

Lockdown

# *Over The Fence*

## The West Malvern Garden & Nature Club News Letter

Winter/Spring 2021



Happy New Year to everyone! And Spring greetings!

I hope that everyone has kept safe and well. Many of you will have had the vaccine or at least one jab now. Hopefully, we are looking at the light at the end of the tunnel and we will be able to see our families and friends again, even if restrictions are not fully lifted for a few months yet.

Michael and I are still plodding a furrow around West Malvern, some of it through mud and a lot of water. One of our favourites takes us through the Chestnut Avenue and we are sometimes ambushed by this chap looking for treats!



None shall pass!

I hasten to add that we do not feed any animals we meet. This stand off usually means that we have to take the path through the mud. I wonder if that is the intention!



The recent snow meant that we could find animal tracks. The squirrel who made these was dining chez Old Vicarage, then returning to home in Elim's grounds. De Waldren road is often busy with squirrels, ignoring us and chasing each other over the road and in circles. There does not seem have been any period of hibernation as we see them most days. If you have photographed any interesting tracks, please send them to me or to David for the newsletter.



This is the next instalment of Tony Tintern's bee articles, taken from Over the Fence 2001

Sir Christopher Wren (1632-1723) is credited with making the first telescopic hive, realising the need for more space as the colony grew. In the summer of 1834 a certain Major Munn was walking among his bees, pondering the ancient narrative of Samson ( the story is that Sampson, albeit unconsciously, first gave the idea of the moveable frame; he discovered the carcass of a lion, dried and purified in the hot sun, leaving nothing behind but the shell, in fact, a tanned skin over the frame of a lion, a perfect beehive.) Major Munn figured that the combs would be built on the ribs of the lion, so that all Samson had to do was take a rib from the beast, bringing the adhering comb with it. So, it was Major Munn who made the first moveable frame beehive.

Of course, there have been many refinements since those days, and throughout the world there are many different patterns and sizes of hives, from the ultra-modern made from polystyrene to the simple boxes, terracotta and hollow log hives, where the bees seem to be quite happy as long as there is enough room and they are reasonably safe from the elements.

The honeybees we tend are pretty well the same as they were thousands of years ago when they lived in trees, hollow logs, and crevices in the rocks etc. Because we keep them in hives, we do not make them any tamer or domesticated than they were then. But they do vary in temper and other characteristics. From colony to colony and over the year's beekeepers have tried to breed out the bad traits and breed in the good, with varying degrees of success.

From my own experience an effort to breed a mild tempered bee ended in total disaster. I bought a new queen bred in New Zealand. The colony built up very quickly and the bees were a joy to handle – they were so gentle I could open the hive at any time without wearing any protective clothing whatsoever. At one time I had a dozen young children stood around the hive passing combs full of bees to each other, all without protection. I thought that this was great, so I induced the bees to build up queen cells and subsequently started a new colony. The new queen mated, and the colony grew rapidly, and as the colony grew their temper grew steadily worse, until they became totally unmanageable, attacking everyone and everything in sight, so sadly they had to go. [*Tony does not mention here what happened to the children or if they were there , hopefully they were not badly stung!*] There isn't much fun dealing with bees knowing whatever you do with them you are going to get a real pasting.

Some strains are more prone to swarm than others, this is to be avoided as far as possible. The bees may have stored a good crop of honey and when they swarm they will take a good proportion of the honey with them because they fill themselves up with at least three days' supply before they leave, to give them a good start in their new abode.

Some strains are dainty eaters while others seem to be 'hungry devils.' Take two colonies side by side with about the same quantity of bees, feed them in the autumn in the usual way with about 35 lbs of sugar. The dainty eaters will survive the winter with stores to spare; if the winter is long the chances are the 'hungry devils' could well die if starvation. When bees are fed in the autumn they must not be opened until the early spring and then only weather permitting.

The ideal colony is mild tempered, large in numbers and economical in their eating habits. The opinion of most beekeepers is that our own local, mongrel bees are best, in other words they will have evolved to suit the region they have lived in over the years. Bees bred in Scotland would not do particularly well here and vice versa, any more than bees imported from foreign countries would do.

A little can be done by the beekeeper to breed the better bee by careful and skilful manipulation of his bees, but whatever you do you still have to watch the sharp end – the weather, any obnoxious odours,

rough and woolly clothes and rough handling (bees must be handled with great gentleness with no jerky movements – to drop a frame is asking for trouble.) Mild tempered bees can be very upset if any of the above occur and the beekeeper is the first to know! They don't like navy blue – I found out the hard way, but that's a story I don't care to relate!

Tony Tinton



Bee feeding on Rosemary flowers Photo by Chris Lee

The first bees this year in our garden were noisily exploring the rosemary. Other herbs which flower later such as chives, oregano and borage are bee friendly.

In March Lockdown prevented us from having the AGM, it was the intention of the committee to honour Vic Frampton on his long and loyal service to the club. This was eventually achieved in January. Chan reports,



*Today Kath and Vic popped up (with a chocolate birthday cake) and I took the opportunity to present Vic with his £50 garden vouchers and thankyou card for his service as Chairman of the club. As you can see from the photo Rob decided (as a sign of the current times) that we should keep our masks on and use the long-handled grabber to enable keeping our distance. It may or may not raise a titter!*

David received this message from Vic,

Hi all,

Today Chan presented me with a card and generous garden voucher for my "services to the WMGNC". It was a surreal experience involving masks, social distancing and a mechanical "Helping Hand" used to pass the card to me. I believe Chan has a photo of this momentous event, and I promise that Kathy and I were smiling behind our masks.

Regarding my "services" to the club, this has been an enjoyable and satisfying experience for both Kathy and I. We have made many new friends, attended interesting and entertaining talks at the Village Hall as well as many great social events. We've loved it and will miss the club and all of you since, as many of you already know, we hope to be moving to Bude in Cornwall sometime in March.

Kathy and I joined the club in January 2008, attended again in February and made the mistake of going to the March AGM at which, despite stout resistance on my part, I somehow became the Programme Secretary. After 9 years I was "promoted" to Chairman, a post that I stepped down from at the 2020 AGM.

Thank you all for your friendship and support throughout those years and thank you for your card, garden voucher and best wishes for the future. We hope that the club will be able to start up again soon and that it will go on to a long and successful future.

Best wishes to you all,  
Kathy and Vic Frampton

I'm sure that I echo the feelings of club members when I say we shall really miss Kathy and Vic when they leave Malvern. They were welcoming friends to Michael and me, when we moved here, and good friends to a lot of people. I have enjoyed working with them on the committee and valued Vic's help and encouragement with the Over the Fence. Kathy's cakes will be missed as well! They have promised to visit Malvern and not forget us! Good luck and be happy in your new home – and by the way will you be doing B&B?!

The next edition of Over the Fence will be later in the year when, hopefully, there will be some sort of club activity on the horizon. Enjoy your gardens, the beautiful West Malvern scenery and encourage your friends to join the club as we need to make it a thriving place for people of all ages to come together and share their love of nature and gardening. Keep safe.

P.S Kathy and Vic have safely relocated to Bude.

Carole Houghton