



Battisford & District Gardening Club

November: "I do it my way..."

By Anthea Howard

On Monday 3rd November a full house of Club members was treated to an informative and inspiring evening with 16 times National Pelargonium Champion Ken Abel.

Ken began by telling us 'I do it my way' and went on to show us just how! Discounting the advice of a number of well known gardening experts, Ken's approach to gardening is all his own and by experience, trial and error, and dedication he has become one of the UK's leading pelargonium growers.

Ken shared with us many of the secrets of his success, including: striking cuttings in tiny 'thumb' pots; 'stopping' which involves pinching out the lead shoots to form a lovely rounded plant; watering little and often and *always* from below; feeding every time he waters (diluted if appropriate); cutting back drastically after flowering - and some plants even respond to stroking!

Ken's success is mainly due to hard work and commitment and he spends much of every day in his greenhouse tending his plants. Here his long suffering wife, Babs, pipes up "Not on Christmas Day though". However, we were then treated to a slide of Ken in his greenhouse on Boxing Day complete with Christmas hat!

The evening concluded with slides of some of his prize-winning exhibits and there were many gasps of admiration and amazement. To see pictures of his wonderful plants or for more information and hints visit Ken's website: www.prize-pelargoniums.com. He is also happy to answer questions and give advice if you email him at ken@prize-pelargoniums.com.

Anthea

November: Roy Lancaster

By George Bethell

On Friday 14th November, Club members and fellow gardeners from north, south, east and west Suffolk packed Ringshall's Village Hall to hear national treasure Roy Lancaster CBE speak on 'A Plantsman's Garden'.

Roy tried valiantly to stick to his brief and give us an illustrated tour of the wonderful plants he has gathered together in his Hampshire garden, but each plant seemed to unleash an avalanche of memories and stories that he simply couldn't contain. Tales of his plant hunter heroes (Frank Kingdon-Ward *et al*) and his own travels to distant parts were intertwined with amusing anecdotes and snippets of old music hall songs ('Ashby-de-la-Zouch By The Sea' anyone?). We even got some philosophy - birth, life and death in one peony plant!

For 100 minutes, Roy hardly paused for breath as he talked in his soft Lancashire accent about the plants in his garden which he sees as 'actors on a stage'. For each tree and shrub that appeared on the screen he sang the praises of its form, its bark, its leaves, its flowers, its seed pods... At the same time, he tried to convince us that all these all wonderful exotics are relatively easy to grow and, with a little effort, not hard to find. Clearly Roy was encouraging us all to be plant hunters!

I shall be taking up the challenge by trying some of the recommended plants in the ginger family (*Zingiberaceae*), especially varieties of *Roscoea purpurea* from one of Roy's favourite countries - Nepal. (See page 3.)

It was a great evening and thanks go to Mike Warren for luring his old friend up to Suffolk, and to Bill and the Committee for arranging yet another inspiring celebrity talk.

George



Above: Ken Abel - a man with unsurpassed knowledge of growing prize winning pelargoniums.

(Photo: George)



Above: Roy Lancaster, plantsman extraordinaire, flanked by Chairman Bill Baldry (L.) and 'facilitator' Mike Warren (R.).

(Photo: George)

December: Quiz Night

By Bill Baldry

George could not be with us for Quiz Night 2014 - away in Tajikistan - but although not present we had his presence as he had set another of his fiendishly difficult (but fun) quizzes to test our knowledge.

Knowledge was needed to cover the range from Linnaeus the Younger to the siblings of Hyacinth Bucket, and classical gardens to pop classics. Luckily he did slip in the occasional slightly easier question! Ultimately the inappropriately named "No-brainers" proved most in tune with our question setter to win by a narrow margin.

Many thanks must go to George for the considerable time and effort that he puts into creating such a wide range of linked questions. Thanks also to Paul Hansord for acting as Quiz Master and his brother Keith for helping Paul with the technology! And last but not least, thanks to Sandra and Daphne for organising the lovely, free buffet.

The proceeds from the raffle - £82 - will be donated to the Stowmarket Stroke Support Group.



Above: The victorious women of the 'No-brainers' ... and Tony!
Words and photo by Bill

News from the Committee...

Since the last newsletter, Jeanne Lynch-Aird has agreed to join the Committee. The full list of members is now:

- Bill Baldry (Chairman)
- Daphne Baldry
- Paul Hansord
- Jim Henson
- Anthea Howard
- Jeanne Lynch-Aird
- Debbie McDowall
- Jo Pepper
- Caroline Wicking
- Denis Wicking

The Committee has agreed to once again hold our Annual Show in conjunction with Combs Fete. *This year it will be held on Saturday 4th July.*

After having borne the brunt of organising the show since 2008, Bill Baldry is stepping down from the front line. Stepping up to the plate for 2015 are Caroline and Denis Wicking, and Anthea Howard. They will need our help as they develop the schedule and, nearer the time, make preparations for the Show. Please look out for their requests for support.

