

# GROWING TOGETHER

The Self-Sufficiency Group

April 2024

Newsletter



*GROWING TOGETHER Self-Sufficiency group exists to enable and encourage its members to practice self-sufficiency and self-reliance, and maintain a "sustainable life style" in a fast changing worldwide environment*

View this newsletter at:-

[www.ehss.org.uk](http://www.ehss.org.uk)

Indoor meetings are held at 19.30 on the 2nd Wednesday of the month in the:-

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The April meeting is on Wednesday the 10th

Our April talk will be given by Christine Stevens of Chichester Bee Keepers. Christine is past president of West Sussex Beekeepers Association. She teaches beekeeping for Chichester beekeepers and is a tutor on beekeeping courses at the Weald and Downland museum, as well as lecturing on all aspects of beekeeping and hive products both locally and nationally.

Please do turn up for what is bound to be a very interesting talk. This is the last of our indoor talks for the foreseeable future.

Our next gathering will be an outdoor meeting. Times and venue yet to be confirmed.

Resume of the March Talk by Frances Bassom.

These days there are around 17 billion domestic chickens worldwide. Even DEFRA recognises that the basis for all these fowl dates back to a just few breeds. Many of which came about during the latter part of the 19th century.

Before the Victorian era breeding and keeping of poultry was haphazard with no specialisation. Unlike other livestock such as sheep, cattle and pigs the idea of breeding of poultry for production traits or even beauty was considered a very frivolous occupation.

A cottager would produce enough eggs and meat for themselves and some extra to be sent to market or preserved for later use. Poultry keeping was confined to the countryside with books of the time referencing the need to have good access to common land to allow enough space to keep poultry. Hens were only eaten once they had finished lay. Young cockerels were often caponised (castrated).

These birds were fed on what ever grains and scraps were available. Towns were also provisioned by imports of eggs from France where they had bigger farms dedicated to raising fowl. Although many imported eggs were preserved so as to spread their shelf life.

In the 19th century hens had to be good at brooding as all chicks had to be naturally reared. This fact severely limited the numbers of poultry available. There were only a few well recognised breeds of chicken, such as the Dorking, Polish and various

Gamefowl. The most common chicken was the “Dunghill cock” basically this was any cottagers fowl of mixed ancestry that proved robust and had utility properties.

Some people of enquiring minds, indulged in acquiring unusual animals and birds from markets and ports. Those who were followers of the Agriculturalist Robert Bakewell started to experiment using the more exotic looking fowl that were arrived on our shores.

The working class diet tended to be seasonal fresh food which was thankfully both plentiful and relatively cheap. Carbohydrates, such as bread, potatoes and porridge oats were cheap and filling. Cheese was widely available and fish and shellfish was plentiful. Meat was usually Pork, Mutton or Beef, with chicken appearing on the menu only very occasionally .

In early 1800’s Yorkshire a few people started to run competitions to find the most beautiful hamburg chicken, at the time these were called hornets or moonies . Meetings were held in pubs where people competed for household goods like pots, pans and kettles, Thus the early poultry shows began.

With British exploration bringing back new fowl from Asia it fuelled not only a new interest in showing, but in standardising the types. It also brought with it a wider gene pool with differing production traits such as brown eggs and larger carcasses.

This being the Victorian era every new variety that arrived, no matter how small and fluffy would be tested for its eating qualities.

Once cockfighting was banned from 1833 onwards (final act 1849) Exhibiting poultry really took off with the masses. People started breeding poultry to written standards.

Chickens that had until then been fed on whatever was readily available started to get special rations recommended. Books and magazines dedicated to the noble art of raising poultry abounded and once Queen Victoria became interested there was no stopping a “poultry bubble” developing.

This was focused mostly around the Cochin China and the Brahma fowl, both asiatic breeds of a very large size. Many fanciful claims about their egg laying prowess, meat qualities and productivity abounded, invented claims as to the history and provenance of the breeds were shared far and wide.

However it was not until the 1850’s that a self promoting, rogue businessman called George Burnham from the USA spurred the hen fever into a form of mass hysteria resulting in prices of over £30 per bird being paid. (About £3,600 in todays money) Cheats and scammers were all leaping onto the band wagon to make money. As George Burnham himself wrote “Did any mania exceed in ridiculousness or ludicrousness, or in the number of its victims surpass this inexplicable humbug.”

Thankfully things calmed down after a few years. George Burnham promptly made more money by writing and selling a book called “The history of Hen Fever” documenting his extensive part in the chicken mania bubble; Even including copies of letters he had been sent by angry victims of his scams.

The biggest and most profound change the Victorians brought to poultry started at the great exhibition in 1851 when Cantelo exhibited an incubator that actually worked. It utilised a rubber membrane that rested on the eggs. It was very expensive, delicate and very large. Until then incubation of eggs in large numbers had only existed in places like China or Egypt where the climate was favourable for their intensive incubation methods.

In 1878 M Rouiller introduced a hydro incubator, using a heated water replacement method where warm water in a tank was replaced every 12 hours. Further experiments resulted in the 1883 Hearson machine which was the most successful and reliable machine of the time. By 1887 instructions on how to build a home made incubator appeared in Poultry Magazines.

Until the arrival of the incubator, breeders would never have dared to bred fowl solely for egg or meat production as they had to depend on broody hens being available. For the first time instead of being limited by the natural instincts, chicks could now be produced any time fertile eggs were available.

From then on the poultry world changed direction towards producing chickens with no brooding instincts and better egg or meat production. Without incubators the modern poultry breeds the world now relies upon for food could not have come about.

