

## *St. Mary's Bramber News, Christmas 2017*

### **GROUPS**

We have had a very successful year, with groups from Belgium, Holland, Germany, France, and notably one group who came all the way by coach from Denmark to see the gardens at Sissinghurst, Great Dixter and St. Mary's among others. Our open afternoons were busy. We were delighted to discover that St. Mary's House and Gardens continues to receive its five-star rating on TripAdvisor, with many complimentary reviews.

### **BEES**

A lady DEFRA inspector came to check on up our bees. Their keepers, Vanessa and Graham Timms, were very relieved to get them a clean bill of health and to find that the little workers had not been shirkers!

### **PILGRIMAGES**

St. Mary's lies on the pilgrim route along the South Downs from Southampton to Canterbury, known as 'The Old Way' ((1350 AD), in existence before Chaucer's route along the North Downs. The map is named after its 18thC owner, Richard Gough, who had presented it to the Bodleian Library in Oxford. Bramber is mentioned as a place of sojourn along the way. In May we were visited by Dr. Guy Hayward and Will Parsons of the British Pilgrimage Trust, with a view to organising events for their members. A surprising number of pilgrimages are now being organised all over Europe. Participants can come from any or no religion. The principal aim is spiritual fulfilment - through walking and talking, communing with nature, singing songs together, and enjoying a new kind of companionship. At the end of July, a group of 37 weary young 'pilgrims' walked along the Downs from Chichester Cathedral to Arundel Castle, thence to Storrington Priory and on to the medieval pilgrim inn of St. Mary's, with the purpose of sampling the crystal-clear water from the now viewable holy well. The walkers were accompanied along the route by a Radio4 reporter (*From Our Home Correspondent*). Further scientific tests are being conducted for the water's purity and content by a specialist firm. Subsequently, a short film on the subject was made by the well-known TV presenter, Dan Snow.

### **ROYAL VISIT**

We were all greatly honoured by the visit of HRH Princess Alexandra on 30<sup>th</sup> May to open the new King's Garden, designed by Roger to commemorate the escape of King Charles II through Bramber in 1651. In the Music Room, the Princess presented long service awards to volunteers of 30 years' service. It was a beautiful sunlit spring day when the gardens were looking at their most spectacular. Following the opening of the Garden, our 45 volunteers, representing all categories of activity including guides, stewards, archivists, caterers and gardeners, were presented one by one to Her Royal Highness. Two Princess Alexandra of Kent roses and an *Acer palmatum* were planted in her honour. On leaving, the Princess was presented with three pots of St. Mary's honey arranged within a charming basket of flowers, and a floral posy was presented by ten-year old Chloe Whitaker. It was plain that Her Royal Highness thoroughly enjoyed her visit, for she stayed almost twice as long as was planned. Clive Blair-Stevens filmed the whole proceedings magnificently and his videos can be seen on our website [www.stmarysbramber.co.uk](http://www.stmarysbramber.co.uk) or on YouTube .

### **THOMAS HOOD SOCIETY LAUNCHED**

For over some 50 years, Peter has brought together one of the largest collections of first editions, autograph letters, pen-and-ink sketches, and ancillary material, besides a large amount of research material relating to the Victorian poet, Thomas Hood (1799-1845) and, this year, has founded The Thomas Hood Society. Enquiries to The Thomas Hood Society, St. Mary's House, Bramber, West Sussex BN44 3WE.

### **BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS**

The volunteers arranged a surprise party for Peter's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday (2<sup>nd</sup> June) with a banjo fanfare, balloons, a Roman candle firework, large birthday cake decorated with a piano and quill pen in icing, and a speech by Gillian Downham, Chairman of the Friends. Afterwards, everyone went out onto the lawn to hear another speech and the presentation of a garden bench, with Peter's name inscribed. All accompanied by an

appropriate atmosphere of merriment. On 13<sup>th</sup> December Roger was also given a lively champagne party for his 78<sup>th</sup> birthday.

### **CHRISTMAS CONCERT**

Peter's traditional 'Christmas Cracker' programme of words and music on 9<sup>th</sup> December was a rousing success with outstanding performances by Susan Jameson and James Bolam, songs brilliantly performed by soprano Janice Watson and tenor Giles White. Roger's green and silver decorations in the hall and music room, enhanced by a colourfully lit Christmas Tree, brought joy to us all and everyone left for home in good festive spirit.