

In a Nutshell

THE NEWSLETTER FROM THE FRIENDS OF STANDEN ESTATE:

NUTS ABOUT STANDEN!



No 55 March 2020

In this edition of In a Nutshell:
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AND FINALLY...

A new style newsletter

Like so many other things at the moment, our AGM, due to run on 7th May with a talk by Colin McFarlin on recycling, has been cancelled. Many of us are suddenly finding our activities severely curtailed. All I can say for myself as an oldie is that I am grateful to have reached the age I am without major catastrophe when so many of my ancestors had lives which were considerably harder and shorter.

Nevertheless, we are all going to be facing challenges in the coming weeks, trying to keep active and avoiding going stir crazy. It occurred to me that although FoSE members are a community, not all of us are on Facebook or similar social media. I suspect, though, that none of us will be sitting around doing nothing. Perhaps we could share what we are doing to keep sane and occupied through a series of interim FoSE newsletters, and so keep in contact. So, if you have any photos of a part of your garden you are carefully tending at the moment, or of a picture you

are painting, a jigsaw you are putting together, a model you are making, blanket you are crocheting.... or in fact information about anything you are doing or reading while in isolation, please send them to newsletter@fose.org.uk. From time to time, I will collate these pictures and any stories you wish to share and send out an interim bulletin as and when there is sufficient material.

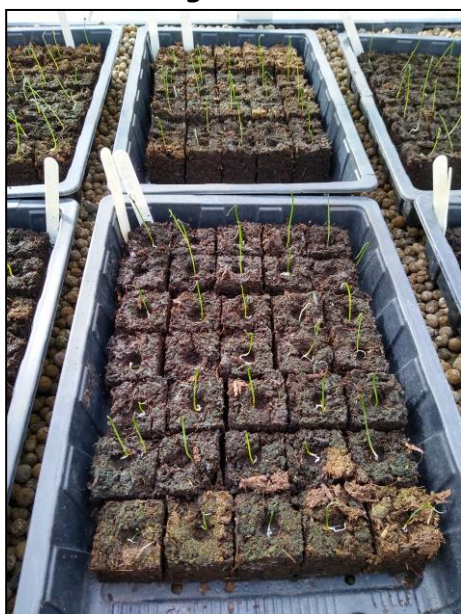
Garden Stewards and Soil Blockers



There is no logical connection between these two items, other than that they are both on Carolyn's mind at the moment.

Last year FOSE bought a set of soil blockers for us to try in the Kitchen Garden to help us reduce our plastic use. The module trays we are using are falling apart but then they have been used repeatedly for many years. I didn't really want to buy more plastic trays so was looking for an alternative. A soil blocker is a device that makes a little compacted block of compost that seeds can be sown into. Our

initial experiments worked well but then a bad batch of compost and poor germination rates caused a loss of confidence. Due to the compost problems James decided to trial some new compost so we had another go.



One of my volunteers did a comprehensive study of the three different composts (Jiffy tref seed compost, Dalefoot wool compost for seeds and Dalefoot wool compost) with varying amounts of coir which is needed as a binder. The same seeds were sown in each and carefully labelled. The germination rates were checked each week and recorded. The jiffy compost, which is 70% coir and 30% perlite, came out worst even though the blocks looked the best.



There wasn't much difference between the two Dalefoot composts so we decided to go with the standard Dalefoot wool compost. This is made with composted bracken and Herdwick sheep wool and is meant to retain water better than other composts so hopefully they won't dry out so quickly. We're using one scoop of coir to every two scoops of compost which is mixed with water to make a wet slurry and

then compressed to make the blocks. So far this year we have sown tomatoes, onions, leeks and broad beans using the blocks. Hopefully we will be using this method for most of the vegetable seeds sown from now on.

Carolyn is also looking for anyone interested in a stewarding role. Obviously this will be on hold at the moment, as there will be no visitors to steward, but something to think about when things return to normal.

*There is a new **Kitchen Garden Steward** role available, hopefully starting later this month or early April once the Kitchen Garden paths have dried out a bit more. This basically just involves walking around the Kitchen Garden and talking to visitors about the produce we grow, what happens to it (i.e. cut flowers to the house, fruit and veg to the cafe, etc) and what they do with it (e.g. make lovely tasty food). The idea is to have someone in the Kitchen Garden on as many days as possible, so ideally this role will be for Wednesdays, Thursdays and Weekends when there are no volunteers working in the Kitchen Garden. A pack with lots of information will be available in printed form and hopefully electronically too once I've worked out how to do it. There will also be regular emails to let you know what's going on in the Kitchen Garden. If you are interested in this role or have any questions, please talk to me or Bleau.*

Thank you for renewing

Many people have already returned membership fees and forms, and this edition of *In a Nutshell* was going to include a courteous reminder from Roy to those who haven't yet done so, as well as his thanks to those who have. However, under the circumstances, it is going to prove impossible for many to return forms and money to Standen until the current crisis is resolved. Under the circumstances, I will continue to send the newsletter out to all those on last year's mailing list, and to new members who have already joined this year.

