

SPS Newsletter

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A belated Happy New Year to you all and I hope it finds you well after an enjoyable festive period.

January is often felt to be a quiet month after the frenetic activity of December, but we still have much to look forward to and enjoy. There's Martin Luther King Day, Winnie the Pooh Day and Red Squirrel Appreciation Day. 25th January sees celebrations for Burn's Night and St Dwynwen's Day (or Dydd Santes Dwynwen), the Welsh St. Valentine's Day. This Saint was the Welsh patron saint of lovers, and the day is a special day dedicated to love in Wales. And on 26th January, we go down under to celebrate Australia Day marking the arrival of the First Fleet at Sydney Cove in 1788. 28th January sees International LEGO Day, marking when Godtfred Kirk Christiansen, a Danish inventor, patented the original 2x4 LEGO brick in 1958. And we finish off the month on 31st January with International Zebra Day, dedicated to raising awareness of the conservation issues of Zebras. Zebras are an endangered species at risk from habitat loss, hunting for their meat and competition with livestock.

Thinking about LEGO, (and I know some of our members have used it in their images) I decided to do a deep-dive into it to see what I could find out. So here you go with a quick history and facts about LEGO.

The LEGO Group was originally started by Ole Kirk Kristiansen in 1932 in Denmark and to this day remains a family business, passing from father to son. It's now owned by Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen, who is a grandchild of the founder. LEGO started off by making wooden toys but ceased this in 1960. The name 'LEGO' is an abbreviation of the two Danish words "leg godt", meaning "play well". There are c.400 billion LEGO bricks in the world, working out at c.86 bricks per person. LEGO has made c.4 billion mini-figures and makes c.36 billion pieces every year... divided by 365, that comes to c.100 million pieces a day or about 5 million every hour! And they are the world's biggest tyre manufacturer, making c.306 million of the tiny rubber tyres on the LEGO cars each year. You would need c.40 billion LEGO bricks to build a bridge between Earth and the Moon.

I bet most of us have played with LEGO at some point in our lives! So, next time you see it or happen to play with it with your grandchildren etc. think of how much LEGO there is in the world ...

I hope you enjoy the Newsletter, and please continue to send material into me at my email address: 172elizabeth@gmail.com.

With my very best wishes

Liz xx

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02

Through the Lens

International Garden Photographer of the Year 2024

In partnership with Birmingham Botanical Gardens the International Garden Photographer of the Year 2024 competition is running a competition Special Award dedicated to images captured at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens, with a focus on the flora and in-situ shots of plants in the Gardens. The competition is free to enter (on-line) and you can submit up to 8 entries. Closing Date is: 12 noon on 15th March 2024.

And to encourage people to enter, the Gardens are offering a 10% discount on the Gardens' entry fee for up to 5 people if you quote the discount code FOCUS24. Further information is available on the website IGPOTY.com.

So if you fancy something to do in January head on up to the Botanical Gardens and get capturing some images and then submit your entries. You never know you could be a winner!

03

'Spud' Appreciation

If like me you have over-indulged on roast and mashed potatoes over the festive period and enjoy a jacket potato, how good is your knowledge of this versatile vegetable?

- The Latin name for potato is 'Solanum Tuberosum'. They are the same family as Deadly Nightshade, Tomatoes and Aubergines.
- The potato's introduction to England is widely attributed to Sir Francis Drake in 1586 (although some think it may have been Thomas Harriot who worked for Sir Walter Raleigh).
- Sweet potatoes are produced from a tropical vine and the plant is related to bindweed.
- Composting potato leaves and peel creates a compost that is high in nutrients.
- c.1.5 million Irish people migrated to America between 1845-1852 due to a famine caused by potato blight *Phytophthora* infestations.
- Green potatoes are poisonous. When exposed to light solanine is produced which is a Glycoalkaloid, which is toxic and bitter tasting. So, store potatoes in the dark.
- c.100,000 tonnes of potatoes are grown annually in Cornwall.
- Potatoes are affectionately called 'Spuds' as the 'Spud' was a sharp, narrow spade used in the mid-19th Century for lifting potatoes from the ground.

