

Spring 2024

Over The Fence

The West Malvern Garden
& Nature Club News Letter

*35th Anniversary
of the club!*





Spring at last! Welcome to the 2024 Over the Fence. This year marks the 35th Anniversary of the founding of this incarnation of the Garden and Nature Club. Many of you may have been amongst its earliest membership. The club history is kept in the Village Hall archives if you would like to see them.

I hope that you have put the wet winter behind you and are busy planting out those seedlings you have nurtured over the winter or are preparing to sow an exciting variety of plants. Are your bulbs brightening up your garden? It is always a surprise (to me anyway) when plants reappear, and autumn planted bulbs have survived the weather and the attention of squirrels and mice! It is a joy to see the colours and the daffodils in Elim grounds are always beautiful. Soon it will be bluebell time and we are so lucky here in West Malvern to have them in great numbers. The verges from the Wyche to the village are a picture and I am sure that some of you know and have special places where they grow together between the trees in carpets of blue.

Sadly, the club lost a member from those early days, Crystal Pearce was a stalwart member of the club for many years and remembered with great affection by people who knew her.

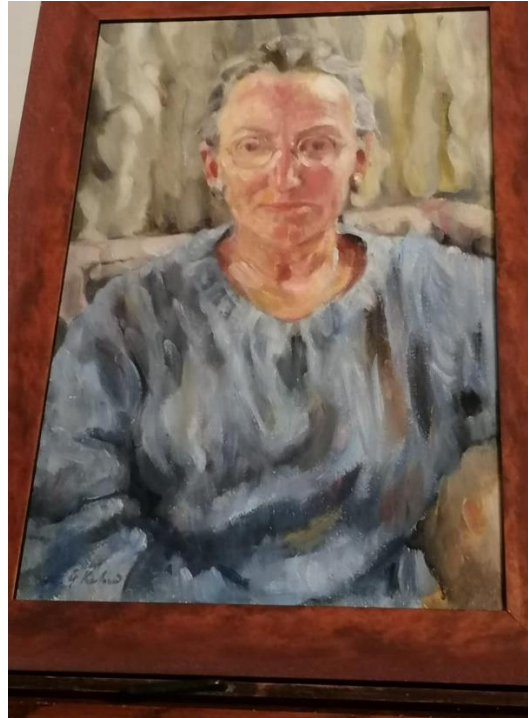
Barbara Meddowes has written her memories.

“Crystal, what an amazing person. I felt a real sense of loss when I heard of her passing. I always remember her giving subtle advice when I first lived here and tried arranging flowers at the church.

A staunch Garden and Nature supporter, she was always interested in plants and knew which particular variety she wanted. Her garden was an absolute picture, a lovely display of aconites, beautiful clematis, hellebores, and roses.

Her generosity knew no bounds. I have lovely roses on my allotment as she hadn't got enough room for them in her own garden. This generosity was very

evident in her hospitality. Always welcoming, always concerned for your welfare and always full of interest. There are many people who will deeply feel her loss.



There are many references to Crystal in the club archives showing her support for club activities and examples of her poetry, which other people remember.

2023 -2024

Our club year (starting in September) has been one of change.

We met in September to hear Chris Hall talk to us about the wildlife of Central and South America. An interesting talk, well presented and full of excellent photos, Chris talked about the huge variety of animals he and Jenny met on their adventure. They were in an environment of amazing animals and dangerous ones as well. The Eyelash Pit viper being the fastest snake in the world when it strikes, Chris slowed down his video of it to show us the speed. We are grateful to Chris for presenting these talks to the club. It is in the spirit of the club's original meetings when the members talked about their interests. Perhaps you have some slides, photos etc. of a trip you have made that you could share with us?



Eyelash Pit Viper

In October it was David Morgan speaking about the National Garden Scheme. Many of us visit the variety of gardens open to the public on a few days of the year but we might not be aware of the origin of this scheme. It started in 1859 by William Rathbone, a Liverpool industrialist, to pay for nurses to help families at home with poorly people. He had been able to pay for someone to care for his wife when she was ill, but realised other people didn't have the money to do this. In 1925 Elsie Wagstaff came up with the idea of opening gardens that would never be seen by the public, and that charging an entry fee would raise money for charity. Spetchley Park Gardens was one of the first.

He also told us what was involved in opening your garden and that £3.1 million was given to 6 charities this year. You can find out more at ngs.org.uk



Spetchley Gardens

November was 'The History of the Apple', David Marshall from the Museum of Cider at Hereford was our speaker. He spoke about the history of the apple from its origins in China and took us across the world as it developed and spread along the highways, like the Silk Road and Spice Road. As seeds from apples do not grow true to their parent, they have to be grafted to retain a variety. Before this was known the planting of seeds across the world produced a variety of apples. In The USA the spread of apples from seeds planted by settlers produced a not very good eating variety, they called them Spitters and were used to make alcohol. So, if you are thinking about growing that Bramley or Gala seed from your apple expect a new variety to emerge! If you are interested in the origins of apples take a look at the displays at Hereford Cider. On an interesting note, apples made their way back to China in 1870, different to original ones where they are seen as western fruit. The Fuji variety, grown in Japan, is the most grown variety in the world.



