



**FRENSHAM &  
DOCKENFIELD  
HORTICULTURAL  
SOCIETY  
NEWSLETTER**

**No 165 August 2022**

*NEWS and recent events...*

*by Sharon Bleach*

What a summer! Although I like sunny days, I do like at least some rain! Aside from watering, we have had a very busy start to the summer with: the Frensham Fayre where we held the highly successful rose competition and plant sale, and fabulous garden visits, thank you to the FDHS hosts for the opportunity for members to see your gardens – the feedback has been fantastic.

With the Autumn Show coming up, clearly there will a few challenges with many of us struggling to keep all of our plants alive and show ready given the heat and lack of water. However, there is enough flexibility in the classes to allow almost anything that is thriving to be shown and we look forward to seeing what people bring along to the show. We also want to remind everyone that there are 5 junior classes and each class winner gets a prize. It would be great to see many entries from the gardeners of the future. Anyone happy to bake a cake for the traditional tea and cakes please let Ruth know...

*COMING UP...*

**Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> September FDHS Autumn Show, Marindin Hall.** Show open to visitors from 2:30 to 4:00pm. See membership booklet for detailed information and article below for an update from Ruth.

**Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> September FDHS garden outing to Sussex Prairie Garden near Henfield including private tour of the garden.** Please let Karen Williams know by 16<sup>th</sup> August if you wish to attend, see below.

**Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> September a Nettle workshop (10am to 4pm) led by Brigitte Kaltenbach of BeeKayMakes at the Marindin Hall costing £55 per person. Maximum 8 places available, so do contact Ruth if you and or friends wish to attend.** Please contact Ruth Murphy on [secretary@fdhs.org.uk](mailto:secretary@fdhs.org.uk) or by phone on 07786 176760.

**Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> September Marindin Hall at 7:30pm. Talk by David Millais.** Our local rhododendron expert will talk about his experiences.

**Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> October AGM and social evening Marindin Hall 7:30pm**

**Friday 25<sup>th</sup> November Members Supper at Marindin Hall**

Our Autumn Show last year was amazing, with over 300 individual class entries. A great response from you all so lets' try and beat that this year!

Dahlias are back in, hurrah! And as we like to keep up with latest trends and prompted by the number of dahlias entered last year, we have increased dahlia classes to five. These cover a selection of different bloom sizes (refer to Members Handbook) and will hopefully help the judge decide the overall winner. On the day of the show, our flower stewards will be on hand to assist in placing in the correct class and will have a set of National Dahlia Society (NDS) size rings on hand to measure.

Vegetables and fruit are always in abundance at the show and, as I write during the extreme heatwave, my squashes and courgettes are romping away! Those very early morning watering sessions are paying off.

Of course, we also have our open class home industries and photography classes, which do include open junior classes too, as well as floral arrangements which we now display in the Green Hall for enjoyment over tea and cake!

It would help the organisers if you could send your entry form by lunchtime Thursday 1 September, so we can prepare the exhibit slips for each class. We can usually accommodate changes and entries on the morning of the show, if you just can't decide what is looking best until the morning!

On the Saturday morning, bring your entries to the Marindin Hall from 9.15 with staging to be completed by 10.45. Our stewards will be on hand to help you with queries and check your entry is as per the schedule. A printable entry form is available on our website [www.fdhs.org.uk](http://www.fdhs.org.uk) (see SHOWS tab). However, there will be a few printed and available in Frensham Village Shop from a couple of weeks before the show.

**Trophies** - For those of you who are holding cups won in 2021, can you get them back to Annabel Sommerfelt ([annabelsommerfelt@gmail.com](mailto:annabelsommerfelt@gmail.com)) polished please, and in plenty of time for the show.

Any queries, email [secretary@fdhs.org.uk](mailto:secretary@fdhs.org.uk) or call me on 01252 793267 or 07786 176760.

It almost time for another of our fantastic trips to see a great garden. This time we are able to arrange a trip to the Sussex Prairie Garden near Henfield in West Sussex on Sunday 4th September at 12noon. As long as we have at least 15 of us in the group we have the opportunity of a private tour of the garden and as an added bonus we can also to attend their Autumn plant fair. There will be 19 specialist nurseries offering some really unusual selections of bulbs, perennials and shrubs, including Hardy's Nursery and Charleshurst Farm. They have a lovely tearoom on site or you can bring your own picnic.

