

SOUTH OF ENGLAND HEDGE LAYING SOCIETY
Reg Charity No 1046124



April 2012

**28TH ANNUAL COMPETITION
PLASHETT PARK FARM, RINGMER
SATURDAY, 25TH FEBRUARY 2012**



MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

Well the season is over, and what a good one. Lots of new faces and some old ones coming out of the wood work. Well done to everyone for your support and help - that's what makes the Society work. We laid about 1,200 yards - not bad I thought.

So now to the summer shows. If you would like to help out please give Phil or me a call.

I'd like to congratulate all the winners of this season and well done to all you novice's - you did a really good job. I'd also like to congratulate Lex and Jeff, our two members from Holland, for taking part in the competition - hope you come again next year.

Well have a great summer. Take care.

Gary

Hi Everybody,

I can't believe this wonderful weather which makes us all feel better. On the other hand we do desperately need rain. Can't have it all ways!!

There are a number of important things in this edition, not least regarding the change of membership date. Also there are a lot of events noted on the diary page. Two in particular are worthy of a special mention – Tool Sharpening at Plumpton College in September and Advanced Training (date and venue not yet known). Please contact either Phil Hart, Gary Moore or Mike Parrott if you are interested.

You will see I have put a note on the front of this issue regarding mailings of the Newsletter and other Society info. It is important that you respond to this please. Postage costs will increase significantly at the end of April which will hit us all hard. The Committee have therefore decided that for those who have given us e-mail addresses, that will be the method we will use for all Society mailings in future. It is the responsibility of all members to ensure that we are kept informed of any changes. Members without e-mail will continue to get their mailings by post as before. Hopefully this will at least offset the increase in postage and may even save us a bit.

Lastly, I hope you all try the recipe on page 7. If you do I want a bottle please!!!

Best wishes.

Rachel

"The best tool you can pack for a day's hedge-laying - your flask of tea!"

Steve Mockford.

TRAINING

The weather was unbelievably good, not only for the three Training Days and the Improver's Day but for all the society outings (apart from competition day which started wet). Was it the weather that made our trainees blossom or natural ability? This year the standard was good throughout, which made for many deliberations on the final day, which nearly finished in the dark - a lot of cutting with hazel isn't there? The new winter caravan was a hit with the caterers - tea, coffee and on the Improver's day, soup! This caravan was obtained for us by Ron Moulard, and I am told it tows better than the old one and the stove is faster, which is of more use to us tea addicts. Thanks Ron. Trainees, by definition require trainers and the skills that they acquire are imparted by the members who come to training days every season. Thank you to all who take part. This not only makes new members very happy, it also fulfils our obligation to the Charity Commission as trainers in the craft of hedge-laying. Thanks of course must go to Gary Moore, the Training Officer, Chairman and Chief Whipcracker, who has the ability to be in more than one place at a time. I hope you all have a good summer, and return to the fray next season.

Mike Parrott

And a trainee writes.....

After meeting some of the team at the Weald Wood Fair in the late summer I was inspired to "have a go". While I was at the show I even bought my first billhook. I also managed to convince Colin (a neighbour) and David (his son-in-law) to have a go as well, so we signed up to the society and booked in for the a training day.

We turned up for our first training day at Colbrans Farm in Laughton with little idea what to expect. We had Phil as our trainer and were allocated our first section of hedge. Phil also introduced us to the slasher, a superb tool. It seemed very alien to hack through a (new) plant 80%, but we "just followed instructions" and we were away. It was after 3 or 4 pleaches that we all realised that our idea of "sharp tools" and hedge layers sharp tools were not quite the same - actually they were miles different! Anyway by lunch time we had managed to get all the plants pleached so got a brew on, and started picking out bits of thorn.

