



Somerset

Federation of Gardening Clubs

Issue XLVIII

Spring 2015

Points of Interest

AGM 2015

**News from The
Bishops Palace**

S.F. Website

**Desert Island
Plants**

Chairman's Corner

Small Talk

*I come to pluck you berries
harsh and crude
And with forc'd fingers rude,
Shatter your leaves before the
Mellowing year.*

Milton. Lycidas

INTRODUCTION

*In March we long for April;
In May we long for June:
Don't be in such a hurry,
It will all be gone too soon.*

R. Arkell.

Signs of Spring

When does Spring start? Officially there is a bureaucratic date, a formal static mark on the calendar for the purposes of the meteorological folk and others. For the rest of us however, it's a movable feast like Easter, but a more individual matter. For some it's the emergence of a snowdrop or daffodil though both of these entered the stage before Christmas. Perhaps the season is marked by your Club's Spring Fair – that grand but intimate array in the village hall of scillas, snowdrops, daffs and hyacinths which so lift the spirit at this time of the year. Or is it the Spring newsletter?

For me it's a variable mixture of the above. The ingredients change each spring. For instance, this year I've watched the transition from winter to spring in the changing form of the umbrella tree, our large *Cotoneaster waterii* bearing a huge red mantle of berries, a Christmas decoration in itself. The birds love it. The blackbirds kick off the predation in midwinter. Then the foreigners arrive, an invasion from Scandinavia and Russia – the cross-faced redwings. They start at the top on the sunny side and drop as many as they swallow. Gradually as the weeks pass the red disappears and the green leaves reappear. When the redwings depart – it's Spring!

And time for another newsletter, hot-foot upon the last one, it seems with an update of the Federations' developments and a bit of information to pass on, where appropriate. In particular please note the date and venue of the AGM – always a fun event.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2015

14TH MAY 2015

Conygre Hall, Timsbury. BA2 0JQ

Open from 6pm. AGM 7pm

Illustrated Talk 7.30pm

**GOLD MEDAL, SUPERB PLANTS & RUNNING AN ALPINE NURSERY IN
TIMSBURY**

by **GRAHAM NICHOLLS** A.G.S. lecturer and author

Refreshments

Raffle

Plant Sale

Calendar of Events

You will all be in receipt of the 2015 Calendar of Events. These of course are your events and thanks to the 75 who responded. Lyn has taken much trouble in compiling the list for your use so please use it and bring it to the attention of all your members. It contains much information not on the website.

Speakers and Judges Register

Another small list of additions and changes has been produced, so please pass this on, if appropriate, to your programme organiser.

If you do come across a new speaker or a judge whom you could recommend to another club, please let us know. Just send in a name and address to Hon. Sec. SFGG and an invitation to join will be sent.

The Federation Website

www.somersetfederationofgardeningclubs.org.uk

As you will all know by now – at least those of you who have access to a computer – the Federations' website is starting to flourish and fulfil its intended role. Please remember this is your site and it should contain what you want it to contain. However, with 240 clubs, the amount of information it is able to display, for example on its notice-board, has to be somewhat restricted. In other words, not all the details of every programme can be displayed.

On the other hand, it is now possible to provide a link from the main site to individual club websites where such information would be available to members and visitors.

Would Hon. Secs. please check the current details on the Federation Website and if these are incorrect or need to be expanded, please contact the Federation or Tina who battles splendidly with all your data. If we have got things wrong then please let us know.

Every club which showed no contact details on the site should now be in receipt of a simple form to return in the SAE. Thank you to all those who replied so promptly. To the others who have yet to reply, please may I have my stamp back!! It's worth ten and six !!

Tina's email for amendments, information, or events overlooked in the events calendar is:

franklyn294@gmail.com

Tell all your members who have internet access to look up:

Somersetfederationofgardeningclubs.org.uk

And find more events on the NOTICEBOARD

We have all visited those great libraries of leather bound books, row upon row from floor to ceiling, which are a feature of a many great houses, and we have all wondered when they were last read or even removed from the shelf out of interest rather than spring cleaning.

In Cecil Torr's Small Talk, I came across Parson Davy of the Dartmoor parishes around Drewsteignton from 1745 to 1826. Parson Davy was a great sermoniser, publishing 6 volumes of his sermons by subscription. Spurred on by this he produced another 500 sermons which he called '*A System of Divinity*'. But, no-one would publish them. So, he set about doing it himself helped by a servant (who did most of the printing and binding etc.). There were 26 volumes altogether and it may seem a touch churlish to suggest they were pretty well unreadable. Even at 80 he was still producing another three volumes.

