



**Newsletter 121**  
**Spring 2021**



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## Chairman's letter – Spring 2021

As the “Beast from the East Mark 2” dumps snow on the already saturated and bedraggled garden this seems a good time to sit down and write to you all – with optimism! I have to say it is difficult to be original and not write in cliché about spring burgeoning, snowdrops and aconites, robins and blackbirds singing – but they are!

What must have been one of the trickiest winters for us all, gardening for so many of us has been a lifeline. We on the committee haven't lost sight of the fact that members need to be persuaded to renew their membership, and we have been planning new and interesting visits, talks, new web pages, and the Spring 2021 newsletter, which will be out in time for Easter.

With time on our hands, and Lockdown Lethargy, we thought it would be interesting to add a Book Reviews page to the website and we have posted a couple of reviews. We would love to have any recommendations for books, both newly published and old favourites, and your review of them. This can be done through the contact page on the website, or if you don't use the website, send them to our secretary.

We have added under Events on the website a heading for Local Places of Interest. Some of these entries are gardens we were due to visit last year but had to cancel, and some are new and posted there in the hope that we can arrange visits either later this summer, or next year and to whet your appetite! Matthew Long is keeping us informed of future talks and events under the heading Other Horticultural Events and while Zoom continues to be the way of things, this gives us access to many fascinating talks we would otherwise miss.

As promised, we have started the application to have Gardeners' Question Time from the BBC during 2022, or maybe 2023. This is quite

a complex and long drawn-out procedure, as you can imagine, so we are starting in good time.

The other point of particular interest to the committee and subsequently all members, is the subject of teas! You may remember in the past that this was brilliantly organised by Judy Baker who has understandably decided to retire from the role. We did write to people who we thought might be interested in taking this on but sadly had no volunteers from members. We have explored the possibility of commissioning a catering firm, or the WI, to do teas but this too has drawn a blank. HOWEVER, Louise Chambury EAGG Treasurer, has volunteered to supervise the teas, and we are exploring the possibility of employing a couple of people from Bildeston to do the actual work involved. Committee Members and members will still be encouraged to bring homemade cakes, scones, etc. as in the past. Let us hope that it won't be too long before we can enjoy these events, and our special delicious teas.

Meanwhile I would like to say a special thank you to our plucky secretary, Liz Law, who has single-handedly managed to keep our talks going throughout the winter by operating Zoom. By using Zoom there have been some silver linings to the cancelled talks, as we can reach a wider audience and members can invite guests without charge. The most recent talk in conjunction with Suffolk Garden Trust – a fascinating hour spent listening to Mark Spencer, with a talk entitled Murder Most Florid explaining about botanical forensics - was available as a recording for seven days and we hope to do the same with other Zoom talks. We have had registrations for Zoom talks from all over the country, from Devon, Tewksbury, Milton Keynes, and have increased our membership as more people see our new website and realise what an interesting organisation we are.

And so to vaccines, summer, and freedom!

**Sue de Sabata (Joint Chair)** March 2021

## Flowery Lawns

This spring several conservation organisations urged us to reduce the frequency of lawn mowing. They suggested that this would bring in more wildlife into our gardens and the appearance of wildflowers we didn't even know we had. I didn't need much persuading to keep the lawn mower in the shed, so embarked upon the task of sitting back and watching with some enthusiasm.

The results were rewarding, cowslips glowing in the spring sunshine, including the curious false oxlip *Primula vulgaris x veris*, a cross



between cowslip and primrose its flowers nodd in all directions.

By mid-April, white deadnettle *Lamium album* became a magnet for bumble bees and continued to attract them until the almost the last bumble bee was on the wing.

One of the most distinctive visitors was the charmingly named hairy footed flower bee.

Concurrently, forget-me-nots were putting on a show in the wilder edges, these flower-bed-escapees were the flower of choice for bee-flies. As April turned to May, Herb Robert, *Geranium robertii* settled into

bloom here too. Sitting on the garden bench, coffee in hand, it was mesmerising to watch the solitary and nomad bees cruising over germander speedwell, *Veronica chamaedrys* and red dead nettle *Lamium purpurea*, far more engaging than any monoculture lawn could ever be.

June arrived and the showed little sign of abating. Scarlet pimpernel, *Anagallis arvensis* appeared. Scarlet pimpernel is charmingly referred to Shepperd's Weatherglass as the flowers close in poor weather.

