, what is in one year, may definitely be out the next and maybe forever! If you have seen an old nursery catalogue of fruit, flowers or vegetables, you will have been amazed at the cultivars we have lost. Plant Heritage (previously N.C.C.P.G) seeks to conserve these plants in National Plant Collections, of which we have 23 in Somerset (with 4 more pending). These are looked after by dedicated members, with help from Headquarters and our National Collections Co-ordinator, Nonie Bemrose, in private gardens, allotments, nurseries, parks, botanic gardens and historic estates. They maybe visited by appointment or on Open Days and form a valuable research facility and gene pool, and a source of interesting plants for our gardens.

Over the last 30 years since the for-

mation of N.C.C.P.G ; 650 National Collections have been set up.

Our local Somerset Group meet monthly during the winter and spring at the Village hall, Edington, just N. of the A39, halfway between Bridgwater and Street, for talks, members plant sales and social events. We hold two Plant Fairs, in April and September with visiting specialist nurseries, and arrange visits to National Collections, gardens often not normally open to the public, and to major Plant Shows. For the last five years we have visited gardens in different counties, Essex, Kent, Cumbria, Hampshire, and last year ventured into Northern France to see gardens around Rouen. If you join, (£25. for National membership) you will receive 2 plant heritage newsletters plus two Somerset newsletters together with a copy of the National Plant Collections Directory each year. Lectures are free to members and you may visit to see if you like us at any time for £4.00. We are a friendly group and really welcome new members.

Sheila Chambers

Publicity Secretary



Cultivating a penchant for village halls

Village Halls – don't you love them ? From the traditional ones with the pale blue china and faint odour of disinfectant to the sleek modern ones with wood strip flooring and funky paint jobs. I've become a bit of a connoisseur since I started giving talks in garden design and garden history to local gardening clubs.

For many years, I had a proper job and taught English to hormonal fourteen year-olds and mustard sharp sixth formers. Now, having retrained in Landscape Design at Cannington College near Bridgwater, my garden design work includes working for architects, community projects and builders as well as private individuals.

Somehow, though, I just can't leave teaching alone, which is why I find myself on winter's evenings surveying you, my determined audience, who have turned up, armed with cushions (for sitting on not throwing at the speaker) for a talk on Victorian gardening.

I must say, you are all very well behaved. Apart from the occasional murmur in the back row, and the odd snort of surprise as someone emerges from their slumbers to find themselves confronted by an oversize image of the Great Stove at Chatsworth, you are all very attentive. You never give me helpful advice on how to operate my computer; your mobiles never ring. You even laugh at my jokes.

It's a pleasure to be able to share my enthusiasm for garden design through the ages. I'm fascinated by the way art, science, literature and economics – to name just a few – have influenced horticulture. And then there are the people: 19th century ladies advising on digging for gentlewomen; 18th century gentlemen blushing at the sexual activities of plants. Kings, queens, farmers, sailors, weeding women; they all play their part.

I have just re-written my Garden History talks for 2011 and I am able to offer a wide range from the gardens of ancient times up to the Edwardian period. If you would like me to talk to your group, then I would be delighted to sample your village hall.

Visit my website www.sarahdarlington.co.uk or give me a ring on 01963 240023

Sarah Darlington is a garden designer and teacher. She is a tutor for the Workers' Education

Association and a member of Bruton Horticultural Society



FROM PERU TO WELLS



“ No ones seen anything like it “ we were told during a talk to the Wells Gardening Club last year. The plant in question is *Salvia Dombeyi*, known affectionately hereabouts as ‘Dombey and Son’; cuttings take fairly readily. A native of Peru, it was not discovered on Paddington Station but, rumour has it, was smuggled into the country by a salvia specialist. Talking of which, Pip, your secretary, who is rather taken with salvias in general and intrigued by the description of this exotic specimen, managed to obtain one which flourished in his open porch last summer.

