

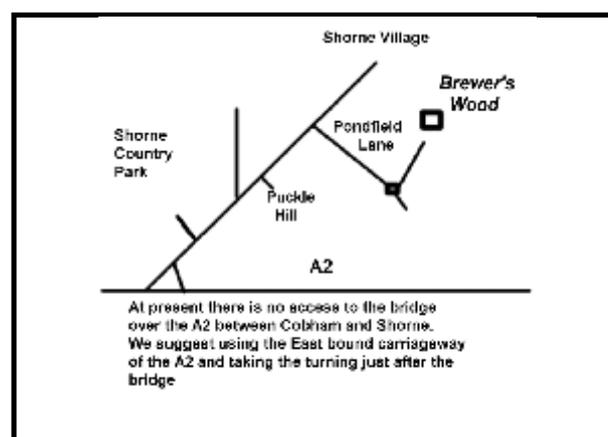
MEOPHAM GARDEN ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



Spring 2001

Social Evening - 9 July 2001

This year we have been invited to visit the garden of Eric and Julie Goodwin at Brewer's Wood, Pondfield Lane, Shorne. Their garden of some 30 acres includes a lake and many interesting plants. Tickets will be on sale at the May and June meetings priced £4 to include refreshments.



Recent Events

At our February meeting, Mr Baughen showed us some spectacular examples of the 250 species of Irises. He also provided some tips on cultivation of this varied species.

On March 12th Laurie Manser returned to tell us how he exhibits daffodils just in time to impress the judge at our Spring show.

At our April meeting, Mr Pilbean a nurseryman from Oprington spoke about 'Cactus and Succulents'. He has travelled to their native Americas and included slides of these plants in the wild. Members present took the opportunity to ask many questions.

Spring Show

Our Spring Show was well supported in spite of the poor weather and made a profit of £70.85 for the Association. Mr Bill Roberts, President, presented the prizes and cups, as follows: Chairman's Cup – Mr Doug Nicholson, Hasler Vase – Mrs K.Green, Harvel Spring Challenge – Mrs B.Macknish, Diploma – Mrs J.Ward and Harvel Floral Bowl – Mrs E.Thomas. The Melliker Cup for the named daffodil class was awarded to Mr Doug Nicholson at our April meeting. The class was postponed from the show due to the lateness of the season.

Puckle Hill

On March 31st some 20 members of the Association took up the invitation to make a return visit to Mr and Mrs Rolls' garden in Shorne to see their magnificent display of daffodils. Fortunately the weather remained dry and we raised £30 for the Lion's Hospice. The front page of the newsletter shows one scene from an area of woodland and below is a picture of another, more open sea of narcissi. We were also lucky to find examples of split-corona narcissi. For the benefit of members who would like to know the structure of these flowers, we have included a picture of one on the right. The trumpet is split in several places and curves back against the petals.



Forthcoming Events

11 th June	Miss J A'Violet	Hardy Geraniums
9 th July	Social Evening	See front page
13 th August	Mr B Bossom	The World of Roses in Colour

A little early to be thinking of Christmas perhaps, but we have engaged the same caterer (Vicky Hooper) as last year for our Christmas Supper on the 10th December and will have Mr Clark (ex solicitor) from Sevenoaks as our after-dinner speaker.

Looking even further ahead, Jackie and Rita have been working on the 2002 schedule. Planned talks include Mexican Plants, ABC of Pruning and a speaker from the National Trust. The committee have been looking into the possibility of a celebrity speaker but some of the fees and expenses charged are well beyond the means of our association. Are there any volunteers to work on the 2003 programme?

Helping Paws

If you are a keen gardener as well as a cat owner you will have no doubt noticed that as soon as we settle down to work on a particular piece of ground our feline supervisor is there to help. Three cats share their home with us. The two elderly tabbies only occasionally venture out so it is the younger, more active white female who has to do most of the supervision.

Some white-collar cats like to keep a watchful eye from a safe distance. They polish their claws on your delicate shrubs or take charge of operations from a nearby vantage point. When the weather is not so good they may even choose to oversee the operation from the comfort of the open shed. The blue-collar more 'paws-on' types insist on being right there where the action is. They claim ownership of all your tools and bedding plants, and position themselves right in the way, demanding your attention as you vainly try to get on with the job. They crouch playfully ready to pounce on anything that moves and may even sink their claws into your fingers.

Your half-filled trug is the perfect place to settle down for a nap so you have to find an alternative receptacle for your weeds. In the warmth of the greenhouse they can be found asleep in your carefully prepared seedtrays 'incubating' your recently germinated seedlings.

