



Photo: Jo Latimer

Autumn 2018

AGM & Christmas Social

We will be holding our AGM on Monday 10th December. The business part of the evening includes the Chairman's report and nominations for new committee members, then we will have a chance to have a catch up over festive refreshments.

The committee meets at Meopham Village Hall on the first Monday of the month from February to December at 8pm, for about an hour.

There are a couple of resignations coming up this year, so if you would like to be more involved in the general running and also the future of the club then please do consider volunteering to be on the committee, we always welcome new ideas.

There is no meeting in January. We will be back with our Gardeners Forum & Seed Swap on February 11th.



Recent Events

Monday 13th August - talk by Nigel Gibson from Provender Nurseries

Plantsman Nigel Gibson's talk was beautifully illustrated and absolutely packed with information. Nigel started out in Faversham 42 years ago - along the way he picked up a gold medal at Chelsea and worked as a landscape gardener at Hampton Court. He counts himself as local, having lived in Cobham for 18 years. He is an expert on perennials and grasses and brought a good selection for us to choose from. It was interesting to learn that plant names are constantly changing as botanists split out different characteristics and reclassify (which he says is a nurseryman's nightmare!)

Nigel recommended plants popular with bees, like the fluffy red flower spikes of *Persicaria Amplexicaulis* Firetail, which is also good for forming dense ground cover, and *Silphium Perfoliatum*, known as the Cup Plant, a tall sunflower-like plant with cup forming leaves which hold rainwater. He advised us on plants that like damp conditions, such as Angels Fishing Rods (*Dierama Pulcherrimum*) and warned about plants to avoid because they run everywhere, such as the yellow-flowered *Phlomis Russeliana*. He also mentioned plants which are not hardy and will not survive a harsh winter, like the ornamental grass *Pennisetum Setaceum 'Rubrum'*, with its purple foliage and silvery flower spikes.

Friday 15th August – Coach Trip to Waterperry Gardens, Oxford

Huge thanks to Gail King for organising a splendid day out in Waterperry Gardens, Oxford – formerly Beatrix Havergal's pioneering 'School of Horticulture for Ladies', founded in 1932. We were lucky with the weather, we travelled through a monsoon on the M25 and expected the worst, but eventually we were rewarded with brilliant sunshine. We received a warm welcome at Waterperry and made straight for the tea room, then the church with ancient stained-glass windows, art gallery, museum and shop.

When the sun appeared, we found that the eight acres of gardens included a magnificent 200ft long colour border, a walled garden, extensive stock beds, a formal garden for silent contemplation, a waterlily canal and many other features - including an amphitheatre!





Saturday 8th September – Autumn Show and Photographic Exhibition

The Autumn Show on Saturday 8th September was our best show for some years. The standard of entries was high and one or two MGA members proved that it is possible to win first, second and third prize in a class!

The photographic exhibition was a great addition to the show, it created extra interest and added atmosphere to the small hall. There were around 14 entries from the U3A photography club and 20 from MGA members. The winner was Janet Oxford with her photo of a pheasant which had wandered into her garden – the brightly coloured plumage and the expression on the bird's face were captured perfectly! We are proud that it was subsequently featured on the front cover of the Meopham Review.

The tombola was a new feature and it went well. The tea room was as popular and as busy as ever! Our thanks to Jill, Lesley and all the team for their hard work in making the show a success.

The prizes were awarded as follows:

Townsend Vase	Most Firsts Domestic Both Shows	Enid Lander/Rosemary Divall
Championship Cup	Most Firsts Flower & Veg Both Shows	Barbara Macknish.
Goodwin Cup	Best Exhibit in Class 1-4	Barbara Macknish
Stevens Cup	Best Exhibit in Class 5-28	Barbara Macknish
Hill Cup	Best Exhibit in Section 4 (Floral)	Gill Carpenter
Coronation Cup	Most Points in Section 5 (Domestic)	Ann Nicholson
Harvel Floral Bowl	Best in Rose Classes	Gill Carpenter
Garden News Shield	Most points in Class 29-45	Lorraine Halls
National Vegetable Society Medal	Most Meritorious Exhibit in Class 29-45	Barbara Macknish
Top Tray Award	Best in Class 50	No entries
The Everard Bowl	New Exhibitor Most Points in Both Shows	Richard Whiffin
The Douglas Nicholson Award	Most Points Veg in Both Shows	Lorraine Halls
Bill Roberts Bowl	Most points in Class 51-57 (Fruit)	Richard Whiffin
	Best Exhibit in Class 13 (Begonia grown from Plug)	Barbara Macknish



Monday 10th September – talk by Christine Bartlett on Successful Orchid Growing for Beginners and Intermediates

Christine Bartlett, enthralled us with her combination of enthusiasm and extensive knowledge of Orchids. She told us that in the early 1800s naturalists risked tropical fever, sabotage, capsized canoes, even cannibalism, to bring the first flowers to the UK, sparking Orchidmania at dockside auctions in London and Liverpool. However, cloning from buds was discovered in the 1960s and by 1973 collecting Orchids from the wild was banned.

