

Frank at The Albion

On 2nd April Silloth based singer songwriter, Frank Devine, played at The Albion pub in Eden Street. Landlord, Bill Allison, a keen supporter of Franks' music, set up his solo appearance

which raised a total of £140 for Animal Concern, Cumbria.

Frank started playing drums at the age of 11 and went on to play professionally with Birmingham groups in the 60's. He sessioned with Steve Winwood and was Jimmy Cliff's first drummer in the UK.

He started writing songs when he was 20 years old and over the years has produced a considerable collection of original songs and pieces of music. For many years he worked in the Health Service as a Clinical Nurse Specialist and Lecturer in Autistic Spectrum Disorder and 'Gentle Teaching'. In 2001 he took early retirement and moved to Silloth, where he has continued to concentrate on his music and art. One of his most recent compositions is a haunting air, inspired by a windy day in Silloth and titled 'Across the Saltmarsh'. It features



Frank on Low Whistle, Guitar and Hammered Dulcimer. Bill has it on CD behind the bar at The Albion and he gives it a spin from time to time.

Franks' evening at The Albion featured a number of his own compositions along with a selection of Scottish and Irish songs, pieces by Nick Drake, Neil Young, The Incredible String Band, Christy Moore, Leonard Cohen and Ray Davis.

Frank wants to say a big thank you to Bill Allison and his wife and the superb audience at the Albion for their generosity and support on the night.

This year he is looking forward to more solo performances, recording and some duo work with Abbeystown based Violinist, Margaret Hancock.

All proceeds from the performance have been received by Marion Rook in Cockermouth on behalf of Animal Concern, Cumbria.

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Lawns

Many years ago my dad said to me that if I could grow grass I could grow anything. Some years later I know where he was coming from. Grass is perverse. It will grow in cracks, in your drive, in your borders, even in the middle of a road if the road is not too busy. But think about your lawn. Weeds, bare patches and enough sphagnum moss to keep a florist in business for a month.

There is no doubt that an expanse of well maintained lawn enhances any garden and really helps to set of the borders but maintaining a beautiful sward is becoming increasingly problematic as our arsenal of chemicals is reduced each season either by withdrawal by manufacturers or by our own decision to use less of them in the garden. I think the answer here has to be a mind-set change as we learn to tolerate a few weeds in the lawn. The spreading weeds such as clover, daisy and the little blue speedwell can look quite attractive. What looks unsightly in a lawn are the large ugly weeds such as dandelion and dock. These can be dug out on an individual basis. Removing dandelions is best done when the soil is quite damp but you will probably still manage to leave the last ¼ inch in the ground which will regenerate over the summer and be back to haunt you next year. In my experience the same weeds are back year on year even if we use chemicals. The chemical application only seems to knock weeds back for a season.

One of the best ways of keeping weeds out of the lawn is to keep the



grass in good condition. Removing the dead thatch in spring and again in autumn either by hand using a spring tined rake, or a mechanical scarifier, breathes new life into a lawn, though it does look awful for the first few days after you've done it. The soil under lawns gets compacted when we walk on it. Aerating the lawn by piercing it with a garden fork, again best done when the ground is damp, will let air into the soil and reduce the adverse effects of the compaction. An application of a natural lawn feed will encourage grass growth which will help to smother out weeds.

Lawns benefit from being cut frequently, but not too short. The first and last few cuts of the season should be on a higher setting and longer grass has more resistance to draught during the summer months. Grass will go yellow if it does not have enough water but quickly recovers when it rains. Watering a lawn by hand is not a good idea as we seldom have enough patience to water the lawn enough to penetrate to the right depth. If we only water the surface, the roots will grow up in search of the moisture and become more vulnerable to scorching which in turn will weaken the grass and let in more weeds....

One of the secrets of a lawn looking good is to have a clear well defined

shape and neat trimmed edges. Trimming the edges is often done last and is the job we don't do if we are time pressured. Do it the other way round. Trim the edges first and mow second. If the lawn is losing its shape redefine it and repair worn edges. Grass overhanging the borders is also the perfect hideaway for slugs to lurk giving them easy access to the juicy bedding plants you have just planted in the border. (More about slugs and snails next month)

Most lawns can be restored with a good regime of feeding, aerating and scarifying but if you are laying a new lawn, April and September are the best months to do either sow seed or lay turf as the soil is the right temperature and there is plenty of moisture available even without rain.

Three must have plants for early spring *Doronicum orientale* (herbaceous perennial)

Leopard's bane is one of the few daisy family members to bloom in spring, and usually manages to coincide with the last of the daffodils. It is an easy-going plant, useful for getting a flower border off to an early start, or for growing towards the front of a shrub border - it will tolerate a little light shade. A useful plant for masking the foliage of daffodils while it dies

down. It also looks good teamed with cowslips, grown with Veronica gentoides or as a contrast with scarlet tulips.

Magnolia stellata (shrub)

This is the smallest magnolia and one of the best for a small garden, growing very slowly into a rounded bush, 3m (10ft) high when mature but still only 1.2-1.5m (4-5ft) after ten years. It is fairly hardy, but frost can damage the grey furry buds and open flowers if exposed to morning sunshine. A position with early shade and sun later in the day is best. The beautiful flowers, pure white and lightly scented, open before the leaves, and cover mature shrub for several weeks.

Fritillaria meleagris (bulb)

They are various shades of purple, growing up to one foot (30cm) tall, with a pronounced checked pattern all over, and even the luminous white form has a faint check pattern like a watermark. They look remarkably like a snake's head hence their common name. Plants are extremely hardy and trouble-free in free-draining soil, and love the light shade of woodland conditions. Planted in drifts under shrubs or naturalise in grass.



Hairdresser Bee by Katie Wills from Holm Cultram Abbey School

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