

MEOPHAM GARDEN ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER Winter 2001



Spring Show Saturday, 24th March 2001

Take a look at the schedule for the show and scour your home and garden for possible exhibits. It's not too late to nurture them. The judges are looking for quality and uniformity, so take care of any plants that show promise. Jackie asks that you make sure you let her know what you will be entering by 10 pm on Thursday 22nd March. The fee is 10p for each entry. Exhibits may be staged on the Friday evening between 9 and 9:30 pm and between 10 am and 12:45 pm on the day of the show. Doors open at 3pm.

NO LATE ENTRIES WILL BE ACCEPTED

Recent Events

November

Mr Laurie Manser talked about his early gardening experiences. Just after the war he left school and began work at a garden in Tunbridge Wells, immediately showed his prowess at breaking glass. It seems that his early experience was in growing marrows that were transmuted into pineapple chunks by the cook.

December

Our Christmas supper was again of a very high standard. The Village Hall looked very festive as members and their guests enjoyed a delicious hot meal and we are extremely grateful to Mrs Barbara Macknish for overseeing and liaising with the caterers.

Mr Graham Hoskins paid us another visit and described a goodwill tour of the United States that he undertook with a group of musicians from the army and marines. He was surprised and very grateful to receive a donation of £100 from the association in support of his charity work amongst the orphans in Romania.

January (AGM)

Some 40 members enjoyed a social evening with cheese and wine. Jo Latimer's presentation took us back to the Village Garden Safari in July.

Our president, Mr Bill Roberts, took charge of the formal part of the evening. and announced the retirement of the Chairman and the Vice Chairman. Mr Douglas Nicholson was elected Chairman and Mr David Mansfield Vice Chairman. Mrs Rita Maynard took over the position of Assistant Show Secretary and in her absence, Mrs Lyn Hamilton-Wargent was elected to the committee.

For the past two years Jackie and Barbara have together undertaken the work of the programme secretary, but we really need someone to take over this rôle and to keep tabs on who is available for talks and to ensure that we continue to find good speakers at affordable prices.

At the end of this year we have been warned that the following officers wish to retire - Secretary, Show Secretary, Publicity Secretary, so we will be needing another three new people to join the committee.

Forthcoming Events

Meetings

12th March	Mr Laurie Manser <i>(Members' Show A pot of three hyacinths)</i>	Daffodils
9th April	Mr J Pilbeam <i>(Members' Show 3 stems polyanthus)</i>	Cactus and Succulents
8th May	Mrs J Bryant <i>(Members' Show 3 stems tulips)</i>	Gardening in Tubs and Containers

Spring Show, Saturday 24th March

Both the sale of plants and provision of teas help to subsidise the cost of running the shows, so your assistance with either (or both) would be most appreciated. We would also be grateful for donations of raffle prizes of general interest.

We need volunteers to assist in the tea room on the day and with making cakes to be sold with the teas. Any cakes that are left after the show will be sold whole.

Bring along any surplus plants you may have, label them for sale on the plant stall. You will receive 50% of the takings from the sale of your plants. Please also provide the plant stall with a list of your plants showing the asking price and the quantity of each. You receive a higher percentage from gardening equipment that you may wish to sell. You may even wish to advertise on the noticeboard without charge, but a donation to the Association would be appreciated if you do manage to sell something this way. Doors open to the public at 3 pm and admission is free. The prize giving will take place at 4:15 pm.

May Fair

It is probable that, as in previous years, we will be invited to have a stall at the Primary School's May Fair on the 7th May. This is a good means of publicising the Association locally. Last year we became much more proactive and instituted our "Lucky-Dip-Tombola". This allowed us to engage the public more directly, to raise our profile, to make some profit and a worthwhile contribution to the school.

July Meeting

We are hoping to arrange an outing to a local garden.

Climate

Weather is always a talking point in the British Isles and particularly so amongst gardeners. For the past few years we have endured semi-drought conditions with parched flower borders, cracking vegetable patches and tinder-dry lawns. We have been harangued by pundits that it is a sure sign of global warming and that we would have to get used to such conditions for the foreseeable future. But what a change over the past few months. The ground has been waterlogged for weeks on end and many unfortunate people have been repeatedly subject to serious flooding. Once again we are told that these extremes of weather are consistent with global warming and that we must anticipate even more.

The truth of the matter is that there have been serious droughts from time to time down the centuries and flooding is always likely to take place over the flood plains of rivers. In 1976 the grass in the fields was scorched by unrelenting sunshine and crunched underfoot as one walked over it. Similar events occurred in earlier years and it was common practice for farmers to cut branches off the deeper-rooted trees around the hedgerows to provide some greenstuff for the cattle to munch on. Again, in 1968 there were severe floods in the west country and the summer was a complete washout. The storm of 1987 uprooted so many trees partly because the ground was so soft and wet. The town of Rye in Sussex was right on the coast until a great storm in the 13th century piled up a mile of shingle in front of it.