And on the subject of 'spuds', I was ecstatic at Christmas as I finally managed to master the art of cooking marvellous roast potatoes. So thank you Mary Berry and Jamie Oliver ...!

04

Protect Yourself

At the start of a New Year it might be helpful for a little reminder about scamming and fraud and protecting yourself. Here's some handy tips:

- If it sounds too good to be true, stop and think before proceeding;
- Never click on a link inside an email. Type the address into your browser instead;
- Shred documents, don't just bin them;
- Never give your bank account details to anyone;
- Never give your personal details to anyone;
- Never transfer money to people you don't know;
- Never give your credit card details unless you made the call/initiated the transaction;
- Check your bank statement regularly for unrecognised charges;
- Never let an unknown person/company remotely access your computer;
- Banks/legitimate businesses never ask you to verify personal information by email or telephone;
- Be aware of 'Phishing' emails. Many contain misspellings and incorrect grammar;
- Never be pressurised by threats;
- Never believe a doorstep person offering an investment.



Why did a Scarecrow win the Nobel Prize?

He was outstanding in his field!

05

Green Fingers

Many of us get a great deal of pleasure out of our own gardens and open spaces as well as from visits to National Trust properties and gardens, RHS gardens and other green and open spaces. I was reading an interesting article recently about a newly published book on the secret history of the pioneering women who battled to become this country's first professional female gardeners. 'An Almost Impossible Thing' written by Fiona Davison who is the RHS Head of Libraries and Exhibitions introduces 6 figures from Edwardian Britain who paved the way for women to pursue careers within the field of horticulture. Most people are familiar with the names of Gertrude Jekyll, Vita Sackville-West and Ellen Willmott, but there were other women who were not wealthy like them with resources behind them who wanted to garden professionally and earn a living through this occupation.

Edwardian Britain's social conventions suggested gardening was not a profession for women and there were lots of barriers in their way. Unlike men they didn't get big ticket garden projects which we see today commemorated and preserved by organisations like the National Trust. But these women gardeners broke new ground, setting the foundations for women's involvement in horticulture for the generations that followed.



What do you call a gardener's bank account?

A hedge fund!

Prior to the RHS introducing written exams in the 1890s, horticulture was a male dominated profession, training being an on-the-job apprenticeship system whereby you lived in a single sex dormitory (a Bothy), thus excluding women. The RHS's introduction of exams was not to consciously let women into the profession but to raise standards in horticulture. But it opened the door for women to obtain a piece of paper that said "I am competent". In 1898 Olive Harrisson came top in the RHS exams and claimed a scholarship at the RHS garden at Chiswick (the prize that year for the top student). However, the Director of the RHS (Reverend Wilks) said that she could not take it up as Chiswick only trained men. Interestingly women did much better than men in the RHS exams. Between the introduction of the exam in 1893 and 1914 15% of those sitting the exam were female but they made up 30% of the first class marks, outperforming the men! As you can imagine there was a big push-back from the male gardening profession and in the gardening media. There was a feeling that women were not strong enough and they couldn't cope and because they had not done the apprenticeship, and all the years of menial physical labour, they were taking unfair shortcuts.

About 30% of women who passed the exams worked professionally as gardeners or had careers in horticulture. They tended to be jobbing gardeners, working in small to medium sized gardens in suburbia. Others ran small nurseries and market gardens. Their undertaking of these roles started to 'normalise' women and make it normal for women to garden professionally and be financially independent.

So if you fancy reading the book your local Library may have a copy or pop into your local book shop and buy it. And the next time you are visiting and admiring a heritage garden or park and taking your flora and fauna photographs for competitions etc. spare a thought for all those unknown female gardeners who either helped create or maintain those beautiful spaces and plants.