In the afternoon we started sharpening and inserting the stakes and struggled with Phil's massive Maul, which seemed to be a tool designed for giants. Phil gave us a top tip - stand back and make sure it looks right, which it did to us (having little clue what we were really looking for at this stage). Once happy we started weaving in the binders which seemed easy. Once we had the binders in we knocked them down and gave the stakes a final whack with the Maul, then trimmed off the tops.

It should be possible to walk along the top of the binders, and some say that the devil does this (not sure why he would). Fine time to have a brew, and admire our handiwork and pick out a few more thorns.

We all enjoyed it so much we decided to book in for another session. David was a little slack in thorn removal, and paid the price in the early hours with a massive swollen hand. Oops.

On our return to Colbrans Farm a few weeks later we were split up and David and myself were given to Desmond, who's first job was to inspect (and reject) the sharpness of our tools (and we had all made a special effort this time!). I also brought some non-traditional shears and a set of ratchet loppers both of which were poo poed by Desmond! We were off to a good start.

As we were now working in the middle of a long hedge we had the added challenge of needing to work with our neighbours as we all needed to lay on top of each other's work.

Anyway cutting was much easier than before with our sharp(er) tools and with some wise words from Desmond we were well away. As we now had some idea what we were up to, Desmond was able to give us more detailed instruction on some of the finer points (lamb runs, and the use of dead wood come to mind here). Desmond was not keen on us nipping away for a brew until we had done what he felt was enough work which was a new approach. Anyway our second hedge was much improved, we felt we were getting the hang of it, and came away with less thorns and some more top tips.

By the end of the day Desmond was very taken with the loppers and even the shears got a begrudging “thumbs up”.

Our third day was at a Ford, which might as well have been Cornwall it was so far away (from Kent), or just maybe we should have set off earlier? The student turnout today was pretty poor, so we were pretty much thrown in at the deep end in pairs to get on with it. When we stopped for lunch we were impressed/ amazed/gob-smacked to see that Gary had done a massive section of hedge on his own, it was also interesting to see how much stuff he had cut out of the hedge. Over tea Mike handed us an invite to take part in an Improvers Day, which was Free and also offered the chance to win a competition, how could we refuse?



Sadly, prior commitments have prevented me from entering any competitions this year, maybe with a little more practice I'll have a go next year.

Inspired by our success I had a go at my hedge at home, which was a bit of a mess. I got stakes and binders from a green woodworker I know locally who was happy for me to thin out some of his unwanted willow (binders only!), and trim up some hazel and chestnut for stakes.

I doubt it would win a prize, but as many people have said “you can only work with what you have got”. My Slasher became my new best friend pulling out the massive amount of ivy as it has no fear of blackthorn. I had to break one of Desmond's golden rules and use “a bit of dead”, as there were a few gaps which I did not want the animals to get through. I'm hoping the new in-fill planting takes, and we end up with a nice hedge. I also ended up with quite a pile of large sized blackthorn wood, which is a glorious yellow/red colour. I have kept this and will make it into something interesting.

I have noticed that when you're hedge-laying it is always sunny, no idea if this is a co-incidence.

I still need to learn how to REALLY sharpen my billhook, but I am getting better. I also need to stop buying more billhooks well maybe just one more, in the Yorkshire style.

Time for a brew I think.

Phill Piddell



FROM THIS

TO



THIS

Phill has sent me a series of photos of this hedge – before, during and after laying. If you would like to see them please contact me. Rachel. rachel.howkins@btopenworld.com, 01428 645899

29TH ANNUAL COMPETITION, PLASHETT PARK FARM, RINGMER

The final event of the season landed on a rather damp drizzly day, but spirits were high, and the hedgelaying began in the usual way with the draw, the sighs, and the “oh Well, at least I didn’t get number 13”!

There were a good number of layers this year including a large novice group with three ladies competing, which was a first for many a year. They had the worst of the brambles and the clearing took for ever it seemed, but eventually they broke through and started to bring the hedge down.