Common Agrimony *Agrimonia eupatoria*, with its conspicuous yellow flowers and faintly aromatic foliage, was coming into its own closely followed by yarrow, *Achillea millefolium* and musk mallow, *malva moschata*. At this point I have to confess to mowing some paths through some of the less interesting lawn. Following accepted wisdom, I collected up the aftermath. With some fortune, the remaining long grasses burst

into flower, knapweed and yellow toad flax. The plants mentioned are only a fraction of the more distinctive wildflowers which attracted numerous pollinating



insects and kept me fascinated all spring and summer. In previous years I have tried sowing wild flower seeds, tried planting plug plants but neither attempts at creating a wildflower patch had nearly as much success as simply ceasing mowing. Having a 'lawn' which was common land before becoming garden, free draining and fairly impoverished, no doubt helped but this is an experiment that I will repeat again. I am converted to the concept of going easy on the mowing and letting the lawn show it's true colours.

**Cathy Smith**

## VISIT TO HOWICK HALL, NORTHUMBERLAND



Last August, which now seems a lifetime ago, we spent a week in Craster, visiting gardens. One of my favourites in that area, is Howick Hall. It was the ancestral home of the Grey family, until the death of the 5<sup>th</sup> Earl Grey in 1963, when the Estate passed to his daughter, Lady Mary Howick. The 5<sup>th</sup> Earl and his wife Mabel were great gardeners, and largely created the natural and informal gardens we see today.

Howick has a wonderful arboretum, with over 12,500 trees and shrubs, with extensive woodland walks, beside streams, with the beautiful family chapel set in a wooded glade, and paths that meander through to the sea. There is an extensive collection of *Acer*s, *Betula*, a beautiful *Davidia involucrata*, and many interesting *Sorbus*, including a rare *Sorbus harrowiana*. So many that it is impossible to name them all, but as we sat down to have our picnic, we were overwhelmed by the most amazing fragrance, a *Pterocarya Macroptera*, with 70 cm. long pale

green trusses of heavily scented flowers, I haven't come across one of these before – glorious!

The borders and terraces on the south side of the hall were at their most glorious when we visited, mainly herbaceous perennials, lupins, delphiniums, mallows, and just below the top terrace, the rose border was edged with Nepeta Six Hills Giant. On the other side of the sweeping lawns was a huge border of Agapanthus, in full bloom, leading through to a large rockery area. Lady Mary's garden was open when we visited, a



beautiful area to the south of the house, the walls clothed with many varieties of old and wonderfully scented roses. One in particular caught my eye, a white single rose, about 3" in diameter, with a bright yellow, heavily stamened, centre, and dark glossy foliage, see picture.



I asked Lady Howick who was gardening there at the time, what variety it was, and she said that they didn't know, but they have always called it The Scottish Rose, it has been there for as far as the records go back. Next time I go, I am taking secateurs for a cutting!

There is a new sensory garden, which is developing nicely now, and from there one can wander through to a part of the gardens where it is mainly planted with shrubs, and in Spring I think it is planted with bulbs and hellebores, but of course

these were over on our visit, but there are lovely pathways beside a brook which flows through here down to the pond. A wild bog garden around the pond has plants grown from wild seed collecting expeditions to China, India, North America and New Zealand. Unusual plants flourishing here are clumps of *Rheum alexandrae*, Chinese and



European Salvias, tall Chinese aconites, cardiocrinums, rogersias and astilbe.

Howick Hall is well worth a visit if you are in the area, it is a wonderful rambling, fragrant romantic garden, with so many fascinating varieties of just about everything. Of course, there is the obligatory tea- room, but as this is the home of Earl Grey Tea, they also do that rather well too!

**Erica Bolam**

### **Book Reviews – ‘My Favourite Garden Reading’**

We would love members to recommend books they have found useful and/or entertaining. Preferably newly published but old favourites would also be interesting. Please do send us your reviews and suggestions to Contact Us on the Website. Book Reviews are listed under News and Interest on the website. Sue

## **OLD WIVES’ LORE FOR GARDENERS**

**Maureen & Bridget Boland pub. Bodley Head**

## **GARDENERS’ MAGIC and other Old Wives’ Lore**

**Bridget Boland pub. Bodley Head**

Did you know that banana skins buried just below the soil are very good for roses? Or that camellias will flourish from a mulch of old tea leaves? Or that hollyhocks thrive on the dregs of beer? For the flower arrangers among you apparently all flowers will last longer in water if foxgloves are included in the vase, delphiniums and larkspur like sugar in the water, for daffodils add camphor or charcoal but beware, they excrete a substance which is poisonous to other flowers.