Given we are now already in August (where has the year gone?) we need to be in a position to let them know quickly how many people we will have in the group. The cost is £10 per person. We will arrange car share for those who would like to attend and need transport. **Let Karen Williams know by 16th August if you want to attend** [karen\\_wales\\_05@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:karen_wales_05@yahoo.co.uk)

*Compost – is it out of date and how long will it last?*

*by Dan Bosence*

A number of people from within and outside the Society have experienced disappointing results this year with the RHS approved, Melcourt SylvaGrow All Purpose, Peat-Free Compost, purchased from Squire's in Frensham. I have used this compost with success for the previous two years and was impressed with seed germination and potting-on of vegetables, and I am happy to pay the extra price for a good peat-free compost. However, this has not been the case this year, particularly for tomatoes, aubergines and peppers (although fine for beans and sweet corn). Seed germination was good but then, even after two weeks, the plants were looking weak and not getting past their 2 leaf stage. They were then very slow to grow once potted on, even after their first liquid feed after 4 weeks. Mayonne Coldicott had a similar experience with this compost with initial, good germination of seedlings of *Hibiscus trionium* but then they "languished awhile before growing sulkily". Furthermore, in an unintended version of a control experiment, she had previously given some of her seedlings to a friend who then potted them on in an "ordinary, peat-based compost". The friend then returned them to Mayonne for care whilst she went away on holiday and was surprised how much better they looked than hers!

I thought the first people to contact about this problem were the manufacturers themselves, and I was intrigued to know what the date stamped on the bag (15-04-2021, see picture below) and in Mayonne's case 24-4-20, actually means. Is it a use-by date or a may be a manufacturing date? The reply from Melcourt's Technical Director confirmed that the date on the bag is the manufacturing date so that the compost I bought was already over a year old. Melcourt also pointed out that age of the compost was the most likely cause of the problems experienced because compost is always best when it is fresh, whatever it is made from. They also informed me that on the back of the pack of SylvaGrow there is a note stating that the product is best used within the season of purchase. This is because longer storage can cause nutrient imbalances. However, they also appreciate that the consumer cannot easily know how long the garden centre has had the stock before selling it to you and they say that they try to get stockists to rotate their stock and not to over-order towards the end of the season. Melcourt went on to say that they have been addressing the shelf-life issue by including some controlled release fertilizer into the mixes. This is as an insurance against long storage, as fertilisers may get leached out if bags are out in the open, but they have to balance this as some customers will be using the mixes very soon after manufacture and others after some time.

So, the next port of call was Squires & Co and initially I contacted Sarah Squire as I had met her at our spring show, and she passed my letter to her Managing Director, Martin Breddy who has many years' experience of working with composts. Naturally he was more concerned with the storage and sales side of the problem.

I was told that Squire's endeavour to practice a 'first in; first out' approach, but they recognise that this doesn't always happen. An additional problem for them was that peat-based composts are much more robust with regard to fertiliser retention and release than peat-free and that the latter are an ever increasing share of their sales. Squire's say they are pressing all their suppliers to find technical solutions to these challenges as the volume of peat-free compost sales grows. This has become more urgent as the latest Government plans foresee the banning of peat-based composts within 2 years. Interestingly Squire's thought that the best suppliers, such as Melcourt, would continue to make improvements in this area.

My reaction to these letters is that I remain surprised that after all these years, and government reviews and advice to the trade that there are still problems with making and selling peat-free composts. At different times many of us rely on bought composts and in my case I use it for growing large numbers of plants for our local village fetes. What has been misleading for me is the lack of clarity concerning the shelf life of composts. It was only after correspondence with Melcourt that I discovered what the date on the bag meant and that they recommend use "within the season of purchase" of that date. This really should be on the bag for customers to clearly see and I tackled both Melcourt and Squire's on that. Finally, after a recent visit to Squire's in Frensham they are now selling the bags of Melcourt Sylvagrow packed during 2022 (some at the back of the pile with a 2021 date) but at a reduced price and they are labelled as "past expiry date".

What about other peat-free composts? I think they are even worse with their labelling than Melcourt. I now take the trouble to look for dates on compost bags whenever I go to a garden centre. Does anyone else do this? I haven't found another manufacturer who even gives a date, let alone a date that doesn't tell you what it means. So Melcourt are ahead of the game and I shall continue to use it but only if I can find bags with the current years date stamped on the back. If it's not, then I will be heading straight for the Information Counter!

