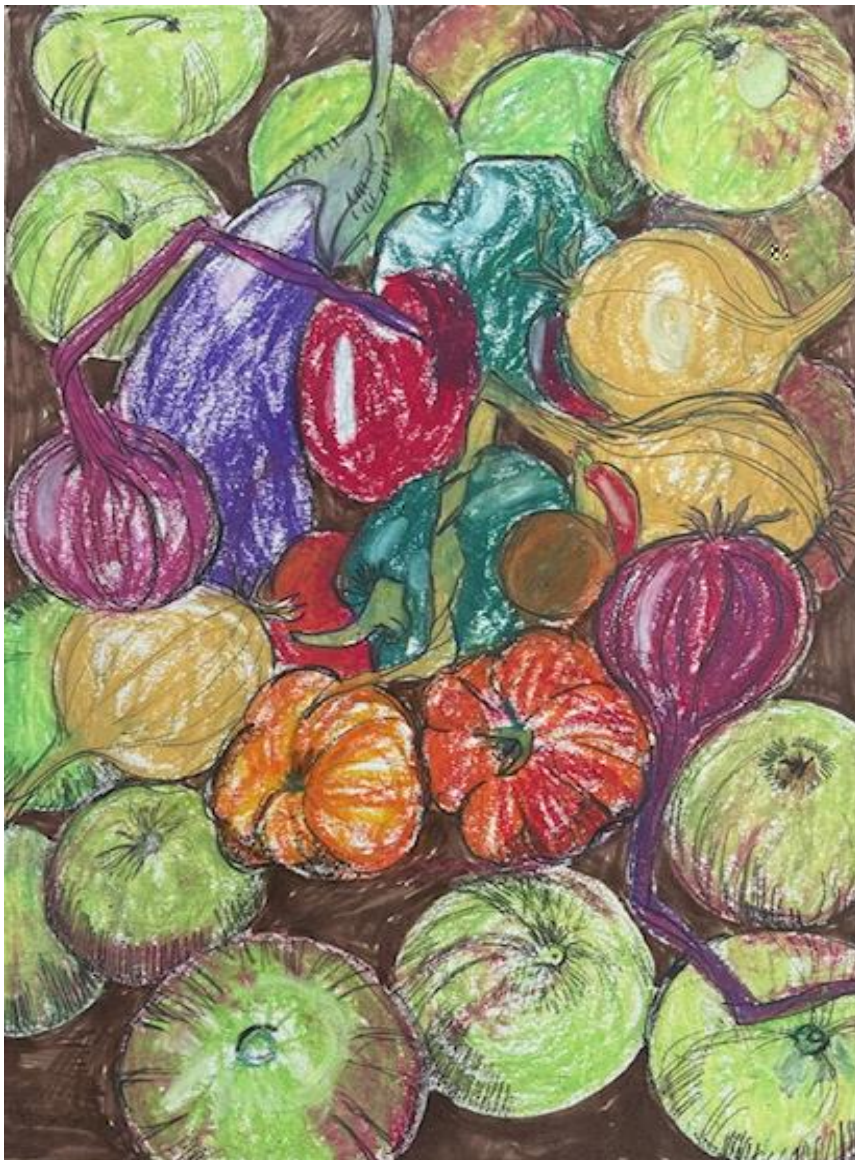


**50<sup>th</sup> Edition!**

**SHROPSHIRE ORGANIC  
GARDENERS**

Autumn 2024, Newsletter 50



For gardeners, allotment holders, window box owners, who wish to grow without chemicals and meet with others.

# SHROPSHIRE ORGANIC GARDENERS

We are a group of growers of fruit, vegetables and flowers with gardens, allotments or smallholdings in various places in Shropshire.

Winter meetings on the first Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm.  
Summer meetings from May to October are usually at weekends, and consist of visits to members' gardens, outings, practical workshops, demonstrations etc.

See the programme on the back pages.

We are regularly involved in putting on displays at green days/climate events/local and sustainable food events.

Subscription rates: £12 per person per year  
Visitors: £3

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SHROPSHIRE ORGANIC  
GARDENERS- SOGS

Members only group;

Soggies Surviving  
Join the Conversation.

# MESSAGE FROM YOUR CHAIRWOMAN

## Autumn 2024

Hello everyone and welcome to our Autumn 2024 newsletter. Time has certainly flown by since I sat down to write a piece for the Spring newsletter back in April.



Yet again, this autumn has been unbelievably wet, although we have been very lucky this year with our summer visits, not a single wet one. But weather aside, we have much to celebrate in the SOGS world.

I hope you can't help but notice that this is a very special edition of our newsletter, because it's the 50<sup>th</sup> one and something we felt definitely worth celebrating. Our newsletter founder and writer of many, many years, Marian Byrne, is also celebrating a large birthday in November and we wish her Many Happy Returns, plenty of partying and, in true SOGS fashion, plenty of cake.

I know from Marian's lovely contribution on p. 7 that once she started the ball rolling she wasn't really expecting it to still be going 25 years later, but it is and we are grateful for its continued presence via Maralyn Hepworth and now in the capable hands of Caroline Wright.

I would like to thank SOGS member Mary Rickards, for allowing us to use her beautiful paintings for the front and back covers of this special issue, even more glorious in their full colour versions.

I'm not going to go into any detail on this year's summer visits here, which finished in October on another wonderfully warm sunny Saturday afternoon at Babbinswood Organic Farm, Whittington, organised for me by Julia and Henry Hunstone. Instead read all about the visits on the following pages.

And this is a packed newsletter with lots of input from yourselves, including a delve into the archives and our new Top Tips Garden Column. Keep sending in those top tips please, ready for the Spring Newsletter.

Planning for Potato Day is underway so I hope you've all let Ian Thom know what potatoes you would specifically like. It's been a hard year for potato breeders with the rain and there will be shortages on certain varieties but, as ever, Matthew at Brighter Blooms is doing his best for us.

Now of course we head into our winter programme of meetings, which I hope you will enjoy. Check out the back pages for the full programme and our website too.

<http://shropshireorganicgardeners.org.uk/>

November's special meeting will be underway when you get to read this so hopefully you have enjoyed it, and our beekeeper speaker, Alison Wakeman.

Also, don't forget, we have the Christmas Bring and Share and our Big Seed and Garden Paraphernalia Swap, so if you have seeds and garden items you want to pass on, put them on one side for December. I have been given some tomato seed from Babbinswood Farm, called Atomic Grape - what a great name - which will be available.

And just to finish up, we also have another milestone to celebrate next year.

**35 YEARS** since the Shropshire Organic Gardeners started their meetings in Shrewsbury, and so we'll be organising a special event in June. Watch out for the date and all the details in due course. It will of course involve a garden and food.

Going for a full colour copy of our 50<sup>th</sup> newsletter is our thank you to all SOGS members for their continued support and help in an organisation that it is a real pleasure to be involved with.

Rachel Strivens





## EDITOR'S NOTES

Many thanks once again for all your contributions to this 50<sup>th</sup> edition of the newsletter. I seem to have taken on editorship at a very auspicious time for SOGS; the 20<sup>th</sup> Potato Day earlier this year, now the 50<sup>th</sup> newsletter and next year a 35<sup>th</sup> birthday to look forward to! I'm particularly pleased that we're hearing from Marian in this issue about how she started the newsletter (which she then edited for its first 44 editions, quite remarkable), and Ian's view of the Newsletter from the archives takes up the fascinating story.



**Celebrating Marian's 21 years as  
newsletter Editor, in 2022**



It's been so heartening to have so many of your voices represented here, keep your articles coming! And thanks very much to everybody who agreed so gracefully to my (sometimes last minute!) requests to write up our wonderful garden visits this Summer. If anybody wants to volunteer in advance to do a particular write-up, including of our forthcoming programme of Winter Talks, that would be even better, just drop me an email in advance: [carolinewright932@gmail.com](mailto:carolinewright932@gmail.com). Many thanks too for contributing so many excellent photos from our garden visits, with a special shout-out for photographer at large Dave Croker.

After a very wet winter, I don't think it was quite the summer any of us were hoping for weather-wise, but luckily we enjoyed sunshine for almost all of our exciting garden visits. Closer to home, things did grow

and ripen on our allotment and we've just emerged from the annual round of ratatouille, pasta sauce and soup making for the freezer! Not everything we planted thrived, of course, and having done well for a while our outdoor tomatoes succumbed to the dreaded blight, but then the eternal optimism of the gardener takes over; there's always next year!

I'd like to share a favourite autumn poem by Robert Louis Stevenson (including a poem here could become a thing!). It reminds me that the passing of the seasons is inevitable, and while we might feel a little sad as another winter approaches, we can still take comfort in this time of year. Of course we may limit our bonfires today, amidst concerns about air pollution and climate crisis, but there are nonetheless blazes of colour to savour in the autumn leaves and berries, as well as other warmths of winter and conviviality to enjoy in a quieter gardening season.

*Caroline Wright*

### Autumn Fires

In the other gardens  
And all up the vale,  
From the autumn bonfires  
See the smoke trail!

Pleasant summer over,  
And all the summer flowers,  
The red fire blazes,  
The grey smoke towers.

Sing a song of seasons!  
Something bright in all!  
Flowers in the summer,  
Fires in the fall!



Robert Louis Stevenson, 1885, in *Penny Whistle*

# HOW THE NEWSLETTER BEGAN

By Marian Byrne

'Do you think SOGS should have a newsletter?', I ventured at a gathering way back in 2002 or 2003. The reply was, inevitably, 'good idea, will you take it on?'. If you suggest something like that, you must be prepared to take it on yourself. I was thinking of just a printed sheet to circulate the future programme to the membership.