It was great to meet up once again with Lex and Jeff from Holland and even more fun to see them laying a beast of a Sussex Hedge! Their flag flew proudly in the stiff breeze and Jeff never stopped grinning!

When you first arrive at the hedge line and see the overgrown hedge you cannot help but wonder how they will all bring it down in just 5 hours, but they always do. I never fail to be amazed at the fine job that everyone does at the end of a long tough day. It really was a transformation and so was the weather. By midday the sun had burnt the clouds away and somehow everyone seemed to speed up and enjoy the day even more. I know I did.

Once the hedge was down it was back into Ringmer for lunch and prize presentations at The Green Man. The staff did an excellent job and could not have been more helpful, making a grand finish to the day.

Well done to all those that helped get the event up and running, from finding a hedge, coppicing materials, organizing the paper work, providing hot drinks and biiccy’s and finally to the tough job of judging and making sense of all the scores.

Jackie Gilligan



An interesting bit of history submitted by Mike Parrott:

Plashett Park (farm) (Ringmer),. The place is recorded as parc. de Plaseto in 1288, and as Plasschette in 1323. The meaning of this word seems to be 'plaited', referring perhaps to the woven fencing surrounding the enclosure, or park, here, and is derived from the Old French *plaissiet*.

From *The Place Names of Sussex* by Judith Glover 1975, p.132

HEDGE RAMBLINGS

HEDGE-LAYING IS GOOD FOR WILDLIFE

A recent study by the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust has found that estates which undertake game shooting had up to 65% more hedgerows per square kilometre than those without. The reason is that estate managers have found that by retaining hedgerows it gives protection and cover for the game birds and as such improves the sport as well as maintaining a better wild life habitat.

Since the 1950's up to 300,000 miles of hedgerow have been lost in this country, mainly due to farmers needing to increase the size of fields to make mechanical cultivation and harvesting more viable. There was also a decline in hedge-laying due to the reduction in manual labour which led to the craft of hedge-laying being lost as less labour was employed on farms and large estates. It was also about this time that hedge-cutting machinery started to be introduced making what was thought at the time to be more efficient use of labour and gradually mechanisation became more important. As a result hedges were neglected and became more open and wire fences and barbed wire started to be used to close off the gaps at the bottom of hedges.

By the late to mid 60's hedges were declining so fast it was not realised the effect that this was having on wildlife. Such was the need to obey the needs of mechanisation. This decline continued until legislation was introduced in the late 1990's to help protect hedgerows and now that the decline has been halted, some 5,000 miles of hedges have been replanted and 10,000 miles restored. Much of this restoration is thanks to grants and the hedge-laying societies such as our own South of England Society and it is important that we maintain and preserve our style of hedge-laying to ensure that future generations can have the benefit of a pleasing craft on the eye, whilst at the same time ensuring that animals, mainly sheep in our part of the country.

We should not overlook the benefits of improving the landscape and whilst overgrown hedges benefit large birds and animals they do little to improve the habitat of smaller birds and animals; one such species, the dormouse, which is finding its numbers increasing as a result of better hedgerow management.



Bill Hook



Having struggled through the season against the dreaded Bramble, I was somewhat cheered up when I found that Reg Lanaway had a recipe for Bramble Tip Wine. Especially when I heard that the tips have to be picked before they are too strong to prick your fingers. Wow handling brambles without getting pricked or caught up – what a joy.

I have nicked named it **“Hedge Layers Revenge”**

Wishing you a Happy Bramble Tip picking session, more to the point what does it taste like? We will have to find out. Phil Hart.

Bramble Tip Wine From Reg Lanaway.

Ingredients:

2 pints of bramble tips (not pressed down)
1 gallon of water
1 Lemon
1 Orange
3lbs of Sugar
Yeast



Method:

Gather the fresh green bramble tips in April. Avoid any with sharp spines that prick your finger as they will be too old.

Boil them in the water until they have lost their green colour (about 15-20 minutes).

