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# Introduction

The aim of this history of the Kimble and Ellesborough Horticultural Society is to record and celebrate the activities of the Society over the last 25 years. The late President Mr Mervyn Rees published a History of the Society up to 1996 [available on the website. I have included some photographs to remind us of the development of the society in that period. As far as the talks and visits are concerned I have tried to provide a summary. For the shows I have tried to give an outline to encourage new entrants to have a go. It wasn't possible to list all winners in all classes – but at the same time it is important to record the achievements of the winners so I have included a table of these. Similarly I have tried to record the main officials of the Society over the years, because it is important to make some acknowledgement and it is a useful reminder of the number of dedicated volunteers it takes to run a community organisation.

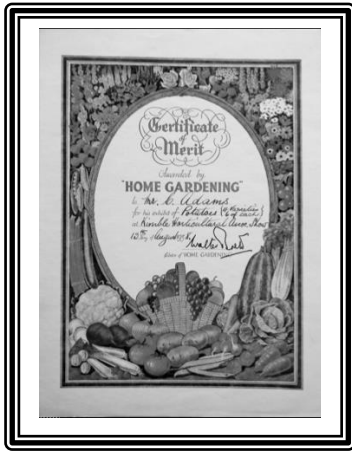
I hope that the pamphlet will give newer members of the society a perspective on what it has achieved and more established members may recall past events and perhaps absent friends. It is also valuable to review where we are in order to think about the future. Any history will always include errors and omissions – I apologise in advance for these.



Before the First World War the show was a grand event which took place on Velvet Lawn.



When the Stewart Hall was built meetings took place there under the 'tin' roof.



Certificate for the summer show 1939 sponsored by the "Home Gardening" magazine. Bill Adams won for his vegetables.



During the Second World War the Society supported "Dig for Victory" Many lawns and flowerbeds were dug up for vegetable growing. The allotments in Marsh Road gained a variety of livestock.



The Society folded in the 1960's but was revived after a meeting at Dillons Garage of Messers Cheetham, Peplow and Stacey re-launched it.



After the Second World War shows took place on the field behind the Stewart Hall and were general village events.



The Silver Jubilee of the Queen's reign was celebrated in this display by Norma Wheeler. Many other tributes were made.



By 1990 the Society was going strong. Familiar faces in the winners' photo.



The RHS medal won by Primrose Cundell at the Hampton Court Show 2000.



The Summer Show 2008 – the Stewart Hall so well set out by gallant volunteers.

## The talks

To any new member of the Society the talks are of a remarkably high standard, but after a time we get used to the high quality and it is easy to take it for granted. The first talk I attended in 1993 was by the weatherman Bert Foord. At that time the climate change and global warming were regarded as very questionable but Bert tackled them in a very calm, measured and professional way, and was very careful to emphasise the difference between climate and weather. Since then I think we have all become more aware of changes in climate and in the timing of the seasons. Bert died at Aylesbury in 2000

The talks tend to fall into three categories – very specific talks often with practical demonstration on a special topic, illustrated talks on wider topics and general interest talks which might be of interest to the general public.

John Marshall has come to talk about chrysanthemums, about propagation, a year on the allotment and about hanging baskets. He was a very popular speaker for his very practical and down to earth advice. Other speakers in a similar vein have been Geoff Hodge who has spoken on gardening on chalky clay, on pests and diseases and on propagation, and Graham Talbot who has spoken on Fruit in the small garden, on the greenhouse, and on vegetables.



Amongst the very specialised speakers talking about about very specific topics were Martin Harwood from the National Narcissus Collection [ apparently not narcissi ] Mr Mason [ we never learned his first name] was a very experienced judge of sweet peas and gave detailed advice on judging those and presenting them for showing. Margaret Morris was able to tell us about the 150 species of Clematis and Brian Fisher made grasses very interesting – which at first sight was a challenge but in fact ornamental grasses are many and various and add so much sculpturally to a garden especially in winter.

Among the much wider topics were the subject of John Tradescant – who was the first celebrity gardener and after whom Tradescantia is named. He and his son had royal connections and introduced the growing of scarlet runner beans, apricots and nectarines to this country. He also made a collection of curios which was acquired by Elias Ashmole after his death and formed the start of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. Stefan White gave us a very authoritative talk on father and son. He returned in 2015 to talk about the role of women pioneers in the History of gardening. John Tyler told us about the lost forest of Bernwood – a fragment of which survives alongside the Oxfordshire Way long distance footpath and certainly lives on in the minds of the older inhabitants of Chilton and Boarstall. Margaret Deakin took us to Cuba while the intrepid plant

hunter Chris Chadwell took us to the Himalayas – from where we get a wide variety of ericaceous plants and shrubs – although they sometimes don't like our chalky and clayey soils. A very successful talk some way from gardening topics was the slide show and talk by Mike Payne on shops in Risborough and Ray Orth provided an interesting talk on the conservation work and restoration work of the Wendover Arm of the Grand Union Canal.