I had been attending a free course on familiarisation with using computers and was at last at the stage of being able to switch on and find my page - a major achievement! I was also managing to cut and paste and insert, while doggedly following each stage in the manual. I should be able to produce a sheet of information, I thought, no problem. I was already able to touch type.

However, I began to feel creative. I had these exciting new computer skills, although rather shaky, and started to use them to add items that might interest members. Soon I met the problem of empty space and the need to fill it, and that resulted in the newsletter expanding as I began regular features, such as chairman's report, members' accounts of visits, press cuttings and so on. The number of pages increased from 16 to 20 then on average 24, with an occasional 28 or 32. Twice yearly was the most convenient for indoors distribution, and for the editor, who hated deadlines!

I was sorry to give up, but I am delighted that it has survived and hope it will continue.

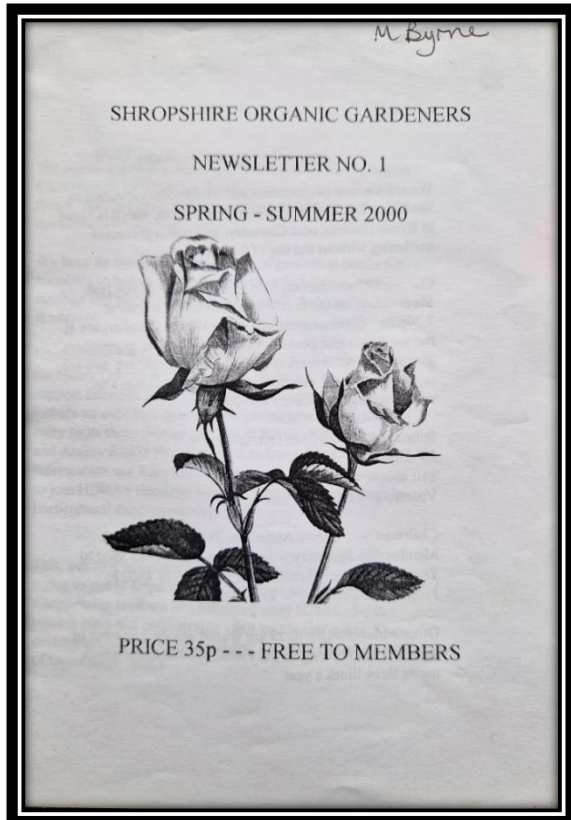


## FROM THE ARCHIVES: SOGS NEWSLETTERS

By Ian Thom

Shropshire Organic Gardeners Newsletter No. 1 was produced in Spring-Summer 2000, and was the brainchild of Marian Byrne, who, after suggesting the idea, of course ended up producing it. 'This, our first newsletter, is produced by a technophobe, trying to get to grips with the computer and dealing with disappearing toolbars and scattered stray bullets. So this issue is plain and unillustrated - but watch this space, I

am determined not to let old age debar me from the white heat of technology'. Many of us have struggled with computers, but not many have produced a newsletter from scratch, and technophobe or not, Marian succeeded, and carried on as Editor until quite recently. We have a lot to thank Marian for.



In fact, Newsletter No. 1 (neatly bound with string) was written entirely by Marian herself, and its sixteen pages are packed full of articles and information, including short resumes of the Winter talks, an item about an offshoot of SOGS (MOGs – Marches Organic Gardeners), an article about urine as a plant feed ('Has anyone experience of using urine this way?' – I'm not sure if anyone owned up back then), news-clippings, poems and puzzles, and Lord Berwick's seed order from 1804.

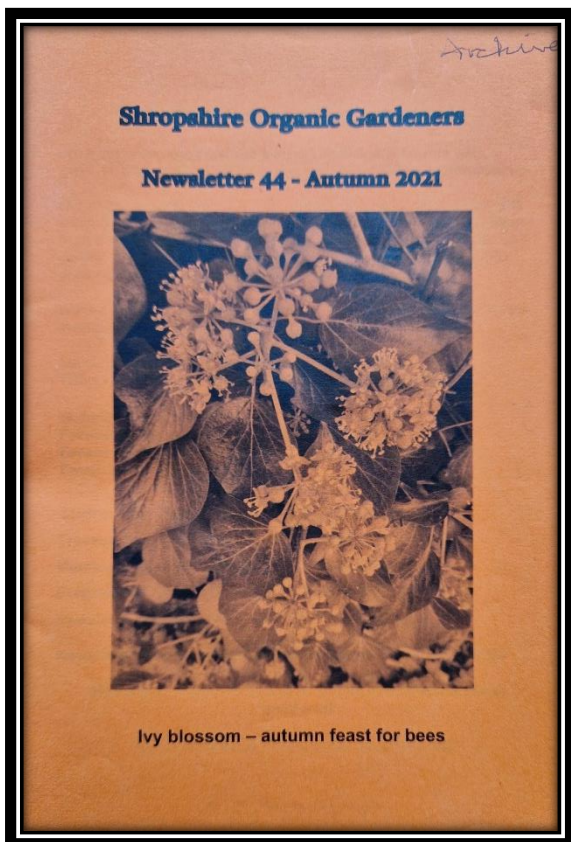
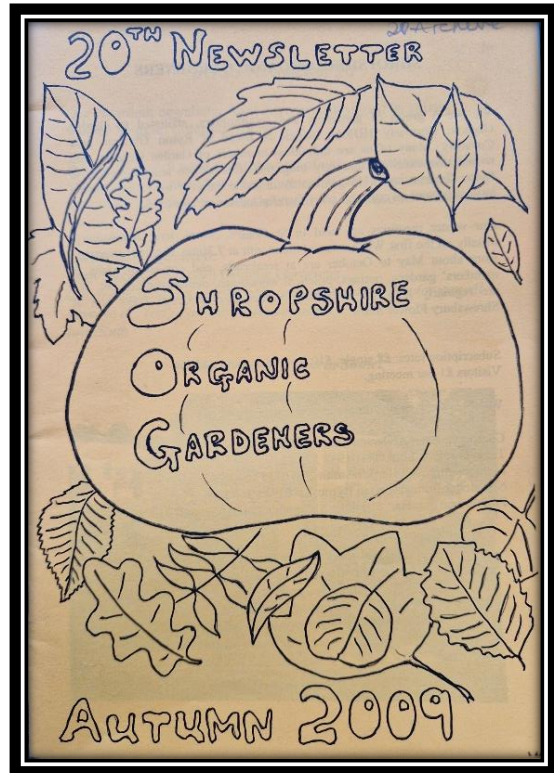
There was also the first Member Profile - of Marian Byrne of course; 'As this issue is all my own work I am going to tell you a bit about

myself and hope that other members will volunteer to do likewise'. Marian did no gardening until after she got married (to Paul). After modernising the kitchen in her terraced house in Liverpool, she put the old sink in the back yard and grew things in it, including honeysuckle. After moving to a house with a bigger garden, she graduated to a rockery and a flower garden cum veg patch, and then took on an allotment, and was inspired by the Liverpool Garden Festival in 1984 to join LOGs, Liverpool Organic Gardeners. After retirement, Marian and Paul moved to Shrewsbury in 1994, and transformed an overgrown and rubbish-strewn garden into the wonderful example it is to this day.

Marian established the newsletter as a twice-yearly publication, and No. 2 duly came out in Autumn-Winter 2000-2001. This time there were contributions not just from Marian, but from Sophie Anderson (a visit to the Greenwood Trust) and Maralyn Hepworth (Westhope Wanderings, including a hand-drawn diagram of their Self-watering System for Tomatoes).



Further editions continued to flourish. Issue 3 was already up to 20 pages, with contributions from others, including Mary White (Oat Roast recipe), Andrew Davidson (What it means to be an organic gardener), Rose Hardy (Ramblings of a Hardy Rose), a Member Profile of Peter Anderson, along with the established cocktail of clippings and puzzles. The first Chairman's Report appeared from Peter Anderson in Issue 9; it won't surprise anyone that there isn't space here to even summarise it! The newsletter introduced photographs by 2006, and soon grew to 32 pages.



Amazingly, in its 25-year existence, there have only been three editors. Marian was the sole editor right up to Autumn 2020 (Issue 42). Maralyn Hepworth became Deputy Editor from Issue 43, and sole Editor from 2022 (Issue 45). And recently, Caroline Wright has taken over as Editor, from Issue 49. Enjoy the next 20 years, Caroline.

[Gulp! Editor]

**Marian's 44<sup>th</sup> and final issue, produced with then Deputy Editor, Maralyn Hepworth**

**BEEN FLEECE!**  
**(up) CYCLING (at its best)**

**By Rachel Strivens**



Friday 5<sup>th</sup> April was the date for our second delivery of sheep fleeces from Glenda Crawshaw at Dolwen Farm.

This time around, SOGS member Linton Waters acted as fleece host in Shrewsbury and we had 141 fleeces delivered. Slightly less than last year but still very worthwhile Dolwen Farm taking the time to deliver them to us. At £2 per fleece, it's very good value for Soggies, and for Dolwen, who would only get about 54p per fleece from the Wool Marketing Board, it makes economic sense.

Modes of collection varied, from Sue Fisher just around the corner taking armfuls and walking them home, whilst Judy and Ian came along (also from very close) on their bikes. Never one to miss a photo opportunity, your Chairwoman decided this had to be recorded for posterity and Ian rose to the challenge!

Following this delivery, we've since found out that member Camilla Loney and her husband also have sheep and would be willing to sell Soggies fleeces.