*Melcourt Sylvagrow All Purpose  
Peat-free compost.  
Note the date stamped on the bag (bottom right).*



*Good germination of tomato seedlings  
but still at 2- leaf stage after three weeks.  
These were eventually thrown on compost heap*





From in-house competition to village-wide competition! Many anxious moments during the re-imaging of our Summer Rose Competition. Firstly, would members make the trek to the Fayre with their prized blooms, would local villagers be willing to take part, how would we get people to vote, etc, etc? And then, testing positive for Covid a few days before the Fayre! Luckily, Team Rose (or Dream-team Rose) took it all in their stride, with Annette Clayson picking up the reins most diligently and ably assisted by Penny Hearn and Annabel Sommerfelt (wearing their uniform Rose Tees on the day). Big thanks to you all x. Ruth

We had a total of 24 people entering the competition, comprising 14 FDHS members and 10 non-members, with a whopping 89 roses staged across the five categories. An incredible response and a massive

thank you to all who entered and huge congratulations to all the winners, as follows:-

Annette, Penny and Annabel (Team Rose)

- Flora Rigg (non-member) with 35 votes for Best Scented Rose
- Stewart Wilson with 32 votes for Best Rose Bud
- Suzanne Mclean with 37 votes for Most Unusual Rose with her Rose 'For Your Eyes Only'
- Most Romantic Rose was won by John Davis (non-member) with an incredible 62 votes – and it was reported that a group of five young men were robustly discussing which entry was the most romantic, and why! Just goes to show how seriously voting was taken.
- Lynn Curtis (non-member) came in with 54 votes to secure the prize for her rose entry in the Fit for a Queen category.

Overall non-member winner with a grand total of 94 votes across all categories entered was John Davis, winning a gorgeous shrub rose donated by Seale Rose Garden Nursery along with FDHS membership.

Finally, the coveted Perring Cup was awarded to relatively new member Karen Williams who achieved 88 votes. She too was the proud recipient of a lovely shrub rose from Seale Rose Garden Nursery.

Clearly seems my angst during the planning and lead up to the competition was completely unfounded and although I couldn't be there, it really was a total success, we've had fabulous feedback. No doubt there will be a few tweaks made to the competition mechanics, however, we are all looking forward to next year's Fayre and Rose Competition.





Perring Cup Winner – Karen Williams

John Davis with Sharon Bleach

*Looking back in time in FDHS....*

*by Neil Mumford*

### **The 'Lady Perring Cup' which is presented at the rose competition**

Ethel Mary Perring was the wife of Sir Ralph Edgar Perring, 1st Baronet (23 March 1905 – 28 June 1998), who was a British businessman elected the 635th [Lord Mayor of London](#) in 1962/63. He was managing director of his family's business, The Perring Furnishings Group.

Ethel was born on 25<sup>th</sup> October 1903, daughter of Henry Theophilus Johnson. She married Ralph in St George Church, Hanover Square in April 1928. They had four sons.

As well as having a home in Park Lane, London, they also had a family home in the suburbs, moving from Esher to Frensham Beale Manor in the early 1950's and employed a full-time gardener Mr A J Brown. Thanks to Mr Brown, Ethel won a number of cups during the 1950's including the Hunter Cup in 1954 and 1957, this was prior to Ralph receiving his peerage and she was known as plain, Mrs Perring.



She presented the society with a cup in 1954, known as The Perring Cup, awarded for the best floral arrangement in the Autumn show. Being a keen gardener, she won the cup in the first two years, 1954 and 1955 and also the Hunter Cup in 1954 and 1956.

Ralph was knighted in the [1960 New Year Honours](#) and created a baronet (of Frensham Manor in the County of Surrey) on 27 November 1963. As a result, Ethel took on the title of Lady Perring and in recognition of her new status, the society renamed the cup, 'The Lady Perring Cup'

Ethel died on 20<sup>th</sup> January 1991 followed by Sir Ralph, who died in June 1998.

The cup was known as 'The Lady Perring Cup until 2007. Since that time, it has been referred to as 'The Perring Cup'. It was repurposed by the society in 2017 and is now awarded for the best rose at our annual Rose event.



Left: Ethel is pictured on the left, with husband Ralph in his Mayoral dress.



Right: A J Brown at the 1954 show with the Hunter Cup. He also won the Stevens Cup in 1961.