But what to do with it during a trip to Australia? Pip needed someone with a greenhouse who lived not too far away. By this time, mid September, it had grown so much that it only just fitted, horizontally into our Volvo Estate and over the next few weeks reached the top of the greenhouse. Small maroon bracts began to appear which I at first mistook for petals; not so amazing then. However, gradually, scarlet, furry trumpet like flowers began to emerge from the bracts, the flowers growing longer and longer by the day, some up to five inches in length. Dangling in gorgeous clusters of fifteen or more, they looked like Christmas decorations— extraordinary.

Happily this magnificent display lasted long enough for Pip’s return and instead of taking it back to his porch, he left it with me to over winter. I was advised by the Daily Telegraph’s Helen Yemm to find somewhere unobtrusive to house it; she had obviously never seen Dombey senior in the flesh—unobtrusive he ain’t

He has spent the winter in my dining room, casting his leaves onto the floor which Katie the cat has found irresistible. All the stems have turned brown and hollow and he looks as if he is about to expire. However as one of the worlds optimists I shall continue to hope new shoots will eventually emerge, not forgetting of course that there are young Dombey’s waiting in the wings. As the man said, “ No one’s seen anything like it”.

Jenny Smith Wells and District G.C.

PS

As a postscript, I would add that this is not the end of the story. Though serialised episodes will not be appearing in ‘The Monthly Magazine’ nor the ‘Evening Chronicle’, occasional updates will appear about this stunning plant. My own plantlets, Little Dorrit & Little Nell dwindled away (on my window sill) in typically Victorian fashion. All is not yet lost. As in the Dickensian original the lineage continue — just.....

. P.H.

Desert Island Post Script

In Desert Island Gardens last autumn I mentioned a 100 yard sprint track through our vegetable garden.

This seems to have caught the curiosity of Pip Harwood our Secretary so I've been asked to explain! My father bought a largish plot of land in Wembley Park, Middlesex as it was then, in about the 1920's. He had just come out of the RFC, told not to marry — injuries too great — so he got married — was not a builder so built his own house (except plumbing and electrics) I have pictures of the field he built on.

My parents loved gardening and the flower garden was a big feature and very pretty, I could still name most of the plants in it. Then you went through a honeysuckle arch into the 'working' part, cold frames, wood chopping and storing, canes, later Anderson shelter, and all the bits and bobs a gardener collects. Then we had the veg garden with a path through the middle, as it turned out the path was 98 yards long.

Then along came all 4lbs of me. At the bottom of the garden instead of fairies there was a sports ground, we had a gate leading onto the ground, every weekend in summer we watched cricket and in the winter Dad and I watched football, mother not so keen she loved tennis.

So this large garden and sports ground became my playground. I can remember when small the grounds man used to take me round standing on the line whitener machine thing, and I used to help on the old lorry converted into a grass cutter (oh health and safety!) The ground was bounded by the River Brent, that was great for games my mother never knew about !

So it was a surprise with both parents sporty (they were first introduced at a tennis club) that I should love all sports. In due course I became an associate member of the sports club, which was BOC to those that remember, I believe its part of something else now And in due course played tennis there, and in my late teens won the clubs singles.

However back to the garden path. I loved running and used the sports ground as a training circuit most evenings. But sprinting was my thing, so to the point of this story Pip, I used the path up the garden to practice, there was a slight slope so I always ran up. But the practice proved successful as I won lots of events, became county champion, and ran with the Middlesex Ladies. Also ran at the White City several times, to my grandchildren it is a TV centre!

I should have concentrated on athletics, but enjoyed tennis and played regular matches for BOC. Then started playing cricket which I loved and still do, going to Taunton as much as possible.

Sadly after the war, looking for housing space the government made a compulsory purchase on my parents house and five others, which made a very large plot... They wanted to fight it, then my mother died, I think fortunately, and Dad moved in with us.

