

Showing the passage of time



With LES DAVIES MBE

WELL, the Royal Bath and West Show was a great success this year and the North Somerset Show was blessed with some of the finest weather and what must have been close on a record attendance. These shows are such an important part of the countryside year and can only be appreciated when the weather is at its best.

Thankfully this year that was the case.

With all the pleasure of the day will however come the frustration of traffic congestion getting in and out of the venues; the crowd at the entrance and the expense of refreshments for the family, once through the turnstiles.

My early memories of the North Somerset Show are of travelling on the bus to Ashton Court and walking up through the impressive gatehouse onto the show site. There was very little traffic back then and lunch, well 'dinner', was carried in a shopping bag. It was nothing fancy; sandwiches were a great treat and egg ones especially. Oh, how my palate has become jaded with the passage of time, when I stand making my sandwiches for 'lunch', the sparkle seems to have gone out of the whole idea.

Often it rained, but my memory is kind to me, and I only remember the dry shows, sitting around the natural amphitheatre and watching the main events in the ring; walking around looking at the machinery and so many stalls! Then the weary trudge back to the bus stop and a wait that seemed forever.

After getting on to the bus (which was inevitably crowded) the journey would be punctuated by the groan of brakes and the grinding clang of the 'crash' gearbox as the driver wrestled with a vehicle that had no synchromesh gears and no power steering. No sooner had he managed the Herculean task of getting the beast into top gear, than someone would ring the bell requesting to be let off at the next stop, and the whole process had to start again.

After what seemed like several lifetimes to a small boy, the bus would finally stop for us, and another long walk back up the hill would bring me home again. On reflection maybe things haven't changed that much; after all, everything is relative, isn't it?

I find gardening is an activity best done at the end of the day, as the sun goes down, and with a glass of good red wine in my hand. Only then will I appreciate the tranquillity of it all and the uniformity of the rows in my vegetable patch. They are neatly hoed and the path is brushed up; the grass cut and edged; the hedge clipped and cleared. This is my managed and manicured landscape that my great hero William Cobbett would have approved of.

Although I would win no prizes for my horticultural prowess, it still gives me immense satisfaction to be there. This is my time to stand and stare at the dying of the day and listen to that most wonderful of song birds, the blackbird as he gives his final warning of the day to all the other birds about. I swear that if he could play a bugle he would be sounding "Sunset", that most evocative of military tunes played as the Union flag is lowered at the end of each day.

The countryside however is buzzing with all the good weather that early June brought. Grass has been rushed off the fields and



into the silage clamps. The 'tractor boys' have been working all hours as the contracting gangs move from site to site, determined to bring in the crop with the utmost speed. I remember last year and the disaster that was summer, together with its effects on moorland farmers. I can only hope that whatever lies ahead of us will be kinder than it was last year.

Already there are concerns amongst the arable farmers that wheat may be in short supply because of bad winter conditions. Even in today's modern hi-tech world we need the wheat that is grown on the land to provide our bread. Not a bad run for a plant that started around 10,000 years ago somewhere around the area of Turkey, as a result of four wild grasses that naturally cross-pollinated – not bad for an accident of nature either.

This country is truly a green and pleasant land that has been passed down to us along the time-span of millennia. We still manipulate this landscape to suit our needs and in its turn it supports us. It's not only food for the body that comes from this land, it is also food for our souls. I never tire of the views, I never stop thinking about those whose lives shaped it, and to this end I can thoroughly recommend Peter Coate's exhibition of paintings of Mendip and the Levels over the past 50 years.

You will remember I mentioned before that I had been to see Peter. His exhibition at Wells and Mendip Museum opens on Saturday, July 6th and runs until Saturday, August 3rd. Entry is free and opening hours are 10am until 5pm daily, apart from Sundays when the museum will be open from 11am until 4 pm.

Another local painter, Richard Blacker, painted a splendid backdrop for the Environmental Youth Awards exhibition at the Bath and West this year. It feels as if you are looking into a piece of woodland, so good is the perspective. If you want to see some more of Richard's work go and take a look at the old Cox's Mill site in Cheddar, that's his work as well. I haven't room to fit a picture into this edition, but I'll try for next time.

Congratulations to Longvernal School at Midsomer Norton, who were the overall winners of the Environmental Youth Award at the Royal Bath and West this year. They will be in this edition, and are no strangers to *Mendip Times*, or me, after I first met them at last year's Mendip Ploughing Match, see page ??.

Finally – last month's picture was of the gatekeepers at Langford Court. I met Sir David Wills at the Bath and West and he did ask me why I had photographed his gateway, so at least one person got it!

This month's will be a little more exacting. Look at Peter Coate's painting near Priddy, but where? For me the trees and the shed gave it away, but you would not normally be looking at it from this direction.

I'm always happy to hear from you, so drop me a line at Les.Davies@westcountryman.org.uk