December was the Christmas party, and we had a really good turn out and an enjoyable evening. The buffet was excellent, and Chris kept us entertained with a variety of quizzes. A mixture of puzzles, questions and identifying birds. That was particularly tricky! David got us involved in a game which the younger members were at an advantage (speed) but was just what we needed to finish the evening. Thanks to Chan for the mulled wine and to the committee for organising and setting up the event, and thanks to everyone who helped tidy up at the end. If you missed the party, I hope you can join us at another social event.

Hilary Ward has sent us this interesting article about the SOUTHERN PILL WOODLOUSE, *Armadillidium depressum*

At the end of November 2023, I received an interesting envelope containing some 'dead beasties' from a garden club member, Diana Morgan. She had found these in a spare bedroom of the house.

I recognised them as Pill Woodlice but not sure what species until I compared my photos with those on the internet and thought they might be *Armadillidium depressum*. To double check I sent the photos to the British Myriapod and Isopod Group and was pleased when they confirmed my tentative identification with the comment that the last two images clearly show the outwards projecting epimeron (skirt). Woodlice belong to the Class Crustacea so are related to crabs, lobsters etc. They feed on dead and decaying matter and live in a variety of habitats. They emerge at night to feed and can be seen climbing trees and walls in search of rotting plants and mildew. Pill woodlice tolerate drier conditions than other woodlice which is why they are often found in houses.

The scientific name *Armadillidium* means 'little armadillo' and refers to the protective 'armour' and the ability to roll into a ball. There are 7 *Armadillidium* species in the UK.

There are currently a limited number of records for *A. depressum* in Worcestershire (3 in 2014) but this is likely due to under-recording. In recent years it has been undergoing a range expansion north and east of its normal UK distribution and is a species clearly taking advantage of our changing climate.

The record has been submitted to the Worcestershire Biological Records Centre.



Moving venue

In January the club changed venues! After 35 years at the village hall, we explored the accommodation on offer at Elim College. We were concerned about the lack of parking at the village hall especially in winter. People were reluctant to turn out in the cold and find nowhere close to the hall to park. Far more convenient to park at Elim. The room was warm and inviting and the seats were comfortable. As one of the club said, let's hope we don't get a boring speaker, or we'll be dropping off in such comfort! I hasten to add that I have seen, even at the hall, members drop off in the dark, even when there was an interesting presentation!

Our January speaker was far from boring. Our move was christened by Helen Picton of Old Court Nursery who spoke to us, without notes, about clematis. She was very knowledgeable and took us through the seasons with photos of many varieties. There was helpful advice about pruning and looking after the plants as well as the history of their origins and the people who bred them and hunted for them. Old Court is known for its Michaelmas Daisies so if you haven't been it is well worth a visit.



February

Helen Mugridge returned to the club, having spoken to us in 2022. Helen and her husband set up a garden devoted to wildlife around their home. This talk took us on from her last visit and we saw a wonderful display of photographs

they they had taken. We were amused by the antics of a badger scratching itself caught on a night camera and the survival of a hedgehog. The badger had preferred the peanuts (to the hedgehog) put out by Helen! It was an enjoyable evening as club members interacted with Helen, asking questions or advice. We look forward to hearing about the development of the garden in future talks or about her visit to South America. Look at her webpage for fantastic photographs, like the one below. Willridgeimages.co.uk



Helen's photograph of a goldfinch coming to the bird feeder.

Asking for contributions brought this from James Bullet, some tips about perennials.

Take cuttings in May/June to get free plants. Perennial plants are very popular in the garden because they grow back year after year. The definition of a perennial is a plant that lives more than two years, and, in most cases, they will live for many, many years and get better with age. But some perennials are short-lived and only live for three, four or five years. In this situation it's best to replace the plants with new ones every few years.

Most perennials are fairly easy to propagate by seed or cuttings. Many will naturally self-seed in the borders, or you can easily raise new plants by sowing packet seeds. These are best sown in pots or trays and the seedlings grown on ready for the garden.

Other types can be propagated by taking short cuttings at this time of the year and rooted on in pots or trays. The rooted cuttings can then be grown on to produce strong new plants for planting in the garden next spring.



TOP TIPS

- 1 – Take short cuttings of penstemons to produce fresh new plants when the base of the original plant starts to get bare and woody.
- 2 – Verbena bonariensis plants weaken and die after two or three years. They will self-seed or can be raised from seed in pots.
- 3 – Erysimum, the perennial wallflower gets very woody, and growth slows down, but can easily be propagated from short cuttings.
- 4 – Aquilegia often start to deteriorate after two or three years, but most types will naturally self-seed to produce new plants. (Garden News 2020)

I really appreciate the contributions to the Over the Fence from you! If you have any gardening or wildlife items, photographs, to share, please send them in via David as your contributions make the Over the Fence more interesting and varied.

The A.G.M. is on Tuesday 19th March at 7pm in the Herefordshire Suite at Elim College. All members are encouraged to attend and if you are interested in joining the committee, please let David know. The present committee will stand down and elections will take place.

Thank you to the contributors to this edition of the Over the fence.

Enjoy your gardening and the wildlife!

Carole Houghton