Tips for using sheep's wool include: putting it around your soft fruit bushes; topping off your compost bins; putting some in the containers for your greenhouse tomatoes (the whole lot can just go on the compost at the end of the season). For the most recent, using it as a membrane layer under wood chip for paths, check out the new TOP TIPS COLUMN on p. 45, and see also why fleece colour makes all the difference!



## **REPORT FROM THE AGM, 10<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2024**

**By Rachel Strivens, Chairwoman**

I rarely report back from the AGMs because AGMs are meetings that have to take place but we none of us really like! However, this year it was an AGM with a big difference.

Back in October 2023 the Planning Group agreed that it was time to reintroduce charitable donations to other groups. It was something SOGS had done for many years, but during Covid we stopped because we needed to ensure we had a healthy reserve in the bank for unforeseen circumstances (how unforeseen could Covid be, I ask myself), and also to make sure we continue to be able to pay for room bookings and good speakers, both of which have seen recent rises in cost.

As a gardening group, we felt that this time around new donations should be directed towards community groups that had or were setting up food growing projects. For example, showing the local community how to grow food, getting them involved in running the projects, enjoying the fruits of home grown veg, and of course the benefits of composting.

As Chairwoman, and also having worked on many funded projects before, I felt it important that in return these groups would come and tell us about their projects and how the money had been spent. Five groups applied for funding and received the money, giving a total donation spend of **£1,200**.



Everyone happily agreed, and below are some highlights from four groups who could join us that evening. Dorrington unfortunately couldn't come, and received their donation slightly later, but we hope they'll join us in April 2025.

It turned out to be our best AGM meeting ever!

## 1. Sue Stickland (SOGS member) on behalf of Wales Seed Hub

On behalf of the Wales Seed Hub, Sue asked if SOGs could contribute to the production of some Seed Saving Cards which highlight saving seed from 9 different vegetables, plus a glossary card. The beautifully designed seed saving cards have all the info' needed for successful seed saving at home. Sold in packs of the 10 cards, they are available to buy from Wales Seed Hub, the profits of which helps to support the hub with seed saving.

As Sue (a seed saving expert herself) explained, four corporations control an estimated 60% of global seed sales and a massive 75% of crop diversity has been lost in the last 100 years. Also, in the UK nearly all small local seed companies have been lost. All this has serious implications for food security and is why the Gaia Foundation's Seed Sovereignty Programme was set up to support a sustainable seed system in the UK and Ireland.

A group of Welsh growers got themselves trained and set up the Wales Seed Hub to sell their seeds, all of which are licensed under the Animal and Plant Health Agency and UK Plant Passport. They select varieties that grow well in the Welsh climate, which isn't so dissimilar to Shropshire's. Like the cards, seed is for sale through their website.



Seed saving cards



Seeds for the Welsh climate



The Wales Seed Hub is a cooperative of agroecological growers, working together to produce **open pollinated** seed.



Welsh growers from the seed hub



[www.seedhub.wales](http://www.seedhub.wales)

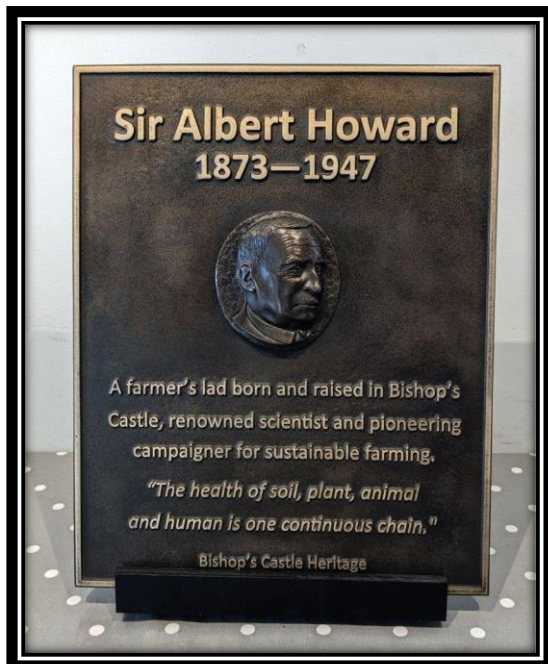
## 2. Trevor Chalkley on behalf of the Albert Howard Society

Trevor got in touch with SOGS to see if we would be able to make a donation to help fund the making of a commemoration plaque in Bishop's Castle, for a Shropshire lad who became the founding father of the modern-day organic movement in agriculture.

Sir Albert Howard, a farmer's son from Bishop's Castle, became a renowned scientist and pioneering campaigner for sustainable farming. He spent many years in India, firstly as Imperial Economic Botanist to the Government of India, then Director of The Institute of Plant Industry, Indore, India, before returning to England in 1930 and spending the next 17 years campaigning for sustainable agriculture.

The Albert Howard Society was formed in 2015, with the aim of getting Albert Howard's work and life known about in his birthplace, Bishop's Castle, the surrounding area and more widely. It was fitting that SOGS should help out with a donation and we will work with the Society and the Bishop's Castle Resource Centre to see how we can keep all the digitised archives in Shropshire and further recognise his work. The original documents are stored in the library at St John's College, Cambridge.

The archive is a very important resource for anyone interested in the history and development of organic agriculture and the central role played by Albert Howard and the Matthaei sisters.



Family members, Charlotte Matthaei and Richard Howard



The two people who unveiled the plaque on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> June 2024 are descendants of 'Team Howard' and the Society were so pleased to have them taking part.

[www.bchrc.co.uk](http://www.bchrc.co.uk)

### **3. Helen, Jan and Ray on behalf of the Bridgnorth Community Garden Project**

The idea of a community garden project came from an original project at the 1808 Hazledine Foundry site, where the group cleared some land, built a dead hedge and grew vegetables for a short while. However, this site is now being developed by a local company as a commemoration garden to Prince Phillip (luckily raised beds to grow food will still be integral to it).

In the meantime, the BCGP group were approached in March 2023 by St James Hall Church to see if they would like to take on their grounds for a project, which they did with enthusiasm.





**Before – the site was just grass but the group wanted to create space for wildlife and growing food**

Following an initial plant sale and seed swap event to let residents know what was happening, work got started.



**Postscript** – since the AGM, BCGP report that the SOGS donation and some money from Veolia has meant the group could complete a larger raised bed than first planned. The local primary school became involved and planted it up with vegetables and small seedlings, which will hopefully have produced an abundant harvest of organically grown produce and a new generation of organic gardeners. The groups says thanks again to SOGS for the support in getting started.



<https://www.facebook.com/p/Bridgnorth-Community-Garden-Project-100091795863088/?rdr>

#### **4. Casper and Fleur Macindoe on behalf of the Street Allotments Project (SOGS group members)**

The aims of the Street Allotments Project are to find and borrow disused land in and around Shrewsbury, convert it to allotment spaces and grow free fruit and veggies for the community. Casper and Fleur's original request for funding from SOGS was for a Community Orchard and Wildflower Meadow at Rock Street in Belle Vue. We agreed this but then, unfortunately, their proposal to Shropshire Council was denied permission, so thinking caps back on.

The group have various projects around town, such as the gardening club at Coleham Primary School, the Belle Vue Youth Centre, Bell Lane, Abbey Pub and Monkmoor Pub, all providing free veggies for their local communities.



**Volunteers hard at work**





**Supply of trees/shrubs for planting**



**Preparing for the next crop and weed mulching**

One of their original and long-term projects at the Monkmoor pub needed to move up a notch or two by becoming self-sufficient in water by installing a rainwater collection system. So we gave them the go ahead to use the money towards the purchase of an IBC (intermediate bulk container) for water storage at the site and pipework for distribution, instead of the meadow project.



<https://www.streetallotmentproject.org/home>

## FARM VISIT: THE ISLE, SHREWSBURY

Edward Tate

Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> May 2024

Written up by Frank Oldaker

**Tea, Coffee, a Picnic and a 'Field of Yoghurt'**

Saturday the 25th May brought one day of warmth and sunshine 'bookended' by less amenable weather. Whether Rachel's magic or Soggies' luck, this made it ideal for our visit to The Isle Estate, where Edward Tate farms 860 acres within a loop of the River Severn. There were a lot of us, so Edward very generously took morning and afternoon groups

separately and we all met up at lunchtime – for a picnic in the walled garden. With tea and coffee available all day from 10am AND a peacock serenade it was special (and just wait for the yoghurt!).



Although he had a family connection to The Isle, and spent time there as a teenager, Edward never expected to end up as the farmer. When circumstances gave him the opportunity he took on a lifetime tenancy, rejected chemical intensive methods, and followed what he initially described as 'sustainable' practices. He has in recent years tucked his approach under the 'regenerative farming' banner.

Edward does not farm 'organically' as such, but as we viewed various crops and listened to what he was doing, and particularly the research and thought that he puts into every aspect of managing The Isle farm, it felt that if all farmers were like this, we wouldn't have the problems that now exist. The underlying principles are to minimise artificial inputs in



the growing of all crops: no insecticides are used and fungicides and herbicides only reluctantly. A lot is done to enhance nature and biodiversity but at the same time the whole place has to remain viable financially. Edward is very open about this and said the profit margin last year amounted to about 6%. In a business where prices are volatile and the risk from weather is ever present, this isn't comfortable. He used the loaf of bread 'trick' to illustrate his point, dividing up an actual loaf in front of us: a loaf is the cost to the consumer; a slice is production costs; a quarter of a slice is his profit.

Ok, to the yoghurt!! Early in our tour we came to a field of maize being grown as animal feed for the herd of cows on the farm. So next to no cow food miles. The milk from the cows goes to Müller at Minsterley, which is almost visible on the horizon, so Edward said he saw this short food chain as one - and visualized the field of maize as a 'Field of Yoghurt', a nice image!!