When you do manage to take a few minutes off to chat to a neighbour your supervisor accompanies you and then decides that neighbours garden would benefit from some cultivation and 'cat fertiliser'. Having disgraced themselves they then roll all over your neighbours plants and your embarrassment is complete.

Of course when you really require their supervision they have given up and will be found indoors asleep just waiting for that human being to present them with their next meal.

Historical Snippet

There is always a new sense of satisfaction when we are suddenly made aware of a new way of looking at familiar things. So it is with the great and formal gardens in Kent. A member of the Association has written an essay that highlights the Italian influence on the design of gardens in the county over the past four hundred years.

It is quite natural that Kent, in the South of the country and with its proximity to the continent, should have been influenced by ideas circulating there. The majority of people embarking on and returning from their 'Grand Tours' in the 18th century would have crossed using a Kentish port.

Italy, with its legacy as the centre of the Roman Empire was a focal point for these tours. This has led to the observation by Elizabeth Hall that 'Italian influence is never far away in England'.

Sir Philip Sydney visited the Villa d'Este at Tivoli and it had no doubt influenced his garden at Penshurst. A mount walk of the style found in the Italian villa garden was to be found at Penshurst. Another Kentish garden, which appears to have owed much to the Italian style, was at St. Augustine's, Canterbury with elaborate knots as well as a mount. Knots and mounts became the two main features to be found in 16th century gardens of the English nobility.

John Evelyn, the diarist, owned Sayes Court and was a friend of the Packer family of Groombridge, to whom he offered gardening advice. He travelled to Italy and on his return created a mount walk at Sayes Court, which gave views over several areas.

The great wonders of the Italian garden, for example that of Pratolino, with its expensive automata and vast hydraulic features were not to be found on this scale in Kent. However, by the beginning of the 17th century fountains were particularly favored but canals, cascades and water grottoes were also built. The de Caus family, who had worked in Florence at the end of the 16th century, brought back their knowledge of hydraulic engineering. Salomon de Caus was probably responsible for a grotto at Greenwich. This was shell lined and contained a small water feature, a sculpture, plants and an automaton in the form of a bird.

Plants were also an integral part of the garden design. Plant hunters such as Tradescant had brought back varied and interesting specimens, which were shown off to best advantage. Myrtle, oranges, lemons and other exotics were imported to give an authentic Italian feel to the garden and orangeries were built to house the more delicate species.

The end of the 17th century heralded a new era in design. The French baroque style became popular and was intended to be seen from the upper rooms as at Versailles. William III brought this style to Hampton

Court.

The parterre de broderie was an elaborate version of the formal Italian flowerbeds with swirling baroque patterns. Much use was also made of fountains. The French garden was marked by a ruthlessly logical extension of practices that had been empirically evolved in Italy. Squerryes Court near Westerham is an example of this style, with a parterre and a semicircular wilderness.

From the middle of the 17th century there are records of gardening on a much smaller scale in the Commissioner's and Officers' gardens of Chatham Dockyard. Phineas Pett, Commissioner in 1630, created a garden in the Italian style. John Evelyn visited and wrote in his diary that there were 'potts, status, Cypresses, resembling some villa about Rome'. A map of 1704 shows the same garden with very elaborate flowerbeds. Even the smaller plots of the Officers' gardens show formal beds on either side of a central pathway.

The Grand Tours of the 18th century led to a greater awareness of antiquity. Grand buildings in the Palladian style, taking ideas from classical antiquity and especially ancient Roman architecture. It became fashionable to build ancient ruins and to create backdrops to Roman artefacts such as sculptures and tablets. Goodnestone Park, where a new house required a modern garden, had two terrace walks flanked by twelve large marble busts from Rome.

Gradually the landscape garden became the fashion. Mereworth Castle near Maidstone, built in 1720, had a less formal garden. A belvedere, a raised structure intended to be used as a viewing point, was built in the form of a ruined Roman arch. By the 1730s the formal garden layout was no longer in use. The new fashion was to go back further than the Italian Renaissance, to Roman times and to emulate the Romans with their farms, their gardens and their architecture.

A leading exponent of the free form of garden design was William Kent whose ideas were soon accepted. The garden was separated from the park beyond by a ha-ha. Walpole put it thus:

'The contiguous ground of the park without the sunken fence was to be harmonized with the lawn within; and the garden in its turn was to be set free from its prime regularity, that it might assort with the wilder country without.'

To be continued ...

(From an essay by Ann Kneif)