Strain the liquid on to the sugar with the thinly peeled rind of the Lemon and Orange into a plastic bucket.

Allow to cool till hand warm. Add the yeast and Orange and Lemon juice. Cover the bucket

Leave in the bucket for four days stirring daily.

Transfer into a demijohn and insert an air-lock.

Leave to ferment.

When active working finishes, siphon into another demijohn leaving the lees behind.

Bottle when clear.





SEHLS MEMBERS GO INTERNATIONAL

Gary Moore & Phil Hart recently attended the Boxmeer Hedge Laying Championship in the Netherlands. They were the only team from the UK and came home as joint winners. Approximately 40 teams competed, with between two and six people per team laying the hedge in the Maasheggen

style. This involves laying the hedge with pleaches cut at between ground level up to 20cm, thus creating gaps to allow flood water to flow through the bottom of the hedge. Normal stakes & binders are replaced by live stakes which are then pleached at between 110 & 130cm high to create live binders. The finished hedge needs to be cattle proof. With 9,500 spectators attending (most of them arriving by bicycle) a marching band, a pantomime horse on the loose and no chainsaws roaring away, it was excellent, with a unique friendly atmosphere.

Peter Tunks also attended, demonstrating his skills laying the hedge in the South of England style. Other styles laid were Midland and the French style

WANTED

Judges and Stewards for the National and other competitions.

Judges and stewards need to be competent hedge-layers with good communication skills and a good eye for detail.

Please contact Gary Moore or Phil Hart if you wish to be considered.

President v Chairman Team Competition

On behalf of John and myself I would thank everybody who took part in this event - what a day, 320 yards in 5 hours. By the looks on some of your faces you all had a good time. It was a team event and you all worked well together. This is what the society is about. Well done to all of you. The Chairman's team won! Thanks Gary.

NATURE NOTES

I always visit the stables at this time of year just to have a look at the Swallows' nests on the beams. Many have been there for years, and will require only re-lining when the birds return.



It is also easy to speculate as to where the ones hatched in those nests may be at this time of year. How many survived the migration south to Africa? How many will make it back to Britain in the spring? Will any of the nestlings we ringed return to their natal colony? One did last year at the college stables, only the third in twenty years I have recaptured as a year old bird where it had been hatched. Will the old male Swallow return to breed in the same loose box as he has for at least five years? Such are the wonders of Nature that the more we learn the more we realise that there is to learn.

Coppicing has traditionally been the way woodlands have been cropped and, incidentally, benefitted wildlife so I was pleased to see some being done in the local woodlands. Over the years many of the woods have become neglected and derelict as the need for hazel products for skills like thatching, hedge-laying and making hurdles became less important in the countryside. Thankfully in recent years there has been an interest in country skills and some of them have been revived.

When the woodland has been worked on a regular basis and a different section coppiced to ground level each winter, the wood will come to life. Firstly the opening allows more sunshine to reach the ground, warming the soil so that, without the competition from brambles, a carpet of spring flowers occurs. This attracts insects to pollinate these flowers and both they and their caterpillars are the next link in the food chain. Larger insects and small birds feed on them and in turn they too are fed upon by birds of prey caught in flight or taken as eggs or nestlings by members of the Crow family or nestlings by Woodpeckers. So as long as this balance is maintained and there is a patchwork of areas in varying stages of re-growth, each new area providing the flowering plants, before being covered by brambles, the eco-system will succeed.

Probably the most beneficial plant is the bramble as not only does it provide cover for nesting and protection but firstly the flowers attract large insects, the fruit is nutritious food to build up the condition of migrating Warblers and the fruit that doesn't get eaten dries out into small parcels of high energy seeds for finches and small mammals in the winter.