When he was 75, Parson Davy moved to a new house and garden on the Dartmoor hillside, blasting away the granite to make five terraces. But ever the divine, he planted texts of scripture in box, the individual letters 6 inches high, regularly trimmed: 'know thyself', 'act wisely'; "deal fairly"; 'live peaceably'; 'love one another'; 'W. Davy 1818'. He called it his 'Living Body of Divinity'.

Completely out of fashion now, but one wonders what the RHS Chelsea Vetting Committee would make of it in a planned show garden. A lot of spluttering and shaking of heads, I suspect. But you can't help admiring the driving force behind it.

Another snippet from my favourite book. Speaking from his Dartmoor village, the author writes:

A quantity of plants arrived here while I was away, and among them were some Kalmias and Andromedas. On my return, I asked where they all had been put; and I was told that some are in the greenhouse, others in various parts of the garden, and the Camels and Dromedaries were out in the orchards.

Besides their botanical names, many things have trade names now. There is a plant here of the sort that is described at Kew as *Rhododendrum ponticum cheiranthifolium*. But when I wanted to get another like it, I found the nurserymen did not know it by that name. He called it Jeremiah J. Colman.

An old gardener once gave me his opinion that a laundry was better than a garden, "as garments had not got such mazin' names as plants." And the maze grows more intricate, when *Berberis Darwinii* is Barbarous Darwin and *Nicotiana* is Nicodemus and Irises are Irish, and they English Irish be braver than they Spanish Irish.

FEDERATION PROVISIONS

The Federation has a number of booklets for sale to members:

A YEAR ON THE ALLOTMENT by Ted Gill	£1.50 per copy
GUIDELINES FOR EXHIBITORS	£3 PER 10
GUIDELINES FOR SHOW ORGANISERS	£1

Prices include postage. Available from Hon. Sec.

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Final Cuttings

Although the present total membership stands at 239, a handful of clubs will be leaving us shortly. Burrowbridge down on the Levels has struggled with maintaining its membership, but the repeated flooding has finally put paid to their hopes of continuing and one sympathises with their situation.

On a more optimistic note, the Moor Garden Club covers the Moorland, Fordgate, Huntsworth and West Yeo areas, which means that these communities are not deprived of horticultural stimulus.

Struggling numbers is one thing, apathy among people in general is a recurring theme to those hard-working officers and committee members who wish to ensure their own succession. Where are the volunteers? Is it a generation thing? Why don't people come forward in the way they used to? or is that a delusion? Are members of any community becoming increasingly isolated, encased in their own digital world? Have people forgotten how much pleasure is to be gained by being an active part of a society?

I had better not bang on any further, but I shall leave you to ponder the answers! All is not lost in despair.... on a positive note, we warmly welcome the Averham, Kelham and Staythorpe Gardening Club to our membership; one of our further flung member clubs being situated in Nottinghamshire.

Details of our Annual General Meeting are in the newsletter. So I hope to see as many as possible of you in Timsbury near Radstock. This is a chance for those of you who live on or around our eastern and north-eastern borders to come along to what is always an informal and enjoyable occasion. Our thanks go to Timsbury Gardening Club who are hosting the event. And next year? At present the Federation has no venue for 2016 but I am sure someone will offer hospitality after my previous grumblings, I had better be positive.

Please send in any returns as and when you can, keeping us and our records up to date with changes of e-mail addresses, officers etc. My thanks to Mo Plomgren and to Tina Franklyn who beaver away making sense of it all.

Your Committee wish you a happy Easter and fruitful springtime gardening.

Pip Harwood 01749 679182

NEWS FROM THE BISHOP'S PALACE

The winter was another mild one but not wet, so we gardened outside almost every day. Winter and spring are our busiest times in the garden and the first job is to clear all the borders of leaves and herbaceous material, prune the roses and any shrubs that need it. It takes about two months to go through every border and then it is back to the start in early March to fork over and apply fertilisers (growmore and blood, fish and bone), some borders will also be mulched at this time. Ideally we mulch each border every other year. The soil is fairly poor and mostly a brown earth soil that was imported in the 1820's during the landscaping. The soil is still hungry for compost even where we have been applying it for ten years. The difference it makes in dry summer weather is very noticeable and has given us several weeks longer before we have had to water. During March we also edge the lawns, rake all the paths, clear the walls of weeds and spend more time preparing in the greenhouse. The second round is considerably quicker and I always like to have been through the whole garden by Easter or April 1st whichever is first. By doing that, it is easier to keep on top of the garden for the rest of the season. Whilst Jane, Rob, Colin and our dedicated volunteers do that, I like to do the hard job of choosing new plants for the coming season and making new plans from the comfort of a warm office. Sometimes as the wind and rain beats against the window I will put my waterproofs on and check that they are still gardening! Amanda and her volunteers are also very busy in the Community garden which is now looking very neat and well prepared and awaiting lots of exciting and varied new crops and flowers.

The most exciting thing about this year will be our garden festival in June (20th – 24th). We have organised many exciting speakers. Alan Titchmarsh will open it on the Saturday, followed by questions and answers with him. Troy Scott Smith (Head Gardener) from Sissinghurst Gardens will talk in the afternoon. On Sunday we have Christine Walkden (of One Show fame) and Charles Dowding (no dig pioneer). On Monday Alan Power (Head Gardener) from Stourhead and myself will give talks. On Tuesday local artist Edgar Phillips (Winged Wonders) and Stephen Lacey (well known and respected garden writer and designer). Wednesday we have Bob Flowerdew (organic supremo). If you would like to book tickets for any of these and for the event itself please do so via our website www.bishopspalace.org.uk or by telephoning 01749 988111. There will be lots of plant stalls, good food and drink, gardening advice, garden tours and much more. The garden should be at its very best! We look forward to welcoming you during the year and we are always happy to answer any horticultural queries that you may have.

James Cross (Head Gardener) Bishops Palace. Wells.

FLEECE REPORT

The sheep fleece seems to have done its work over winter. The tree ferns are still showing last year's green fronds sticking out of their woolly jackets and a careful finger placed into the crown indicates the satisfactory bulge of new crosiers getting ready for spring. We have had several frosts of -4 degrees C to test the insulating properties of fleece.

There are however, a few down points to the fleece scheme. Firstly, the heavy rains have washed out a lot of mutton flavoured lanolin which is now lying in a greasy ring round each of the protected plants and this will need to be scraped away. Secondly, and I am not sure whether this is an advantage or otherwise, at least two solitary bees have made nests in it and the young have just started to emerge on a sunny afternoon this week. Whilst delighted to have provided winter accommodation for them, it may prove problematic when attempting to remove the protective coats.

For anyone wishing to try this winter protection, you will need whole fleeces, straight off the sheep. These can be wrapped around and tied in with binder twine. Brown fleece is obviously more pleasing on the eye than white. They look neater than any other method I have seen and hopefully can be carefully unwrapped, dried out and stored for future use (bees permitting).

Lyn Spencer-Mills.

Chairman's Corner Spring 2015

In July 2000, we moved into our new house in Holford. The Garden is .26 of an acre ("rather precise" I hear you say!) We had the garden surveyed that year, which gave us detailed plans of the garden showing levels, boundaries, trees and foot print of the buildings. Very useful when planning garden layouts!

Right from the start, we decided the garden would be wild life friendly with no toxic chemicals used, no spray and definitely no slug pellets. Some of you may remember my describing our garden before, with sloping lawns descending from the rear of the house to flower beds bordering the stream. On the far side are rhododendrons and azaleas and a few huge hostas, which thrive in the damp conditions alongside the stream, so large are these plants I have given up trying to dig them up and divide them. The garden then rises in stages, with terraced paths to the top where a gate leads out onto the Quantock Hills.

The garden is surrounded by hedges about seven feet tall, consisting of holly, blackthorn and several other species which make excellent cover for wildlife and a good barrier to keep out the local population of deer...or so I thought! One particular early morning our dog Toby was furiously barking more so than usual and on looking out of the bedroom window, I saw three large red deer merrily munching away in the flower beds. Rushing to get dressed to get down into the garden, I'm thinking to myself 'how on earth did they get in?'...on reaching the other side, I watched them paddling back up the stream. Needless to say, means of entry were soon blocked! Yes - we wanted to encourage wildlife, but not that kind.....!

Over the next seven years, I built dry stone walls, pathways and many steps enabling better access to all the areas, an irrigation system was installed and since then, as written previously we now have new ponds, which we hope will be home to frogs, toads, dragonflies etc., but we have decided against fish.

At the top of the garden on the boundary are banks of shrubs, and some large holly trees, this seemed a good spot for the planting of crocus, which would drift down and give a good display in the early spring. One year, I ordered seven hundred bulbs from a wholesaler and spent many back aching hours during one day, planting all the bulbs with a dibber; I'm sure you will appreciate that this was quite a monotonous task!

In those days when our little cocker spaniels were much younger, a walk up onto the hills each morning was a regular thing and one morning - passing by the holly trees, I noticed some holes in the earth..not giving it too much thought at the time, we continued out of the garden gate and onto the hills. After a few hundred yards, in my head - 'a light switched on'.... realising that the 'wildlife' had definitely arrived...and had taken advantage of a nice full winter store and had helped themselves....the following spring, I counted nine crocus flowering!

Gardening, what joy!!

Next time, the birds, the compost heaps and lots of nutshells - watch this space!

Enjoy your summer

God Bless

Erl