



July & August 2022

Newsletter

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Dear Members,

Welcome to the July & August newsletter. Our Society does not meet in August therefore, as happens in December, there will be no newsletter next month. This is also my final newsletter as I have stepped down as Newsletter Editor. My husband's cancer is proving problematic again, necessitating a reduction in my commitments. I have produced the newsletter since January 2017, and it is probably time that a fresh look is taken in the delivery of information to you in this electronic age.

The Annual Members Show will soon be upon us, and **Helen Jones requires all entry forms to have been received by her NO LATER THAN 11am on Wednesday 20th July - late entries will not be accepted.** Helen has only received a small number of entries to date. She has put in a huge amount of work in taking over the show when David Ashcroft passed away – please make every effort to enter something!

Helpers for setting up on Friday 22nd July at St Peter's Church Hall should arrive from 5pm. Helpers are also needed for dismantling the show on Saturday afternoon, following the prizegiving which is scheduled for 3.45pm. Thank you to all who have already signed up to help, as well as to those who have offered to bake cakes for refreshments.

The hall will be open to receive exhibits from 8.30am and **these must be staged by 11am**, when the hall will then close for judging. Doors open again at 2pm. **Exhibits may not be removed before 4.15pm**, but should be taken away by 5pm.

Our Members Social Evening is on the Thursday after the show (28th July) from 6.30pm, in Pet Hawley's garden, 19 Alder Lane, Balsall Common, CV7 7DZ. Car parking is on Alder Lane, Gipsy Lane and Holly Lane. Drinks and nibbles will be available, and Nigel Briggs will be bringing his greetings cards again to raise money for the Save the Children charity.

Tickets for our coach trip to RHS Garden Bridgewater, Manchester, on Sunday 25th September are disappearing fast. Please contact Helen Jones for information on helen@manorfarmknowle.co.uk or tel. 01564 772645. The coach will leave the Co Op carpark at 8.30am. Cars should not be left here as this carpark has a maximum 2hr stay.

Our next speaker meeting is on Thursday 29th September in the Village Hall, when Razvan Chisu will tell us about 'Plants & Gardens of Transylvania'.

I was unable to attend both the visit to Sarah & Andrew Heath's garden in Marton on 23rd June and the Berkswell Open Gardens on 26th June. I understand both events were enjoyed by all who attended.

Wishing you all many hours of happy gardening,

Marion



SPEAKER REPORT

On 30th June, our speaker was David Wood, Master Thatcher, from near Lichfield . We've all seen cottages with thatched roofs and no doubt wondered how these are constructed. In fact, David is amused that when he is at work on a roof, he assumes 'celebrity status', with spectators coming out to watch. The word soon gets round to other owners of thatched dwellings in the vicinity, who want 'to keep up with the neighbours' and nab him for a quote!

David has over 50 years experience in this ancient craft, starting as a 'weekend boy' aged 13, after being caught peering into the lorry of George, the local thatcher. George allowed him to assist with weekend repairs, plus bigger jobs on weekdays in school holidays. When David left school aged 16, he commenced a 7 year apprenticeship with George. Large jobs meant living away from home in a caravan on site with George, with work taking them across the Midlands. Jobs included private homes to dwellings on large estates such as Merevale, near Atherstone. To qualify as a Master Thatcher at the end of 7 years, David had to thatch a roof on his own ,with an assessor from the Association of Master Thatchers observing him. His assessment was successful, allowing him to register as a member of the Association and set up independently. David now takes on apprentices of his own.

A roof has a top beam and ridge board, with timber rafters and horizontal laths or battens. There is no felt nor membrane underneath, as natural materials need to 'breathe' to deter rot.

Traditionally straw was used to thatch a roof and, as it had a lot of 'weedy rubbish' in it, this had to be cleared out to leave clean straw and the waste was made into ties for tying down the thatch. The whole cleaning process was time consuming and hard work. Blackberry briars were also used as thatching ties and it is no wonder that thatchers had tough leathery hands! However, modern cereal straw is much shorter than the old varieties, and in any case modern combine harvesters chop it up, rendering it useless for thatching. There is a single farm near the Emley Moor transmitter, Huddersfield, that produces longer thatching straw, cutting it with a traditional binder machine 6 inches from the ground. The depth of cereal straw on a roof is usually between 18 & 20 inches, but the thickest David has worked on was 8 feet deep! Other traditional ties include damp straw woven into a 'rope', and hemp twine which has existed for about 300 years. The Bristol Tarred Rope Company still makes waxed hemp twine.