Good nurseries sell named hybrids such as Bee Sting and Mini Mark. Universally available in shops and garden centres is Phalaenopsis, in a wide range of colours and patterns, which tolerates home temperatures, prefers bright, filtered sunlight and no drafts, is reasonably priced and flowers all year.

Orchids need no soil - Christine recommends coconut husk as a growing medium and rainwater, as in their natural habitat they grow horizontally from tree bark and the aerial roots take in moisture and nutrients from the air. Soak the roots when silver, until they turn green, then drain off any excess, then do not water again until the roots turn back to silver. Christine presented a colourful slide show and brought an interesting selection of the different types of orchids, using one to demonstrate the care of an orchid. We were also able to buy different potting mediums etc – all in all, it was a very interesting evening.

Monday 8th October – Harvest Supper, ‘Just Desserts’

This cost £5 per person, unless accompanied by a pudding. It went well, with tasty cheese and French bread followed by a wide choice of delicious puddings. We were able to meet in the small hall due to many people being on holiday and this, together with the colourful Autumn leaves, berries, pinecones etc collected locally to decorate the hall, created a cosy atmosphere. We also had a garden and plant themed quiz. Many thanks to the organisers, Gill and Marion, and all the folk who helped set up and brought puddings!

Thursday October 18th - Inter-Society Quiz hosted by Istead Rise Gardeners

The MGA team did their utmost but sadly were unplaced. Hartley won and will be hosting the quiz evening next year.

Meopham Parish Council

Earlier in the year the group was invited by Meopham Parish Council to attend to the garden area by the public toilets, near the Cricketers Pub, which has become overgrown with nettles and brambles. Work on reclaiming the flower beds is due to start this Autumn and once the roses are cleared from all weeds they will be inter-planted with spring bulbs. If you are interested in taking part in this, please let Brian Carpenter know.

A Few Reminders

MGA Membership cards – we had a card again this year but we are bringing back the book by popular demand! All information is also on the website: www.meophamgardeners.co.uk

Millbrook Garden Centre – we have been offered 10% discount on all plants so long as your membership card is produced at the till to prove that you are a fully paid up member of Meopham Gardeners. Please note that the discount only applies to plant sales.

We now also have a 10% discount from **Fairseat Garden Centre** as well as **Walnut Hill Nursery**.

Provender Trade Cards – these are held by Hazel, Barbara, Gail, Roy and Claire. Provender Nurseries is in Leydenhatch Lane, Swanley, BR8 7PS.

Monthly Raffle – if you have any gardening-related articles suitable for the raffle, please bring them to any meeting. We will happily accept wine and chocolates too!

Items for Sale – if you have any tools or pots in good condition but have no further use for them why not try selling them? Larger items can be advertised on the notice board. If items are sold, all the club asks is for 10% of the sale price.

For information relating to the Meopham Garden Association go to our website at

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Summary of Members' Comments on Possible Effects of the Weather in 2018

Gill Carpenter said, "What a crazy year in the garden!" Roses being particularly beautiful and still going.

- Few bees both honey and bumble. Bumble bee population seemed to recover later in the summer
- Hellebore blooming in August. Azalea blooming now.
- Butterflies down in number (did the B&Q sponsored Butterfly Count). Lots of whites. No Admirals, Peacocks or Hummingbird Hawk Moths (normal visitors). Brimstones, Holly Blues, two Commas.
- Birds seem to be doing well: Greenfinch, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Sparrows, Starlings, Dunnocks, Robins, Sparrow Hawk, Blackbirds, Blackcap, Wood Pigeons, Ring Necked Doves.
- Lots of ladybirds. Hover flies on fennel seemed normal volume.
- Lots of wasps, particularly on the ivy flowers and a couple of hedgehogs visit.

Ann Nicholson planted some cherry tomato plants in the open garden. In spite of regular watering, they failed to get going and fruited very late providing a small harvest. Many now lie green on the earth. Three lots of spinach sown at different times and one lot of lettuce failed to germinate.

Roy Lingham noticed that 'their' blackbirds were not as evident this year. They have appeared, but not as frequently as normal, and were hardly seen at all for a fair spell in the summer. Perhaps this was weather related, although there have been a couple of new cats around. The squirrels which used to be resident in the adjacent roof have not been around much for the last couple of years, so they may have lost the battle for residence with the starlings which contested the space with them (although neither have really been evident); we do though still see an occasional squirrel in the large tree, so they are still around somewhere.

There were a few more signs of hedgehogs having been around this year, although I don't think they have taken up residence in the splendid accommodation provided for them. This situation seems to counteract the possibility that cats have limited blackbird activity, as cats would also be likely to mitigate against hedgehogs.