So my husband and I had to clear everything before the bulldozers moved in. We had three poplar trees at the end of the garden. They kept those, built hundreds of flats and called it Poplar Grove. So that was the end of the path.

Barbara Rahn

Now we know. P.

7



John Starnes—Founder Member, Treasurer, Chairman and President

The title alone gives an idea of the long and valuable service of our President, John Starnes, who has given 27 years to the Federation. He has told us that at the ripe old age of 92 he has decided to retire as President. I know he will forgive me for mentioning his age - he's proud of it. We will miss him greatly from our Committee meetings. He has a fantastic grasp of the important things and was ever a source of excellent advice. One might say that he IS the personification of the Somerset Federation - dedicated to giving the best possible service to our members and the lowest possible cost to them.

He has recently recovered from a worrying illness which took him to hospital for a couple of weeks. However, we are delighted to hear he is now back at home and well on the way to recovery. We wish him a long and happy retirement. Indeed — those of us who attended his 90th birthday have already been invited to the 100th.



ANTS, EMOTS OR PISMIREs

A recipe from the past.

From the Gardeners Labyrinth 1577

The skilful Neapolitane *Rutilus* reporteth, that if the great company of Pismires or Ants have deep holes in the Garden Ground, these may the owner chase away, or kill in the ground by stopping the mouthes of the holes, with the heart of an Owle. If they creep abroad, then sift all the Allies where these runne with bright asher, or else score the ground thick together with red Okar or white Chalk, or make long strikes with oyle on the earth. Further he writeth that the husbandly Gardener may drive away Pismires, if on the mouthes of their holes he sprinckle the powder of Organy and Brimstone beaten together, or

burn the empty shells of snails, and with the ashes of the same, stop abundantly the mouthes of their dens and holes. In which device, this *Rutilus* omitted the Storax, that of *Paxanius* the Greek, out of whom he borrowed this conclusion, is added. The words of *Paxanius* be on this wise: If the owner, saith he, shall burn certain Ants or Emots in the middle of the Garden, the others of the savour will creep away. To these, it is about the mouthes of the Emots holes, the careful Gardener shall smeare the grosser Turpentine, the Emots or Ants wil not come forth, and he may expel or drive away from their proper resting place, or dwelling together, if the shelly coverings of Snailles, burned with *Storax Calamita*, the beaten to powder, or the ashes sifted, he shall after sprinkle on the heape of the Pismires.



A tip about Speakers.

Here is a suggestion from one of our members - a tip in these financially difficult times. Source local information on speakers from clubs in your locality. You can get a list of member clubs from Hon. Sec. Get together for a chat, tea, cakes (very important) and collect local names who are recommended, thus avoiding travelling expenses. Some names may even arise that could be added to the Federation list itself.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

I came across this snippet the other day. Whilst he was serving his long sentence in the prison on Robben Island, Nelson Mandela grew melons, cucumbers and other vegetables on a small plot. Against the regulations, of course. Gardening as a subversive activity.

The Walled Gardens of Cannington

The gardens have seen more development throughout 2010, and with the tea rooms and garden shop, they are the perfect way to spend a day.

Groups and coach parties are very welcome, and special garden tours can be arranged with the head gardener. Group rates are £ 6.00 per person (for groups of 15 +) and include hot drink and a slice of cake.

Advance booking is essential; and we ask for a minimum group size of 15 people. If you would prefer to browse the gardens at your leisure, entry is only £3.50, £2.50 for concessions, under 18's free.

Don't forget to keep checking our website for event updates and special offers:

www.canningtonwalledgardens.co.uk

BARNSELY HOUSE, GLOS.

As Head Gardener, Richard Gatenby—who has worked at Barnsley House since Mrs Verey's day explains, " The gardens are very much the heart soul of what Barnsley House is all about.

Mrs Verey started as an amateur but her increasing love and enthusiasm for gardening saw her develop the grounds at Barnsley House over almost half a century."