And to keep you amused here's a few gardening related jokes ...



What do you get if you divide the circumference of a pumpkin by its diameter?

Pumpkin Pi!



I read a novel about a man who had a small garden?

Not much of a plot!



Why are plants bad cheerleaders?

Because they are only rooting for themselves!

And talking of gardens and greenery did you know that Hedera (Ivy to you and me!) has over 400 cultivars in existence today. And if you want to see c.200 of them head down to RHS Wisley which holds the National Plant Collection of Hedera. You will see 'Clotted Cream', 'Midas Touch', 'Pink n' Curly' and 'Goldfinch' amongst others. I was fortunate enough to visit RHS Wisley in August 2023 (and for those of you who remember the President's Assignment and my entry 'Leaf Lines' that's where I took the image) and it really is a stunning place with so much to see. On a smaller scale than Kew Gardens nevertheless it packs a punch and is easy to wander around with plenty of seating to sit and rest and admire the planting. So, if you haven't already been to RHS Wisley why not put it on your list of places to go in 2024 – you won't be disappointed. Oh and they have nice refreshment provisions with delicious cakes ...!



What do you get if you cross a bell-ringer with a bee?

A humdinger!

06

The Colour Gold

For thousands of years gold has symbolised opulence, status and spirituality in everything from architecture to paintings, jewellery and ceramics. It represents the milestones in life: golden years; a golden age; golden anniversaries. In its physical form, gold is a practically indestructible metal, but it is also malleable and unlikely to tarnish, so it's no surprise that humans have long been infatuated with turning gold into long-lasting decorative items.

Small concentrations of gold are commonly found in all of the world's igneous rocks. Gold is easy to forge, engrave, cast and gild, and so humans have mined and moulded the metal into many useful forms since the time of ancient civilisations, such as electrical circuits, currency and dental alloys. Gold became a popular metal for jewellery-making because it is incredibly malleable, and it retains its brilliant colour and shine even after years of exposure to the elements.

Humans first began discovering gold deposits washed up in streams and rivers. The first known artefacts of jewellery and religious objects made of gold are believed to have come from Eastern Europe in 4000BC. By c.1500BC Ancient Egypt was benefitting from mining a bountiful supply of gold from Nubia in Northeast Africa. Other regions were also finding gold deposits, though to a lesser degree, such as Lydia (in modern-day Turkey) and Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq), along with India, China and Persia (modern-day Iran).

It was much later that the quest for gold became exploitative – from Christopher Columbus' quest for gold in the Americas in the 1400s, to the gold rush in California and Australia, along with discoveries in Alaska, South America and South Africa. The rise of the Atlantic slave trade and the looting of palaces, temples and tombs meant that an unprecedented influx of gold arrived in Europe, resulting in a global boom in gold production.

It's believed that the Ancient Egyptians began creating objects from gold before they had a written language. Because of the huge supply from Nubia, gold was everywhere. The colour represented the skin of the gods, and so gold items were reserved for pharaohs, particularly when connected to the afterlife. One of the most spectacular and well-preserved remains from Ancient Egypt is Tutankhamun's burial mask, made up of 11kg of gold and embellished with glittering gemstones.



In the Incan Empire, gold was believed to be the sweat of Inti, the sun god, while silver represented the tears of the moon. Because Incan kings were believed to be descendants of gods, the Incan people became master goldsmiths, decorating temples with gold, and forging regal jewellery. Only the kings were allowed to wear gold during their lifetime; noblemen were permitted to wear gold only in the afterlife in their burial chambers.

The art of goldbeating describes a process of pounding fine gold into exceptionally thin sheets (roughly 0.1 micrometre thick) known as gold leaf, which is then used to gild objects such as paper, textiles, glass, wood and metal. Gold leaf is synonymous with the Byzantine era, where lavish depictions of Christian icons were encircled by gold leaf backgrounds or halos. Remains of Byzantine mosaics are widespread, and some of the finest examples are those depicting Jesus and Mary, along with various saints, emperors and empresses, in Istanbul's Hagia Sophia.



