



View towards Court Farm, Luddesdown

Photo: Mike Hughes

Winter 2019

Spring Show

The Spring Show on Saturday 16th March is our biggest event featuring Spring flowers, floral arrangements, fruit and vegetables, crafts, a junior section and a cookery corner. If you haven't entered before, give it go, there will always be something in the garden that you can enter – that pot of primroses and grape hyacinths on the patio might just catch the judge's eye! You have until the Thursday before the show to look around the garden at the new season's blooms and foliage and decide on your winning exhibits! If you are a flower arranger, check the website for more information - not all the flowers need to be home-grown. If you love to cook, try the domestic classes! There will be advice about how and when to register your entries and on presentation of exhibits at the February meeting - if you need to know anything else, just ask!

Exhibitors in the main classes must already be fully signed up MGA members to enter, however, the domestic and junior sections, crafts and floral arrangements are open to all, so there is something for everyone. If you would like to be involved, but do not wish to exhibit, contributions of home-made cakes for the tearoom and all offers of help setting up on Friday night and helping on the day will be gratefully received. We also need to clear up afterwards, dismantle the tables and store away cloths, society vases etc. so it is a busy day – the more helpers the better!

There will be a plant stall and raffle, so contributions of plants and raffle prizes will also be welcomed.

Doors open at 3pm so come along and enjoy a cup of tea and slice of home-made cake - bring your friends, bring your Mum! Please also pop some 'invitations' (to be provided) through neighbours' letter boxes before the day.



Forthcoming Events

Monday 11th March – Arts and Crafts Movement and Its Gardens – Stephen Harmer

Stephen is passionate about garden history and his illustrated talk on the 'Arts and Crafts Movement and its Gardens', promises to be insightful and entertaining.

Members' Show: a) Pot of 3 Hyacinths b) Members' choice
(See more info below on entering the Members' Show – this is also on our website)

Saturday 16th March – Spring Show (see above)

Monday 8th April – Modern Medicines and Their Plant Origins – Min Keating

Following a long, distinguished career as a Pharmacist, Min teaches at Medway School of Pharmacy and, with years of horticultural studies under her belt, also works as a Garden Guide for the National Trust.

Members' Show: a) 3 stems Polyanthus b) Members' choice

Friday 10th May – Coach trip to Leonardslee Gardens – details available at club meetings

Monday 13th May – Primula Auriculas – Their History, Cultivation and Categories – Rachel Castle

Members' Show: a) 3 stems Rhubarb b) Members' choice

Recent Events

Monday 12th November - Peter Golding from Kent Wildlife Trust: 'The Geology of Kent'

We were fascinated to learn that during the Pleistocene (Ice) age Kent was not actually covered in ice and that the River Thames flowed through Norfolk! We were also amazed to hear that there was also a time when it was warm enough for elephants, with hippos in the Thames!

Monday 10th December - 2018 AGM

During our AGM our Chairman, Barbara Macknish, looked back over the year, reminding us of Caroline Halfpenny's illustrated talk on working behind the scenes at Monet's Garden in Giverny, Christine Bartlett's fascinating talk and demonstration with her beautiful Orchids, our summer outing to Waterperry Gardens in Oxford, and our best Autumn Show for years.

Barbara is standing down this year to have a well-earned rest! We thank Barbara for her huge contribution as Chairman, with her extensive gardening skills and fantastic knowledge of plants. We are pleased to announce that Richard Whiffin is taking over the role of Chairman.

Members' Show, February to November 2019

One class is the 'Selected Item' and is specified with a different seasonal item every month.

