

Newsletter

June 2011

Cookham and Cookham Dean Horticultural Society

NEXT MEETING

Wednesday, June 29th 7.30pm

Cookham Dean Village Hall

David Austin Roses; their History, Varieties, Breeding and Care

A talk by Edwin Rye

BBC Gardener of the Year 2002

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

Last month's talk was, I thought, a perfect example of an excellent subject brilliantly presented by a speaker who knew his subject backwards, knew how to illustrate it and clearly found it deeply interesting himself. We learnt so much in a short space of time about the area we live in and the history of its flora and fauna, and Clare's excellent summary in this newsletter reminded me of so many fascinating facts that Michael Keith-Lucas included in his talk. I feel sure that everyone who heard him would agree that he is someone we must invite again as I think he could make any topic interesting and I believe he has several other talks to offer.

I have just come back from a week in Italy, North-west Tuscany to be precise, and we stayed in a lovely area called Garfagnana. Fairly mountainous with thickly wooded slopes and beautiful valleys, and although like us they have had a very dry spring, everything looked lush and green. Lots of olive trees and some citrus, and of course some vineyards, and most garden plants seemed about a month ahead of here. As always in Italy, the fruit and vegetable stalls in the markets were heaving with the most beautiful produce, though quite a lot of it had come from Morocco, especially tomatoes and peppers.

Just a reminder about our visit to Old Waterfield garden in Ascot next month, on July 13th – if you weren't at the May meeting and won't be at the June one either, but still want to come and haven't already given us your name, please let me or someone on the committee know so that we will be able to give the garden's owners an idea of how many people to expect. (Details below.)

This will be the last newsletter before September, as we don't meet in July or August, so I hope you all have a very good summer and let's hope for some decent rain so that all our fruit and vegetables do well – and the flowers of course!

Susie Tremlett

Did you nip her Bottom?

Well that is what I thought I heard Reading University's esteemed ecology expert Dr Michael Keith-Lucas say. It transpires he was referring to Juniper Bottom, a grassy dry valley in the North Downs.

But that was not the only surprising moment during what turned out to be an absolutely fascinating talk on 'Wildflowers and the management of Chalky Grassland'.



Adonis Blue Butterfly

Did you know for example that the beautiful beech woods in the area were planted in the mid 1800's to supply the furniture industry in High Wycombe? But fashions abruptly changed in favour of tropical hard woods and that is why to this day areas like Quarry Wood remain untouched. Then we heard the astonishing fact that rabbits no longer live together in warrens, but prefer a more solitary existence above ground. Myxomatosis is to blame after 95% of our rabbits were

killed by an epidemic in the 1950's and they learnt the hard way that living alone in open grassland was a safer bet than retreating to disease infested underground homes.

And who would have thought sheep had such sophisticated and selective palates. The densely tufted perennial grass, sheep's fescue, is highly poisonous for them to eat, as are buttercups and gentians and so they take great care to pick out carefully delicious herbs and sedges to suit their tastes.

But beware, sheep give the particularly sharp and prickly Picnicker's Thistle, a wide berth, leaving them to impale us instead.

Indeed, it turns out there is in fact very little actual grass in chalky grassland. But there are orchids in abundance. 17 species have been found in the fields around Henley alone. Not only is their fragrance divine, from the delicious vanilla of the Man Orchid to the extremely fine scent of the Musk Orchid, but the variety of astonishing shapes can also be highly entertaining. The Monkey Orchid, found in Oxfordshire, has to be seen to be believed.

Although it has been in existence since Neolithic times, 90% of our chalky grassland is now lost and the main threats to the areas remaining are fertilizers and the plough. Hundreds of acres were dug up during the war and Salisbury Plain for example is now mostly arable.

With nutrients such as phosphorous and nitrogen famously in short supply on chalky grassland, the last thing they need is to have John Innes No 3 added. Bird's Foot Trefoil has learnt to thrive by taking the nitrogen it needs from the air, Mouse Ear Hawkweed survives with a very limited and compact root system and Eyebrights are particularly crafty parasites, tapping into the root systems of other plants.