Similarly, gold has long been used in Islamic artwork, from miniature paintings to calligraphy. One of the oldest and most notable gold-leaf illuminated manuscripts to survive is the Blue Quran. Islamic Holy laws prohibit human idolatry and therefore illustrating the human physical form in religious material is largely forbidden. Thus the use of gold has been restricted to intricate gold patterns, scripture and calligraphy, and so these techniques are highly developed.

Important buildings, including many houses of worship, have been gilded in gold across the world. Countless golden temples, pagodas and shrines are scattered across Asia, from the gold-leaf Golden Pavilion in Kyoto (Japan), to the Sikh Golden Temple in Amritsar (India). Also known as the Golden Rock, Kyauktiyo Pagoda is a Buddhist pilgrimage site in Myanmar. A small pagoda is perched atop a huge gold-leaf boulder that looks as if it could roll away at any moment. According to Buddhist legend, the rock is kept in place by a strand of the Buddha's hair.



In Japan, the art form known as Kintsugi (translating as 'golden joinery') was developed during the 16th and 17th Centuries. It is the method of repairing broken ceramics with gold. A tree sap lacquer is used to glue fragments together, left to dry and then traditionally dusted with powdered gold. The technique is part of a wider Japanese philosophy called *wabi-sabi*: the beauty and acceptance of imperfection and incompleteness.



Perhaps the most famous artist to use gold in portraiture is symbolist Gustav Klimt. His father was a gold engraver, and when the artist visited Italy in 1903 he was particularly taken by the medieval gold mosaics that decorated religious buildings. The most famous painting from his Byzantine (or Golden) phase is the first portrait he made of Adele Bloch-Bauer in 1907.



His use of gold leaf was used not to pay respects to holy deities, but to illustrate the sensuality and sexuality of his subjects, which was received somewhat controversially at the time. Klimt completed the portrait over two years, immortalising her in what many consider to be the ultimate expression of desire and reverence. At this point, Klimt was already famous for his unique style having been commissioned to create three paintings to decorate the ceiling of the Great Hall of the University of Vienna. When completed, this work was criticised for being too racy, so it was never installed in the Great Hall and was destroyed by the retreating German forces in May 1945. The portrait of Bloch-Bauer still exists having been stolen and installed in the Galerie Belvedere in Austria by the Nazis until, after a lengthy international court battle, it was returned to her heirs in 2006.

And on the theme of Gold, here's what the great Bard himself, William Shakespeare had to say ... "Gold – what can it not do, and undo?"

And if you like proverbs here's some golden ones ...

- *"The Golden Rule: He who has the gold makes the rules." – Attributed to a 1967 Wizard of Id comic strip*
- *"Real gold is not afraid of the melting pot." – Chinese Proverb*
- *"If you are sick, think about your life; if you are better, think about your gold." – Mongolian Proverb*
- *"If speaking is silver, then listening is gold." – Turkish Proverb*
- *"He fishes well who uses a golden hook." – Latin Proverb*

And in photography we always talk about "The Golden Hour"



What did the gold collector bake for dessert?

A Karat Cake!

07

Competition Corner

Thank you to all of you who submitted entries for the Christmas Competition. Many of you got the right answer but the first right answer received was from Dave Cornish who wins the 'Secret Santa'. Well done Dave.

The more you take away the more I become - What am I?

The Answer: A Hole

The 'Secret Santa' unfortunately had an untimely demise as 'Mouse Gate' occurred! The prize had been purchased and was in my car and when I came out of the house to retrieve it to wrap up I found someone had already taken a fancy to it! So in the bin it went and a replacement has been procured. However, despite going through the whole car in search of the culprit as yet it has not been found ... watch this space ... the humane mousetrap is in position with chocolate inside to entice it! It can only happen to me ...



