



# NEWSLETTER

www.parishgrasslandsproject.org.uk

## COMMITTEE

**Chairman:**  
George Peterken 01594 530452

**Secretary, Treasurer and Membership:**  
Jean Pitt 01594 530255

**Minutes Secretary:**  
Ursula Williams 01594 530247

**Committee Members:**  
John Childs  
Tony Eggar  
Jean Green  
John Josephi  
Sarah Sawyer  
Mike Topp

## CONTENTS

Peter Chard	1
Flowers Leaflet	1
Flower of the month	1
Diary	1
Primroses	2
Grassland Management	3
Peter Chard	4

### Flower of the month



Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*

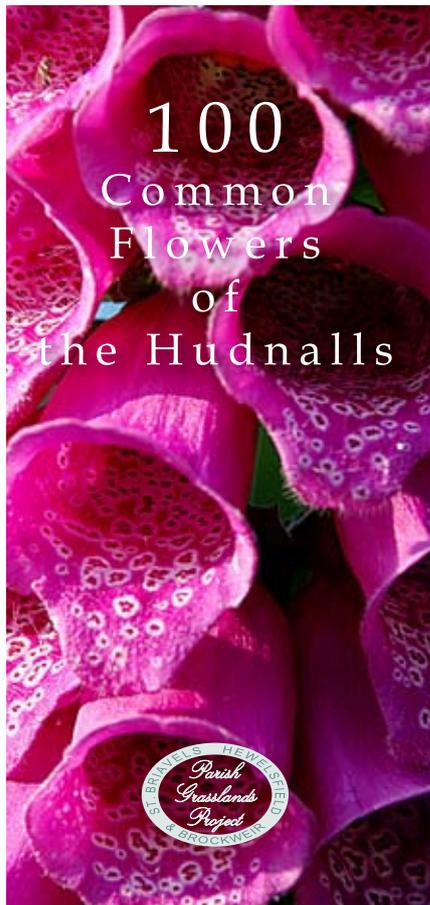
## Peter Chard

Following a relatively short illness, Peter Chard died in July. A key figure in the community and founder member of the Parish Grasslands Project, Peter was usually the first to welcome a new member, visit their land and give wise advice on how to look after it and how the PGP could help. He is greatly missed.

John Childs and George Peterken have written tributes on page 4.



## Flowers Leaflet



At the beginning of the summer we published a new leaflet "100 Common Flowers of the Hudnalls". Put together by George Peterken, Paul Wilkins and Tony Eggar, the leaflet is an essential field guide to the common flowers of our area.

The entries (samples shown below), have common and Latin names, flowering months, heights, photos and succinct descriptions which include the likely environment in which they can be found.

Copies are available from the Village Shop for £1.

**Ragged-robin** – *Lychnis flos-cuculi*

J F M A M J J A S O N D

H 25-60

Upright slender plant of wet meadows and marshy places. The bright pink petals are deeply-lobed giving a ragged appearance. Long spear-shaped leaves arranged in pairs along rough stems.

**Silverweed** - *Potentilla anserina*

J F M A M J J A S O N D

H 5-20

Named after the covering of silvery-white hairs on the leaves. Yellow flowers on long, creeping stems which root intermittently enabling the plant to spread. On waste ground and field margins.

### Dates for your Diary

7.30 Thursday 15 October at the Mackenzie Hall

**Bees, Flowers and Meadows**

## Primroses on the Hudnalls by George Peterken

When we moved here in October 1993 I was keen to discover what wild flowers we had acquired with our fields and wood, so next spring I walked the grounds mapping several species, including primroses, and repeated this in 1995. Primroses, unlike cowslips, cant stand grazing, so they are usually found in woods, hedges and ungrazed margins, but they also like soil to be neutral or alkaline, so it was no surprise to find that most grew close to hedges and walls, and that they largely ignored our wood and fields. In total I found 31 individuals.

By April 2000, for reasons I can't now remember, I started to wonder how they were doing, so I walked the fields and wood again and was pleased to discover that 23 of the original plants were still there and they had been joined by 6 more. Unfortunately, my 1994/5 records were rather casual, so I was not sure whether these were new plants, or plants that I'd missed earlier, but from their size I thought that 5 of the 6 could have been overlooked in 1994/5. However, from then on I recorded annually and carefully.