From the Small Blue Butterfly, that is actually brown, to the iridescent Adonis Blue, the insect life is every bit as rich and varied and the plants.

And now I know that the clay and flint found in abundance in my garden is inextricably linked to its origins as chalky grassland, instead of muttering quietly to myself, I will marvel instead at the glorious array of flora and fauna found flourishing to this day in such challenging conditions

. *Clare Phillpot*

Evening Visit to Old Waterfield, Ascot Wednesday 13th July 2011 at 6.30pm.

Nestling in 4 acres adjacent to Ascot Racecourse, Lady Catherine Stevenson's garden has attractive herbaceous borders and lovely views. There is a productive kitchen garden full of fruit and vegetables, a natural pond, specimen trees, a young orchard and mixed hedging.

Lady Stevenson is providing a basket of produce for us to raffle. Proceeds to Thrive, the horticultural therapy charity.

Cost per person: £3 to include refreshments. Raffle tickets 50p.

Please pay Mary Downes or Pam Campin at the venue. Correct change if possible.

Car-sharing is encouraged. Please print out the directions below or collect at the June meeting.

If there are any transport problems please contact a member of the Committee or phone Mary (01628 524881) or Pam (01628 483279)

Old Waterfield, Winkfield Road, Ascot. SL5 7LJ **Directions to venue for Evening Garden Visit on 13th July 2011**

16 miles, allow about 30 mins.

From Maidenhead, take the road out through Holyport and on to Hawthorn Hill where you take the left fork to Ascot (A330,) going through Maidens Green. After about 3 miles the road meets Hatchet Lane from the left, turn sharp right and continue along Hatchet Lane still on the A330 (Winkfield Road) and Old Waterfield is about half a mile along on the left hand side opposite Ascot Racecourse on the right.

Any problems on the night, please phone Mary Downes on 07906278051.

Reminders of other local gardens to visit

Air Ambulance Open Gardens

Sunday 10th July Holyport Village SL6 2LA. An all inclusive ticket will allow access to six gardens and the Holyport allotments. This is a new opening and the gardens range in size from large landscaped to small cottage gardens. Plants for sale and refreshments. 2-6pm Adults £2 from outside Holyport Post Office.

Some NGS Gardens (lots more in the Yellow Book)

Edwin and Pamela Rye's garden.

11, The Paddocks, Wendover, Bucks, HP22 6HE, is open for the NGS Scheme on **Sats and Suns 18,19 June; 2,3 July (2-6). Evening Opening, wine, Fri 24 June (5-8.30)**

A small, peaceful garden with mixed borders of colourful herbaceous perennials, a special show of David Austin roses and a large variety of spectacular named "Blackmore and Langdon" delphiniums. A tremendous variety of colour in a small area. White garden with arbour.

Contact Mr and Mrs E. Rye. tel 01296 623870.

Location

From Great Missenden, on reaching Wendover, turn left at Clock Tower, then right at next mini-r'bout. The Paddocks is on the left.

Edwin Rye, BBC Gardener of the Year 2002, rose and delphinium specialist and trained Horticulturalist will be talking to us on "David Austin Roses, their history, breeding, varieties and care", at our Meeting on Weds. 29th June.

If you missed the society visit to **Waltham Place Gardens (SL6 3JH)** last summer, or would like to revisit the gardens they are open under the NGS every **Friday between 6th May to 30th September 10-4pm**

Littlecote House Hotel, Hungerford RG17 OSU is open most Saturdays and Sundays in May, June and July (phone to check 01488 682509) Beautiful setting around Grade I house. Herbaceous borders, rose and herb garden, fruit trees, plants for sale and refreshments. 10-5pm £4 (no children) I have not seen this garden since it was a themed medieval leisure park in the 80's (with lots of children) so the transformation should be interesting!

