



Somerset Federation of Gardening Clubs

Issue XL11

Autumn 2011

Points of Interest

Chairman's Corner

News from Bishops Palace

Dombey and Sons

Exhortations

Loam from Loam

Final Cuttings



The mistletoe hung in the castle hall
The holly bush shone on the old oak wall.

The Mistletoe Bough

Oh, the mistletoe Bough !

Oh, the Mistletoe Bough !

Thomas Haynes Bayley 1797—1839

Mysteries have always had a certain appeal, alternatively fascinating or frustrating. Bayleys' lugubrious ballad was a popular item belted out in Victorian drawing - rooms. Several locations lay claim to the inspiration of the tragic tale, Bawdrip in the Polden Hills being one, albeit a tenuous, even erroneous one. Still, it's nice to puzzle over these things. One horticultural mystery has dogged all my gardening days hitherto and I am delighted to reveal in this issue of the newsletter a Definitive Resolution. For many years I thought I was ingenuously alone in my bewilderment, blundering along in timid ignorance. Every other gardener seemed to know what they were talking about. They KNEW. They had discovered The Secret or it had been revealed to them at some point in their gardening lives.

A short while ago; I finally discovered a kindred spirit, one like me who didn't understand In a second-hand bookshop I came across a book by the American humourist Stephen Leacock. Here, at last, was one who shared my opinions and feelings and was brave enough to express them. Some thing I had never dared to do until very recently.

In Back to Land he writes:-

" All the books and instructions insist that the selection of the soil is the most important part of gardening. No doubt it is. But, if a man has already selected his own backyard before he opens the book, what remedy is there ? All the books lay stress on the need of "a deep friable loam full of nitrogen" This I have never seen. My own plot of land I found on examination to contain nothing but earth. I could see no trace of nitrogen. I do not deny the existence of loam. There may be such a thing. But I am admitting now in all humility of mind that I don't know what loam is. Last spring my fellow gardeners and I talked freely of the desirability of "a loam" My own opinion is that none of them had any clearer ideas about it than I had. Speaking from experience, I should say that the only soils are earth, mud and dirt. There are no others "

At last, the secret was out. I could come out of my garden closet and even to reveal to others that, after decades of gardening activity, I still had no idea what LOAM was. That had been my secret ignorance. Every gardening book I had ever read together with all the celebrity pundits stressed the need for loam. Butthey never told you what it was.

Now, the mystery is solved. In this very newsletter you will find all you need to know about loam. Nick Rigden, formerly of Cannington College and still disseminating his knowledge freely and widely reveals all . You are now the fortunate beneficiaries and will, like me, be able to sleep easy in your winter beds in the future. Either that, or dashing out to your allotment, garden plot or potager and thrusting your fingers deep into the earth to check on that loam

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT AND PLEA

The Federation is without a venue for the AGM for 2012.

Happily, The Ding have very kindly volunteered to host the event for 2013 but next year we are seeking a location. The Federation helps substantially with the cost, providing the wine, and contributing towards the refreshments and I know one or two clubs have indicated an interest in holding the AGM at home. Everyone who came to Shipham last May spent a lovely evening in the Mendips and the Committee are grateful for the warm reception and conviviality provided by Shipham Gardening Club.

So where next year? Please help.

If you can, just ring 01747 679182 for details.

A Change in the Weather ?

Are things changing in these hard times ? A number of Clubs have told me that their show entries had increased this year. A typical account comes from Anne Brown of Stalbridge Garden Society.

` We have had, so far, a very eventful year and the best ever show (despite the weather) with over 640 entries in 93 classes`

SOUTH WEST ALPINE FLOWER SHOW AND PLANT SALE

SATURDAY 31ST MARCH 2012

ST LUKE'S SCIENCE & SPORTS COLLEGE

HARTS LANE, off HILL BARTON RD, EXETER EX1 3RD

On the Pinhoe road next to Sainsbury's leave the M5 Jct 30

Show opens 12 noon

Plants Sales open at 10 am. (13 Nursery Stalls)

£2.50 AGS members free. Refreshments. Parking'

Alpine Garden Society Exeter Group

CHAIRMANS CORNER

This is my first 'Chairman's Corner' article, and I find myself sitting in my favourite rocking chair overlooking our front garden on a very wet (and somewhat chilly) August Bank Holiday Sunday, wondering where the summer has gone, as now the nights are already drawing in and the leaves outside on the trees are turning to their autumn colour.