Large scale commercial poultry breeding had not existed as an industry of any sort prior to the 1890s. Annual consumption was only around 100 eggs per

person.

The Utility Poultry Club was formed in 1897 and shortly afterwards the very first egg laying trial was held near Northallerton.

From the chickens point of view the incubator could never be classed be a positive step. From a feeding the masses perspective, that could be open to debate.

Some of us still prefer to use broodies when available, but cheap reliable incubators are commonplace and useful. Formulated balanced feedstuffs are the norm and luckily we still have many wonderful Victorian inspired breeds to admire.

### THE COMPOST BIN

**Apologies:** I'm sorry this contribution is necessarily brief as I only returned this week from a three-week stay in our restored mountain



farmhouse in Spain, and now everything needs catching up with at the same time – dentist, hospital scan, thanking those who looked after our animals and plants, replying to urgent emails, dealing with a major rat problem in the chicken house, “catching-up” visits from family...

Anyway, as I'm also in the middle of seed sowing, at least that topic is fresh in my mind. Now at last we can freely sow the majority of veggies: in my case the remaining onion sets (I took a chance on a short row at the beginning of March and they are growing fine!), lettuce, carrots, beetroot, most potatoes, a second sowing of parsnips, leeks, radish, spinach (this time I'm growing some “proper” traditional New Zealand lettuce as well as my usual perpetual spinach beet) – just about everything that's not especially tender can go in

now. If in doubt, have a piece of fleece standing by in case of hard frost– and, by the way, it can go straight on to your plants, no need for hoops.

Also, indoors or inside a greenhouse propagator (much cheaper to run than heating the whole greenhouse!), you can sow both hardy and half-hardy flowers and vegetables to give them a head start – but with one warning. Before you sow seed of tender plants like cucumbers, courgettes, melons, chillies, French beans, greenhouse tomatoes and the like, think ahead two or three weeks when they're up and growing out of hand and there's still a risk of hard frost outdoors – what will you do with them then? Pay a fortune to heat the greenhouse, or watch them growing tall and straggly on a kitchen windowsill? Also bear in mind that those to be transplanted outdoors will need hardening off. Make life easier for yourself by delaying these plantings for a month more.

**It's strange, and perhaps disconcerting**, to realise how our lives are dictated by the hands of a clock. I write this after going through the spring ritual of turning them forward by an hour. Brilliant, now I can really get things done in the garden: I get up and it's light, and now my outdoor day includes a far bit of late evening as well. How much more logical than during the winter, when the day also begins as I get up, yet is brought to a sudden close around 4pm.

I have long campaigned for BST to be the all-round time for this country. I know it means that the sun is not now directly south until lunchtime, but who cares? At one time such a change was being considered, but was prevented by our being part of the E.U. Now that's no longer the case, let's press for year-long BST, increase productivity and do away with Greenwich Mean Time for ever!

### My favourite picture of the month:



*Snow still lingers on in eastern Russia – this amusing shot was sent to me by a penfriend! --Alec*

This is from Eco Rother Action: Sorry to spoil your day folks, but here is our local data for 2023 for sewage spills. SIGH!

How much untreated sewage ends up in the River Rother in our area?

Location	Total hours of discharge of untreated sewage			
	2020	2021	2022	2023
Liss Waste Water Treatment Works, Southern Water	611	607	542.90	1439.85
College St., Petersfield, CSO, Southern Water	3	7	0	0
Chapel St., Petersfield, CSO, Southern Water	151	28	4.97	15.43
Petersfield Waste Water Treatment Works, Southern Water	233	330	328.97	543
Buriton, Sewage Treatment Works, Southern Water	975	284	128.55	2394.95
Rogate, Waste Water Treatment Works, Southern Water	705	323	259.98	772.99
South Harting, Waste Water Treatment Works, Southern Water	4146	3406	3154.83	2164.12
Totals (FYI there are 8760 hours in a year)	6824 hours	4985 hours	4420.20 hours	7330.34 hours

I guess we can congratulate College Street Combined Sewage Overflow for another good year and I was aware there was a major problem at Buriton but it now has the dubious honour of overtaking South Harting for spill hours! The Liss figure is particularly depressing as the river has hardly got started by then. Rogate and Petersfield also record their worst ever figures.

**And there's just enough space left for me to** write a little: Easter Monday; it is 1.30 and its raining hard, however the Easter break has been lovely for me. It started on Good Friday with a 6.30 am walk with the dog who is staying with us as I had to be at the eye clinic for follow up after second cataract surgery by 8 am. And Joy! Given the ok to return to normal life, lifting heavy objects, having my head down for prolonged periods in house and garden, but continue with the drops. So pleased! And eyesight excellent, no glasses needed except for very small print. As my brain took to varifocals instantly, so it has adjusted to a long lens in my dominant eye and a mid length in the other eye. Perfect for reading and using the computer.

The seeds I commented on last month are doing well except for the Cosmos the mice destroyed when I put them in the lean to instead of the kitchen. They are now resown and in the summer house. Lots of Morning Glory up, and I have just sown a few Electric Daisies (look them up) and some tall Corn Flowers! Now, do I dare ut the Dahlias into their pots outside? I can cover them if they come up before the frosts have gone, but will they be safe from Mice? Oh yes, they destroyed all my tulip bulbs this year too.....

I saw a product advertised on Instagramme which said restored dry leather and wood; made from hemp oil and beeswax and probably something else. not expensive, but still thought I could make some...and I have just dressed the sofa with it. It started a bit sticky but now after an hour the sticky has gone off and it seems the leather has absorbed it and looks a lot better....

Well, that's me run out of space!!!

~ Dru