'Field of Yoghurt', a nice image!!

As we walked on through more fields, we found out how carefully the NPK (Nitrogen, Phosphorus, Potassium) requirements of the crops

were satisfied, firstly by calculating what was available and then just making up the balance with manufactured fertilizer. A spade or two of soil revealed healthy worm activity and the benefit of having a good population of natural predators like ground beetles is appreciated. All fields had an uncultivated strip around them and if near the river a wider 'buffer' area was provided, so that any nutrient rich run off would be absorbed before it reached the water. Some wheat being grown was a high-quality mix of 4 varieties, the so-called Marks and Spencer wheat, and while it will be worth more than 'ordinary' wheat the yield will also be lower, so it is not necessarily a lot more profitable. Experimenting is part of what is being done constantly and about 10% of the crops each year are experimental.

The enhancement of The Isle Estate as a natural area, as well as a farm, is obviously a passion. Hedgerows around fields are allowed to

become thick and just topped so they are also high. Wild areas exist and the bird life is encouraged. Eleven species of dragonflies have been seen on the large natural lake. These efforts, along with the reduced area available for cultivation due to wide field margins, buffer zones etc., cost money and Edward is very critical of the inadequate level of Government support for regenerative farming. It is an issue for The Isle, and although Edward would try to follow his principles anyway, the lack of support serves to deter others from following suit and impedes progress. It also comes in addition to other cost pressures, from low supermarket pricing to costs due to Brexit and 'rushed' trade deals with countries like Australia that disadvantage British farmers; Edward listed them all.

The need to 'manage' the river is now widely accepted and regenerative farming has an important role to play. Wild areas and tree belts along the river absorb rainfall and help to control the rate of flow and reduce flooding. Climate change is very much on Ed's mind, especially relevant when he has 5 miles of river frontage. A carbon audit of The Isle has been done and showed that carbon absorption exceeded emissions and he will look to further reduce emissions into the future.

We were also told how important diversification has been to the finances of the farm. The provision of livery services is major, there were lots of horses around and, because The Isle is such an idyllic place, people are also happy to pay to ride there. The large lake is also a fishery for an angling association and there is a B&B business.

Most of the visit was about what you have just read but we started off going to the hillfort near the house. The Isle has a long history of human habitation and the earliest building still standing dates from the 1400s. There is a real sense of history about the place but it also has a great feeling of being busy with lots going on, as we saw, it is in the forefront of what we hope will be a complete change in farming methods.

**Mission:** To sustainably farm for the future.  
To return the land to a level of health and bio-diversity not seen in our lifetimes.



<https://the-isle-estate.co.uk/isle-farm/>



## **MEMBERS' GARDEN VISIT: CRUCK HOUSE, BASCHURCH**

**Maggie and Peter Anderson  
Sunday 30 June 2024**

**Written up by Caroline Wright**

On a dry and bright but somewhat chilly June day, and having cycled over from Pontesbury with other Soggies, it was wonderful to arrive at an absolute haven of a garden, sheltered by woodland on all sides. This was my first visit to Maggie and Peter's garden, but I could immediately appreciate why it's been returned to several times over the years and why we were more than 40 people visiting this time.

After the usual welcome from Rachel, Peter explained how the garden has evolved since they arrived in 1979. Trees have been planted to replace the huge elms lost to disease, including a huge white poplar grown from a stick and an English oak grown from an acorn the year Maggie and Peter got married. The overall focus is on providing a selection of produce to eat, fresh or preserved, every day of the year. As well as the usual fruit and vegetables, this includes meat and milk from cows, sheep and pigs on their adjoining 3 acres, as well as fuel for heating the house, plant material for Maggie's textile dyeing and a nice line in home-made cider, cherry liqueur and damson gin! They've even tried growing wheat to make their own flour but gave that up as just not worth the effort.

Some seasonal help is usually on hand from WWOOFers, those seeking Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms, and in fact two had just left. And Peter had a clear answer to a question about how many sheds are on the site – one too few! (and something similar could perhaps be said about the wheelbarrows...!).



We then set off to explore the acre of garden and its myriad of paths, according to our own pace and interests. There was such a lot to see

but the goats with new-born kids were an early port of call for most of us, irresistible!



Alongside the greenhouses full of tomatoes, lusty courgettes on the compost heap and other vegetables seeing off this season's incessant slugs with the help of beer traps, there were beautiful rambling roses, including a spectacular Bobbie James in full flight, beehives, a gravel herb garden with luxury

bug hotels, an apple tree tunnel and a thriving wildlife pond. I particularly enjoyed some of the more unusual features, such as taking a quiet moment in Buddhist corner, complete with meditation bells, and contemplating the compost loo prototype that gives added impetus to the term 'long-drop'! Chatting with those who've seen the garden before, what came up as one of its most appreciated features is being both highly productive and real, not overly pristine. I couldn't agree more.

The large lawned area in the centre of the garden proved a perfect setting for tea and cake under the tulip tree and, once again, members had excelled in the variety and deliciousness of what was brought to share. Meanwhile, the fragrant roses and sweet-peas on the tables dotted around reminded us that we were in mid-Summer, and even if the temperature wasn't quite what we'd hoped for, the generosity of this garden and the unfailing conviviality of SOGS more than made up for it.



### **Addendum from the assistant gardener, Peter Anderson**

(A man should not have any more garden than his wife can manage!).

Thank you for coming to visit; it is a pleasure for us to share our enthusiasm for the garden. It makes such a difference to be able to see

it through other people's eyes. When alone in the garden one tends to see the jobs that have not been done but with an enthusiastic visitor it is the other way round and one basks in the glow of their appreciation. The garden suddenly looks wonderful and for several days the feet hardly touch the ground.

This is one of the great pleasures (there are many others; how long have you got?) of SOGS, visiting other gardens. There is always something that is not quite as good as what you have got at home and then a little touch of non-malicious *shadenfreude* sets in and brings about a warm glow from knowing that not everything in your own garden is below par.

On the day our goats were scene stealers, having given birth the day before. Two of the goatlings were reluctant to suck and caused some concern but I am happy to report that they soon got the idea and now they are big and strong and nearly weaned, which means that there is lots of milk left over for us.



There was a question about a contraption on our yard to which the answer is...Yes, it is a hot tub; very experimental. All of the components I had been given at one time or another. At the moment it is hot but spelled c-h-i-l-l-y. The heat exchange from the old radiator is not efficient enough. I have cut the tub down by half (the bit that I have cut off will make a raised bed in the veg patch) but even so it is now spelled t-e-p-i-d. But at least it is possible to step in to it. When it was full sized I got in... but that was the easy part...! I will continue to develop the idea.

If you have a garden, new or old, large or small, please do not wait for it to be perfect before you invite SOGS to see it. We love to see the potential and share the vision in the gardener's mind. You will be glad that you invited SOGS just for the gardening boost that it gives you; the comestibles that everyone brings along will be, if I may use the expression, pun intended, the cherry on the cake.





## RECIPE CORNER

### Orange and Caraway Slices with Orange Blossom Glaze

As created by Rachel and shared on summer garden visits

#### Ingredients

200g unsalted butter, softened  
80g spelt flour  
180g light brown soft sugar  
Grated zest and juice of 2 oranges  
2 tsp caraway seeds (these can be ground up or left whole)

160g plain flour  
1 tsp baking powder  
3 large eggs lightly beaten

[The two different flours can be replaced with 240g of self-raising flour and no baking powder if desired]

#### For the Glaze

150g icing sugar  
40 ml milk  
Splash of orange blossom water or orange juice

Finely grated zest of one orange

#### Method

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C/350°F. Butter a 30 x 20x 5cm roasting tray (or square/oblong cake tin) and line with baking parchment.
2. Combine the flours and baking powder, if using both instead of SR.
3. Beat the butter and sugar together with electric beaters or an electric mixer until fluffy. Gradually beat in the eggs, then the orange zest and caraway seeds.
4. Stir the butter mixture into the flour mixture, alternating with the orange juice, to make a thickish batter. Scrape into the prepared roasting tray/cake tin, making it as level as you can, and smooth the top with a spatula. Bake for 20 minutes or until firm to the touch. Leave in the tray for 5 minutes then turn out on a wire rack to cool.
5. Meanwhile combine all the glaze ingredients in a small bowl. When the cake is completely cold, spread the glaze over the top, leave to set and cut into portions. Enjoy!

*Taken from Roasting Tray Magic by Sue Quinn*

# GARDEN VISIT: DOWN TO THE RIVER SEVERN

## Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> July 2024

Written up by Rachel Strivens

21<sup>st</sup> July saw another perfectly sunny afternoon for our SOGS visit to an enchanting and hidden garden sloping down to the River Severn. Our hosts Robin and Julia welcomed us on the upper lawn with an overview of the large half acre main garden, which boasts grape vines, raised veg beds, a 21ft polytunnel, pond, fruit trees and ornamentals. Then on to the riverbank walk of wild-flower areas and House at Pooh Corner.

Before starting the journey downhill, Robin told us a very amusing tale (involving all sorts of shenanigans by Greek gods) of why the white umbel flowers of the Wild Carrot (*Daucus carota*) have a very central floret of dark red. It is only this flower that produces nectar and is a definitive feature of Wild Carrot, although not all specimens possess this element. Those Greek gods really have a lot to answer for.



Robin on the 'wild side'

Moving on down the garden we stopped to discuss the new raised veg beds made with Marley tiles. Robin also demonstrated a unique way of carrot sowing (and that's not wild carrot) - see The Top Tips Column on p. 45 for all of Robin's useful growing tips.