If you have not yet paid your fee for this year, but are planning to do so eventually, it would be helpful if you would email Roy at fosemembership@outlook.com , preferably attaching a completed membership form (copies can be downloaded from <http://www.fose.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Membership-renewal-2020.pdf>) He will be able to follow this up and claim your subs when we all return to Standen.

A good excuse for a nibble

As most of you know, Sally Roberson does us a huge favour each week by supplying delicious cakes to the Stable Tea Room. She does this out of the goodness of her heart, and we are very grateful to her. Those who indulge then pay 20p into the tub on the table. Periodically, Anne, our treasurer, collects this up and adds it to FoSE funds. However, the 'cake money' has a specific target, to continue to fund



Azalias which are being planted on the slope above the Stable Tea Room. This year, all those 20ps added up to £204 which should go some considerable way to buying more plants. So thanks again to those who succumbed to the 'naughty but nice', and thanks again to Sally for facilitating this particular revenue stream.

Welcome new staff

Since Ben's departure, the Standen Garden Team has been short-handed and somewhat stretched, so the heading here can be read both ways: Welcome to Amy and Richard, and: Their arrival is very welcome. Richard Drew, who has taken on one half of Ben's old job, is well-known to most of us, as he has volunteered at Standen for many years, taking a particular interest in the ecology of the estate as well as engaging in the general hard graft around the garden and woods. Amy Page has also been volunteering, but for a shorter period, so I asked her to jot down her reflections on her first, very damp, week.

My first week of working at Standen is drawing to an end, and having been a volunteer for the last couple of years the transition has been more noticeable than I expected. But the unpredictable weather, varied work, and great company have remained constant.

I came to Standen to support studying Horticulture, and following that course, I got a position working as the gardener in a care home. It was a huge learning curve, and although I enjoyed it overall, I must admit that it began to make me question some of my career decisions...

I'm sure that we can all agree what a special place Standen is, and to be able to say I'm now an Assistant Gardener here is a huge privilege. Even after just one week, I once again feel extremely proud to call myself a gardener, so I'm excited for the future.

"Arty" is back

Many thanks to Graham for updating us on Standen's special cat.

Many of you will, I am sure, be pleased to learn that our stone cat "Arty" has returned from his recent extended sabbatical and the construction team (wall builders) is now back up to full strength. During recent work on installing new drainage pipes at the far end of the Farm Track he was discovered sleeping peacefully in the bushes. To date how he ended up surrounded by bamboo remains a mystery but fowl play has not been ruled out.



"Arty" has been an integral member of the team since he first appeared some three years ago as we were working on the brick steps at the top of the garden. Since then he has accompanied us on all our construction projects around Standen and shared all our jokes, witticisms, observations on life, gripes, moans and accumulated wisdom and not once has complained or argued with anything, making him the

perfect work colleague.

Whilst a number of people have remarked that he doesn't seem very responsive when called and rarely moves (making him an ideal prospect for employment as a Southern Water Customer Services Advisor!) there are many advantages to having "Arty" around. He doesn't leave fur balls on the rug, nor does he do his business in the newly planted flower beds nor leave half-eaten mice and birds as a present for us. He costs nothing to feed, is very obedient and scrupulously clean.

"Arty" acquired his name in homage to the Arts and Crafts movement, appropriate when one considers where we all volunteer. Efforts to establish his pedigree have proved fruitless; there are rumours of him being seen around the Estate prior to him joining our team but nothing that can be verified.

Having spent his entire life living outdoors "Arty" is now showing increasing signs of wear and tear. His ears and nose are badly worn, his whiskers have long since disappeared, his tail has suffered a similar fate and his paws need cleaning and polishing. Over the next few weeks we plan to give "Arty" a facelift and restore him to something like his former glory. Judicious use of my sculptor's mallet, chisel and rifler will address the problems outlined above and then a thorough clean and a few coats of sculptor's resin will bring him back to life.

Once this is done "Arty" will resume his regular place alongside the team and we look forward to many more years of his company around the Estate.

Hey, yew

Part of the yew hedge surrounding the Croquet Lawn side of the Kitchen Garden has been in a poor state for some time, but no funds were available for replacements. Last year, FoSE agreed to stump up the necessary cash, and so, a couple of weeks back, these slightly dubious-looking characters were seen digging out the dead wood and planting new, healthy yew plants, which will soon catch up with the surrounding established yews. Well done to all concerned, not an easy task.



Deferred gratification

This quarter's prize draw winner is Alison Smith, who volunteers both with the Woods Group and Garden Group. She has been informed of this, but will have to wait some time before she can be presented with the set of notelets she has won.

In the Green



For the last five years, we have been planting 2,000 snowdrops per year around the gardens. Last year's batch went in along the Hydrangea Walk, where the bloomed beautifully after only one year.

Traditionally, Snowdrops are planted 'in the green', that is before the leaves die back. Usually, we have to wait until the following year for flowers. However, this year, the order went in earlier, and the bulbs arrived just as they were about to flower. These were destined for the winter garden area along the shelter belt

and near the Bothy, and have already put on a good display, despite sitting in waterlogged ground.

And finally...Let them eat cake

For some obscure reason, there seems to be a world shortage of toilet rolls in the supermarkets at the moment. Some crafty baker has come up with his/her own ironic comment on human behaviour:

