August 2015

Issue no. 36

May 18th: Visit to Abbot's Hall, Walled Garden

By Bill Baldry and Lucy Skellorn

Twenty-seven members enjoyed a fine evening at Abbot's Hall at the Museum of East Anglian Life (MEAL), Stowmarket for our May meeting. One of our members, Lucy Skellorn, was instrumental in the recent restoration of the walled garden there and the work has continued under the direction of David Tolliday. The gardens are now in very good order, after many years of neglect - see Lucy's article opposite for more details. For those that were interested in the old rose in the corner of the garden it is a 'Kiftsgate' rose. Vigorous, even in shade, Lucy was told by a gardener at Helmingham Hall that it is capable of pulling down an old cottage! Lucy is just hoping that it will climb into the yew tree.

After a wander to see the lake, Mal Ramplin told us about the history of Abbot's Hall itself and then we had the opportunity to see the many displays that there are in the rooms. The Walled Garden and the Hall are open to visitors, absolutely free, daily except Mondays. They are well worth a visit - or a return visit if you haven't been lately!

Bill

Abbot's Hall Opening Times

Peak Season - to 7th November

Tuesday - Saturday: 10:00 - 16:30

Sunday: 11:00 - 16:30

Mondays: closed (except for Bank Holiday Monday, August 31st when it will be open.)

Abbot's Hall Walled Garden has been open to the public since April 2012. Previously under private ownership, the Hall and the garden had become derelict and overgrown. Since it came under the care of *The Museum of East Anglian Life* the house and garden have been awarded *Heritage Lottery* funding. Since then it has been gradually restored as a living historical recreation of a working Victorian kitchen garden whilst Abbot's Hall offers a suite of exhibitions exploring the idea of 'home and belonging in East Anglia'.

The walls of the garden date to the 1800's and the layout of the garden today follows that seen on an 1885 ordnance survey map. Using this, new box hedging was planted and paths created. The large beds in the centre of the garden are divided into four giving the 'quarters' by which crops can be rotated. Next to these is a bed devoted to culinary herbs and another of perennial vegetables with artichokes and asparagus.

On the south facing side of the garden a cut flower border has been planted and along the wall peach and apricot trees are being trained as fans. Within the wall a door leading to the potting shed can be found. With its dirt floor and old boiler pit it tells the story of how the greenhouse was once heated.

The greenhouse, a *Boulton & Paul* of Norwich construction, has been beautifully renovated retaining much of its original metalwork. The west and north facing sides of the garden have espalier trained apple and pear trees including East Anglian varieties such as 'Lord Stradbrooke', 'St. Edmunds Pippin' and 'Sturmer Pippin'. A metal framework down the centre of the garden showcases cordon grown 'Adam's Pearmain' apples which, in time will form a decorative and productive tunnel.

As much as possible the garden aims to grow the lesser known heritage varieties of fruit and vegetables which are then sold on a produce stall outside the museum cafe. The funds generated help to continue work within the walled garden. A group of volunteers consisting of mental health users, long-term unemployed people and citizens of Stowmarket make up the team who tend to the garden and run the stall.

Lucy

Below: Club members explore the walled garden at MEAL.

Photo: Bill Baldry

June 1st: Alan Seager on 'Bees'

By Michael Warren

What a talk we had, anyone who failed to attend missed a splendid speaker, one who knew his subject and could put it over with just the right speed and clarity. I am sure I would have done better at school had my teachers been as good as Alan. What we learnt would fill several newsletters. Briefly though, a hive of 50,000 bees has 60% females and 40% males - plus a Queen of course. Having evolved over 50,000 years they are well ahead of us in many ways, for example the hexagon shape of their wax cells is the strongest shape for a soft material. Their precision in making the gap between combs exactly three-eighths of an inch and sealing any gaps in the hive so that they can control the temperature by having bees at the bottom of the hive fanning with their wings as the air rises to the top controlling to within + or – 2 degrees of 35 degrees. A team of bees guards the entrance whilst the females forage for up to a mile bringing back nectar, pollen and water which they transfer from their stomach to another bee's stomach at the entrance so they can be off searching again . No wonder they only live for six weeks. The ventilation bees control the water content of the honey in the cells reducing it to avoid fermentation before sealing the cell. Bees are at their safest when swarming, they like chimneys which give a natural air flow ventilation and will often return to the same place. Should you be lucky enough to have a swarm land in your garden, just telephone your local bee keepers' association (look on website for help line). As honey lasts 2000 years or more why look at the 'best before' date on the jar!