(Did you spot the split infinitive and the mixed metaphor? [Ed.](#))

December: Christmas Workshop

By Barbara Chatt

On Saturday 6th December, 28 of us gathered in Battsford Community Centre to make Christmas wreaths and table centre decorations under the guidance of Jackie Collings - who, as always, made it look so simple.

Coffee & mince pies were served and we had a morning with much laughter and with results that surprised us all. A walk around the village before Christmas would have shown you some of the glorious fruits of our labours! Without Jackie's input and patience I am certain we would not have achieved our objective—thank you Jackie. Many thanks to Caroline Wicking for coordinating the event and also to Denis and Anthea for their hard work in the kitchen and beyond.

Barbara



Above: Workshop participants too engrossed in their work to smile for the camera
Photo by Jackie

Prospective new member...



Congratulations to Lucy and Will Skellorn on the birth of baby Casper. Born on 5th November and weighing in at 6 lb 12 oz Casper, according to Lucy, 'has already been getting out into the garden, and especially enjoys snoozes in the poly tunnel!'

Message from the Club Treasurer: Casper, your membership for 2015 is now overdue.

January: Annual Club Meal

By Jane Pope

Over thirty people enjoyed the meal at Alder Carr Barn this year. We were sorry to be without Sandra and Jim, as Jim is currently recovering from a knee operation. Unfortunately Paul also called in sick, thereby depriving us all of our clandestine bulb collecting by torch light from the boot of his car - always a highlight for the diners at the end of the evening. Get well soon to both of them.

The food was very good and well presented as always. The conversation on our table rambled between parrots, politics and pets and occasionally even strayed to gardening. The three courses originally allocated to Paul were promised one to each of the three tables. Somehow the dessert was diverted by Faith and so Table #3 was deprived of its rightful calorie rush. No hard feelings guys!

Thanks are due to the organisers once again. Mr Baldry delivered his usual speech and cabaret, but sadly the diamante and feathers were absent this time. Never mind, there's always next year. As one happy diner commented, "Anyone who did not come tonight has really missed a treat." Jane



Above: Debbie and Jeanne hear the sad news that Paul is unwell and they will have to eat an extra starter. Photo by Bill

Roy Lancaster's Plants

A full list of the plants mentioned in Roy Lancaster's talk can be found on the Club's website. Simply select 'Roy Lancaster's Plants' from the menu on the left of the home page. Below *Roscoea purpurea* var. *rubra* "Red Gurkha".



T&M Tomato Recommendations

By Paul Hansord

In a quest to ensure that T&M offers the best tomato range, I will have tasted 173 different tomatoes this season. Could this be a Guinness World Record?

This amazing fruit offers so many different variations of size, texture, colour and flavour – even seeds or no seeds! All suitable for different uses i.e. salad, juice, sauce, drying etc. Flavour is always an interesting topic as some people like a more acid flavour while others prefer a sweeter tomato. To me a tomato has to be sweet and after trying so many varieties, I reckon *Sweet Aperitif* is the best red cherry followed closely by *TomTato*.

It is 25 years since T&M introduced *Sungold* to UK gardeners and it still has the best flavour of all golden tomatoes. Its thin skin encases an explosion of real tomato flavour so sweet that children will eat them directly from the vine. We are so confident that our customers will not find any tomato with a sweeter, tastier fruit that we will give them double the price they paid for their seed or plants back if they do. I did find a close contender on a recent trip to Germany and we hope to let some customers try it next year to get their opinion.

New for the 2015 season is the world's largest variety, a giant beefsteak weighing in at 3lbs. To get fruit this size, it is best to grow 1 or 2 fruits on each truss. *Steakhouse* is exclusive to T&M and will be featured in a national advertising campaign.

Paul



Spice is the variety of life... (Answers at foot of back page.)