And here's another little teaser for you this month:

January Competition

I am tall when young and short when I am old - What am I?

The first correct answer emailed to me will win. So send your answers in by email to 172elizabeth@gmail.com. **Closing Date for Entries: 31st January 2024.**



08

Photography Podium

Christmas Knockout



Wow what a night was had with 442 entries and much "door or window", "left or right" dominating the evening. Many congratulations to Dave Venables who was the audience's favourite and took first place with his 'Red Squirrel' and to Jolanta who came second with her image 'Ashness Bridge'. And to all of the Runners-up well done on some lovely images. Thank you all for entering and swelling the Society's funds, it's much appreciated.



	All Groups	
First	Red Squirrel	Dave Venables
Second	Ashness Bridge	Jolanta B Axon
Runners-up	Curves	Mick Schilling
	This Won't Win	Mick Schilling
	Female Red-Veined Darter	Jane Roby
	One Step at a Time	Kevin Watts
	The Northern Lights	Chris Mallett
	Bamburgh Castle	Sue Pearmain

All Groups



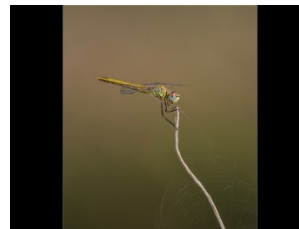
Red Squirrel



Ashness Bridge



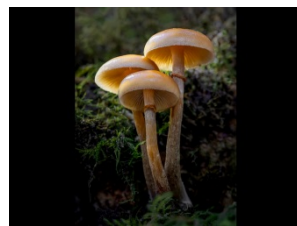
Curves



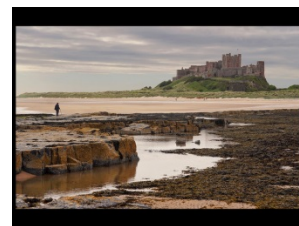
Female Red-Veined Darter



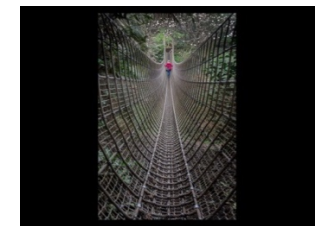
The Northern Lights



This Won't Win



Bamburgh Castle



One Step At A Time

Straight Out of the Camera

	Group 1		Group 2		Group 3	
First	Heron Green Algae	Mike McShane	Lime Hawk moth Caterpillar	Tony Dyson	Cosmos in Vase	Jolanta B Axon
Second	Peony	Michael Prince	Last Light	Dave Ward	Lone Tree	Sue Pearmain
Third	Kelpies	Ann Ashford	Red Squirrel Reflections	Chris Lee	Tranquility	David Steele

Group 1



Heron in Green Algae



Peony

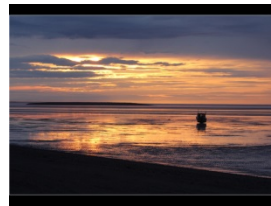


Kelpies

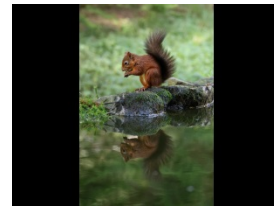
Group 2



Lime Hawk Moth Caterpillar



Last Light



Red Squirrel Reflections

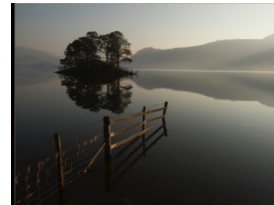
Group 3



Cosmos in Vase



Lone Tree



Tranquillity

09

External Recognition

If any of you enter any competitions and get any external recognitions then please drop me a line so that I can add it into the Newsletter. It's great to see what everyone is up to and the accolades they receive.



See you next in February 2024!