Words and photo by Michael

Right: Alan Seager and a table full of bee-related props.

BDGC: In the Community…

Above: This year, as in the past, the Club has planted up the pots and baskets it maintains at the Punch Bowl Community Inn on Bowl Road. Pictured (L to R) are 'super volunteers' Daphne Baldry, Helen Read and Linda Clark.

Above: The Club's display at Battisford's St Mary's Church Flower Festival (13-15 June) - created by Anthea Howard and Jackie Collings.

June 15th: Visit to the Collings' Garden

By George Bethell

On June 15th, Jackie and Stuart Collings generously, if a little foolishly, opened their garden to Club members and were rewarded with fine weather and a very large turnout of enthusiastic (i.e. nosey) visitors. Perhaps most knew what to expect but, as a 'first timer', I was blown away by Jackie and Stuart's immaculate garden. Till then, it had not been a great year for gardens and everything had been slow, but the Collings' flower beds were full of colour, as seen in the photo opposite, with plenty more to come.

Walking through the various parts of the garden revealed a huge number of different genera and varieties - all in tip-top condition and pest-free. Jackie fended off the questions: 'Why haven't your hostas got holes in the leaves?' 'Where are the nettles?' 'Is this real grass or Astroturf?' The answer, of course, is constant attention to detail and a great deal of hard work.

As I explored, I thought back to the Club's March talk on garden design where we were warned against buying single plants 'on impulse'. Well Jackie obviously wasn't listening. Her philosophy seems to be, if you see a great plant, buy it and then search for a spot to plant it. And it works!

During the evening visitors took full advantage of the refreshments available - tea and coffee and a huge range of cakes made and donated by Jackie's support team. Many also paid a pound to take part in the 'A to Z of the Garden' quiz in aid of charity. Linda Clark was charged with finding a winner but in the end it proved impossible with answers ranging from the sublime ('T = *Thalictrum*' by Mike Warren) to the ridiculous ('Z = Zinnias... in the future' by the Baldrys)! In total, donations for refreshments and the quiz raised a massive £122 for Muscular Dystrophy.

Our thanks to Stuart and Jackie for giving us a great evening filled with much admiration - and, perhaps, a little envy!

George

Above: A sweeping bed of colour against the sharp edges of a 'bowling green' lawn. (Photo: Michael Warren)

Left: Stuart and Jackie pose in front of an astrantia - and a patch of rare, blue sky. (Photo: George Bethell)

Star Plant

Spotted in the Collings' garden by Michael Warren, this is a close-up of *Dictamnus albus* which has several common names including Gas Plant and, perhaps best known, Burning Bush. It is sticky with volatile oils which on hot, windless days can be ignited. Michael has vowed to return to try the experiment later in the year!

Annual Show: 4th July 2015

By Denis Wicking

We had a great day for the show, and it seemed to encourage people to come out. We had 793 entries and only a few drop outs on the day - mainly due to storm damage the night before! A full range of members' products were on view from flowers to lemon curd, embroidery to peas, and photos to shortbread.

In the Thompson and Morgan classes we had 35 potato entries and 125 plant entries. There were 63kg of 'Jazzy' potatoes to weigh and 3472 individual potatoes to count. It is a good way for T&M to see how their plants grow in the gardens of 'real' people.

We were very lucky to have Ken Abel the 16 time National Pelargonium Champion be our Head Judge. Our other judges were Pam Fayers, Lindsay Symis, Mollie Whitehead, Angela and Jeremy Pratt, and Mike Warren. We are grateful to them all.

Denis

And the winners are...