Maureen (Mo) and I live in the pretty little village of Holford in the Quantock Hills, West Somerset, where our house sits on the lane leading to one of the combes surrounded by the glories of nature which we enjoy through all the seasons, and where William Wordsworth and Samuel T. Coleridge were much inspired to write some of their greatest poetry, not forgetting the Alfoxden Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth, written during the time the brother and sister lived in our village, in the late eighteenth century.

In our 'back' garden, we have a stream meandering down from the hills and with the heavy rainfall over the last couple of days, running very fast! We have the advantage of an irrigation system from the stream, so keeping the shrubs and perennials well watered on the higher slope of the garden; but as I look out onto the garden and all its greenery, it reminds me of the marvellous vista from the village hall at Shipham, set in those magnificent Mendips where last May we held the Federation's AGM, and so it is quite fitting for me here now, to take this opportunity in thanking Sally Herring and her superb committee for their very warm welcome and hospitality in hosting that meeting. As chairman of a Garden Group myself, I know only too well, the hard work and organisation that goes into this type of event, so very well done everyone and again, thank you. And whilst on the subject of the AGM, at the time of compiling this newsletter, we still yet to have a venue for next year. If anyone would like to host the event, do please contact either Pip or myself, therefore - in anticipation, thank you for your consideration!

I'm looking forward to my first meeting as chairman and working more closely with our committee, to help improve even more the services that we provide for you – our members. Finally, it would be very remiss of me not to thank Lyn Spencer-Mills for her enormous input as past chairman, and also the current committee who have ensured that the continuation of the Federation has not only been extremely successful, but is the largest in the country. I hope I can do them justice!

Warm wishes to you all,
God Bless
Erl

A Winter Trip

Wells and District took a coach to Budleigh Salterton and Bicton Gardens to liven up the shortening days. On a splendidly refurbished Palm House there used to be the following inscription:

The Gardener at a hole looks out
And holes are plenty hereabout
A pair of pistols by his lug
One load with ball the other slug
A blunderbuss of canon shape
Just ready to discharge with grape
Let midnight thief or robber stand
and pause ere puts out his hand
While those who come in open day
May look but carry nought away.

Bicton House, East Budleigh 1850

SOUTH WEST ORCHID SHOW

SATURDAY 25TH FEBRUARY 2012

WEST MONKTON VILLAGE HALL Taunton TA2 8NE

10.30-4.00 pm.

£2.00 Orchids for Sale

Details 01278 455170



LOAM SWEET LOAM

Loam – what is it?

Gardeners often come across the term loam either in publications or on gardening programmes. It may be in relation to our garden soil or it may be relating to a compost that contains loam (such as John Innes composts) or even one such as many multi-purpose composts which are lacking in loam i.e. a loamless compost.

The correct use of the word loam relates to soil and in particular to soil texture which defines the mineral particle size of any given soil. Basically there are three categories of minerals in a soil and these are referred to as sand, silt and clay. Sand is the coarsest mineral with the largest particle size and contributes to better drainage and aeration in a soil. Silt particles are smaller but larger than the third category of clay. The latter are very small and are associated with properties such as poorer drainage, stickiness and slowness to warm up in the spring.

A soil that contains approximately equal proportions of sand, silt and clay is referred to as a **loam**, i.e. no single mineral size category dominates. However if our soil contains a greater proportion of sand it may be referred to as a sandy loam and similarly if clay particles dominate it will be a clay loam. It should be noted that loam only describes a **textural** class. It does not indicate how fertile a soil is or how much organic matter exists in the soil.

Of course a garden soil has more than just mineral particles. In order to provide a medium that plant roots can exploit it requires **structure** and for this soil organic matter is very important. Regular additions of bulky organic materials such as well rotted farm yard manure or garden compost will help bind soil particles together so that it ensures a quality soil **structure** is built up and maintained. This helps to provide the right size and shape of **structures** that result in a friable soil which enables the gardener to obtain a tilth for sowing and planting into.