Their orchard was looking very healthy, with good crops of apples and pears to ripen in due course, but Robin's real interest on the fruit front is his small vineyard of several years cropping. Robin had promised me



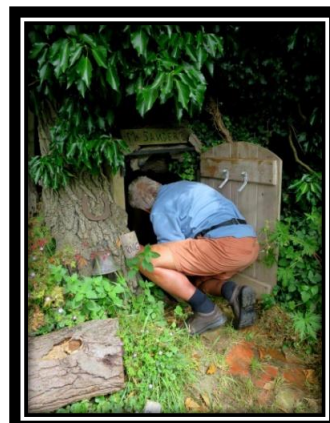
we would have a tasting at the end of the tour, but I didn't tell members that beforehand.



The final part of the garden is a new area of riverbank wildflower walk. Very easy to maintain, as Robin just mows paths and leaves the rest to flower, it was buzzing with pollinator activity.



Robin also revealed that he was a huge fan of Winnie The Pooh and treated us to extract readings from the books. He is such a fan that various bits of the books have been recreated in the garden for entertainment of the family.



**David's bum  
disappearing**

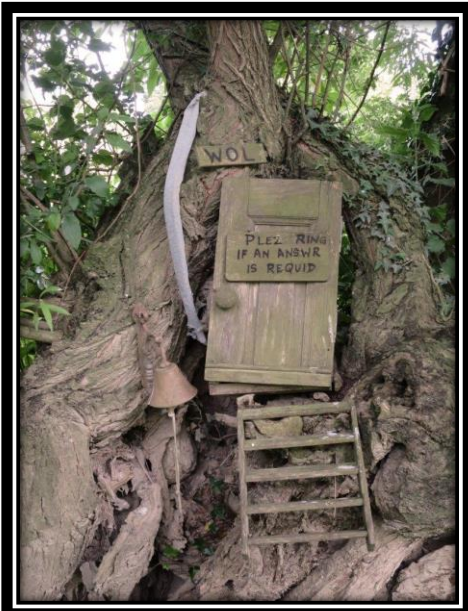




**House at Pooh Corner!**



**Piglet**



**WOL's House**

**Winnie the Pooh, aka Siobhan!**



The afternoon finished with a surprise wine tasting for everyone from Robin's previous bottled stock.

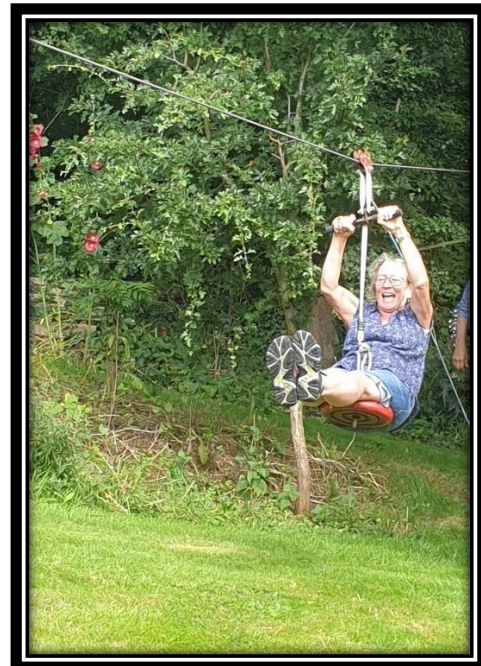


**Sue enjoying a quaff, and just a bit more!**





However, it wasn't quite the end. As part of Robin's future proofing of the garden for getting about, he had installed a zip wire in part of the garden, and member John Williams couldn't resist having a go, along with a couple of others who shall remain nameless!



### **Editor's Note:**

I was sorry to miss this Pooh-themed visit down to the river! It brings to mind a handy quote typically attributed to Winnie the Pooh / A.A. Milne (does anybody know where it is in the texts?):

**'Weeds are flowers too, once you get to know them.'**



# SMALLHOLDING VISIT: TWELVE ACRES, POWYS

Drew Spellar

Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> August 2024

Written up by Jan Gibb

It was another lovely day for our SOGS visit to Twelve Acres smallholding, deep in the beautiful Welsh countryside near Llangadfan. We pulled into the lane past a very pretty Welsh stone cottage with authentic stone building opposite. The gazebo was already up and the cake table all ready to be filled with the usual treats!

The smallholding has been owned for 5 years now by Drew and David, who live there with their adopted sons, two brothers. As we started off on the tour Drew talked to us about the process of adoption and how the boys had settled in, also how hard it was at first, but how satisfying it is now to see them growing and enjoying the land and animals. What a marvellous environment to grow up in!



Drew is a full-time gardener, RHS qualified, who got hooked on growing when he took on an allotment. He has got bags of energy and amazed us with his

plans for Twelve Acres, including a Japanese Garden behind the stone building! We moved along to the productive area near the polytunnel. Drew is so enthusiastic about bringing life and diversity to their land, with barn owl nest boxes, tree planting and good pasture management.



First, we came to the poultry enclosure, containing lots of rescue hens and 3 cockerels, also ducks. There was a wealth of electric and wire fencing as it had been a long learning curve to keep the poultry safe from foxes. Thinking that geese may protect the hens didn't work, unfortunate for both hens and geese. Also thinking that fruit trees in the enclosure would be productive and attractive didn't work either, as the geese peeled the bark (before the foxes got them). Good news though, the poultry were re-stocked and the trees recovered. I think a lot of us have had similar experiences. Drew said he had learnt a lot from these predicaments and having, by necessity, to get on and solve problems.

The polytunnel was a treat, especially the nectarine tree which was covered with fruit, the scent was delicious. In the Welsh winters the



polytunnel suffered with the cold and the lemon and lime trees needed extra care. The temperature has been as low as -10° in winter and up to 45° in summer. The strawberries had been excellent, also the garlic, and an actual wooden bed (slept in by Drew when he lived in India) filled with salad leaves was charming.

Back outside to numerous raised beds for vegetables, flowers for cutting, also 150 fruit and nut trees. Near the composting area is the pig enclosure waiting for the next inhabitants. The composting area had been another learning curve as the first bays under the trees were too dry.

Then we met the goats, who are pets and lead a charmed life, playing on their seesaw and climbing frame, built by Drew from reclaimed wood.



The hillside pasture looked inviting and we admired the Black Welsh Mountain sheep, whose gorgeous fleeces we all coveted. These sheep are hardy, small and easy lambers so a good choice for novice shepherds, but fast movers when you need to round them up!



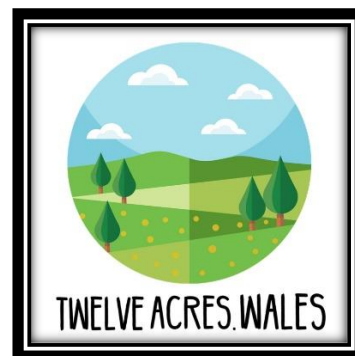
The walk up the hillside pasture brought us to the vineyard. The views from here were stunning. A lot of hard work and investment has gone into planting the vines (with input from friend Lisa) and all the 239 vines looked healthy and vigorous. This is

planting with foresight; Welsh wine has a promising future!

Time to head back down the hill towards the afternoon tea table where brews and cakes were enjoyed and we all agreed that Drew, David and sons are an inspirational family with boundless energy. Plans to grow and sell herbs, produce, fruit, veg, eggs and wine are in the pipeline..... they have plenty to get on with!



To finish with a dream of Drew's.....he would like to have a Christmas Dinner using only their own meat, vegetables, fruit and wine produced from their own land. How good is that!!





# MARKET GARDEN VISIT: HAVENHILLS FIELD AND KITCHEN, SHIFNAL

Jonathan and Karen Hartnell-Beavis  
Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> September 2024

Written up by Sylvi Greenfield

Our visit to Havenhills started, middled and finished well, particularly the taaaasty cakes and convivial surroundings at the end. And not forgetting the fact that the rain stopped before we arrived, and that we stayed dry during the very interesting tour of the market garden with lots of info' and chat with Jonathan and each other, as ever. I enjoy every SOGS visit I can get to, especially to chat with like-minded people, compare our garden successes and not-so-successes - and the more



veg the better (not forgetting the cakes), so Havenhills ticked every box.

John and Karen started their venture just 3 years ago and what they have achieved is nothing short of a miracle. They've had the same successes and failures as we have, experimented and

learned lessons but on a far greater scale. We were all amazed that they can manage to grow, harvest, cook, pack hampers and veg bags, run a weekly stall, deliver, sell and pursue the myriad other small and essential jobs necessary to develop and continue to expand their successful business. HOW do they find time to sleep?? And what about all the paperwork?

Jonathan continues to read avidly on farming and gardening methods and mentioned one book which impressed him, *The One-Straw Revolution* by Japanese farmer and philosopher Masanobu





Fukuoka. Another influence is Iain Tolhurst who, over 40 years, has developed a highly successful, self-supporting market garden system with high levels of biodiversity. Havenhills is in the first year of a new 8 year rotation system, following Iain's method. Jonathan is also a member of the Landworkers Alliance and he highly recommends the film 'The Biggest Little Farm'.

Another influence is the Jadam method of organic farming, which I'd never heard of. Jonathan makes Jadam liquid feed, which is easily and quickly produced. For Jadam tomato feed, he uses the vines after the harvest is finished, and he favours a variation of tomato ring culture. This year Jonathan experimented by stopping watering tomatoes about the end of August, which concentrates the flavour.



Jonathan admits he needs to sort out his composting system but, Jonathan, you can't do everything at once ;). He recommends NOT growing plants through weed suppressant, certainly leeks were not a success for him this way. Instead, he now grows cover crops such as rye and vetch. He is a fan of companion planting - we were interested that this year he has successfully used white alyssum with broad beans.