Wednesday 13th July sees the opening of **Gypsy House and The Plant Specialist in Great Missenden** on the same day. A chance for a return visit to the nursery so many of you enjoyed seeing in 2009. Gypsy House is the late Roald Dahl's garden in the same lane as the Nursery. 2-5pm £4

Thursday 8th September Lords Wood Frieth Road, Marlow. 11am-4.30pm Adm.£4 5 acres of ever changing garden with extensive borders and water gardens. Wonderful views. Refreshments.

Sunday 17th July. 2.30pm .Whitewalls Marlow SL7 1RE. From Marlow, cross over bridge, 1st left then 3rd house on left with white garden wall. (Open for the Royal Berks NHS Trust)

Thames-side garden approx ½ acre with spectacular view of weir. Large lily pond, interesting planting of trees, shrubs, herbaceous perennials and bedding, large conservatory

EVENTS

Visit the **Summer Living exhibition on 14th June at Barn Galleries, Aston, nr Henley RG9 3DX.** 10am-3pm. More than 35 exhibitors to include plants, garden accessories and other decorative gifts. Admission £4

Easy parking and good signage from the A4130 past the Black Boy pub, Light lunches and teas. In support of Wellbeing of Women charity.

DON'T FORGET TO PLAN AHEAD for the Cookham Dean Village Flower and Produce show. Janet Shanks has the details penfoldshanks@btinternet.com. and there will be programmes available at the June meeting.

Remember to support Braywick Heath Nurseries.

Plants, soil conditioner, pots and advice; volunteers always needed.

Opening hours: Mon-Sat 9.00am to 5.30pm, Sun 10.00am to 4.00pm

41 Braywick Road, Maidenhead, Berkshire, SL6 1DX

Tel: 01628 622510



BEFORE GOING FOR A HOLIDAY

As many of you know I moved house last September and as I was packing up my large collection of gardening books I came across a copy of "Popular Gardening" Annual for 1928. Originally priced at 2/6 , I had paid 40p for it several years ago, probably in a second hand bookshop in Falmouth. The advertisements alone make fascinating reading, but below is a topical extract which you may find useful 83yrs on.....

"The keen amateur who runs his garden in his own spare time is generally rather concerned when holidays mean a fortnight or so at the seaside, away from his precious plants. In the course of years the old hand will have learned how to best prepare his garden for his absence, but the newcomer to the brotherhood of the spade may welcome a few hints .In the first place, all things like Dahlias that are growing rapidly should have their stakes attended to; it is very distressing to come home and find the good shoots broken, and flowers lying on the ground. Then plants that benefit by a severs cut back, Aubretia, Pink etc and even some annuals like Night-scented Stock, will be found to have made fresh growth to greet their owner on his returning if he does the trimming before he goes.

But the most important point of all is to give a judicious mulch (soil covering) to prevent the ground drying out round plants that require moisture. It must be remembered that this should be put on when the ground is damp. Some amateurs dislike mulches because thy find them unsightly, but that idea need not weigh with those who are about to leave the garden for a time. Of flowering plants that much appreciate a soaking and a mulch, the Pansy and the Viola, deserve especial mention. In fact, if this is attended to, and all the old flowers and seeds nipped off, they may be at their best when the owner returns.

Seedlings should be thinned, or they will become unpleasantly "leggy". Old flower stems should be cut away from perennials that may give a second bloom, or if they are wanted for seed, see that they are staked; if blown over and broken the seed will not develop properly. Roses should be searched for pests and cleared of them. They will also benefit from a mulching and from the removal of old flower heads. Sweet Peas come in so quickly that before leaving for a fortnight it is well to cut off not only the flowers, but buds. Then plenty more may be expected later on, but the setting of even a few seeds brings the flowering period to an end"

Welcome to the 'brotherhood of the spade'. No mention of the sisterhood!!! GT

Remaining programme for 2011

September 28th **Peter Brandham**, retired senior scientist from Kew.
A Year at Kew

October 26th **Russell Bowes**, garden historian.
The Ancient Garden

November 30th **AGM and pre-Christmas meeting.**

December No meeting.

Next newsletter deadline is 6th September. Please send your contributions to gilltownend@aol.com or phone 01628 483092 if you have any queries.