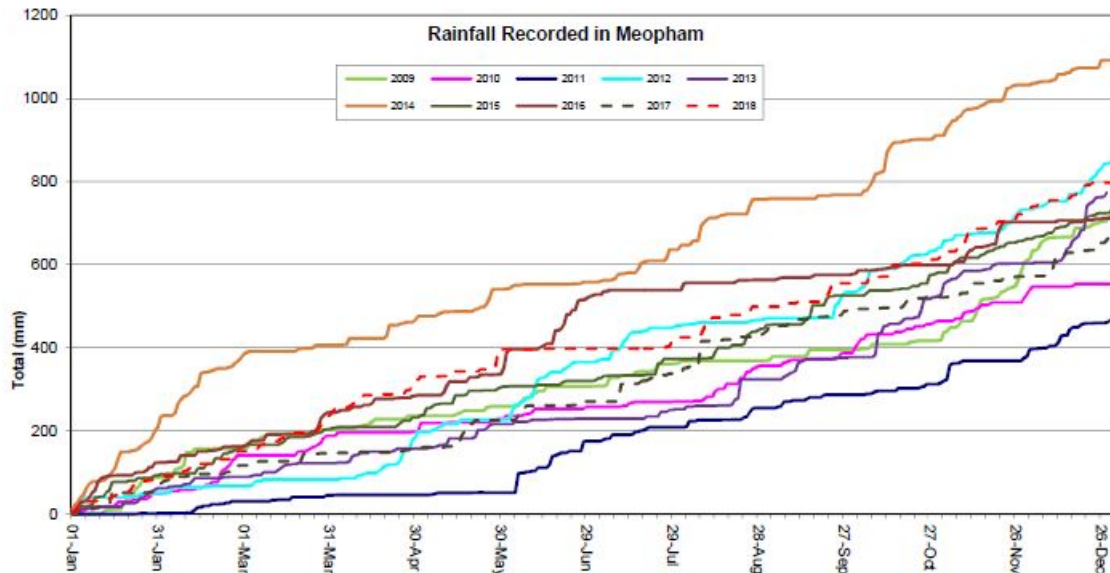
The other class, Member's Choice, can be anything from the garden which is perhaps looking spectacular on the evening, or is of special interest.

The entries are judged by a club member during the tea interval and points out of 10 are awarded for each exhibit. These points are totalled at the end of the year and the entrants with the most points from each class receive a cup and prize money of £2.50 at the AGM.

Climate Summary for 2018

The total rainfall recorded for 2018 was 797mm or 31.4". During the meteorological seasons the rainfall was as follows: Winter (Dec - Feb) 257mm, Spring (Mar-May) 244mm, Summer (June-Aug) 102.5mm and Autumn (Sept-Nov) 236mm.

The graph shows the cumulative rainfall recorded during the year along with the same data for the previous 9 years. 2018 was warmer than average for the UK, but not as warm as 2017. May, June, July and December were all much warmer than the average taken from 1981-2010. This is the averaging period referred to below.



January was generally mild and changeable. The end of February saw the arrival of 'The Beast from the East' with significant snowfall. The exceptionally cold wintery weather continued into March and April. A brief hot spell (18th - 21st) gave the highest April temperatures since 1949 with St James's Park recording 29.1°C on the 19th. May was warm and the early May Bank Holiday was the warmest recorded. Thunderstorms on the 29th dumped 44mm of rain in a few hours on Meopham. June was warmer than average and exceptionally dry with the only rain recorded locally on the 13th.

July was often very warm, dry and sunny. Thunderstorms ended the hottest spell (23rd - 26th). Faversham recorded a maximum temperature of 35.3°C on the 26th. Ozone levels were high at times for the south-east. The weather cooled during August and with above average rainfall in the south-east. A maximum temperature of 33.2°C was recorded at Kew Gardens on the 3rd. Thunderstorms on the 9th caused flight delays at Gatwick and Stansted and some flooding on the 10th.

The start of September was fine and warm over southern areas, but it became windy with the arrival of Storms Ali (19th) and Bronagh (20th - 21st). Cambridge Botanic Gardens recorded 26.5°C on the 17th. Mid-October was unseasonably warm due to southerly winds, but Storm Callum brought wet and windy weather to most parts on the 12th. After a relatively settled spell the end of the month was very cold.