[1] Win and Bob Rolphe Cup (fruit): Bill Baldry

[2] BDGC Treasurer's Cup (photography): Helen Ashley

[3] BDGC Children's Cup: Rhys Watson

[4] BDHS Craft Cup: Daphne Scarff

[5] BDGC Junior Cup: Harry Chaplin

[6] Portway Cup (cut flowers): Jackie Collings

[7] BDGC Salver (flower arranging): Anthea Howard

[8] Edna Green Trophy (cookery): Sandra Henson

[9] Ken Abel Pelargonium Trophy: Caroline Wicking

[10] BARCLIF 2012 Jubilee Tray: Michael Warren

Also:

BDGC Trophy (most potatoes): Jo Pepper

Webb Cup (vegetables): Michael Warren

BCLFR Community Cup (flowers): Jim Henson

Community Challenge Cup (pot plants): Helen Ashley

BDHS Miscellaneous Cup: Jackie Collings

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July 6th: Plants for the Autumn and Winter

By George Bethell

On a fine summer's evening, members filled the village hall to hear Matthew Tanton-Brown of The Walled Garden, Benhall, talk about the plants we should be considering *now* to provide coloured foliage, flowers, berries and scent for the autumn and winter seasons in our gardens.

Matthew was a returning speaker and for good reason - he is clearly passionate about plants and talks about them with consummate knowledge, with great humour, and without pausing for breath! Against the backdrop of an impromptu hedge which he had 'planted' across the front of the hall he reminded us of the seasonal virtues of familiar, but increasingly underrated, shrubs such as *Pyracantha*, *Berberis* and *Euonymus*. Matthew also pointed out some stars including two clematis - *Clematis cirrhosa* 'Freckles' and *Clematis tangutica* 'Lambton Park'.

Aware that he had probably given us too much to take in, Matthew closed by recommending potentially helpful books including Roy Lancaster's *Perfect Plant, Perfect Place*.

George

Above: Matthew Tanton-Brown waxes lyrical about the virtues of Cotinus 'Grace' which sports large, rich purple leaves which turn reddish in autumn, and feathery pink fruiting plumes.

Irises at Chelsea

By Michael Warren

Iris specialist Sarah Cook, who spoke to the Club in 2013 and whose garden members visited in June 2014, won a Gold Medal at this year's RHS Chelsea Show. This was in conjunction with Howard Nurseries (wholesale) at Wortham near Diss. Howard's have been bulking up the Cedric Morris Iris collection that Sarah has built up. The week following, Howards organised a buffet lunch for all their employees where Sarah thanked everyone involved and credited them as joint winners of the Gold Medal. Howard's was started over 40 years ago by two ex-employees of Blooms of Bressingham and now has a staff of 40 supplying container and bare-root perennials to garden centres and landscapers.

Words and photo by Michael

Opposite: Gold Medal winning exhibit by Sarah Cook & Howard Nurseries at the RHS Chelsea Show 2015. For more information go to www.howardnurseries.co.uk/chelsea2015

A Gardener's Question Time #4: A BDGC founding member and club stalwart - Anthea Howard

Q1: What is your favourite plant to grow and why?

"Favourite plant? I couldn't choose - I like too many."

Q2: You are an accomplished flower arranger. Which plant or plants in your garden do you tend to rely on when creating an arrangement?

"I wouldn't say accomplished! I like my flowers growing in my garden rather than being picked, so I usually buy plants for arranging. Having said that, I could do a fantastic display with stinging nettles!"

Q3: What plants would you like to grow but which, in the past, have defeated you?

"I *am* defeated by sweet peas."

Q4: What is the biggest gardening lesson you've learnt over the years?

"The term 'dwarf conifers' is a misnomer - they will grow into big conifers! If you want small conifers you need to buy *miniature* conifers."

Anthea's comment about nettles in response to Q2 was clearly not an idle boast as shown by her prize winning arrangement of wild grasses at the Show! Ed.