It is surprising that, when some people see this work being carried out, they often object, thinking that by cutting English hardwoods down to ground level they are being harmed. The truth is that this rejuvenates the tree and can keep it young and vigorous for centuries

Reg Lanaway

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Two readers have sent in some "factoids" about hedges which appeared in the Daily Telegraph recently. Here's one for our Dutch friends. More to appear in later issues.

Dutch Hedge:

Den Haag means the Hedge in Dutch. The city is more properly known as 's Gravenhage, meaning the Count's Hedge, because the city had once been an aristocratic hunting ground enclosed by hedges.

NEWS FROM THE AGM

As you know, it is very important that all participants in Society events are covered by our insurance. It has, therefore, been decided to move the renewal date for membership from 1st September to 1st April. To enable the change to be made, current members will get a few free months before their membership needs renewing. This should ensure all members are paid up and covered by the Society's insurance before attending coppicing, training or competitions.

In addition, in future, all members will be required to bring their membership cards with them to all events to prove their membership. When arriving at the event, those without membership cards will be asked for a £10 payment to ensure they are on the books. This fee will be refundable if it is found later that they are paid up. We apologise for any inconvenience this may cause but it will help ensure that at all events, participants are paid up and insured.

Apologies!!!!

There was an error in the last issue regarding the trip some of our layers made to the North of England and Scotland.

It should have read:

"Gary and Clive were deducted points, quite rightly, for the removal of stems/pleaches which happened in error as they were laying two different styles next to each other. They might have been in contention for 1st and 2nd as they'd otherwise laid good hedges".

It was wrongly reported that they had won. Sorry!

Thank you to the Northumberland correspondent for spotting it and raising the issue.

TOOL SHARPENING DAY

1ST September, 9.30am
Plumpton College Workshops
Ditchling Road, Lewes BN7 3AE

Follow the billhook signs.

Book with Gary Moore or Phil Hart

Please bring your tools and sharpening gear as this will be a hands-on session to help tune up your tools for the start of the season.

£10 per
person

"Many a competition has been won in the tool shed the previous week, - sharpening the tools. "

Clive Matthews.



FOR YOUR DIARY

2012		
April		
May	10 th	Committee Meeting
	12 th	Plumpton College Open Day
	19 th	Sparsholt College Countryside Open Day
	26 th	Heathfield Show
June	24 th	Fairfields Country Fair, Fairfields Recreation Ground, Burgess Hill
	30 th -1 st	SEAS Smallholders Show
July	12 th	Committee Meeting
	12 th	SEAS Connect with the Countryside
August		
September	1 st	Tool Sharpening, Plumpton College
	8 th	Laughton Ploughing Match, Hedge-laying Competition
	13 th	Committee Meeting
	15 th	West Grinstead Ploughing Match, Hedge-laying Competition
	21 st -23 rd	Weald Wood Fair
	TBA	Tool Sharpening, Plumpton College
	29 th	Coppicing – Venue to be announced
October	6 th	Hurstpierpoint Ploughing Match, Hedge-laying Competition
	6 th -7 th	SEAS Autumn Show
	13 th	1 st Training Day – Venue to be announced
November	15 th	Committee Meeting
	17 th	2 nd Training Day – Venue to be announced
December	1 st	Coppicing – Venue to be announced
	8 th	3 rd Training Day – Venue to be announced
2013		
January	5 th	Coppicing – Venue to be announced
	10 th	Committee Meeting
	12 th	Improver's Day – Venue to be announced
February	15 th	Annual General Meeting, Plumpton College
	23 rd	29 th SEHLS Annual Competition – Venue to be announced
	?	Chailey Heritage Charity Day (Bi-annual event)
March	21 st	Committee Meeting

Committee:

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Secretary	Phil Hart Tel: 0771 705 4172
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Membership Secretary:	Dick Morley Tel: 01273 843633
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Show Officer & Caravan Manager:	Ron Moulard Tel: 01273 513597
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The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the policy of the South of England Hedgelaying Society.

The Editor reserves the right to edit or exclude any item sent.

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