Many gardening books/publications refer to a medium loam as being the optimum soil. Basically this is a gardeners/horticulturists term (as opposed to a soil scientist) referring to a garden top soil that contains the correct proportions of sand, silt and clay particles together with the right amount of organic matter. Yes, medium loams do exist but in reality most of us have soils that lean more towards the clay end of the texture spectrum or towards the sandy end.

Except in very small areas it is not easy to alter the texture of your garden soil (you cannot realistically bring in lorry loads of the correct particle size of sand in order to compensate for a soil dominated by clay!). However it is soil structure that can be influenced and this is where good gardeners over a lengthy period of time produce a deep dark soil with regular applications of well rotted organic matter. Vegetable plots that have been expertly gardened over the years can be quite different to adjacent soil that has never received the same treatment. Properties such as good drainage, nutrient and water retention combined with ease of working the soil will result from understanding your soil texture and using regular applications of well rotted organic matter to ameliorate or condition the soil so establishing good quality soil structure.

Nick Rigden



HALSWAY MANOR

National Centre for Traditional Music, Dance and Song

Have you ever wished you lived nearer Rosemoor or a National Trust House so you could volunteer in the garden?

Rarely opened to the public, Halsway Manor, near Crowcombe is a grade 2* listed house with a history going back over 600 years, and is set in 6 acres of peaceful gardens and woodland. It has been a residential centre for Folk Arts for 46 years and over the years many people have enjoyed dance, music and story telling there.

You are invited for a free tour of the house and gardens, to give us the opportunity to explain why we are looking for volunteer gardeners. The flower borders are not overwhelming, and have relied on various folkies doing "their bit" when they attend courses. We would like to make this less erratic and more sustainable, so are looking for people to "adopt" a flower bed or help occasionally on special weeding days. Light refreshments will be available for volunteers.

We are also looking for design help to improve the overall plan of the garden and woods.

Do come and see our delightful house and gardens even if you are not able to help us at present.

Contact details: CEO@halswaymanor.org.uk

Do you wish to be a Judge ?

Please bring the following information to your members.

The Gloucestershire Federation of Gardening Societies organise very successful Judges Courses under the auspices of their Guild of Judges, whose convenor, Martin Davis, is also Chairman of the Federation.

Club members who have experience in exhibiting at local or national level and who would like to try their hand, under a scheme which ends in qualification are very welcome to apply to the GFGS Guild of Judges. The course is friendly and interesting and open to anyone interested. Judges for local shows are in short supply and this is an opportunity to fill the gap.

Details and more information from :

Martin Davis

Osric, 115 Carlton Road, Gloucester GL1 5ES Tel : 01452 539749

DOMBEY AND SONS

Cast your mind back if you will to the 'Somerset Federation of Gardening Clubs' issue XL1 Spring 2011 when you were introduced to Wells' own Dombey and Son. You will recall that Pip had invited a certain Mr Dombey to take up residence at Fernville in June the previous year and being a rather diffident sort of chap he opted to spend his days in the porch. Then during Pip's visit to Australia he thought it would be rather jolly to camp out in my greenhouse where he continued to flourish, eventually producing gorgeous large groups of dangling scarlet furry flowers which certainly had the wow factor and had to be seen to be believed.

However by last spring I regret to say that Dombey senior passed away but left a bevy of children to carry on the Dombey name and both Pip and I once again had the joy of nurturing this amazing plant and the cycle has once again come full circle, with Dombey senior's grand children being nurtured in a number of crèches in Wells and also in Hinton St. George. Your President had a rather anxious time of it when visitors from Hillier's Nurseries were witness to *Salvia dombeyi*'s propensity to cast off heart stopping numbers of leaves for no apparent reason. However, on seeing the first flowers emerge she could be heard exclaiming 'Yee haa !' from one end to the village to the other!

Jenny Smith Wells and District G.C.

Salvia dombeyi

On a more down to earth note you may like to know a little history concerning this wonderful plant.

Joseph Dombey 1742 - 1796

In 1776 Louis XVI organised an expedition to Peru in search of platinum, cinnamon and quinine among other things.