By April 2009 I had accumulated records of at least 66 plants. At least 28 were new plants recruited steadily since 1994 and were still there in 2009; 8 had come and gone while I'd been watching; and 22 had survived from 1994/5. This leaves 8 I was not sure about, but the size of the plants when first recorded suggested that 6 of these were new and 2 had been there in 1994. So, the bare stats were that I had probably started with 32 plants in 1994; lost 8 by 2009 but gained 34 new recruits; leaving me with 58 plants in 2009. We (and Bill Creswick) were obviously doing something right!

What killed primroses? Several plants suffered from the increasing shade cast by untrimmed hedges, excessive bramble growth and bracken expansion in years when fields were mown late, and at least 3 were smothered to death. Two more were probably grazed too severely after a water trough was placed near them. Three are mysteries: perhaps they were unlucky with a badger scrape or the victims of over-zealous attention from slugs.

The plants first recorded in 1994 are now at least 15 years old, but how much older might they be? When I first saw them, they ranged from giant poseys in sunny positions against a hedge or wall to small weaklings half smothered in tall herbage, and on the whole they

have stayed the same, so we can deduce nothing from their size. Some of the recruits have themselves grown to spectacular clusters in 4-5 years, so clearly large size does not mean great age.

However, if we examine the plants closely we may be able to get some hints. First, primroses grow in two flower forms - 'pin' (which has long styles and short anthers) and 'thrum' (with short styles and long anthers) – a feature that helps ensure cross-pollination. Large populations have equal numbers of both forms, but small populations may deviate: ours happens to be 38 pins, 27 thrums and one that has yet to flower. The interesting point is that pins and thrums form clusters of one form growing within perhaps two feet of each other.



Second, some of our 15+ year old plants have expanded over the years and separated into several functionally independent, but genetically identical plants. What was once one seedling has become a tight cluster of distinct plants, and there seems to be no reason why this process should not continue indefinitely. Perhaps the 1-form clusters described in the previous paragraph are simply older individuals that are further down this road.

Previous students of primroses – and they include Charles Darwin – have reckoned that individual primroses can live for 40-50 years, but that's little more than a guess: nobody has kept individuals under observation for that long, and neither, as far as I know, has the DNA of primrose clusters been studied. But, consider the clusters of six thrums or six pins: there is a 50:50 chance that each new seedlings will be one or the other, so six together is a one in 64 chance, and we have several such improbable clusters. My hunch is that some might live much longer than 50 years. After all, unlike trees that eventually rot, break-up or fall, primroses have no aging process and no limits on their longevity.

Primroses are a delicate and uplifting sight in the hedges and lanes of the Hudnalls. Now that I realise that some may have started life before the Second World War, I will welcome and respect them even more.

# Grassland Management

## by Mike Topp

When we moved into our new home in Hewelsfield last summer, one of our first acts was to send off an application to join the Parish Grasslands Project. And a few days later our first visitor arrived – it was Peter Chard, who walked our fields with us, named many of the plants, and explained how the project worked.

Late last year Peter asked me if I would take on the duties of machinery treasurer, sending out the bills for work done. I was happy to undertake this relatively straight-forward task, which would involve working closely with Peter. We had only known each other for a few months, but I greatly looked forward to working with him. Then as Peter became ill, and his condition worsened, I offered to help with some of the co-ordination work that Peter had done so efficiently, and apparently effortlessly. That is how I came to join the committee and why, since Peter's death, I am writing this report.

Following two very demanding years for the project, earlier this year we took a hard look at the way we manage things. In those two years we had not been able to provide as good a service as we would have liked, chiefly because of extremely difficult weather conditions. We decided that in order to improve the service to members we needed to simplify our operations.

Our first decision was to negotiate a new arrangement with our partners in the Monmouthshire Meadows Group, so that we could concentrate efforts on our own side of the Wye Valley. In previous years we have shared ownership of the machinery with Monmouthshire Meadows, and it has been operated and maintained by John and Robert Childs, and stored at Cowshill Farm in Hewelsfield. John and Robert were contractors for both organisations. The membership of Monmouthshire Meadows is spread over a much wider area than the Parish Grasslands Project, and the additional travel

times in order to fulfill orders from Monmouthshire put the operation under some strain.

Over a period of time we conducted negotiations with Monmouthshire Meadows and agreed a new way of sharing our resources. They would own one of the two tractors, the Massey Ferguson 135, while we would retain the Alpine tractor. They would also have ownership of the tedder, the minibailer and its wrapper. And crucially, they would have their own contractor, on their side of the valley, enabling John and Robert to concentrate efforts on our side.