Many speakers are very highly qualified academics Others come from the world of practical experience. Dr Michael Keith – Lucas from Reading University has visited regularly most recently telling us about the origins of garden plants. His colleague at Reading Dr Roland Fox had previously spoken on pests and diseases. Dr Sandy Primrose had trenchant views on Holland and Barrett and on homeopathy. Dr Vivian Moses from University College London talked about Genetic Modification in plants.

Institutions which the Society has links with and provide us with knowledgeable speakers include Pershore College – the National College for Horticulture – from which John Edgerley came to talk to us on vegetables and Duncan Coombes on the shady border. We have also had Mary Spiller, Rob Jacobs, Barbara Drake and Chris Lanczak from Waterperry gardens and centre, near Oxford. Waterperry was the vision of Beatrix Havegal and pioneered a school of Horticulture for women. It

then passed under the aegis of The School of Economic Science and offers courses in a range of subjects. I think that the speakers' focus on how the gardens and borders were developed and how the fruit trees are managed was a sound choice rather than the Vedantic Yoga connections of the organisation. From Kew gardens we have had Stuart Phillips who talked about various gardening beliefs including lunar planting which was popular around 2009. I must confess to a certain degree of scepticism as to whether planting according to the phases of the moon could be significant, but I do know that one member who is a fellow allotment gardener tried it and had more success with beans and peas than I did. It is from the RHS gardens at Wisley that we get the most speakers from and they are invariably professional and knowledgeable. David Hyde had useful tips on the everlastingly popular topic of propagation, while Andrew Halstead was able to give us thoughts on our insect enemies, and Jim Arbury certainly knew a lot about Fruit.

In the 1990's it was still the age of the celebrity gardener and Howard Drury from Central TV's *Gardening hints and tips* visited us in 2001 and had a lot of useful advice. Sidney Love was another TV gardener and specialised in roses – a topic which is always popular. More recently in 2009 there was a presentation by Tim Miles who had been curator of the Gardens of Heligan, and then moved on to the Cotswold Wildlife Park.

The Society has also called upon local knowledge as well, including some of our own members who shared their expertise. Chrissie Hollingdale was able to give hints on showing roses and in 2006 she and Graham gave us useful information on growing and showing sweet peas. In 2010 Tony Young told us about the fine garden he and Jean have at Homelands. Jean provided us with her advice when we had an "ask the expert" session.

Some speakers have various quirks, oddities and catch phrases. Others interact with the audience in an entertaining way or have amusing mannerisms or an infectious laugh. Colin Crosbie from Wisley was always entertaining, as was Bernie Flay – but he knew his stuff about vegetables. Once I got over the fact that "Matt" Busby [ a nickname – he was actually Albert ] wasn't the ex-Manchester United manager I found his talk on ferns amusing.

Some speakers arrive bearing gifts – which always goes down well. The perhaps appropriately named Mr Woolworth from Hozelock of Haddenham brought some freebies. Paolo Arrigo from Franchi seeds was a big hit and his calabrese did very well. Michael Keen of PBI also had samples to distribute.

When I surveyed to find out the speaker who stuck in member's minds the most the commonest answer was Tim Walker and it's perhaps useful to look at the sessions he did in a bit more detail as

his development as a speaker is typical of the changes in style and content of talks over the years.

Tim Walker was the head of the Oxford University Botanic Gardens which was founded in 1621 mainly as a physic garden. It owed its fertility to the fact that the Colleges' cess pits were periodically emptied out and the product put on the area where the Botanic Gardens now stands – giving it a rich and fertile base. His first talk was in 1996 with the typically provocative title *Can the Americans garden?* and he has visited us nine times. To begin with his talks were fairly formal in structure with witty asides and a determination to use the Latin names but since then the talks have gradually become more informal and the subject matter less specific. He talked very specifically about the History of the OUBG to start with. Then in 2013 he shared his passion for Euphorbias for which the OUBG holds the national collection. One particularly interesting fact was the position of the rare and endangered *Euphorbia Stygiana* noted by Hooker in Kew Gardens 1844. The plant is unique to the Azores Island right in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Many isolated islands have unique species. Euphorbias are normally relatively easy to grow from seed and most of them freely self-seed but *Stygiana* repeatedly failed. Close inspection revealed a small round hole in each seed. The use of cameras revealed visits from the local wren population. The wrens ignored other seeds – which

is not surprising as they are insectivores but immediately attacked the seeds of *stygiana*. Once secured from wren attack *stygiana* grew easily and is now available on e-bay. How or why it came about that a species of insectivorous small bird not native to the Azores, or anywhere close by, would select a seed from there to attack in preference to any others seems to be one for Charles Darwin to explain.

