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November: Whither the weather?

By Jackie Collings and Val Gould

Jackie says... Before the meeting entitled 'Weather, Climate and Climate Change', I was a trifle apprehensive that the speaker would issue dire warnings that we were destroying the planet and were all doomed if we didn't listen to the "experts". In the event, the speaker allayed my fears. Steve Western from Weather Quest, a meteorologist who has studied the weather and climate from the Arctic to the Sahara, provided graphs and research results disputing many of the conclusions reached by other researchers. He made it clear that the weather is, by its very nature, unpredictable. His sense of humour and casual reference to his many qualifications resulted in a very enjoyable and, more importantly for me, reassuring evening.

Val adds... Steve Western explained that climate change is, and has always been, a natural phenomenon which has been going on for millions of years. In his opinion, there is no conclusive evidence that human activity is causing it. To support this view he showed us lots of graphs and statistics and used examples from relatively recent history such as the Victorian ice fairs held on the Thames. He acknowledged that we are pumping lots of CO₂ into the atmosphere and that there is a strong correlation between CO₂ levels and warming. However, he isn't convinced that it is the CO₂ levels which necessarily cause temperature rise. Perhaps more controversially, he went on to suggest that recycling is a waste of time and that alternative energy sources such as wind farms aren't a solution.

It was a very interesting talk and was met with one of the most enthusiastic rounds of applause I have heard at a club meeting.



Steve Western and an appreciative audience.

Editor's note: The consensus of the scientific community is that we are certainly in a period of rapid warming and that it is 'highly likely' that most of this effect is due to human activity. For a good overview of the evidence try NASA's site: <http://climate.nasa.gov>

Polishing the Punch Bowl

By George Bethell

The Punch Bowl on Straight Road, Battisford is our community inn and the gardening club supports it by tending its garden and supplying plants and TLC for its tubs and hanging baskets. Having provided masses of colour over the summer, November was the time for the pre-winter overhaul. A small but crack team of volunteers took on the job of hoiking out the old plants, replacing exhausted compost and planting up with bulbs and plants for winter and spring colour. Drop in to check out their handiwork - and have a drink and a meal. Opening times and news of upcoming events can be found on the website: <http://www.punchbowlbattisford.co.uk/>



Who said there's no glamour in gardening? Helen Read and Daphne Baldry pose for the camera



The Three Musketeers: Jim Henson, Linda Clark and Bill Baldry

Contact us...

Website: www.battisfordgardeningclub.org.uk

Email the Secretary: dmbaldry@btinternet.com

November: Bob Flowerdew

By George Bethell

On the evening of Friday 23rd November, an audience of about 150 packed Ringshall village hall to listen to Bob Flowerdew talk on 'No work gardening'. Some, undoubtedly attracted by Bob's celebrity status, had travelled not insignificant distances to be there. Expectations were high but not, I think it's fair to say, entirely met. From the outset it was clear that this was not to be a presentation packed with original labour-saving tips, but more of a stream of idiosyncratic opinions and anecdotes loosely linked to two messages. Firstly, it was said that much of the expert advice we as gardeners get from 'traditional' sources is not wrong, but wholly inappropriate. For example, it was suggested that advice such as 'double digging' stems from a time when gardening books were written by the head gardeners of estates where armies of under-gardeners did all the hard work. This undoubtedly contains an element of truth, but Bob's advice on growing grape vines in large tubs which are lugged into the greenhouse in spring and back out again in autumn hardly seemed an easy option.

The second theme was that, before we plant, we should ask ourselves what we really want from the garden – long, serried rows of onions, beetroots and cabbages or (relatively) low maintenance asparagus beds and fruit cages. Bob summed this up in a neat proverb: 'If you want to eat strawberries, don't plant radishes.'

Bob Flowerdew is clearly a seasoned speaker and, as one guest remarked, 'He's very easy to listen to.' But the content was thin as reflected by the lack of enthusiasm shown for a post-talk Q and A session which elicited just four or five soft questions. This left plenty of time for Bill to announce the winning raffle ticket numbers before we wended our various ways home - not exactly disappointed, but not greatly enlightened either.



Bob Flowerdew in full flow at Ringshall.

On the other hand...

It's clear from some of the e-mails received by the Chairman after the event that some in the audience thoroughly enjoyed the evening. Comments included: 'I found the talk very interesting and he made a lot of sense.' 'Bob was better than I expected so I hope every one had an enjoyable evening.' 'I loved it and so many of his ideas suited me'.

The one thing we can surely agree on is that the Committee is to be congratulated for all its hard work in making it happen. Thank you all.

And from Bill Baldry...

Under questioning, Bob Flowerdew explained the recent national newspaper headlines attributed to him – "Rip up your lawns" and "Keep using peat". He feels that the headlines were overblown in that he had merely suggested that for many gardeners there are better uses for a small space than having a patch of grass and that there is still nothing better for seed sowing and germination than a peat-based compost. For Bob, but not one suspects for everyone in the audience, controlled peat extraction would be better than a blanket ban. Not quite as sensational as the headlines suggested - but still somewhat controversial.