These little gems of information are included in two books which I treasure for their wisdom , humour and tactile quality – printed on thick cream-coloured paper illustrated with exquisite woodcuts.

As the titles promise, they're full of practical gardening advice and magic though sometimes it's hard to distinguish between the two. 'If an oak be set near a walnut tree it will not live' say the authors, 'which we have on the authority of Pliny, but alas it's unclear whether it's the oak or walnut which will die.' Never mind, there's lots of helpful advice including a chart of which vegetables make good neighbours. Carrots are friends with leeks, peas and beans but they are the only veg which should be planted near onions and garlic. And don't even think of putting your gladioli anywhere near strawberries which will suffer if planted up to fifty feet away.

There's lots more in this vein, but it's the authors as well as the content which intrigue me. The Boland sisters shared a house and garden together for forty years, first in Pimlico (before it became expensive) then Hampshire. Their London garden was featured in books and magazines 'because' says Bridget 'we placed arch-shaped full length mirrors on the back wall, giving the idea of two gardens for the price of one to many Londoners' – a trick that has since been copied by countless garden designers. When they moved to the country 'the little learning we'd acquired in our town garden was useless. We needed to learn fast, and asked all our friends for the advice which their grandmothers had passed down to them. We decided to pass it all on to those who are not afraid of finding a certain amount of superstition mixed with good sense.'

These books were the result. Maureen Boland spent her career in the book trade, working for Hatchards for many years. Bridget was a trail-blazer as a screenwriter when there were few women in that field, the author among other films of *Gaslight* and *Anne of a Thousand Days*. Their books are now out of print, but available on Amazon. Look out for them in charity shops and car boot sales – I snapped up a copy at the EAGG book stall!

Widget Finn

# **A Beautiful Obsession**

by Jimi Blake and Noel Kingsbury

published by Filbert Press 2019

The very fact that you are reading this review in EAGG's Spring 2021 newsletter, or on their website, probably means that you share *A Beautiful Obsession*. Fergus Garrett wrote so eloquently in his forward; "Jimi Blake is an exciting young man. He combines a deep love and inquisitiveness for plants with an artistry and adventurousness that is a joy. His garden at Hunting Brook is endlessly full of surprises, a dynamic canvas on which Jimi creates. New plants come and go and the garden never stands still, and each visit leaves you inspired for more....."

I am lucky enough to have met both Jimi and Noel Kingsbury. A wonderful gardening holiday in Ireland in 2015 began with a visit to Hunting Brook, which took my breath away. Jimi was our tour leader and during the week introduced us to his friends (and in the case of Helen Dillon, mentor) and their gardens, including Arthur Shackleton, Carmel Duignan, Helen Dillon and Oliver and Liat Schurmann, all charming owners of stunningly different gardens and a nursery, but Hunting Brook, and the garden of Jimi's sister, June, have remained firmly in my memory. Despite the garden only being three years old when I visited, Hunting Brook seemed so mature and blended beautifully into the landscape, and already showed Jimi's genius. Noel is a fascinating and knowledgeable Plant Ecologist and I was fortunate enough to spend a day with him at RHS Wisley as part of The Plant School Specialist Plant Course in May 2017. He talked about flower structure in relation to plant performance, and understanding long-term plant performance. He transformed the way I thought about plants, not just for their immediate impact but how they evolved and interacted with their neighbours. What a combination!

This book is a breathless romp, accompanied by beautiful photographs, of a truly original and inspired man and his garden. If I have to make one criticism, it is that it is far from a restful read! The energy that Jimi puts into his planting (and the book) and the continuous changes and evolving nature of the garden is highly infectious and makes one's head spin!