From the 1950s, straw was superseded by water reeds. These originally came from Norfolk until the reed beds were damaged by nitrogen run - off from fields, making the reeds too soft and lax for thatching. There is a move to repair these reedbeds but in the meantime, David uses top quality water reeds from Hungary, or 'from the Danube', to impress his customers! As water reeds need more substantial fixings, blacksmiths made metal hooks to secure the bundles. A roof made from water reeds is normally about 12 inches thick and can last up to 70 years. A single bundle of reeds would cover one square foot of roof.

David brought along the hand tools of his trade in a huge metal trunk, accompanied by a homemade model of a roof section. He demonstrated how he prepares bundles of reed so that they shed rain, and how he fixes them to the roof. He also showed us how he finishes the upper ridge with hazel latticing, and cuts away a fancy scollop edging (each thatcher has his own pattern). The whole roof is then swept downwards with a besom brush to tidy it up. Some owners like a mesh of plastic or chicken wire applied to deter undesirable 'lodgers'. Some like the adornment of a straw bird or animal on the top, which David did not agree with. However, he has since capitulated and orders such figures in bulk!

David spoke with passion for his craft, punctuated with amusing tales, and kept us engrossed. Far from being a dying craft there are still around 1200 Master Thatchers on the register, but if you want David to do your roof, he has a 3year waiting list. However, Warwickshire has its own lady Master Thatcher just down the road at Gaydon!

Picture opposite shows hazel latticing, scollop edging, chicken wire mesh, and ducks along the ridge!

JULY / AUGUST 2022 LOCAL HORTICULTURAL EVENTS

Every Sat & Sun + Bank Holiday Mon 29th August (10 – 4)

Bridge Nursery, Tomlow Rd, Napton, CV47 8HX. (Christine Dakin & Philip Martino). Admission £3.50, children free. Plant sales & light refreshments.

Sat & Sun 16th & 17th July (10 – 4.30)

NGS Open Garden at 11 Priors Crescent, Salford Priors, WR11 8AN. (Rob & Diane Cole). Combined admission with 3 Cleeve View £5, children free. Plant sales.

NGS Open Garden at 3 Cleeve View, Evesham Road, Salford Priors, WR11 8UW. (Pip Harris). Combined admission with 11 Priors Crescent £5, children free.

Sat. 6th August at 2pm

Lowsonford, Rowington & District Horticultural Association Village Show at the Shakespeare Hall, Rowington, CV35 7DB. Over 100 classes, sideshows, displays & a band. Adults £3, under 16s free. For information & entries, contact Lucy Marsden on lowsonfordrowingtonvillageshow@gmail.com or 01564 784823.

Sat. 13th August at 2pm

Marston Green & District Gardening Club Annual Show at the Parish Hall & Grounds, Elmdon Road. Enquiries to the Show Secretary, T. Burnett, Tel 021 684 1299

Sun 28th (10 – 5) & Mon 29th August (10 – 4)

Warwick Horticultural & Allotment Society Annual Show in Warwick Courthouse Ballroom, with refreshments in the adjoining walled Pageant Garden. Address is Jury Street, Warwick, CV34 4EW. Non – members admission £1. Wheelchair accessible. Non – member entries also welcome. Further details on website www.whasociety.org

Sat. 10th September at 2.30pm

Autumn Gardening Show at Wren Hall, School Lane, Wroxall, CV35 7NF. Full details and schedules at wrenhall.org



Smell the Roses!

A final competition a word search containing 15 rose varieties, from hybrid teas, shrubs & floribundas to climbers & ramblers.

Can you find 'Hanky Panky', 'Irish Eyes', 'Albertine', 'Alberic Barbier', 'Peace', 'Iceberg', 'Aloha', 'Blue Moon', 'Maigold', 'Just Joey', 'Rosa rugosa', 'Bonica', 'Graham Thomas', 'Rambling Rector' & 'Gertrude Jekyll' ?

They may be horizontal, vertical, diagonal and reversed. Those with double names may be on the same line or on 2 lines, parallel with each other.

Answers to me by the next speaker meeting in the Village Hall on 29th September in person, by email (marion.keeley@btinternet.com) or by post (The Cottage, Fen End Farm, Oldwich Lane East, Fen End, Near Kenilworth, CV8 1NR). The winner will receive a copy of the RHS 'The Garden' magazine.

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MONTHLY FLOWER STEM & POT PLANT COMPETITION

- Flower Stem**
1. Edward Cotterrell (Dahlia)
 2. Alison Watson (Antirrhinum)
 3. Mary Cotterrell (Rose)

- Pot Plant**
1. David Cotterrell (Heuchera)
 2. Edward Cotterrell (Fuchsia)
 3. Angela Shaw (Succulent)