Today, her gardens pan out across an 11 acre site with four acres of formal gardens (featuring a knot garden, lawns,potager, terraces and secluded paths) in addition to a substantial kitchen garden, meadows and a sizeable paddock. Richard and his team continue to ensure that the gardens evolve and develop as nature and time demand while always holding true to the spirit of Mrs Verey's ambition for her garden.

For more details visit www.barnsleyhouse.com/gardens.

Barnsley House, Barnsley, Cirencester, Gloucestershire GL7 5EE

A Peek too far

Awaiting treatment in a London Hospital, my brother-in-law started chatting to a lady patient, swapping ailments, conditions and experiences. She confessed that on one occasion when the doctor had left the room, she leant over his desk and had a quick butchers at her medical notes. In them she read that the doctor had described her as suffering from "morbid lethargy ". She didn't bother with the rest of the stuff....

The condition may sound familiar but we have the answer, don't we? What is more it is now Backed Up by Science. Apparently the details are contained in an article of the Daily Telegraph 20th March 2011 page 15. Research around the world has discovered that Gardening is better for the mind and body than Suduko or the Times crossword. Those who indulge in it live longer, healthier and happier lives. Engaging closely with Nature, planning projects making decisions and keeping fit, all have a beneficial function.

What a surprise. I shall be officially told to draw my trousers up over my own legs next. Forget Morbid Lethargy — Hedonistic Lethargy is my occasional problem.



FINAL CUTTINGS

The Gardener's Day is now in full swing. Lawns manicured or ignored, planting in earnest, plant fairs and sales eyed up for replacements. In this household we specialise in two types of plants. My wife grows Tough Plants that Do. I grow Tender Plants that Don't. A couple of my treasures were given the full treatment, swathes of bubble wrap and white fleece, mummified for the long cold snap. Unpeeling the bandages the other day I felt like Florence at the Crimea. I shall still try again, though. However, hidden among the dried out leaves were ladybirds: this years bonus for neglect. In this garden, we have them in spades. So it is with some care that I practise the ancient rite of turbarry and estovers, snapping off and picking up twigs and tidying neglected places. Now to tidy up the news.

The Events Calendar is being sent out shortly. In future if you wish your March entries to appear please send details in for it to be included in the Autumn newsletter, as the Spring issue goes out in April, usually.

Please tell us if you want the newsletter by e-mail. And tell us if the contact address is wrong. And tell us about new speakers and judges.

Since the last newsletter we have said goodbye to Wellow & Green Fingers Gardening Clubs. We warmly welcome Banwell Allotment Society which brings our total membership to 253 affiliated clubs.

I am very grateful to all those who have made a contribution to this newsletter. My thanks are due once again to Judy Combes and Mo Plomgren whose mastery of the computer leaves me in awe.

Your Committee wish you a Happy Easter and colourful productive year in the garden, show tent and on the allotment. And see you all at Shipham.

Pip Harwood. Hon Sec.



Amendments to Speakers & Judges List - Spring 2011

New Speakers

Ms. Lyn Miles **Foxgloves, campanulas &** **C+**
Westcroft **euphorbias, Salvias & their** **travel**
Boscombe Village **relatives, Getting to know some** **pfs**
Salisbury **Umbellifers, Yorkshshire gardens,** **'s'**
Wilts ~SP4 0AB **Annuals +++**
01980 610877
lyn@resale26.demon.co.uk

Mrs. Gina Merrett Smith **Marianne North Victorian** **B**
29 Rodney Rd. **Botanical Artist (Kew)** **'s'**
Blackwell
Bristol BS48 3HR
01275 462069

Amendments to existing speakers

Mr. Anthony Turpin (p. 24) **Phone number is 01934 510672**

Mrs. Gail Forrest (p.10) **Delete**

Mrs Alison Shingler (p21) **Delete**

Mr Don Everitt (p9) **Please note :**

Travel limit : 150 miles