The garden portrayed in the book has evolved into a very different garden to the one I fell in love with five years ago, although the book shows that the spirit is still there, and I know I would fall in love all over again. It was interesting to read how what in 2015 were just ideas Jimi had for different areas have now been put into practice, especially the woodland. Among successful additions are the *Fatsia polycarpa* in the valley, one of many Araliaceae new to cultivation at Hunting Brook. The genius of plantings of *Aralia echinoculis* giving such grand structure with a lightness of touch, and allowing perennials to flourish beneath them, is still the same and a defining statement of Hunting Brook, but the ever changing pallet, shapes and structures of the beds left me breathless at the enormous thought, energy and work that goes into them. The photographs show that the result is a brilliant panoply of light and colour and structure that makes the heart sing. A visit to Hunting Brook and a meeting with Jimi would always be memorable and joyful, but reading this book puts a whole new perspective on the experience.

### ***Sue de Sabata***

Jimi Blake will be talking to us at Chamberlain Hall, Bildeston on the 6<sup>th</sup> November 2021

## **A Garden in Lockdown**

Reflecting on the past year in the garden, it is hard to know where to begin. It already sounds such a cliché to say that lockdown helped bring neighbours together and enabled people to enjoy their gardens more. But of course it is true; at least for those of us lucky enough to have them. My husband remarked he had never before noticed how beautiful spring is - until this year. He finally had the time at home to observe and involve himself with the gardening process, which was always my project, but is now his too. This is wonderful to me.

The lockdown has also made my garden a communal effort. Neighbours have kindly donated trellis, paint, manure, plants, cold frames, bricks, wood, post-mix, tools, hosepipes, pond liner, advice and encouragement, expecting absolutely nothing in return. Had it not been for lockdown, these interactions

would not have happened. I would have wandered anonymously round the garden centre spending money with corporations. Everyone's sheds would still be jammed full and my garden would be poorer for it.

I have realised that a true cottage garden is born of a mixture of generosity and serendipity in equal measure. Seeds arrive; wind blown, bird dropped. Plants find their own way here, delivered from the bicycle baskets of friends, or left outside the back gate, carefully wrapped in damp newspaper. They creep round from 'next door', scrambling over fences. The result is a genuine, rather unplanned and slightly chaotic beauty. Chelsea could but hope to recreate such authenticity!

A new lockdown hobby, inspired by our California days, is potting up succulent displays. I'm hoping they will survive our wet winters tucked under the thatch, out of the worst of the weather. Container gardening is really hard and very time consuming with all the watering needed in summer, but I don't learn and still seem to fill more pots each year.



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Spring brought welcome colour and interest and above all, hope, as the country grappled with Covid. It also meant we could get all (well, some of) the jobs we'd been planning to do finished (ok, started). A rose arch was a birthday present from my husband, which I've used to frame a borrowed view of a Georgian windmill. I have chosen two David Austin rambling roses - one for either side.



I can't wait to see how it looks when they are fully grown. I just need to keep the deer off them until then!

I have landscaped the area around the arch and planted colourful dogwoods and willow from cuttings, (the offcuts of which were donated by a lovely neighbour) snowdrops, euphorbia, bergenia and hellebores in an attempt to create a winter garden. Ultimately there will be a circular lawn in front of the arch with grasses encircling it and a bench to sit and look at the view. Roses 'Blush Noisette' and 'Clare Austin' frame another rose arch – also a birthday present. They still have buds on them as I write in deepest midwinter!



I love the front beds in high summer. They are an unashamed, crazy, joyous riot of colour, somewhat reminiscent of a 1970s tablecloth. We are lucky to have lots of mature trees as a backdrop to the garden, some of which are ancient.

Autumn colour gives the garden a last hurrah. And now we just tidy and mulch and plan and wait for the bulbs...

And so the sun sets on another day of work and play in the garden.

### **About the Author:**

Jilly McNaughton is a member of EAGG. She is a passionate gardener, nature lover and blogger. She works as an Assistant Farm Environment Advisor at the Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG East) helping landowners create or restore habitat ponds on their land, not quite gardening (!) but Natural England funding is available for large ponds in certain areas of Essex to help create habitat for great crested newts. This might be of interest to members and Jilly would be happy to be contacted on her work email about this [jilly.mcnaughton@fwageast.org.uk](mailto:jilly.mcnaughton@fwageast.org.uk)

She is opening her garden for the NGS for the first time this May as part of a group opening.