We can't forget that Karen cooks and bakes with their produce. I can vouch for the excellence of her courgette, fretta and mint tart and her sourdough bread and have yet to cook with her homemade pasta (fretta is a locally made feta-style cheese). Jonathan and Karen sell products from many local producers, using, for example, flour ground from grains grown less than 5 miles away.

Future plans include vines and a permaculture area. Where WILL they find the time?

Jonathan and Karen, thank you sooooo much for giving us an interesting, informative and tasty afternoon. We wish you continued success and learning - and energy!!!



### Following Up:

Masanobu Fukuoka: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masanobu\\_Fukuoka](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masanobu_Fukuoka)

Iain Tolhurst: <https://stockfreefarming.org/tolhurst-organic/>

Jadam fertilizers: <https://www.microfarmguide.com/jadam-liquid-fertilizers/>

The Biggest little Farm: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt8969332/>

Shrewsbury Fretta: [www.moydenscheese.co.uk](http://www.moydenscheese.co.uk)



<https://www.havenhills.co.uk/>

## **FARM VISIT: BABBINSWOOD, WHITTINGTON**

**Barbara and Casha Jones  
Sunday 19th October 2024**

**Written up by Pat Frost**

On Saturday October 19th and in autumnal sunshine, over 20 members of SOGS were welcomed at Babbinswood Farm, near Whittington, as the guests of the owners, Barbara and her daughter Casha. The family farm had been run by Barbara and her husband Richard, until, after the foot and mouth pandemic in 2001, Richard decided to stop milking. The farm was then leased to a local dairy farmer, who put it into organic use. The farm was leased for 16 years and during this time, Barbara and Casha learnt as much as they could about organic farming, taking advice from other organic farmers as well as attending conferences and courses. By 2016 they felt they had enough experience to take on the farm themselves. Throughout this time, Barbara continued to run her holistic veterinary practice, Oakwood Veterinary Centre, which has been on the site since 1994 and is still operating today.

The farm comprises a traditional 19th century brick-built detached farmhouse and a courtyard plan of three substantial long barns similarly built in brick and of the same date. As an archaeologist, I particularly appreciated the open view of the courtyard buildings, with no anachronistic features spoiling them! The main buildings back on to large modern sheds and 180 acres of farmland, some of which is separated by the lane.



In taking on the farm, Barbara and Casha have a clear vision of its purpose and future, as detailed on their web-site:



‘Babbinswood Farm exists to provide our family with a sustainable foundation, to ensure that the land and its special energy is handed down to future generations in a thriving state, whilst being a beacon of inspiration to others.’

SOGS were treated to an introductory film show in one of the barns, where the Babbinswood commitments to farming closely with nature and caring for our soil were set out, with the aim of producing nutritious, organic food which is accessible and affordable for all. The farm is currently under-used and the financial burden of buying Barbara’s husband out is substantial. Following years of hard work, Barbara and Casha have been inspired by the success of Fordhall Farm, near Market Drayton, and have set about a programme of fund raising and planning which they hope will sustain the farm in the future. In 2023, they launched a crowdfunding campaign and in 2024 they found a temporary backer, which has given them time to set up a Community Benefit Society. This is selling shares to allow community ownership of 116 acres of farmland on the south side of the lane, together with use of the courtyard barn that fronts the lane.

After the film, Barbara and Casha took us on a tour, starting with the milking parlour and then moving on to the pasture behind.



Currently Casha has a small herd of cattle who are purely pasture fed and graze the same field as the sheep. Only six cows are milked at present, the remainder being kept with their calves until the calf it is old enough to wean naturally. Casha’s cows are producing milk for sale in the farm shop and provide the milk for the soft-cheese and yogurt also on sale there.

From the pasture we moved on to see the large Community Garden, which has been run by Lesley for the past 3 years on organic and

biodynamic principles. She is especially keen not to have any bare soil. The two polytunnels still had some tomatoes available, including an unusual 'atomic grape tomato' which was much admired.



After the tour, we were treated to refreshments and sat in glorious sunshine in the courtyard. Some of us then visited the farm shop, which sells fruit, vegetables and dairy products, which the owners hope will eventually all be sourced on the farm. The shop is expanding, producing and delivering veg boxes and retailing at local farmer's markets as well as stocking organically reared meat, and sweet and savoury snacks. Some of us also visited the excellent composting toilet!



The visit ended with Rachel giving a vote of thanks to Barbara, Casha and Lesley for welcoming us to the farm, showing us around and sharing their vision for the future with us.



<https://www.babbinswoodfarm.co.uk/>

# KEEP ON GARDENING!

By Maralyn Hepworth

Sometimes gardening seems impossible. Aches and pains, physical disabilities, energy levels - not all old age! So how do you keep on gardening? I have been unable to kneel since I was 16 years old (motorbike injury) and now have other bits of my body objecting, and poor energy levels. But I still garden. Here are my adaptations.

1. Set your alarm (mobile phone or other) for 10 mins before the time you feel you can manage whilst still being ok. Then you have finish-and-tidy-up time. Ignore that bit just by you that needs weeding. Then you will be able to do more the next day. My limit at the moment is 20 mins. Regularly!!!
2. Allow the garden to garden itself. There are some surprising successes. Wonderful plants arrive all by themselves and they always go where they like it best. Others spread by roots or seeds and create a natural look. I always used to transplant my evening primrose to the back of the border. They love it nearer the front and create a screen for the smaller plants. Whilst I have been doing this for years, Chelsea is catching up!
3. Get tools that help you. Long handled trowel, fork, hoe (there are long handles to attach them to), long secateurs, so you don't have to bend. One handed shears and long handled pruners are essential!
4. People give me kneelers, even though they know I can't kneel. But I have used them to bum-shuffle forwards round borders and paths. Recently, this ended up with me in the herbaceous border path unable to get up! I tried to roll over into the Dog Head Down yoga pose – but there was no room. I trialled next door's stool with handles to enable easier standing. Mine now has a pocket on the side for secateurs. The only issue with this is that you have to get up and move it continually unless you have a lot to do in one area.



5. I use a walking pole with a handle. This makes sure I don't fall over and the handle is really useful for pulling high or low branches, plants towards you to cut off. Or use a litter picker.
6. SIT. Have special places round the garden from which to enjoy your garden. I have the merlin app to identify bird song. I see birds, bees, butterflies that I wouldn't otherwise.
7. Get a Frank! – or someone who will do the bits you can't do. The walking pole is excellent to point out what needs pruning, weeding!



**Stool with tall, self seeded plants.  
Thalictrum, evening primrose,  
mallow.**



**Long handled secateurs,  
changeable long handled  
tools, one-handed shears,  
long handled hoe.**

**Resting place with birds.**

# PONTESBURY COMMUNITY GARDEN: OUR FIRST SEASON

By Philip Bradshaw



View of the garden and some of the vegetables donated

The Pontesbury Community Garden has just had its first growing season. And we had a party for the whole village on the 22<sup>nd</sup> September to celebrate. We have been pleasantly surprised by how much food it has produced. Most of the vegetables have been donated to the Pontesbury and Rea Valley Foodbank.

The idea came from an event that the Pontesbury Climate Emergency Action Group (PCEAG) held at the Pavilion in Pontesbury. The Shrewsbury Street Allotments project had a stand and Casper and Fleur were so inspirational that we started looking for a location in Pontesbury. We felt it was a way to connect with people who wouldn't engage directly with a climate crisis event.

We soon identified a plot behind the Ark Nursery in Pontesbury. It is a green space that was part of the Cricketers Meadow housing development and is now managed by the Parish Council. After consultation with the residents and discussions with the Parish Council the location was agreed. In addition to permission, the Parish Council gave us a support grant which allowed work on the garden to start in February this year. We also got a grant from Save our Shropshire.



Planting started in early April and, as the pictures show, we had a lot of community support building and filling the raised beds. The beds are made from re-used boards and filled with peat free compost from e4environment.



We also built a shed that gave us the chance to harvest water for the garden. And we have composters that we can use to demonstrate and encourage composting, working with Garden Organic.



The results have been better than we expected and vegetable boxes have been delivered every week to the Food Bank, from June to September. And we even got 2<sup>nd</sup> prize for our potatoes at the Pontesbury Garden Association annual show!



**First Food Bank delivery in early June 2024**





Next year we have plans to work with the children's nursery just next to the Community Garden to add a sensory raised bed. Our big challenge is to get more volunteers to share the load of watering and harvesting. If we can get enough support then there are other sites around the village ready to develop new gardens.

**A regular bi-weekly working day**

We have learnt a lot this year and had a lot of fun working together. We are looking forward to seeing the project grow and develop.

The activity at the garden is coordinated by Bill Sample and Phil Bradshaw and managed by Liz Knowles, the Chair of the PCEAG.



**Our youngest recruits and a well-earned refreshment break**



**Rea Valley**  
foodbank

Supporting those in food crisis within the Rea Valley Community



## SLUGS ON SLICED BREAD!

From Radio 4 Sliced Bread Episode on Slug Repellents

Recommended by Mike Richardson, Summary by Caroline Wright

This fascinating programme provided a wealth of knowledge about slugs in our gardens and how we might better cope with the destructive habits of some of them. With two expert entomologists on hand, Dr Gordon Port and Dr Hayley Jones, up for discussion was whether or not there is a slug repellent out there that is the 'next best thing since sliced bread'. Alongside this was a fun slug testing box in the studio, to see what might deter them from reaching their prized lettuce, and input from gardener Nicky, who was desperate to preserve her hostas.