After the talk, the book signing.

"If you want to eat strawberries, don't plant radishes."

What next? Who next?

In 2010, the Club organised an "Evening with Peter Seabrook". The event was a sell out and, in the opinion of many, an unalloyed success. It also added a tidy sum to the Club's coffers - helped in part by Peter Seabrook's generosity in waiving his appearance fee. Having had time to recover from the considerable effort of organising such an event, the Committee decided at the beginning of 2012 to go for another "big name". The result was Bob Flowerdew's talk reported here.

Such events are clearly very popular amongst the wider Suffolk gardening community and, albeit with extensive advertising, we have shown that we can pack our village halls. They are also potentially lucrative with, for example, the Flowerdew evening netting profits of close to £1000 for the Club. However, a huge amount of time, energy and hard work goes into staging such an event. The Committee works tirelessly over a long period to negotiate terms with the speaker, arrange the venue and other logistics, and conduct a county-wide publicity campaign.

So now the questions are: Do we want to arrange another celebrity gardener talk? If so, who should we try to attract? Should we try to do something in 2013 or should we give the Committee more time to recover?

If you have views on this and/or suggestions to make, the Committee would love to hear from you. You can phone Bill on 01449 672168, send an e-mail via Daphne on dmbaldry@btinternet.com or simply collar a Committee member at a Club meeting.

December: It's Quiz Time!

By Bill Baldry

December 3rd 2012 was...

Great
Educational
Original
Rounds (x6)
Gifted
Entertaining
'Skilful

Quirky
Unique
Ingenious
Zesty



Editor's note: Thanks Bill and here's my account...

Eight teams took part in this year's quiz and, beneath the camaraderie, competition was fierce. At the break for fish and chips, three teams were tied in first place with the rest snapping at their heels. Afterwards, the going got tough and by the end there was one clear winner - the *Garden Gnomes* amassed an amazing total of 70 points out of a maximum possible score of 78. The *Construction Gang* was second with a very admirable 68 with the *Weeds* and the *Combs Crumbles* tied in third place on a handsome 65. Commiserations to all other teams. Finally, my thanks to Bill for acting as my reliable, if not particularly attractive, scorer.



Intense concentration at the Club's annual quiz night.

December: Deck the halls...

By Linda Clark

The Christmas Workshop was held on 8th December and was a sell-out with some reserving places as early as September! Following drinks and mince pies, Jackie Collings did her first demonstration – table decorations. Participants made good use of the foliage, ribbons, cinnamon sticks, dried fruits, and gold and silver sprayed cones and teasels provided and, by mid-morning a beautiful array of finished table decorations covered the spare tables and windowsills. (See picture opposite.)

Continued in next column...



Jackie's second demonstration was how to make a Christmas wreath. Not only did she create something amazing very quickly, she also made it look so easy! No sooner had we started tying bows and wiring gold sprayed walnuts and cones that it was time to break for lunch. Time passed so quickly that, before we knew it, what started out as simple oasis rings were transformed into beautiful Christmas wreaths. I find it amazing how every one is so individual even though we all share the same materials and foliage.

We all came away feeling very pleased with ourselves and couldn't wait to show our family and friends. What a lovely way to spend a couple of hours. Many thanks to those who helped to set up and clear away the debris, and to Pat Oliver for the loan of her tables.

Finally, a big thank you to Jackie for guiding us so expertly. She kindly offered to do it all again next year so, before she could change her mind, I immediately booked the hall for Saturday 7th December. Remember – book early to avoid disappointment!



The creative process begins and... behold, the fruits of our labours!



The Annual Dinner

By Jane Pope and Anthea Howard

A delicious post-Christmas meal was enjoyed by a large number of members and guests at the Barn Café, Alder Carr Farm on Friday 11th January. As you can imagine, there was a lot of chatting and laughter but not, we suspect, much conversation about gardening!

The organisation was admirable; we all had carefully crafted cards with our names and choices, which was just as well as we had given our orders to Debbie several weeks before and we at least would have struggled to remember!



We had not ordered a sweet, so had to sit and salivate over Clare's mulled wine trifle and Sally's chocolate cheesecake, which were kindly passed around for all to sample. The sweets were then forgotten in the excitement of the raffle.

The ladies at the Barn are charming, efficient and helpful. The food is delicious and we urge the Committee to book us in again next year. Thank you once again for a happy and well organised evening.

One last thought - we did wonder what a passer-by would make of open boots, torches and small packages being stowed away in waiting vehicles. In fact, it was people helping themselves to free bulbs, generously donated by Paul. We are sure we will all see the beautiful fruits of our labours next season.

Happy New Year and happy gardening; spring is just around the corner.