*The Young Dandelion by Dinah Mulock Craik suggested by Annette Clayson*

I am a bold fellow  
As ever was seen  
With my shield of yellow  
And my blade of green

You may uproot me  
From field and from lane  
Trample me and cut me  
I spring up again

I never flinch, sir  
Wherever I dwell

Give me an inch, sir  
I'll soon take an ell

Drive me from garden  
In anger and pride  
I'll thrive and harden  
By the roadside

Not a bit fearful  
Showing my face  
Always so cheerful  
In every place.



What a lovely day it was to visit Down Place and Sandhills Farmhouse near South Harting, South West of Petersfield. A good time was had by all. Two lovely houses and gardens with charming chateleines, each providing a tour of their garden and also drinks and home made cakes.



**Down Place** – a long time Victorian family home at which Selina Twistleton-Smith was the first to set up a garden proper, nestling just off the top of a ridge with sweeping views down. A terrace by the house planted with traditional favourites such as lavenders, roses (and delphiniums planted for the first time this year by Selina yet reaching 7-8 feet high) and immaculately edged grass paths leads to a garden with herbaceous borders.

Although the ground is porous chalk, in one area a spring had been found high up years ago, allowing for an area with lush large leaved plants such as *darmera peltata* and *rodgersia*. The real jewel in the crown was the bulk of the garden, a few acres of parkland with mainly indigenous trees, with a wide-open wildflower meadow. This meadow has a succession of colour throughout the year – awash with daffodils, then cowslips, in spring, and full of early summer wildflowers such as ox eye daisies, wild bugle and three types of orchids while we were there – common spotted, pyramidal and bee orchids. Interestingly, mown paths could be seen zigzagging through the wildflower meadow here and there – this year's path showing green from the recently cut grass, last year's paths showing as a white swathe of oxeye daisies, which were clearly the first and strongest of the wildflowers to grow back again.

There is a lovely view down on to South Harting, its church spire of copper a gleaming centrepiece. The church was close to Selina's late husband's heart, and all proceeds from our visit went to support its maintenance.





**Sandhills Farm House** – cute old cottage home of Rosemary Alexander for 30 years, also based high over countryside, though the more enclosed garden of maybe a third of an acre is focussing primarily inward. Rosemary is the founder and doyenne of the English Gardening School in Chelsea, so as is to be expected the garden is planted in what we would now regard as the traditional English gardening style.

The house and garden are not immediately visible as you go through the entrance gate into a shady area - from there, “the motorway” – a path flanked with formal box balls to lead the eye forward – leads through into the open and to the front of the property. It has to be said, the shady area was suffering from drought, with plants rather wilted when we visited – the soil here is very sandy, thus dry, and even though a large number of peat blocks were incorporated when the bed was first made, this like the rest of the garden is high maintenance with a lot of attention needed to keep things at their best. The sickness of one of her gardeners meant that there had been nobody to do any watering for a while. However, such lack of attention was not obvious in the other parts of the garden – a terrace with chairs by tables and immaculate succulents, a large rose “Bengal Crimson” by the front door in the middle of the terrace which flowers from March until Christmas, the view to the front door flanked by a pair of what had been large box balls which Rosemary has topiarized into cloud pruned divisions – apparently viewed as an abomination by Christopher Lloyd when he visited!

Throughout the garden was a combination of traditional favourites, together with a few rarities given by friends (and admirers?) – including a species dahlia, the delicate dahlia merckii, with delicate lavender flowers. We enjoyed hearing Rosemary’s tales of gardening glitterati - most gardening presenters on tv have been through the English Gardening School, and she has been canvassed to suggest who should be the follow on presenter for Gardeners’ World (no names dropped as to suggested successors, however!).

**AND FINALLY....**

**The Annual General Meeting and Social** will be held in the Marindin Hall on Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> October. The current committee have done a fabulous job this year and I would appreciate a couple more people joining the committee to take forward the many plans we have for next year. I am very happy to have an informal chat with anyone who feels they could contribute a bit of time to join the committee and keep the FDHS calendar moving! We are a very friendly bunch of people!! Please feel free to contact me by email or phone [bleachsharon@gmail.com](mailto:bleachsharon@gmail.com) or 01252 792993.

**Seed Share:** Given the current trials and challenges the one thing I have noticed in my garden is that there are plenty of seed heads around at the moment and so I have started collecting! It would be good to have a face-to-face seed share at our January meeting. So please do gather up some seeds ready to share out for next summer.

The next newsletter will be issued in November to round off our year. Anything you would like to see included – just send it through!

I look forward to catching up with you at the show and events in the next few months.

Best wishes and happy gardening.

*Sharon*



All unattributed articles are by the Editor Sharon Bleach.