Memories of the extremes of the past tend to fade and we are all immersed in our petty day-to-day concerns where the current weather has a direct impact. The overall picture depends upon careful measurement and record-keeping and this shows that global warming is, indeed, taking place. We can cope with extremes around what we perceive as normal, but there are serious threats to what we think of as normal. Further melting of the Greenland ice cap could lead to the gulf-stream becoming erratic and stopping altogether with disastrous consequences for our island. A few degrees warmer and we will find that peat bogs of the temperate zone will begin to degrade, pumping vast quantities of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and thus inflaming the trends in global warming that man's activities have kindled.

It is up to us to do our own little bit towards reducing our impact on the planet and to strengthen the political will to do something on a global scale. The fact is that there are too many people who all want higher and higher standards of living and this desire is incompatible with a healthy planet. The only effective measure that could ensure that the human race has minimal effect on the environment is to reduce the population of the world.

Historical Snippet

William Paxton

The National Botanic Garden of Wales has a rich legacy on which to build.

William Paxton the man who, two hundred years ago, turned the Middleton Hall estate into a vast pleasure garden. It was under Paxton's instructions that the landscape which we see today was sculpted and according to Paxton's orders that the necklace of lakes which surrounds the main body of the estate was formed.

William Paxton came to Wales in 1785, after thirty years of travelling the world, bringing with him a taste for the exotic. With the money and privilege to be able to indulge his passions, he bought Middleton Hall and its estate, and in 1789 he set about enlarging and enriching the five hundred acre park. He intended to develop the estate into a home that would do him credit and provide amusement for him and his young family.

Engineer James Grier, was his estate manager and his skills must have played a large part in the creation of the artificial lakes and the design of the intricate water management system that distinguished Paxton's park in its heyday. Water played an important role in Paxton's scheme. It may be that he had been inspired by the Mughal gardens which he had seen in India. If so he adapted his ideas well to the landscape and climate of South Wales where water could be used to create beautiful lakes stocked with fish. Dams were created and bridges and sluices were built along with two cascades.

Architect Samuel Pepys Cockerell designed a new mansion, sited to take advantage of the magnificent views over the Towy valley.

Samuel Lapidge, one of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown's surveyors, was probably responsible for the idea for the double walled garden towards the north of the estate. Paxton had probably been interested in gardening long before he bought Middleton Hall. It was a popular occupation among the Europeans in Bengal where he had lived. It was not uncommon for enthusiasts such as him to import seeds and seedlings from different parts of Asia, the east coast of Africa and Europe in order to test the possibilities of growing different plants in Bengali soil.

Paxton failed to build a political career. It is said that Paxton's election promise to the voters was to build a much needed bridge over the Towy. Instead, it is said, with the money and the

materials he had put aside he built Paxton's Tower. The 'folly' is one of the most conspicuous landmarks overlooking the Towy Valley. Whatever the true reason for its construction the 'folly' was dedicated by Paxton to Nelson after his death at Trafalgar.

After Paxton's death in 1824 the Middleton Hall estate was put up for sale. It passed through the hands of three families before, in 1931, the mansion was gutted by fire. Twenty years later the walls were pulled down and for some years this was the end of the story of Middleton Hall and its parkland. The site was bought by Carmarthen County Council and leased to young farmers hoping to make their way into an agricultural career.

The artificial lakes drained away with the ruin of the dams and sluices. Paxton's bath-houses were forgotten and it needed an experienced and discerning eye to find the underlying structure of Paxton's park and to imagine the former charm and beauty.

It was the artist William Wilkins who first came up with the idea of building a botanic garden on the site of Paxton's park and although the new National Botanic Garden of Wales is much more than a reconstruction of Paxton's creation it is on a scale of which William Paxton could be proud.

National Botanic Garden of Wales
Gardd Fontaneg Genedlaethol Cymru

Poetry Corner

Wild Forget-Me-Nots

When bees hum in the linden tree
and roses bloom in cottage plots
Along the brookside banks we see
the blue wild forget-me-nots.
Shy flowers that shun the prying eye –
content to let the daisy hold,
he glances of the passers-by –
with brazen stare of white and gold.
Forget-me-not!

From long ago it stirs the thought of happier days
For memories like wildflowers grow –
along the heart's untrodden ways.

Chris and Claudia Sutton
Forget-me-Not Herbs 'n' Wildflowers