

MEOPHAM GARDEN ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER



©Jeff Latimer

Spring 2004

Visit to Rock Farm, Nettlestead 14th June

For our June meeting we will be visiting Rock Farm, Nettlestead from 7pm. After looking round the most interesting garden we retire to The Hop Pole, Nettlestead where refreshments will be provided. The cost for this trip is £7 per person to include the garden entrance fee and refreshments at The Hop Pole but not drinks (soft or alcoholic). Anyone requiring transport is asked to contact a member of the committee.

Recent Events

9th February What is “Organic” Vegetable Growing Dusty Miller

Dusty Miller took the ‘romance’ out of organic vegetable growing by immediately pointing out that a pure organic method was almost impossible to achieve. Bees visiting neighbouring non-organic pastures and polluted rain are just two examples of how difficult it is to exercise control over our crops. He also reminded us that, with the exception of man-made radioactive concoctions, all chemicals are actually produced from elements *naturally* occurring on planet Earth! However, Dusty went on to produce a plethora of information and tips on how to grow vegetables as organically as possible. He covered basic principles such as feeding, composting and crop rotation along with his homespun remedies for treating mildew and the solution to the slug problem ... you should have been there!!

A very interesting and amusing talk which continued after the tea break and prompted many interesting questions which Dusty answered in his inimitable way.

(Jayne Macknish)

8th March Practical Propagation for Small Gardens Mrs J Talboys

Mrs Talboys gave another talk of the highest quality, blending her professional knowledge with the practical experience of creating her own garden. She presented both subtle and simple practical tips together with the reasoning behind the methods for providing the best conditions for plants being propagated. She also outlined a simple watering system with a large reservoir that she and her late husband developed to help look after their pot plants while on holiday.

19th April Gravesend’s Forgotten Canal Mr Brian Macknish

In a departure from the gardening theme, long time supporter of the club, Brian Macknish spoke to us about the Thames & Medway Canal. The original purpose of a canal between Gravesend and Strood was to provide an inland emergency supply route between the naval dockyards at Deptford, Woolwich and Chatham. The journey would be shortened from 46 to 7 miles. Work began at Gravesend in 1809 and included constructing a tunnel of 2.5 miles at Higham which is now used by the railway. However the project was not completely finished before the Napoleonic war ended and after that it was not quite so necessary and eventually it fell into disrepair, being abandoned in 1934. Gravesham Borough Council bought the canal in 1970 with a view to restoration. Since then much work has been done to restore parts of the canal but it is a constant battle with developers and vandals. Brian showed slides to illustrate the problems facing the restoration as well as some of historical significance.

20th March Spring Show - Show Secretary’s Report Jayne Macknish

The weather during the week leading up to the Spring Show did it's best to spoil our fun. Having had frosts with bright and freezing days the previous week, temperatures lifted and along came the rain. The wind picked up and by Friday the gardens were looking decidedly battered.

However, it takes more than a bit of rain or a puff of wind to dampen the enthusiasm of our members! Flowers were cut and pots removed to the safety of porches, conservatories and windowsills. The entries came through as usual and on Friday evening the Village Hall was laid out to receive over 160 exhibits.

The Association bought daffodil and hyacinth bulbs for the membership this year for the last time. Members will purchase their bulbs themselves for the show in 2005. It was interesting to see the extraordinary growth variation in a batch of so-called ‘same’ hyacinth bulbs! Even the colours were different! Will it be the same when the bulbs are sourced from different suppliers next year?

It was good to see so many members of public supporting their local show, especially on such a dreary day. But then, anybody walking into the hall that afternoon and being confronted by such colour and superb perfume would have had their spirits lifted considerably. There was a large plant stall, a lot of raffle prizes and the ever-popular refreshment area. Our members were busy in the kitchen all afternoon providing a steady flow of drinks and delicious homemade cakes.

The trophies were awarded as follows:

First in class 1	Chairman's Cup	Brenda Mansfield
First in class 2	Melliker Cup	Jayne Macknish
Best in Class 4-8	Hasler Vase	Jayne Macknish
Best in Class 44-45	Oldham Goblet	Elizabeth Thomas
Best Bloom in Show	Diploma	Barbara Macknish
Most points in Classes 9-38	Harvel Spring Challenge Cup	Tony Thomas

A huge thank you to *everybody* who helped with the show in any way. It's not possible to list everybody because there are so many contributors. Special thanks go to those people who gave up their entire Saturday to ensure the show went off without a hitch.....it was a good show!