It turns out that there are 30-40 different types of slug, most UK gardens having around 10. Many are beneficial to gardeners, recycling dead material, such as the great grey or leopard slug, *Limax Maximus*. The culprit when our seedlings and lettuces have been gobbled is probably the netted field slug, *Deroceros Reticulata*, or perhaps the brown soil slug, *Arion Distinctus*.

**Limax Maximus**



**Deroceros Reticulata**

This complicates any strategy for simply killing slugs; we'd be killing beneficial ones too, as well as removing a food source for frogs, toads, beetles, slow worms and hedgehogs.

The specific methods of despatching slugs also give pause for thought:

- Slug pellets comprise a food source to attract slugs (and snails) together with a stomach poison to kill them. Today the poison is Ferric Phosphate, less harmful than the banned Metaldehyde, but it can still harm soil fauna like earthworms.
- Nematodes (microscopic parasitic worms added to soil) do only impact slugs (but all of them). Can be quite effective for 6 weeks if instructions for soil temperature, watering in, are carefully followed.
- Beer traps drown slugs, and while we may count the dead bodies, there is no scientific evidence that they reduce plant damage.

So, no surprise that many of us look to repel slugs from our treasured seedlings and plants, rather than killing them. This has the benefit of maintaining the garden food chain and not destroying the slugs that are helping us. But does it work?

Deterrents are physical barriers placed in a ring around plants in the ground or in pots and include crushed eggshells; wetted wool pellets; copper bands or rings; horticultural grit; and bark. The idea is that they are too sharp or dry for the slug to cross comfortably, or, in the case of copper, deliver a mild electric shock. Handily, Dr Hayley Jones conducted a 6-week scientific research project in 2018, testing how much barriers of these materials worked to reduce slug damage on lettuce plants, compared with a control group. The rather disappointing news was that **NONE OF THEM WORKED!**

It turns out that slugs can produce thicker mucus to glide over barriers and are adept at bypassing them altogether from above or below. The slugs in the radio studio testing box actually made a bee-line for the crushed egg shells, perhaps attracted to them as a source of potential food(!), and seemed to prefer traversing the copper tape rather than the wetted wool pellets. Perhaps there is more mileage in the wool pellets, at least in the short term, and they do have the added fertilizer benefit; Dr Jones seemed to think that more research in that area is warranted.



**Wool pellets in action**

So it turns out, as we might have suspected, that there's no silver bullet when it comes to deterring damaging slugs, no next best thing, and what's recommended is a more holistic strategy:

- Choose plants damaging slugs don't like to eat.
- Grow seedlings on under cover and only plant out bigger plants.
- Use mulches to keep soil surface drier, also suppressing weeds and retaining soil moisture.
- Search for slugs on plants at night and remove to compost heap.
- Encourage slug predators in our gardens and veg patches.
- Accept there will be bad years and better years in terms of slug damage!

Definitely worth a listen: [Sliced Bread - Slug Repellents - BBC Sounds](#)



## THE TOP TIPS COLUMN

### From SOGS Member Jan Gibb

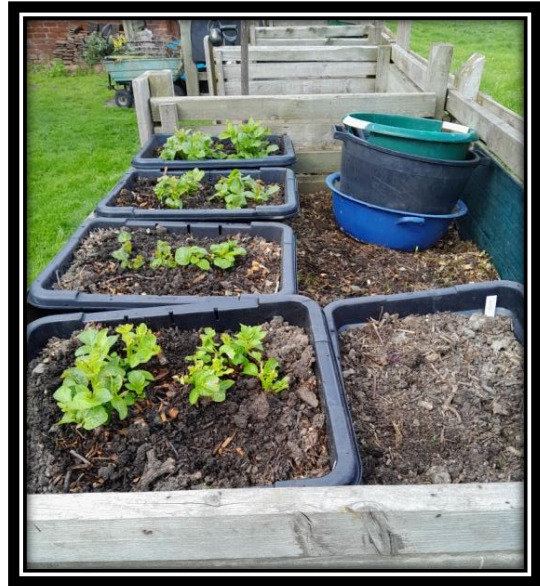
- Got a blue barrel you don't know what to do with? Try a mega size planter. For adults only - cut slits with a grinder, heat the plastic with a blow torch then push a wine bottle bottom into it to make a lip!
- Fill the bottom with a few heavy bricks/stones to keep it weighted, then fill with a mix of soil/peat free compost + polystyrene blocks and perlite, to give a free draining mix, then plant up.



- Jan says the whole thing looked good but found the strawberries didn't do as well as she hoped because the barrel gets quite dry.
- However, thinking about it, Jan reckons it would make a very good herb barrel.



- Upcycle your unused recycling boxes (or get some from someone not using them) into potato containers.
- Put them on top of your compost bin where they can benefit from any heat being generated.
- Once harvested, all you need do is turn the boxes upside down and add the contents to your compost heap.



- Beans, Means, Easy Picking!
- This great bean frame angles the supporting canes outwards from the ground.
- This allows the beans to hang down on the outside making them much easier to see and pick.
- Just ensure you feed the soil well before the next crop the following year.



## From Robin's Garden - July Visit

- Lockdown in 2020 provided Robin with plenty of time to finally re-do his raised beds.
- He hit upon the idea of using old Marley roof tiles, which he found online.
- The beauty of them is that they lock together very neatly and **THEY DON'T ROT LIKE WOOD!** Brilliant!



- Old builders' dumpy bags make really great growing containers for things like sweetcorn and courgettes.
- Turn the top down so that you halve the depth of the bag and give it extra strength.

- Fed up with floppy pea netting which somehow always comes back out the following year in a right pickle?
- Instead, create a fence using pots and rigid sheep netting for the peas to grow up.

- A really easy way to plant tiny carrot seed is to make up a runny paste of cornflour and water. Put in a plastic bag and add the carrot seed.
- Mix the seed into the paste really well then cut a small corner off the bottom of the bag and 'pipe' the mix into a pre-watered drill.
- Cover with soil and wait. The cornflour mix protects the seed with moisture for germination.

- If you love your carrots but battle with the dreaded carrot root fly, then what better than to scour the charity shops for net curtains.
- They make brilliant barriers against the flies!





## From Drew Spellar's garden - August Visit

- Determined not to let the Welsh weather interfere with his enjoyment of a good juicy nectarine, Drew planted this in the polytunnel and it's doing very well.
- Having a polytunnel, large or small, can significantly extend your growing season.



- What a novel idea for drying off your garlic and a good re-use for open mesh plastic crates!

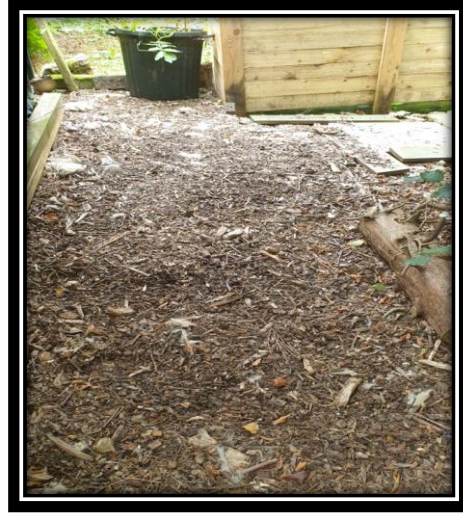


- Drew keeps a small flock of Black Welsh Mountain Sheep and uses the fleeces in the same way SOGS members have done with our fleece deliveries. Black does blend in nicely on the raised beds.
- Drew also uses the black wool in hanging baskets and says it makes the flower colours really zingy and pop out. So we might have to find some for next year's fleece delivery.



**From SOGS member Sue Fisher**

- Sue decided to follow the Roman Road example and put a layer of fleece on her paths with a layer of bark on top.
- She's been very happy with the outcome, although some birds have managed to pull a bit of fleece out as can be seen, so probably the bark layer needs to be thicker.



**From the SOGS Chairwoman**

For those that know me well, I haven't suddenly taken to football.

- This year I decided there had to be a better way of growing peas than in a wigwam. So following Jan's idea for her beans, Dave and I came up with this frame with sisal/string netting. I planted the peas along the back outer edge (and ends) with the idea the plants would climb up and the peas would neatly hang down to be picked from the inside.
- First problem was an almost complete failure of seed germination and being away at the critical time, no chance to re-seed. The only ones that did grow are on the end so that sort of worked.





- Second problem was don't believe anyone who tells you that borage is an annual herb. It completely took over the soil that I was going to use for catch crops of lettuce and radish. The bees moved in big time, so I couldn't possibly remove it, for this year at any rate.
- So, we've had a very small crop of peas, which admittedly have been easy to pick. The theory is good, I just need to make sure I get good germination next year! C'est la vie.



**From SOGS member Maralyn Hepworth**

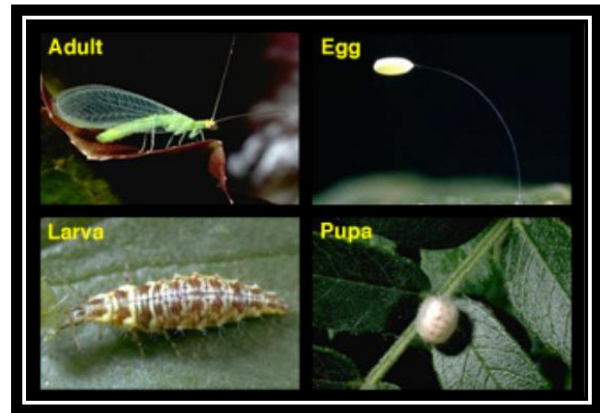
- Get rid of your green bin or use it for something else and put a dustbin with the bottom cut off, turned upside down, in your front garden, under shrubs. Use it for the weeds, prunings etc., without having to walk to the compost bins - which are usually a long way away.
- The compost is then really near where you will need it. Add faces and make your visitors smile! This makes gardening easier and saves you £56 a year.





