

Gazette & Herald

Radio 4 Gardeners' Question Time at Malmesbury School

Thursday 19th March 2009

Radio 4 Gardeners' Question Time came to Malmesbury School on Monday to mark the 200th anniversary of the Great Somerford Allotments.

The programme, which fields questions from gardening enthusiasts across the country, was hosted by experts Bob Flowerdew, Chris Beardshaw and Anne Swinthinbank.

Before the show Great Somerford's longest serving allotment holder, Arthur Scott, planted a commemorative tree in the school grounds.

Like his father and grandfather before him he has worked his allotment for over 60 years.

Mr Scott said: "It was a different place in those days.

"Much more working class. People depended on their allotments for food.

"Nearly everyone kept a pig and allotment holders would leave out any vegetables they couldn't use, especially small potatoes, for people to collect for their pigs."

Jill Shearer, who invited Gardeners' Question Time to come and mark the occasion, said the school hall was packed.

She said: "It was a brilliant evening, there were over 300 people crammed in.

"There were lots of questions asked including what was the best value veg to grow during the credit crunch and what gardening jobs would the panel attempt to do in the nude.

"There was lots of humour and the warm weather helped create a lovely atmosphere."

The waiting list to host Gardeners' Question Time is over two years but Mrs Shearer was able to secure a visit at short notice.

She said: "The village wanted to mark the 200th anniversary and hold some kind of event.

"I was able to track down the number for the radio programme's producer and rang him up.

"There is usually a long waiting list but they are keen to mark special occasions and I explained it was important.

"It turned out they had an available slot in March, so we grabbed it."

She added that Mr Beardshaw said how impressed he was with Malmesbury.

She said: "It was good to see so many local people attending.

"Chris Beardshaw said what a lovely town Malmesbury seemed to be with a real community spirit.

"It does have a village feel to it but with all the history of an ancient market town."



Arthur Scott plants a tree watched by Eric Robson, left, Bob Flowerdew, Anne Swinthinbank, Chris Beardshaw and pupils