

## MUSINGS FROM THE SHED APRIL 2024

How it all started.....



### THE START OF NEWS FROM THE SHED – APRIL 2020

The time of Covid - what was it like?

A legally-enforced Stay at Home Order, or lockdown, was introduced on 23 March 2020, banning all non-essential travel and contact with other people, and shut schools, businesses, venues and gathering places. People were told to keep apart in public. Those with symptoms, and their households, were told to self-isolate, while those considered at highest risk were told to shield. The health services worked to raise hospital capacity and established temporary critical care hospitals, but initially faced some shortages of personal protective equipment. By mid-April it was reported that restrictions had "flattened the curve" of the epidemic and the UK had passed its peak after 26,000 deaths. The UK's overall death toll and by population surpassed that of Italy on 3 May, making the UK the worst affected country in Europe at the time. Restrictions were steadily eased across the UK in late spring and early summer that year. The UK's epidemic in early 2020 was at the time one of the largest worldwide.

This 'STAY AT HOME' order gave me the idea of writing to fellow gardeners and gardening clubs in the south west; the following snippets are from the first editions:

#### April 2020

Dear Gardeners

We have now completed almost four weeks of isolation. Our thanks go out every single day to those who are working to keep us all safe, the medical staff, the shop keepers, the emergency services, the garden centres and also our neighbours for their acts of kindness; the cake left on the door step, the fetching of prescriptions, the daily posies of flowers for passers-by to help themselves to, the newsletters produced by communities – it all helps so much.



This lock-down reminded me of how in the C18 isolation became fashionable and hermitages became the 'must have' in your garden

### **A Melancholy of Mine Own.**

From around 1730, the hermitage started to appear in English landscape gardens, either as a moody eye-catcher or as a summer house. Designed in 1730 by William Kent (1685–1748), the Hermitage at Stowe in Buckinghamshire is very atmospheric; a reminder that there is more to life than beauty and pleasure. The new trends in garden design—away from formal, geometric grounds and towards artificial Edens—created a new kind of cultural habitat, which some people filled with an actual occupant. Provided with a hut or grotto to call his own and a few simple meals a day, a garden hermit might live for years on a picturesque corner of the property. Wandering guests would marvel at this living, breathing symbol of rural withdrawal.

*The Hermitage at Stowe*



*The hermitage at Craigiebum*



Charles Hamilton at Painshill wanted a hermit who would stay for 7 years." *He would be provided with a bible, optical glass, a mat for his feet, a hassock for his pillow, water for his beverage and food from the house. He must wear a camel robe and never, under any circumstances, must he cut his hair, beard or nails, stray beyond the limits of Mr Hamilton's grounds or exchange one word with a servant.*"

The hermit only lasted three weeks before he was spotted creeping out of the grounds to go down to the local pub. Ah some things never change!

Vita Sackville West seemed to capture what many of us are experiencing:



*Days I enjoy are days when nothing happens, When I have no engagements written on my block,  
When no one comes to disturb my inward peace, When no one comes to take me away from myself  
And turn me into a patchwork, a jig-saw puzzle, A broken mirror that once gave a whole reflection,  
Being so contrived that it takes too long a time To get myself back to myself when they have gone.*

Her writing was always pithy and well observed, these are her comments written in her column in *The Observer* during an Easter week.

*The Pasque flower , Anemone pulsatilla, is blooming just now for Easter as its name indicates. This is a native to our Downs, getting rare in its wild state, but still cultivated in gardens. It is a soft and lovely thing, pale lilac in colour with a silvery floss-silk surround: and it can now be obtained also in a rosy -pink colouring, which mixes and merges most exquisitely with the original mauve native....There is also a white form. It is easy to grow anywhere, though as a native of the chalk it appreciates a bed of limey rubble in the sun. The sparrows so far have left it. April. Vita Sackville West*

Vita's mother was deliciously eccentric:

Victoria Josepha Dolores Catalina Sackville-West was born the illegitimate child of Lionel Sackville-West and Pepita, an Italian dancer. She married her cousin and they moved into Knole House when he inherited the title. She could either be wantonly extravagant or exceedingly mean. She had a penchant for writing letters on the lavatory paper from the Ladies room at Harrods. When she had to leave Knole, she moved to a modest house in Brighton and it was there that she developed a taste for tin delphiniums which she extolled as being 'impervious to slugs'. In deference to her daughter, Vita S-W, Victoria would fill all the empty flower beds with artificial flowers before Vita came to visit

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It's been a good time to dip into books, this is from *The Garden in Poetry and Prose from Selborne* 5th April

*1793 The air smells very sweet and salubrious. Men dig their hop gardens, and sow spring corn ..... Dug some of the quarters in the garden, and sowed onions, parsnips, radishes and lettuces. Planted more beans in the meadow. Many flies are out basking in the sun.*

Gilbert White (1720 – 1793)



### ARE GARDENERS ECCENTRIC?

Nathan Mayer Rothschild who believed that “A garden is a necessity as much as bread! managed to train zebras to pull his carriage



and the lawns were kept tidy with a troupe of wallabies



### STAYING AT HOME

**A glimpse from WW2 years:** The Government issued information about how we can enjoy holidays at home. Aah - just what we need now, although Janie Oliver is doing sterling work.



We are very fortunate during this crisis as we seem to be still able to get medicines but times were different in WW1 and WW2

### **A Wartime Botanical Medical Chest**

During both World Wars our own wild flora provided a whole range of drugs and other supplies. Over 80 species were used medicinally, making up the shortfall when supplies from German pharmaceutical companies (which dominated European markets before both wars) were cut off.

During the 1st World War, huge quantities of plants like foxglove, henbane and valerian were needed. But the problems of co-ordinating collection and transport, combined with poor drying techniques and identification problems meant lots of material was wasted. Lessons were learnt during the 2nd World War though, with botanists, pharmacist, doctors and the ministry coming together to form the Vegetable Drugs Committee. They established 70 County Herb Committees along with 250 drying centres around Britain, and conducted extensive research on which plants contained the most active ingredients, the best ways to harvest, dry and extract these drugs.



I do enjoy old gardeners' tips such as:

*When you hear the cuckoo shout*

*'tis time to plant your tatties out.*

*Cosmic Quest* –is an absolutely fascinating series of talks about astronomy which can be found on *BBC Sounds*. The programme I heard this morning had details of farmers in Peru and Bolivia who for centuries have monitored the brightness of Pleiades stars to determine when to plant potato crops for optimal rainfall.

When the Pleiades cluster is particularly bright or when it appears to be large, Andean villagers anticipate earlier and more abundant rains and larger harvests, while the opposite is linked with less clear skies. If poor rains are predicted, the farmers postpone potato planting.

Whichever method you use to determine when to put your chitted potatoes in the ground.  
GOOD GARDENING!

Well that's it!

**KEEP WELL and BEST WISHES TO ALL**

CJS April 19<sup>th</sup> 2020 and April 2024