November was mild, dry and fine in the south-east but it ended very mild, wet and windy. December started mild and changeable. Kew Gardens recorded 15.9°C was on the 2nd. Storm Deirdre on the 15th brought widespread freezing rain and considerable travel disruption to the north. The milder changeable weather then returned from the 16th - 23rd but it was dry from the 24th onwards.

(Source: Met Office Website and locally recorded rainfall)



Freezing and Boiling, 2018

Wind from the East has an easy journey to our house and it damaged several plants in the garden. The *tracelospermum* still carries damaged leaves and a young yew in the lane, where the wind was probably funnelled along, has died. During February the birds, including a family of a dozen long-tailed tits were very active on the bird feeders. After the cold spell we saw only two or three very ragged long tailed and other tits. There were many fewer other small birds – dunnocks, wrens, robins. Spider webs that would normally been filling every corner of the garden and field in the spring were hard to find.

Six weeks later there were very few aphids to squash so I left what there were for the birds. There was little sign of a recovery in bird numbers until late summer when it was a great pleasure to see a large family of long-tailed tit fledgelings braving the birdbath. They also took an interest in the feeders. However, few of the other common summer residents and migrants graced our garden. The double whammy of severe cold followed by extreme summer temperatures must have been a factor in the reduced numbers of birds and invertebrates. Only when the late autumn migrants such as blackbirds and robins returned did the wildlife activity return to a level that has, over the past two or three decades, become 'normal'.

Following on from these observations, I was interested to see the plover featured on the BBC Countryfile programme from the Isle of Sheppey on 9th September. The plover - just one plover, how sad. In my early teens there were large flocks of these lovely birds and I remember a hundred or more would spend several days in the open fields near my home. We knew them as "peewits" from their calls, but they no longer appear. And again, this recollection led to the memory of night jars purring from fence posts as dusk dissolved into night. Of snipe and woodcock flitting away during a walk through the woods. Of coveys of partridges gliding quickly to the far side of the field as we made our way home. Of chaffinches and yellow hammers singing their hearts out from every hawthorn tree, rowan and maple in early summer. Of swallows and martins building their nests on the northern wall of the house. Of a family of wrens chastising me for disturbing them. The murmurations of starlings weaving wonderful patterns just before they roosted at dusk. Of the dozens of blackbirds dodging in and out of the scrub as they got their fill of cornus berries. Most of these birds have gone now.

On a positive note, the number of butterflies on the field was still quite high this past summer, but perhaps the variety had declined somewhat. They had probably pupated beneath the ground and were insulated from the severe winter weather. Common blue were to be seen most days in the summer and autumn but there were few sightings of peacocks or red admirals.

We still have the jays, crows and magpies, but they are smart and take advantage of every opportunity to snatch a snack or steal a meal. The spotted woodpecker still occasionally visits the feeders and, infrequently, a green woodpecker flies noisily by. Greens used often to be seen working the ants nests on the field. On one occasion, perhaps a little less than 20 years ago, at least a dozen were seen sitting on our fenceposts and obviously in conference, discussing some important matter.

The decline in wildlife is noticeable in both large and small mammals. We found the remains of two baby badgers in the field this spring and a few weeks later 'our' badger was found dead by the side of the lane, but we don't know the reasons. Perhaps the summer drought made it too difficult to find enough worms. Rabbits (and hares – absent from our field for at least 60 years) are now being killed off by new diseases, probably brought in with imported animals. Smaller creatures, stoats, weasels, rats have not been seen for at least 20 years and even the number of mice has dwindled. A walk in the snow in the past would reveal many tracks of all these animals, but apart from a few fox, badger and rabbit tracks I found only two mouse tracks after the fall of snow last week.

The dawn chorus from the wood beside our house is no longer as loud as it was when I made recordings 30 years ago and the choir does not enjoy the same variety it once had.

