

September 2020



Before we get started this month...

We would like to thank all of you for your continuing interest in our part of the world and we would very much welcome your feedback on topics we haven't yet covered, or you would like us to revisit.

In future issues we are planning to reflect on 26 years of exhibiting, and hopefully interviewing one of our customers about her home hybridising exploits. We would love to hear more about what interests you, so we can share more good stuff among our little community. It's amazing how the love of a plant can spark so many discussions, do [email us](#) with your thoughts.



Project work continues apace...

One of the decisions we made around ten years ago was to develop the nursery and encourage more visitors.

So far we have managed to attract more visitors, some coming from as far afield as Japan, but we haven't had the opportunity to develop the nursery to the state we envisaged back then.

This year we have already done more than we managed over that whole ten year period. This is primarily because we haven't been stretched across all our usual activities, selling plants and promoting the business.

Unfortunately, some of the planting we did a couple of years ago hasn't been as successful as we would have liked, due mainly to the searing weather and prolonged periods without rainfall.



East Ruston Old Vicarage

Saturday September 5th
2020 at 10am

We are delighted to be attending the Garden Event and Plant Fair.

However, it was a useful exercise to see what we could realistically do, and where. As with any landscaping project, compromises need to be reached to turn a vision into a practical and sustainable result.

The north field

North of the reservoir lies a two hectare field, which is currently feral, with self-sown trees, bramble and all manner of undergrowth, which has been left to flourish and become home to the local wildlife. Mel spent a couple of hours blackberry picking last weekend and found the only way to get around was to follow where deer, foxes and badgers have already cleared routes through it all. [Watch the YouTube video of the latest progress.](#)

We have contemplated many uses for this land over time but the one vision that has remained constant with us is that of a wood. As we reported a couple of months ago David has been busy clearing undergrowth in the field and has made it past where the field juts out into adjacent farmland. This is Mel's favourite part of the nursery as the view across the fields to the west presents uninterrupted open farmland and a 'big sky'.

Roy is currently modifying the table mower to be able to do a first cut around any trees we decide to keep. We will then probably disc the area to break up long established ruts and warrens before we can routinely run any, more delicate, machinery over it.

The ideal solution would be to get some pigs to turn the area over. However, they are notorious for escaping as we found out one night many years ago, when we used to keep pigs. After returning around midnight from a family do we found a pig at the cross roads in the village. Robin jumped out of the car and caught the pig, which squealed so much it woke half the village. He managed to steer the pig back to the nursery and get it safely behind bars, at which point Yvonne asked whether he was sure it was our pig! In the morning we were able to identify it as our little porcine pal but we had to reinforce the enclosure to prevent further escapology.

On balance we feel machinery is probably the way forward. It is exciting to begin the process of achieving the vision of a two hectare wood.

Reservoir update

The reservoir is now empty of water for the first time since Robin dug it out in the late 1970s. It isn't completely dry as Roy discovered when he decided to try walking out to the middle and almost losing his boots. As a consequence, we have been able to



Autumn Plant Fair with Artisan Market Helmingham Hall

Sunday September 20th 2020
from 10am

Pre-booked tickets only

We will once again be attending the Autumn Plant Fair in association with Suffolk Group Plant Heritage.



Reservoir progress

One of David and Mel's favourite walks takes an old trading route to Debenham and where it emerges is an area of private land, which has been turned into an outdoor play area. The contours of this would be brilliant to replicate inside the reservoir.



Archaeological dig

We unearthed this last century hammer, complete with the nail Robin was trying to remove at the time. It flew out of his hand and into the reservoir when he and David were fixing the pump pontoon.

get down into the base and start tackling some of the trees. We have had help from friends looking to replenish wood stocks, so several trees have been removed opening up the area for the first time in many years. It is a very exciting project and the plans for it have moved on from the initial drawing Mel did a couple of years ago - see the project page on the website.

Rubber Rockery extension

Imagine Mel's excitement to discover lots of old tyres as the water receded! The Rubber Rockery has become a bit of a visitor attraction and it has been quite a success plant-wise. Only a couple of plants have suffered being in too much light, so they will be moved and something else planted in their place. New tyres means an extended area is now planned alongside the developed piece but it will take quite an effort to fish the tyres out of their muddy positions so it will have to wait until we hire a digger.

New water tank

As the reservoir is no longer used for irrigation we have been planning to install a water tank at the end of the packing shed to augment our watering system and enable us to run multiple hoses without reducing water pressure. The 21ft diameter tank has made it to the top of the infrastructure list so we hope to get underway with the base within the next few weeks, using most of the unattractive rubble heap alongside the reservoir. The usable rocks will go to the north side of the reservoir to construct a large rocky slope for planting.

The tank will take all the rainwater from the roof of the packing shed, so hopefully this will help reduce the amount of water we need to take from the mains, saving money and improving our green credentials a bit more. We had thought of installing a larger tank but have decided instead to install several smaller tanks around the nursery to take advantage of the various roof draining opportunities.

Finally, we are attending two plant fairs in September, one in Norfolk and one about 5 miles from the nursery - see the side column for more details. The event at Helmingham Hall is ticket entry only so don't forget to pre-book to avoid disappointment. Hope to see some of you there - do say hello as it is always good to put faces to names of our subscribers.

Happy gardening

Team Mickfield Hostas



David stands on the old pump pontoon where it has beached on the floor of the reservoir. It is quite a steep climb in and out as the lads have found when removing felled logs.



David and Allan making short work of the bramble and willow suckers so we can get to the larger trees.