Forthcoming Club Events

Sunday 16th August: *Club BBQ from 3:00 pm*

An annual favourite, this year the Club BBQ will be at The Neathouse, Moats Tye, IP14 2EY - courtesy of Jo and Ian Pepper. BDGC members go free - 'plus ones' £3. If you're planning to be at the BBQ please let Daphne, Caroline or Jo know as soon as possible to give us an idea as to numbers.

Please note that parking will be available at the Livery (up the drive past the Neathouse) rather than in the narrow lane.

Monday 7th September: *Speaker Janet Buist*

Janet Buist runs Pennycross Plants in Colne (near Huntingdon) and is widely recognised as a 'Salvia guru'. She will talk to us about 'The Wonderful World of Salvias' - a huge genus which includes both culinary and decorative sages.

7:30 Battisford Community Centre.

Monday 5th October: *Annual General Meeting*

The agenda for the AGM has been changed from that previously announced in order to accommodate the Club's 'Mini Show' for later fruit and vegetables.

The hall will be open from **6:00pm** for the setting up of exhibits. The formal business of the AGM will start at **7:00pm** with committee reports and the election of committee members and a new Chairman. This will be followed by *free* refreshments and the opportunity to discuss the exhibits and the outcomes of the judging process. Molly Whitehead has kindly agreed to be our judge on the evening.

For full details of the classes and entry procedures see the 'Mini Show Schedule' on the website or contact Caroline, Anthea or Denis.

Monday 2nd November: *Speaker Ben Potterton*

Ben Potterton is a nurseryman and wildlife expert who owns and runs the Blacksmith's Cottage Nursery and Shorelands Wildlife Gardens near Diss. More information can be found at http://www.blackcottnursery.co.uk/

The topic for this talk is yet to be finalised. (Battisford Community Centre, 7:30.)

Saturday 28th November: *Wreath Making Workshop*

Make a note in your diary for this popular annual event. Further details to be announced but if you can't wait contact Caroline Wicking on 01449 770980 or caroline@wicking.me

Monday 7th December: *Quiz Night*

Food and fun at the annual Club Quiz with George Bethell as quizmaster. Battisford Community Centre for a 7:00 pm start.

Other Events

Wednesday 28th October: Meal and Talk

Inner Wheel, Stowmarket have organised an open evening at the Cedars Hotel including a meal and an after dinner talk by archaeologist and garden historian Edward Martin on: '*The Lost Gardens of Suffolk*'.

More information and tickets (£15) are available from Jackie Collings 01449 613494.

Gardening in Suffolk (and 'nearly Suffolk') …

1: The ancestral home and gardens of the Tollemache family are where?

A Glemham Hall
B Helmingham Hall
C Ickworth House

2: Named after a Suffolk-born farmer and pioneer of the organic movement, 'Lady Balfour' is a variety of which vegetable?

A carrot
B onion
C potato

3: Which of these is Adrian Bloom's garden at Bressingham?

A Misty Dell
B Foggy Bottom
C Hazy Hollow

4: According to Plantlife's 2002 'County Flower' campaign, the county flower of Suffolk is the oxlip. But what is its botanical name?

A *Primula elatior*
B *Primula veris*
C *Primula vulgaris*

5: To all intents and purposes the Suffolk Punch (produced in Stowmarket) was the first modern motor lawnmower for domestic use. When was it launched?

A 1937 B 1954 C 1961

6: Which of these celebrity gardeners gardens in Dickleburgh, Norfolk?

A Bob Flowerdew
B Joe Swift
C Chris Beardshaw

(Answers at foot of page.)

Valedictory

After three years and twelve editions, this will be my last newsletter as Editor-in-Chief. Perhaps the most satisfying aspect of the job has been the ever increasing number of members who have responded to my encouragement (i.e. threats) by contributing copy and photographs. *I am most grateful to you all.*

Particular thanks are due to Michael Warren and Bill Baldry: Michael for his generosity in contributing many great photos (*and even some words!*) and Bill for his constant support in all departments - writing, taking photos, supplying information and inspiration, and acting as an eagle-eyed poof reader. Thanks guys.

This is George Bethell signing off...

Brain Teasels Answers 1: B 2: C 3: B 4: A 5: B 6: A