- 1: From which part of the plant is the spice *turmeric* derived?
A bark B flower bud C rhizome
- 2: In which of Shakespeare's plays do we hear: "Hold, take these keys, and fetch more spices, nurse." ?
A *Romeo and Juliet*
B *Twelfth Night*
C *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
- 3: Weight for weight, saffron is the most expensive spice in the world. Which is the *second* most expensive?
A cardamom B vanilla C nutmeg
- 4: Emma Bunton was which Spice Girl?
A Sporty B Scary C Baby
- 5: Paprika is strongly associated with the cuisine of which country?
A Hungary B India C Japan
- 6: Nutmeg and Mace come from trees in which genus?
A *Myristica* B *Myrtaceae* C *Cydonia*
- 7: Musician Ginger Baker is most closely associated with which instrument?
A trumpet B drums C piano

Coming Events

Monday 2nd March: *Speaker Andrew Bly*

Andrew Bly is Technical Director for the UK division of G.A Verdegaal - a long established (1917) specialist supplier of lily bulbs both for cut flowers and pot plant production. Andrew, a recognised expert in the field, will give a talk simply entitled "Lilies".

7:30 Battisford Community Centre.

Monday 23rd March: *Speaker Hilary Thomas*

This talk was originally planned for January but had to be postponed due to a problem with the hall's heating system. Our speaker, Hilary Thomas, has kindly agreed to reschedule and so she will now talk to us on Monday 23rd March, 7:30 pm at the Battisford Community Centre.

Hilary is a vastly experienced and well-respected garden designer who also lectures and writes on the subject. She will talk on "Designing with plants: the role of form, texture and colour in the garden".

Not a Club event but...

This year, Suffolk Gardens Trust is organising a tour of gardens in the South of France to be led by our very own Michael Warren "the well-known and respected horticultural and garden photographer".

The packed itinerary includes visits to seven renowned gardens as well as the Perfume Museum in Grasse, and the historic perfume manufacturer, Galimard. The tour will depart from Stansted on 9th May 2015, returning on 14th May, staying at two comfortable hotels in Menton and Grasse.

The cost of this fully escorted tour is from £865.00 per person (based on two sharing).

For full details, please contact Michael on 01473 253041 or at warrenmichael@btinternet.com

Places are limited so if you are interested - hurry to avoid disappointment!

Below a picture by Mike of La Mortola (the Hanbury Garden) - just to whet your appetite!



Monday 13th April: *Trip to Woodward's, Coddanham*

A trip to see spring bulbs at 'Woodwards' (a member of the National Garden Scheme), Blacksmiths Lane (off School Road), Coddanham IP6 9TX. Meet there at 6.00pm or Battisford Community Centre at 5.30pm for car share. Ample car parking at Coddanham Village Hall 350 yards past Woodward's. £5 including refreshments. Please note that this is the second Monday of the month.

Monday 18th May: *Trip to Walled Garden, MEAL*

A trip to see the recently restored Walled Garden at Abbotts Hall, Museum of East Anglian Life, Stowmarket. Meet there for 7.00 pm. Cost = £6. Please note that this is the third Monday of the month.

Monday 1st June: *Speaker Alan Seager*

The much anticipated talk on "Bees", as requested by members, will be delivered by Alan Seager, Chairman of the Suffolk Beekeepers' Association. 7:30 Battisford Community Centre.

Monday 15th June: *Visit to the Collings' Garden*

An opportunity to see the garden of members Jackie and Stuart Collings. 6:30 pm Woodstock, Park Rd, Combs, IP14 2JS. Speaking of Jackie...

A Gardener's Question Time #2: Gardener and Craftswoman *extraordinaire* - Jackie Collings

Q1: *What is your favourite plant to grow and why?*

"Alstroemeria. An amazing perennial that blooms from May until the frosts. I buy my plants from Tatingstone Nursery on the A137. It looks stunning in the garden, and has so many stems, I can cut loads for the house and still leave masses on the plant."

Q2: *What plants would you like to grow but which, in the past, have defeated you?*

"I love sweet peas, but can't be bothered to grow them correctly and just let them scramble up a picket fence. Consequently they have very short stems and few blooms. So it's my own fault!"

Q3: *You share your love of gardening with your husband Stuart but do you agree on everything horticultural or are there 'bones of contention'? If so, what?*

"The main bone of contention – Stuart says I spend far too much time and money on the garden as I can always find room for one more plant. However, I don't smoke or drink (paragon of virtue really!) so this is my vice."

Q4: *You are off on a long space mission to colonise a distant planet and you are allowed to choose ONE plant to grow in the space station's biosphere (all conditions available). Which plant would you choose and why?*

"I thought of taking a rose bush, as a reminder of England, but decided on a more practical option - runner beans. I love eating them, and it would be a useful vegetable as we could save some seed for the following year."

Thanks Jackie for keeping the ball rolling with some great answers. And Stuart - shame on you! Ed.

Brain Teasels Answers

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