

February 2024 meeting Peter Rowbottom "Gardening the World - The Horticulture of the Commonwealth Graves Commission"

Despite the very wet weather we had an excellent turn out for our February talk entitled "Gardening the World – The Horticulture of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission", (CWGC), presented by Peter Rowbottom. Peter started his fascinating talk with a few vital statistics about the Commission: 1.7million Commonwealth servicemen and women are commemorated in 23,000 locations in 153 countries and territories. Worldwide, the Commission employs about 950 gardeners. The CWGC was founded by Sir Fabian Ware. Ware was too old to fight in the First World War, but volunteered for the British Red Cross. As commander of a mobile ambulance unit, Ware became concerned about the lack of an organisation for marking and recording the graves of the fallen and set about rectifying this. After 1915 there was no repatriation of war dead. The CWGC headstones are designed to be uniform, with no distinction for rank or status. Worldwide, forty different types of stone are used, reflecting the local area.

The design and the planting at the individual cemeteries has always been an important consideration, and the planting is used to evoke the spirit of the location. For instance, Eucalyptus in Australia, Formiums in New Zealand and Travellers Palm in Thailand. The cemetery in El Alamein, with 7000 burials in desert conditions, presents a special challenge. The planting here is based around aloes, agaves and bougainvillea, which can all tolerate the dry conditions. Where present, grass is well-maintained, although not weed-free, and there is always a mixture of low growing plants in front of the headstones. Like Beth Chatto, the CWGC have adopted the philosophy of "right plant, right place".

Repairing damage to cemeteries in conflict zones like Iraq is clearly a challenge, but climate, environmental considerations, and soil conservation are also very important factors for CWGC. They are embracing the latest science on climate change and developing new strains of grass with improved root systems to reduce the need for watering.

From the outset, with the involvement of Sir Fabian Ware, Sir Frederic Kenyon (artistic advisor), Sir Arthur Hill (Kew Gardens), and Gertrude Jekyll, the concept was always to build garden cemeteries where the horticultural elements were an important feature in the overall design. This has been achieved on a worldwide scale. CWGC have an excellent website at www.cwgc.org.

There is no Horticultural Society meeting in March but the next meeting is on Thursday 11th April 2024. Lindsay Huggins will be giving us a talk on allotments. Lindsay has helped develop a community garden in Framlingham into allotments, a meadow, an orchard and even a bug farm.

Members and visitors are welcome to attend any of our meetings. Entry is free for members, and the admission charge for visitors is just £2.00. The talks are followed by refreshments, (tea or coffee and biscuits), and there is a raffle and plants and produce for sale.

Annual membership of Ardleigh Horticultural Society is £5, which includes free admission to all the monthly meetings on the programme up to June 2024 and the Annual Flower and Produce Show on Saturday 17th August, 2024. This year the annual Plant and Cake Sale is on Saturday, 18th May, from 09.30am to 11.30am.

The monthly meetings, Plant and Cake Sale, and the Annual Flower and Produce Show are all held at Ardleigh Village Hall. Schedules for the 2024 Society's Annual Flower and Produce Show will be available at our April meeting and following that, from Ardleigh Convenience Store and Craft Nurseries. More information is available on our website: <https://e-voice.org.uk/ardleigh-horticultural-society/>