The decision to offer the minibailer to Monmouthshire was not taken lightly, but we felt that we could offer a significantly more efficient service by using John Childs' own bailer, which produces large round bails, and covers a given area much more quickly than the minibailer.



With the new arrangements in place, we started the season fulfilling a steady flow of orders for early flailing, mostly bracken, etc., round field edges. But as June progressed and the haymaking season approached the weather took a turn for the worse. This was the year we had been promised a barbecue summer, but a run of more than two dry days simply didn't occur during July and August. In order to make hay we need to start with reasonably dry ground, and then we require about five days to cut and then turn the hay to dry it, before rowing it up and bailing. A further complication is that as the summer progresses and the days get shorter, there is less daytime drying time, and additional time for night dew to form. All of which helps to explain why placing an order to have a field cut and bailed is not the same as booking a plumber, say, to come to your home to do a job. The plumber can usually offer you a date when he will start,



and you can expect him to turn up then. But of course agricultural contracting, with its dependence on the season and the weather, doesn't function like that.

However, after all that gloom and doom about the weather, the dry weather in September has allowed us and others to catch up with much of the hay making.

## Appreciations of Peter Chard

It will be more than 10 years ago when Peter Chard first asked me if I could mow the bracken in his field. It was probably then that we both realised that the equipment most farms had was not suited to steep banks. I have memories of one of our neighbour's tractor running away down a bank (minus its driver) plunging over a small cliff, hitting a tree central to its bonnet and stopping at such impact that all 4 wheels sheared off. The remains of the machine unceremoniously dropping to its belly, whilst one wheel bounced off gathering speed down the bank, over the stream, up the other bank, nearly to Wells farm where it stalled, rolled back and collapsed in the brook.

Peter understood exactly the void that was forming over his fields and many others on the common, both with few grazing animals and little equipment to operate in small meadows. I feel few people would comprehend the amount of paper work he ploughed through to obtain the funding that made the Parish Grasslands Project a reality. He took on the role of coordinating the work schedule, which for him was a far-reaching task. He visited sites to inform and advise, he organised work in adjoining areas, but perhaps what he did best was to help reconnect people with the countryside they owned and lived in.

Perhaps I should tell of the several times each week he would arrive at the pig yards, complete with clip board, the rain gently pouring on his head and myself and Robert would hide! – His sense of humour would never fail!

As to Peter's own fields, well I'm sure everyone would agree he achieved what he set out to do. The bracken is very much reduced, the flowers have increased, and by means of a new gateway, a herd of 70 Gloucester cattle graze them in the autumn- quite a site in a small field!

The memory I shall treasure is of him setting off on the Massey Ferguson 135, bracken bruiser on tow, obviously in too higher gear- but who cares – the look on his face said it all, it was of someone who's childhood memories and past pleasures had flooded back- which of course they had.

John Childs

When, at the height of the crisis over the BSE and Foot-and-Mouth diseases, a group of us met to consider whether this might mean dereliction for the parish environment and landscape, it was Peter Chard who was most certain that we, the parish community, could do something worthwhile to help ourselves, and it was out of this that the Parish Grasslands Project developed. Peter was actively involved from the start in all our activities, contributing ideas and always volunteering to do the hard work. In particular, when five of the original committee wanted us to acquire machinery and offer a management service, it was Peter who undertook the considerable task of developing the proposal, filling grant application forms, negotiating with grantors, and eventually reporting annually on our progress.

One spin-off from our grants was a series of Open Days, and again it was Peter who did most to set up the first one. I doubted there would be enough interest, but Peter was convinced otherwise, and he went on to prove it. He and Ann also hosted 'thank you' gatherings at their home for everyone involved, which are the nearest we have come to harvest suppers. For years, he co-ordinated our programme of management, a largely thankless task of reconciling what people wanted with an uncooperative climate. Even as his illness developed, he was thinking about arranging tuition for anyone who wanted to keep sheep on their fields.

Put simply, it is largely thanks to Peter that the PGP has been active and reasonably successful, but now we must learn to work without him. He was anxious that we should continue, and the committee has since decided to maintain the programme of meetings and management through 2010. However, the interests and needs of residents are changing, and we will also discuss how we can work with other groups in the parishes with overlapping interests.

George Peterken

