

Minutes of the meeting of SADGA, Sunningdale & District Gardening Association, held at Lynwood, Rise Road, Sunninghill (due to elections in the Village Hall), on Thursday, 5th May 2011 at 7.30 pm

The evening began at 6.45pm in the car park with a car boot plant sale. There were all sorts of plants to buy, and Ascot Horticultural Society's Jim & Doreen Hathaway and Sue Potts joined us for that and stayed for the talk. The air was cold but it was a fine and dry evening.

Having moved to the warmth of the Garden Room, the Chairman, David Kaynes, welcomed the 35 members and guests to the meeting and announced that Mary Barnard had died just a few days ago. People were shocked. He then handed over to Chris for apologies and notices. Chris added that Peter and Mary Barnard had been on holiday in France and she understood that they had had a lovely evening out together for a meal. It seems that Mary then had a massive heart attack. Chris hoped there would be more details when the family were back in England.

Apologies for absence were received from Peter Barnard, Norma Bateman, Pat Bond, Jill Gresswell, Barbara Jarrett, Peter & Jane O'Kill, Jill Ormrod, Jon Read, Sue Roberts, Ron and Rosemarie Sibley, and Jenny Stubblefield.

The April meeting had seen Paul Templeton talk about the History of Herbs and Herb Growing, with more of the former than the latter. There had, however, been plenty of plants for sale.

Notices

- 1 Chris held up the two "snail" plates which had still not been claimed. This was the third time of asking and they would therefore be put into the raffle.
- 2 There were a pile of (bright yellow) Village Venues leaflets to take for anyone who wanted them.
- 3 Ros Anderson, once again, kindly agreed to help Rowena with the teas.
- 4 The next meeting would be on 2nd June, back at the Village Hall, when Robin Lack and Mike Clift would talk about their trip to SE Australia. Robin Lack is one of our Vice Presidents but rarely comes to a meeting as he plays chess on the same night. Mike Clift is an ex-Kew student.
- 5 Chris welcomed our guests from Ascot.
- 6 Chris pointed out the fire exits.
- 7 Liz Morgan then reminded everyone that forms for the outing to Hever Castle were available.

David Kaynes then expressed the hope that **Chris Howkins** might actually be available for some more talks even though we expected this to be one of his last talks before retiring. Chris took the floor and did not disappoint with his talk on **Early Saxons - Success from Sand**.

Chris was covering the 5th and 6th centuries, often known as the Dark Ages, but now termed "Early Saxon". He explained that one should take with a pinch of salt the ideas generated on television of people in these times being small, dirty, scratching themselves and wearing sackcloth. In fact, they were the tallest in Europe; women averaging 5' 8" and men between 5' 10" and 6'. They wore linen or wool, dyed with woad giving a mauvy blue colour. Materials were beautifully made at 16 strands to the inch and would have been sewn with a bone needle. Green was worn by a select few, a sign of being high quality like, say, the farmer's wife and, of course, yellow was needed with the woad to make green. Slaves wore undyed cloth. Slaves then were not treated as the African slaves in America; they worked and were fed, clothed and housed. You could elect to become a slave, e.g. a widow might choose to do so, and you could work, buy, or marry out of slavery - generally at this time the system was very social, no-one was homeless or at risk.

Men of the time grew hair to chin length; it is unclear about the women as they covered their hair. The women ruled the house, while the men tended animals and grew vegetables and food. Sheep were mottled until the Romans introduced white wool sheep. Barley was grown here (sandy soil is not good for wheat). The Saxon name for a woman translates at "doughkneader". A hand quail was used to grind corn - it would take about 20 minutes to produce enough for a loaf (Chris explained that he had visited West Stow and done this himself). Bread was the main food, with side servings of a little meat and vegetables. Spare barley would make ale; mead was made from honey.

Flax and hemp (cannabis) were grown and used for textiles as was nettle (similar to flax). Plants needed to be strong. Again the crops grown are reflected in places such as *Flexlands* School, and Upper and Lower *Flexpool*. Weld (an annual) grew wild and was also used for dying (yellow). Dyer's Greenweed (genista) provided both green and yellow dye; it was eaten by sheep which spread the seeds. Flax also provided linseed.

Federati (mercenaries and pirates) worked along the Thames. They were given land to look after, about 50 yards square, like a huge allotment. Generally plots of land were used by common consent. It is unclear whether fields were rented or owned. The Great Hall of a settlement would be used to resolve issues, provide a meeting place, and convene war councils.

The Saxons loved the cuckoo; it features in poems. They were also well tuned to the weather and countryside. They could tell the time just by looking at the moon, seeing its shape and size.

Ladies made lace to the rhythm of songs and poems. The seeds of henbane were used to make a brew which had mind altering effects, tropane being the active ingredient. Oil lamps from sheep fat would have provided light - it would have smelt terrible.

Peas and beans could be dried for the winter - salt was expensive so preserving without it was preferable. The diet was a healthy one - there was very little arthritis. Beowulf literature reports an average age of 47 but recovered bones were generally healthy. Perilous ages seem to be about 4 years old, and young women of 18-21 years of age (probably in childbirth).

Heaths and heathers were cut for turf - local place names reflect that resulting "clearings", e.g. -leigh or -ley. Woods were home to wild pigs and people had their own domesticated animals. Pigs love barley so it had to be fenced off with willow hurdles. Nearby Loseley means "place of pigs"!

Chris had books for sale at half price - he was keen to clear out his stocks (he really is going to retire). He also had paintings for sale of trees and bark and the like.

After a break for tea there were a few questions:

Q: You mentioned LEY and LEIGH; what about Binfield and Warfield. **A:** these relate to pastures or woods deriving from felled trees (FELD).

Q: Was meat eaten? **A:** Pigs, sheep, goats and cattle all reared. They had cats and dogs. There were lots of goats, used for milk and meat, their hair and skin all used too. Baby goats were used as a sacrifice (hence scapegoat). They don't breed prolifically - their specialist farms are called a WICK (hence Gatwick); and Gatton Place means "place of goats". Cattle were important and evaluated a person's wealth. There were no draught horses, cattle were used. Perishables needed to be sold quickly and being near a river the goods could be transported for sale.

Q: Were there rats? **A:** Yes. Rat skeletons from the time have been found in York, Southampton and London. One particular rat was spectacularly captured after a fire when it was crushed between two beams. There is therefore no argument that these rodents were around.

Doug Smith said the talk had been fascinating; and thanked Chris. The audience duly applauded their approval. Chris reminded the audience that the Saxon times were very fair - a man had 7 days in which to return his wife!!

Liz judged the competition and the raffle was drawn - prizes included the snail plates! Just before closing the meeting at 9.40 pm David announced that the Boot Sale had made just over £67.

Signed..... Date.....