Marion Johnson reported more goldfinches on the feeders. Over recent years there has been a lack of earwigs. Fruit trees have not produced as much fruit. Flowers came into their own later, to be expected really after the hot weather. Cosmos grew really tall with the thickest stems she has seen. This year primroses have been blooming in August. Some of my strawberries have flowers on now with small fruits forming.

Elizabeth Thomas reported that runner beans grown from seed, potted on in May grew quickly and we had plenty of flower but not many beans. Only when it cooled and rained was a decent crop produced in September. Roses flowered but repeat flowering started later after rain and extra rose feed. Especially a bush rose, probably Rosa Chinensis, also known as Bengal Rose which is looking its best in mid October (see below).



Photos: Elizabeth Thomas

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In the News

Iceland and Palm Oil. Malcolm Walker, CEO of Iceland Frozen Food stores, was recently interviewed on the BBC Today programme concerning the decision of the company to phase out the use of palm oil in its own products. He explained the serious damage that monoculture plantations of palm trees have to the natural forests of Indonesia. Many of us will remember pictures on the BBC news of the Orangutan clinging to the last standing tree in a vast area of forest that had been subjected to slash and burn. (These fires also contributed to a long period of severe smog in Singapore.)

The Decline in the Numbers of Insects. Ben Guarino, writing in the Independent 16 October 2018 reported a 'Hyper-alarming' study that reveals dramatic decline of insect population in Puerto Rican Rain Forest. Researchers warn decrease could put food supply in jeopardy from loss of pollinating insects. Huge numbers of bugs have been lost in a pristine national forest in Puerto Rico, the study found, and the forest's insect-eating animals have gone missing, too. In 2014, an international team of biologists estimated that, in the past 35 years, the abundance of invertebrates such as beetles and bees had decreased by 45 per cent. In places where long-term insect data is available, mainly in Europe, insect numbers are plummeting. A study last year showed a 76 per cent decrease in flying insects in the past few decades in German nature preserves. The biomass (the dry weight of all the captured invertebrates) had significantly decreased from 1976 to the present day. The sweep sample biomass decreased to a fourth or an eighth of what it had been. Between January 1977 and January 2013, the catch rate in the sticky ground traps fell 60-fold.

When Susan Weller, quoted in Scientific American, travelled to Ecuador to study tiger moths in the 1980s, she found plenty of insects. A decade later, Weller, now director of the University of Nebraska State Museum, returned to conduct follow-up research. But the moths she was looking for were gone.

"Just in that time frame, areas I had collected had been transformed. Forests had been taken out. ... brand new cities had sprung up. I tried to go back and collect from other historic collecting sites, and those sites no longer existed. They were parking lots," she says.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/insect-population-decrease-hyper-alarming-puerto-rico-rainforest-invertebrate-bugs-america-a8586126.html>

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/as-insect-populations-decline-scientists-are-trying-to-understand-why/>

Glyphosate in Cereals. Colin Todhunter has written several articles highlighting areas of concern to horticulturists that have been published on the *Counterpunch* web site. One deals with the health effects of Glyphosate residues found in common breakfast cereals as reported by environmentalist Dr Rosemary Mason. Significant levels of weed killer were found in 43 out of 45 popular breakfast cereals marketed to US children. Products with some of the highest levels of glyphosate include granola, oats and snack bars made by leading industry names Quaker, Kellogg's and General Mills, which makes Cheerios.

In April, internal emails obtained from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) showed that scientists had found glyphosate on a wide range of commonly consumed food, **to the point that they were finding it difficult to identify a food without the chemical on it.** Mason was involved in sending samples of four oat-based breakfast cereals marketed for children in the UK to the Health Research Institute, Fairfield, Iowa, an accredited laboratory for glyphosate testing.

Dr Fagan, the institute's director, reported that "The levels consumed in a single daily helping of any one of these cereals, even the one with the lowest level of contamination, is sufficient to put the person's glyphosate levels above the levels that cause fatty liver disease in rats (and likely in people)." Two 'organic' products from the US that were also tested: granola had some glyphosate in and 'organic' rolled oats had even higher levels of the chemical. Dr Mason argues that these results should ring alarm bells across Europe, especially the widespread distribution of glyphosate and breakdown product aminomethylphosphonic acid in soils of the EU.

Dr Mason describes how regulators in the EU and the UK relicensed Roundup for the benefit of the industry-backed Glyphosate Task Force. Even more alarming is that, on the back of Brexit, she notes that a US-UK trade deal could result in the introduction of Roundup ready GM crops in the UK. Indeed, high-level plans for cementing this deal are afoot.

<https://www.counterpunch.org/2018/10/15/from-gm-potatoes-to-glyphosate-regulatory-delinquency-and-toxic-agriculture/>
<http://rinf.com/alt-news/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/The-British-Government-stands-accused-of-crimes-against-humanity-ecocide.pdf>

The Web links can be activated by going to www.meophamgardeners.co.uk and viewing the newsletters.

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