**From SOGS Member Sue Bosson**

- To encourage lacewings in your garden (to eat aphids) make homemade wheast.
- 1 part sugar to 1 part yeast, add water to the sugar and yeast, mixing to a paste.
- Apply the wheast paste to small wooden stakes and place them in the soil around your plants.



- Intercrop 2 rows of tomatoes with 2 rows of cabbages between, to help deter cabbage white butterflies.
- Both plants are greedy feeders so ensure rich soil.



**From SOGS member Chrissy Bridge**

- Make it easier to pick runner beans – grow the purple ones! I'm sure most of us have discovered long tough green beans that have been hiding under the leaves and grown stringy. The purple ones are so much easier to spot so you can pick them when young and tasty.



- I've had good success with a heritage variety called Blauhilde, which is quite common.
- Disappointingly, they still turn green when you cook them!

**From SOGS Member Caroline Wright**

- Germinating legumes give off a smell irresistible to hungry mice, and there are plenty around our allotment! A neighbour gave me these tips that I've used very successfully.
- Don't direct sow but germinate fast at home by adding peas/beans to moist compost in a plastic bag and leaving in a warm place.
- Once sprouting, plant peas/beans in toilet roll holders for deep and open root run (remembering that what sprouts first is the root not the shoot; I had to reverse several of mine the first-time round!).
- Grow on at home under cover until the first leaves emerge, then plant out in the toilet rolls. This helps with planting at the same soil level and avoids transplantation shock; the toilet rolls will compost away in time.



**STOP PRESS!**  
**WHEN IS A VERY RAISED BED  
NOT RAISED ENOUGH?**

**By Chrissy Bridge**

My husband John built 3 long raised beds, 5 metres long by 1 metre wide - and a metre high! That's because we live in Belle Vue, Shrewsbury and our garden slopes down to the Rea brook, which floods.

Ten years ago, it flooded over our strawberries, covering them in pale brown silt, hence John built the very raised beds.

However, in October this year, as you can see from the before-and-after photos, a metre wasn't high enough and they were all submerged in the floods. Our neighbour tells us it's never been that high before in the last 40 years.

I've a feeling that in these days of climate change it won't be the last time...





## **SOGS AUTUMN/WINTER PROGRAMME 2024/2025**

**Meetings will be held on the 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday of the month in The Bradbury Room, Drapers Place, Horsefair, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury SY2 6BP, unless otherwise stated.  
7.30pm Start Time**

### **6<sup>th</sup> November 2024**

**A special first meeting to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Edition of the SOGs Newsletter followed by guest speaker talk:**

**Alison Wakeman - Awareness of Bees and their importance in the Environment**

Alison is an award-winning beekeeper based in Shropshire. When she isn't buzzing around the country giving educational talks, she runs her 'ABC - Alison's Bee Classes' and looks after her own hives. Alison's talk is interesting, informative and, at times, entertaining. She will share a huge array of facts and figures about all types of bees before focusing on honeybees and their secret life in the hive. Because she has been taking her educational program into primary schools for over ten years, she will share numerous anecdotal observations, making her talk funny too!! Alison will bring plenty of local honey to purchase, along with other bee-based items. Ideal Xmas gifts.

### **4<sup>th</sup> December 2024**

**Christmas Bring and Share and our Big Seed and Garden Paraphernalia Swap, plus Christmas Quiz/Competition**

### **8<sup>th</sup> January 2025**

**On-line Meeting**

**A 'Seedy' Saving Zoom talk with SOGS Member, Sue Stickland**

Sue was Head Gardener for Garden Organic at Ryton Organic Gardens for many years and also worked for their Heritage Seed Library. She is the author of numerous garden books. Now living near Newtown, Sue continues to write for mainstream gardening magazines such as *Kitchen*

*Garden and The Garden* and is involved with the Gaia Foundation's Seed Sovereignty programme and the Wales Seed Hub. She is passionate about fruit and veg growing and has a special interest in vegetable seed saving. Sue's talk will cover a short history of UK seed – from sales at medieval markets to today's multinationals – then lots of practical tips on saving your own seeds. We hope to follow this up with an 'on the ground' practical session as a late summer 2025 visit.

## **5<sup>th</sup> February 2025**

Final details for Potato Day followed by:

### **Sam and Kate Davies - A Final Update from Shepherd's Barn**

Sam and Kate Davies have been self-sufficient in fruit and vegetables for almost 20 years. They began when they both worked full time and had two allotments. Now they have a smallholding which SOGS visited a few years ago. On top of the veg and fruit growing, they also keep goats and bees and their ornamental garden is also pretty extensive! The most often asked question by visitors is how they manage to fit it all in and their latest talk attempts to answer this. Sam will explore methods of cutting down the work needed to keep your veg tasty and your flowers beautiful if you don't have much time or are getting older like he is! We will have a final visit to their smallholding in summer 2025.

## **Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> February 2025**

**Potato Day - Wattlesborough Village Hall**

## **5<sup>th</sup> March 2025**

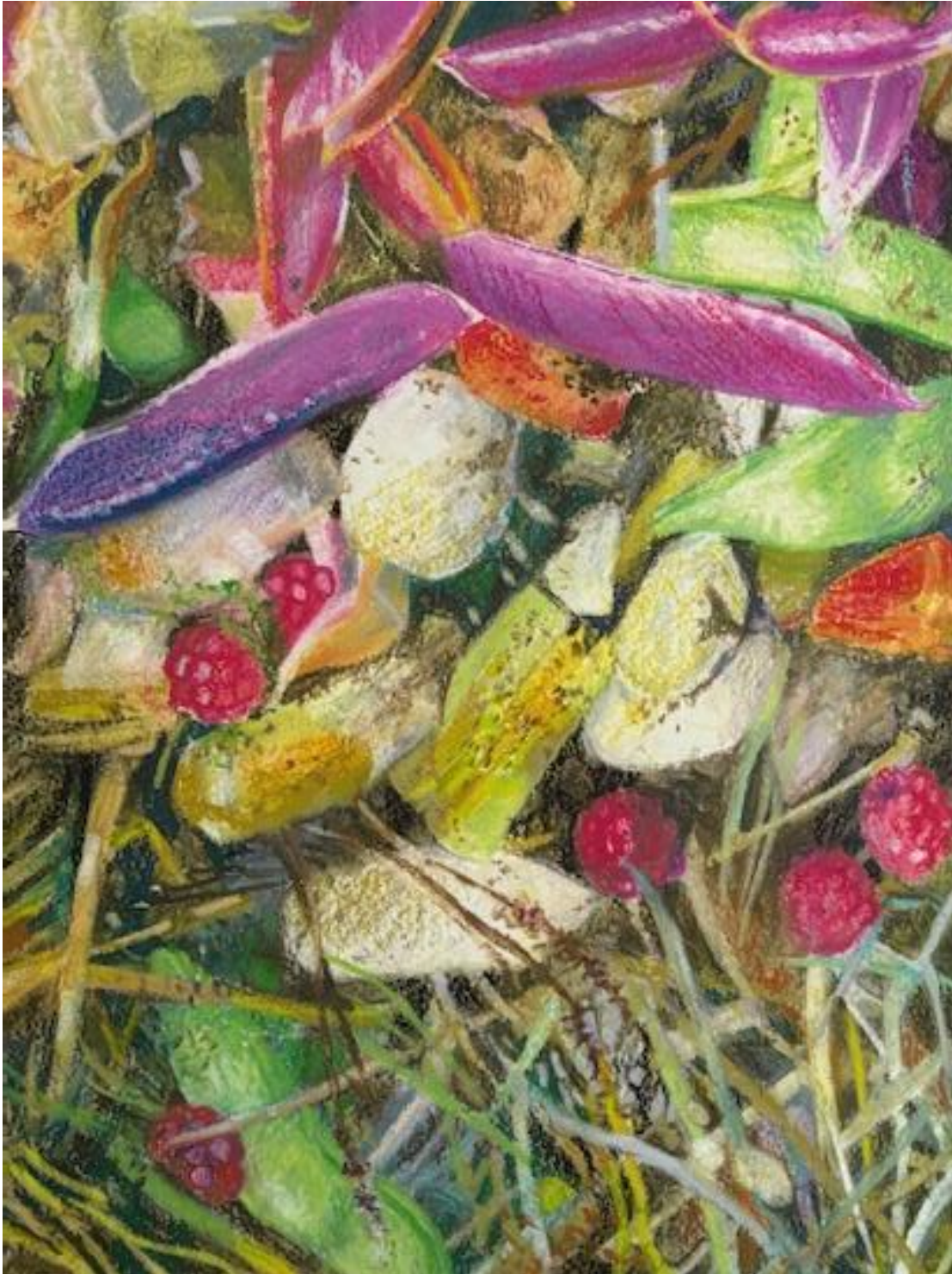
### **Foraging - A talk by Dr Cath Price**

Cath is the Membership and Engagement Officer based at the Shropshire Wildlife Trust and an expert on Foraging (and lots of other things). Further details on this talk to follow.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> April 2025 - AGM**

**Plus:** Speakers from each of the Growing Projects that SOGS have donated funds to in the last 12 months will update us on how they used the money.

Many thanks to Mary Rickards, artist and SOGS member, for allowing us to use her fantastic artwork on the front and back covers: [Mary.homegrown@gmail.com](mailto:Mary.homegrown@gmail.com)



**SOGS IS A MEMBER OF GARDEN ORGANIC**