For details visit: <https://ngs.org.uk/view-garden/42171>

## Lockdown lessons

I heard the plea from our newsletter editor that members are invited to write a few words about their successful ventures during last year's lockdown. I envisaged all sorts of wonderful plantings and achievements with new cultivars and seed propagations and looked forward to reading of the triumphs of our eminent members. Seeing another request for members' jottings I wondered what tales I could add to entertain our members. Sadly, there's nothing to report of magnificence from my garden but my foray into the world of seed planting could be a beacon of light for all newcomers to the scene.

Finding a few seed packets in the shed, I set about happily planting for the flower beds. Soon my window ledges were full of pots with encouraging shoots peeping through so I set up a trestle table at the sunny end of my dining room ready for my next venture into horticulture.

My two smallish fruit and veg beds can only accommodate my prolific raspberry canes, blackcurrants and a row of runner beans so I've always stuck with them. Then my older daughter, having always been a career girl, suddenly rented an allotment and became jubilant about all the produce it provided. As she previously relied on plug plants, I decided I would supply her next crops from my lockdown project.

Undeterred by the fact that the above mentioned seedlings, so initially promising, ended in disaster (**Lesson No. 1**, don't use old packets of seeds) I embarked on my next planting foray. Tomatoes, broccoli and brussels sprouts were my next aim and here was a different story. My dining room soon became full of happily growing plants. The abundant tomato plants soon outgrew each pot and, like Jack's beanstalk, increasingly flourished. No friends visiting for what they thought was just a walk departed without at least 2 pots of tomato plants, even previously unknown locals taking lockdown exercise found themselves proud owners of a pot of Ailsa Craig, despite insisting they already had other varieties. The same problem occurred once the plants fruited in abundance; friends stopped visiting and I'm pretty sure walkers found other routes, just not to have a bag of tomatoes thrust at them.

Where did I go wrong I wondered till a kindly friend explained that it wasn't compulsory to plant the whole seed packet in one go (**Lesson No.2**)

The brussels sprouts and broccoli grew steadily but, as my daughter lives in Surrey and travelling was prohibited, I realised I'd have to find room to transplant them to my beds. My grandson and I were thrilled to see the pretty white butterflies hovering around them and greatly intrigued by the striking yellow eggs on the underside of the leaves. Why did I not know about netting these temptingly delicious plants – soon the leaves looked like lace and I realised that Christmas lunch would not be graced with homegrown veg (**Lesson No. 3**). On the upside, my chickens greatly relished eating both holey leaves and little caterpillars.

Ending on a positive note, not all is gloom. My successes include pots of tulips purchased a couple of years ago from Riverside Bulbs producing the most large and delicately coloured blooms. They are now bravely coming through for the third delightful viewing. I have a large deep pink hibiscus which is about 30 years old which a couple of years ago decided to produce about 50 seedlings in the gravel path. I've transplanted a great many for friends and my job this spring is to get on my knees and pot up many more for sale at future EAGG meetings.



I don't pretend to think that any of our members will have learnt anything from my musings, but perhaps I can give a pointer to very amateur gardeners like me.

**Karen Murdoch**



## True Blue

If you think about it, true blue flowers are quite rare; nature seems to favour a sort of washed out magenta or lilac. The flowers listed by nurserymen as blue are very often shades of mauve or purple. In fact there is no blue pigment in the plant world and colours that appear blue to us are actually permutations of violet or purple. To make flowers appear blue, plants carry out some sort of biochemical magic using red pigments called anthocyanins. I have read the science but I can't get my head round it, so it is magic to me. Blue flowers are universally appealing, and that is why the obsessive search goes on for a blue rose and we have the hideous crime of dyed carnations and even orchids that you sometimes see for sale in supermarkets. The perpetrators of this crime against plants need locking up. But naturally blue flowers are considered sophisticated and appeal to the plant snob lurking in all gardeners. But it is not just snobbery is it? Pure blue flowers seem to touch a chord in all of us.

The blue flowers of spring are particularly magical. Years ago I sorted out the confusion in my mind about the names of the most gorgeous early-spring blue flowers; the little bells of *Scilla lucilliae* and the

1-*Scilla Lucilliae*



starry flowers of *Chionodoxa forbesii*, by reminding myself that chionodoxas don't hang their heads, but have their chins up; I know it's not quite chin, but if you slur 'chion' a bit it sounds like it. *Chionodoxa* is a lovely Greek word

2-*Chionodoxa forbesii*



meaning the 'Glory of the Snow' which is a bit misleading as we don't usually get snow in April. Anyway no matter where they point their chins the arrangement of their anthers and filaments are quite different if you look at them closely.