With regard to the ecological dangers of the rapid decline in the number of insects, it would seem that there should be far greater urgency with campaigns to do something to help reverse the decline in the media, particularly the BBC, and by the government.

In late summer we suddenly found ourselves being bombarded by clouds of insects – in our hair, on our faces, on our clothes. They turned out to be ladybirds and were probably blown here on a warm breeze from the continent. There were thousands of them.

Mike Hughes

In the News

Glyphosate is Carcinogenic: EU Regulatory Authorities Colluding with Agrochemicals Industry, Complaint Lodged with European Ombudsman

In 2016, Colin Todhunter posed the question in [The Ecologist](#) whether regulators in the EU were acting as product promoters when it came to the relicensing of glyphosate, the active ingredient in Monsanto's herbicide Roundup. The renewal of the license for glyphosate in the EU was being debated at the time and much evidence pointed to collusion between regulators and corporate interests whose sales of the herbicide add up to many billions of dollars a year.

In that article, he referred to evidence presented in various documents written by environmentalist and campaigner **Dr Rosemary Mason**. Now, in the wake of a new, important [paper by Charles Benbrook](#) (14 January) in the journal 'Environmental Sciences Europe', Dr Mason has lodged a complaint with the European Ombudsman accusing European regulatory agencies of collusion with the agrochemicals industry.

<https://www.globalresearch.ca/author/colin-todhunter>

The GMO Issue Reaches Boiling Point in India: Interview with Aruna Rodrigues

[Colin Todhunter](#) – December 23, 2018

Aruna Rodrigues explains that most GMOs on the market now provide technological fixes to kill weeds or pests. They have no trait for yield. Together, they account for nearly 98% of all GMOs planted worldwide. 25 years of official US data on HT crops (e.g. GM mustard) show they have led to intractable problems of super weeds, significant increases in herbicide use because of resistant weeds, higher farmer costs and no yield advantage. Claims made for GMOs with various traits, for example, drought or saline resistant or providing yield or nutritional enhancement, are futuristic. The few that have been tested for drought resistance and some other traits are, according to prominent scientist Doug Gurian-Sherman, were **out-performed by traditional breeding techniques hands-down**.

<https://countercurrents.org/2018/12/23/the-gmo-issue-reaches-boiling-point-in-india-interview-with-aruna-rodrigues/>

Colin Todhunter writes that the mainstream British media have long acted as cheerleaders for GMOs, especially The Times and its disgraced correspondent Matt Ridley. His most recent article is a strange concoction of misrepresentations, falsehoods and blunders dressed up as science, and reflects both his ignorance of the real facts and his deep ideological commitment to corporate profit and power.

<https://theecologist.org/2016/jun/03/matt-ridleys-pro-gmo-blunders-and-ignorance>

Living with GMOs: A Letter from America

An open letter to the citizens, politicians, and regulators of the UK and the rest of the EU about the hazards of genetically modified crops

We are writing as concerned American citizens to share with you our experience of genetically modified (GM) crops and the resulting damage to our agricultural system and adulteration of our food supply. In our country, GM crops account for about half of harvested cropland. Around 94% of the soy, 93% of corn (maize) and 96% of cotton grown is GM.

The UK and the rest of the EU have yet to adopt GM crops in the way that we have, but you are currently under tremendous pressure from governments, biotech lobbyists, and large corporations to adopt what we now regard as a failing agricultural technology.

Polls consistently show that 72% of Americans do not want to eat GM foods and over 90% of Americans believe GM foods should be labeled. In spite of this massive public mandate, efforts to get our federal and state governments to better regulate, or simply label, GMOs are being undermined by large biotech and food corporations with unlimited budgets and undue influence.

As you consider your options, we'd like to share with you what two decades of GM crops has brought us. We believe our experience serves as a warning for what will happen in your countries.

<https://www.theletterfromamerica.org/>

<http://t.co/n00QiBdUqs>

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

www.meophamgardeners.co.uk