It was proposed, that Joseph Dombey, being a very young doctor of some talent, should go with the party. However, as Peru was a Spanish possession he had to be accompanied by two Spanish botanists who basically filched all the doctor's achievements and discoveries; this in spite of the fact that young Dombey had saved a native village from Indian attack and tackled a plague epidemic in Santiago.

The Spaniards published the work in 1778 and Dombey was subject to a super injunction and gagging order, broken on pain of death.

Dombey's achievements were not recognised until 1937 when *Salvia dombeyi* was named in honour of his discovery.

Pip Harwood Wells and District G.C.

SOME EXHORTATIONS

To all Hon. Secretaries

Especially those newly appointed/ volunteered/ changed

Please note:

If your club would like to receive information and the Newsletters via e-mail which can save postage then please contact the following e-mail address with the name of your Club and email address.

sfgc.judycombes@sky.com

And...

If we have not the correct contact address then please accept our apologies and send in the appropriate details to Hon Sec SFGC.

And....

The form for next years Calendar of Events is enclosed. Please return it to Barbara Rahn by the 16th of February 2012.

And...

Enclosed, too, are a few additions etc to the Speakers and Judges Register, please stick these into your booklet.

And while we are on the subject, if you know of a speaker or judge you can recommend not on the S.F. list please let the Hon Sec know and contact and invitation can be made.

NEWS FROM THE BISHOPS PALACE - WELLS

Almost there! The Bishops Table Café is almost complete and should be open for business by December depending on any further archaeological finds. The archaeologists have found an old gatehouse, buildings and a well and although very interesting the finds have slowed the lottery project greatly, I am just grateful that the garden developments do not need to go that deep! The new glasshouse and community garden will be open for next spring which will open up a whole new area of garden. We will also be opening up the area containing St Andrews Well, known as Scotland which will contain shade loving plants and more tender plants as it is quite sheltered. We have been inspired this year by another visit to Joan Lorraines garden at Greencombe in Porlock and the Garden House at Buckland Monochorum both of which are well worth a visit.

Our five year garden development plan will start on the East Lawn and we will begin with a framework of paths which will mark the new borders within. The knot garden will be our first project and we are using the crest of the rose in the Oriel window as our inspiration. It should be planted up for next spring. We will also be de compacting the soil under the holm oak and under planting in a relaxed informal style. The driveway from the Bishops Eye will be resurfaced and a more colourful surface put down which will draw people to the drawbridge which will have its tarmac refurbished with a more attractive aggregate.

We will stay open full time until the end of October and then open on Wednesdays and weekends until December 21st and re open the gardens at February half term every day. The new café itself will be open every day and will encourage people from the market place we hope it will become a regular for locals and popular with all the tourists and gardening groups in particular.

James Cross

www.bishopspalace.org.uk

Final Cuttings

And a final exhortation. Please pass on relevant information, e.g. new speakers, email addresses etc to the relevant person in your club. I am occasionally (quite often in fact) asked for information which has been sent out and has become mislaid or lodged in an inappropriate place. The success of the Federation- and at over 250 member clubs, it is a success, depends entirely on a friendly flow of info. Please keep the Federation informed with names of speakers/judges, articles for the newsletter, suggestions for improvement, even complaints and grumbles-we love them all.

Since the last newsletter we have said goodbye to Abbots Leigh, Wembury and Sidmouth Gardening Clubs. In their place we warmly welcome Bridford and Teign Valley, Banwell in Bloom and Paulton Gardening Club to our membership and wish them a happy affiliation.

On a personal note I wish to record my thanks to Mo Plomgren for keeping my lists in order and to Judy Combes who produces what you read in a legible form.

Elsewhere in this newsletter you will have come across a Dickenensian flavour. As fitting the season to the latter a festive quotation from Pickwick Papers completes the picture.

'Happy, happy Christmas, that can win us back to the delusions of our childish days, that can recall to the old man the pleasures of

Of his youth and transport the sailor and the traveller, thousands of miles away, back to his own fireside and his quiet home.

..... and Mr Weller, not being particular about the form of being under the mistletoe , kissed Emma and the other female servants, just as he caught them. !

A good-humoured Christmas chapter.

Your Committee extends to you and your club good wishes for Christmas and a successful new year.