COMING EVENTS

The coming months offer a packed programme of events as summarised below. For full details, see the 'insert' that accompanies this newsletter. (if your copy is missing, contact Bill at wbdry@btinternet.com or on 01449 672168.)

All meetings are at Battsford Community Centre and start at 7:30 p.m. unless otherwise stated.

Monday 4th Feb.: Sarah Cook on 'Cedric Morris Irises'

Monday 4th March: John Hewson on 'Sweet Peas'

Monday 15th April (note 3rd Monday): Jeremy Pratt on 'Alpines in the garden and in the wild'

Monday 13th May (note 2nd Monday): Tour of the NT's Ickworth gardens with Sean Reid (Meet at the Community Centre at 5.45pm or be at the gardens by 6.30pm. Cost £3.)

Saturday 6th July: Combs Fete and BDGC Show 2013
Early warning so members can start to think about what they will sow, grow, make and bake for the Show.



Above and opposite: Revellers at the Club's annual dinner



BRAIN TEASELS #2

Try this 'daisy chain' of questions. (Answers at foot of the page.)

1: Daisies were originally in the botanical family *Compositae*. In which family are they now found?

A *Asteraceae* B *Ericaceae* C *Solanaceae*

2: In the 1989 Oscar winning film 'Driving Miss Daisy', which actress was being driven around?

A Jane Fonda B Vanessa Redgrave C Jessica Tandy

3: In the hit TV show of the 1980's, where did the attractive Daisy Duke and her wayward cousins Bo and Luke live? (See picture.)

A Cook County B Hazzard County C Orange County



4: In the 1960 film 'Please Don't Eat the Daisies', which actor plays opposite Doris Day?

A Rock Hudson B David Niven C James Stewart

5: Michaelmas daisies are great perennials, but when is Michaelmas Day?

A 29th September B 31st October C 5th November

6: 'Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do' starts the chorus of the popular song 'Daisy Bell'. When was it composed?

A 1922 B 1912 C 1892

Contributions to the Newsletter

If you would like to submit something for inclusion in a future newsletter, please don't hold back! Offers and/or submissions to George Bethell via e-mail [bethell.george@gmail.com] or by snail-mail to: Stone Croft, Valley Road, Stowmarket, IP14 2HH.

Brain Teasels Answers

1: A
2: C
3: B
4: B
5: A
6: C

COMING EVENTS

Monday 4th February:

Sarah Cook on 'Cedric Morris Irises'

Sarah Cook, former Head Gardener at Sissinghurst, now lives in her native Suffolk where she has established a collection of irises bred by the artist and plantsman Cedric Morris. Morris lived in Benton End in the Stour Valley and spent so many years painting his favourite irises that he is sometimes dubbed 'the Suffolk Monet'. (See opposite.)

Sarah Cook is now doing all she can to find and save 'Benton Irises'. The nation's leading expert talking on a plant with local interest - what more could you ask for?

Monday 4th March:

John Hewson on 'Sweet Peas'

Get some expert tips on growing Sweet Peas.

(Thompson and Morgan are giving members free Sweet Pea seed this year so perhaps this talk will help you to 'maximise returns'!)

Monday 15th April (note 3rd Monday):

Jeremy Pratt 'Alpines in the garden and in the wild'

Jeremy is Secretary of the Alpine Garden Society's Ipswich Group. Check out their website - including some nice pictures - at www.ipswich-alpine.co.uk

Monday 13th May (note 2nd Monday)

TRIP - Tour of the National Trust's Ickworth gardens with Sean Reid



Meet at Battisford Community Centre at 5.45pm or be at the gardens by 6.30pm. Cost £3

Photo © Anthony Hammond

Saturday 6th July: BDGC Show 2013

Spring is just around the corner so it's time to think about what to sow, grow, make and bake for this year's Show. The Show schedule will be coming soon and once again T&M are providing members with early variety seed potatoes (at the February meeting) and also some sweet peas. The vegetable and flower classes have been adjusted as the Show is earlier this year and the classes now include those suggested by members. We hope that you will find several classes to enter so we will be able to produce another colourful and interesting Show for all that attend the Combs Fete to enjoy.

'Gardening is not a rational act.'

Margaret Atwood



Iris seedlings (1943) by Sir Cedric Morris Bt. Now in the Tate Collection, this was painted at Benton End, Suffolk.

February Bird Seed Order

Tori will, once again, be taking members' orders for bird seed at bargain prices. Details, including prices and the *last date for orders*, can be found on the order form downloadable from the website: www.battisfordgardeningclub.org.uk Just click on the 'Seed Orders' link.



Recommended event...



15th-17th March at Stoneleigh Park

Billed as "the ultimate grow your own event" the show includes: tips and advice from experts including James Wong and Bob Flowerdew; expert demonstrations including cookery and smallholding; and... shopping! You can book by phoning **0844 3388001** or online at: www.theediblegardenshow.co.uk