The **Autumn Show** is on Saturday 18th September 2004 start thinking about your exhibits.

Forthcoming Events

14 th June	Garden Visit to Rock Farm, Nettlestead	
12 th July	A Naturalist in South East England	Mrs Caroline Alexander
13 th July	Visit to Pashley Manor Gardens The coach will pick up from the Village Hall at 9:15am. There are only a few places left. Cost £13. Contact Vera Bingham know if you'd like to go.	
9 th August	History and Uses of Culinary Herbs	Mrs Jean Bowles

Creating a Wildflower Meadow

Over the winter we cleared a patch of blackthorn and bramble that was encroaching onto the field, sometimes 20ft deep, back to the original fence. I decided to try creating a wildflower meadow on this patch of ground after seeing a recent Gardener's World programme. The site is at the top of a bank and on chalk which has had no fertiliser in recent times. I ordered catalogues from the recommended websites and decided to order from Landlife Ltd, a charitable organisation, where 100% of profits go to support creative



conservation work (www.wildflower.org.uk). Soon the stumps will be removed and the soil cultivated then I'll be able to sow the perennial wildflower flower and grass mix. It will be a little late to be sowing but most of the plants are not expected to flower in the first year so this should not be a problem in the long term; prolonged drought may be a different matter as the site is some distance from the nearest water source. Watch this space as I will keep you informed of the progress. (Jo Latimer)

Historical Snippet

Scarlet Sage

Common Names: Scarlet sage, salvia.
Botanical Name: Salvia. Family: Labiatae.

Scarlet sage is, like culinary sage, a member of the mint family. The name "sage" is the English corruption of salvia, derived from the Latin *salvus* (healed or saved). No garden of the past would have been complete without the medicinal or culinary sage, *Salvia officinalis*, but the scarlet sage is often rejected by gardeners nowadays as being too gaudy. Hummingbirds do not share this perception. When the scarlet sage was introduced into Britain in the 1820, it immediately became a popular bedding "annual", although it is actually perennial in its native Brazil and Mexico. Most garden salvias grown today descend from it. Along with lobelia and ageratum, it could be part of a patriotic carpet bed – the kind of thing the Victorians loved. It is often still used in this way, thereby enhancing its reputation for vulgarity. But amongst other flowers in an informal bed, with hummingbirds darting in and out, its real beauty can be appreciated.

Baron Alexander von Humboldt, the German aristocrat who sent back the *Salvia splendens* from South America, wanted to go with Napoleon to Egypt in 1798 (see "Montbretia") but grew impatient waiting. So he went to Spain to organise and pay for his own voyage to South America. Humboldt had a theory that the immense vegetable richness of South America was to be explained by an unusually high level of

magnetism in the area. "In the interior of this new continent", he said, "one almost grows accustomed to seeing man as not essential to the order of nature". This was a new concept and a new world that his writings opened up the contemporaries such as Charles Darwin. Plants, seeds, theories and accounts of hair-raising adventures came back home. He experimented with curare, almost killing himself when a jar of it leaked over his stockings and was only discovered just before he put them on over feet raw with chigger bites. Another time, seven horses in their team were killed by electric eels when they were crossing the Orinoco river.

Humboldt and his fellow naturalist Aime Bonpland returned in 1804 to a Paris where Napoleon Bonaparte had just become emperor and where the world's greatest scientists and philosophers were on hand to applaud their discoveries. Goethe said that "my natural history studies have been aroused from their winter sleep" by Humboldt. Thomas Jefferson wrote, "You have wisely located yourself in the focus of the science of Europe. I am held by the cords of love to my family and country or I should certainly join you."

The scarlet sage, as brilliant as the man who brought it back with him, may be gaudy and is too often used in a way that reflects the superficialities of our civilisation, but the little hummingbirds that dart to it, back and forth, come each summer from a faraway world that still, as Humboldt said, has much to teach us.

(Adapted from *100 Flowers and How They Got Their Names* by Diana Wells)