But now after getting my head round the differences, I find that chionodoxas have been subsumed into the *Scilla* group anyway. There are some lovely flowers in the scilla family including *Scilla peruviana* which has flowers the colour of lapis lazuli and the giant scilla from Madeira, *Scilla maderensis*.

I love the pretty, starry flowers of the Turkish Squill, *Scilla bithynica*. They are produced in pyramidal racemes of starry flowers.

### 3. *Scilla bithynica*



Still on the theme of sky blue flowers I have creeping carpets of *Omphalodes cappadocica* 'Starry Eyes'. If this name is a bit of a mouthful for you, its common name is 'Navelwort' but I have no truck with common flower names or navels. This plant does best in dappled shade.

### 4 *Omphalodes cappadocica* 'Starry Eyes'



The flowers of *Omphalodes cappadocica* look rather like Forgetmenots as do those of *Brunnera macrophylla*. There are several varieties of brunnera with variegated leaves which make nice foliage plants all year round. I started off with 'Jack Frost', 'Looking Glass' and several others. They have all seeded around now so they are quite varied.

Grape Hyacinths spread around everywhere too and can become a nuisance but there are some very refined ones which stay in nice

clumps without getting everywhere. *Muscari armeniacum* 'Mountain Lady' is a beautiful variety which is quite new, it has bicoloured flowers.

5 *Muscari armeniacum* Mountain Lady'

I have a lovely powder blue Grape Hyacinth which Jenny Robinson found in Cyprus, *Muscari* 'Jenny Robinson', but to confuse matters it is sometimes called 'Baby's Breath'. To confuse matters even more it is very similar to *Muscari* 'Valerie Finnis'. The only difference I can see is that Jenny has slightly broader, tidier leaves.

6 *Muscari* 'Jenny Robinson'



I am going to include '*Bellevalia pycnantha*' in with my '*Muscari*' because it looks just like it and in fact it used to be called '*Muscari paradoxum*'. It is very dark and sophisticated.

7. *Bellevalia pycnantha*

Of course there are many more true blue flowers that bloom in April. For instance, we have the onion scented, *Ipheion uniflorum* with starry blue flowers, the daisy flowers of *Anemone blanda*, the creeping speedwell, *Veronica peduncularis* 'Georgia Blue', fabulous *Hepatica transsilvatica*, pulmonarias, blue primroses and probably lots more. For many people the yellows of daffodils and forsythia are the hallmarks of spring, but for me it is the advent of blue making little pools of light all round the garden.



Liz Wells

## **Stop Press.....**

Just a quick note to let you know that there are now **3 ways to make payments to EAGG, whether for Subs or to pay for a event.**

- 1 Send a cheque to EAGG to Louise Chambury (Treasurer)  
24 New Cut, Hadleigh, Suffolk, IP7 5DA
- 2 By BACS through your bank to EAGG Sort Code 20-44-51  
Account No 10394270
- 3 Via the website

Thank you, Louise Chambury

## **Vegetables!**

*We have great excitement in the family as my niece, Lucy Hutchings is just having her first book, Get Up And Grow, published on 29<sup>th</sup> April. Lucy is a fanatical vegetable grower, very definitely a new generation gardener, with a huge following on [www.instagram.com/shegrowsveg](http://www.instagram.com/shegrowsveg). Do look her up, she has a lovely story to tell of her journey into horticulture, and I hope we will be having her to speak to us before too long about her innovative approach to vegetable culture, she is also in partnership with the European Space Agency, with insider access to all their plant and food based research, with the European Space Agency exploring ways of producing food. Erica Bolam.*

## **Old Newton Open Gardens 2021**

Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> June, 11am – 5pm

Varied and interesting gardens, Scarecrow Competition, refreshments, plant sales and other attractions

Admission £5, children free

Programme and tickets from St Mary's Church, IP14 4PJ

Contact: Libby Brookes [familybrooks@btinternet.com](mailto:familybrooks@btinternet.com) or  
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