More recently Tim has spoken about wider topics and has included comments on changing climate, pesticides, Genetic Modification and conservation. He has retired from the OUBG but runs a 600 acre conservation project in south Oxfordshire which is aimed mainly at conserving MG5 - meadow grasslands – but of course trees, hedgerows birds and insects too.

Over the years we have had excellent speakers and it is a real strength of the Society. In 1992 most speakers were very specific and the topics very focused on specific skills. We still keep a balance by having specific speakers but over the years more speakers talked about wider topics, about garden design and local interest subjects. More recently conservation, climate change and GM come more into talks. The speakers are a very real strength of the Society and perhaps we could publicise one or two which may be of general or local interest more widely to get in a wider audience.

# The Visits

Trips and visits to garden sites were a feature of the Society up to the 1980s but as people have come to rely on the convenience of their own personal transport they have become less frequent, or arranged on an ad hoc basis.

In the 1990s there was a visit to Exbury Gardens - the Rothschild garden near Southampton famous for its Rhododendrons and Azaleas and a narrow gauge railway.

In 1995 there was a coach trip to Wisley on what began as an unpromisingly cloudy day which turned fine and sunny. The borders were at their peak and the new trees planted on Battledown Hill to replace those lost in the Great Storm were beginning to establish themselves. Also eye-catching was the magnificent white wisteria in full flower.

There was also a visit to Hatfield which has a large park and a Jacobean garden partly the work of John Tradescant senior. There are ancient oaks in the park and it was in the shade of one of these that Princess Elizabeth learned that she had become Queen Elizabeth I with the death of her half sister Mary.

The most frequent time for visits was when Mrs Janet Brunswick was Outings Secretary. As well as a visit to Chenies in 2000 there was a very ambitious and successful visit to northern France which included a number of classic gardens but the highlight was the visit to Claude Monet's garden at Giverny which is famous because of his impressionistic paintings, particularly of water lilies. The water garden was begun in 1893 with additional land bought to add to the existing garden which had been started in 1883. Roses, zinnias, clematis, dahlias and hibiscus caught the eye and nasturtiums carpeted the central pathway, In the water garden, as well as the famous water lilies there were fine willows and poplars, while the acid soils encouraged azaleas and rhododendrons and agapanthus.

Under Janet's auspices there was also an evening visit to Timothy Walker's domain at the Oxford Botanical Gardens, which has the National Collection of hardy Euphorbia, but also the walled garden and woodland walk as well as the same kind of fine herbaceous borders that can be found in several of the older colleges. The heated greenhouses also have many exotic and interesting species. The gardens are close to the centre of Oxford but are walled off on the banks of the River Cherwell.



There was a visit to the University Arboretum at Nuneham Courtney but the most notable arboretum visit was to the National Arboretum at Westonbirt, near Tetbury in Gloucestershire. This has 2,500 different types of trees and includes 5 National Collections. This visit was for the hardy and determined enthusiasts as it rained and was cold – with wellington boots needed.

There were then a number of evenings in the early part of the century where members could tour round local gardens specially opened - generally by members. In 2004, as a follow up to a talk Edwin Rye's garden at "The Paddocks" Wendover was visited. The Hollingdale's formidable rows of meticulously tended Sweet Peas and immaculate roses were a sight to be seen, but then other gardens had a more rustic feel. Each one had its own character, and, as always, the garden at *Homelands* had a really interesting range. Often a small detail will stick in the mind – in a small garden in Stoke Mandeville I was struck by the very unusual yellow of a rose which turned out to be *McGredy's Yellow* – very rarely grown but one of the parents of *Piccadilly*.

In 2009 a June visit was made to the nursery of Keith Pounder and Sean Walter in Great Missenden. The nursery had been founded in 2002 and specialises in perennials and grasses.

In July 2011 a visit was made to the garden at Chenies. Previously home to the Russell Earls of Bedford it has an arts and crafts garden, two mazes and a physic garden as well as the health spa and garden centre. What caught some people's eye was the poison bed which was part of the physic garden. What is rather sobering is the number of quite common plants which are fatally poisonous. Many bulbs can be lethal – particularly aconites and daffodils but hemlock, hemlock water dropwort, foxglove, hydrangea, rhododendron, and angels trumpet are all potentially lethal. Also there were obvious candidates such as yew, henbane and deadly nightshade.

2012 saw two visits. In May as a follow up to a talk by Alexia Balance in March there was a visit to her "*Blooming Marvellous*" nursery in Winslow and the summer evening visit in July was to John Branham's garden in Wingrave.

Garden and nursery visits are interesting and can help the creative process in garden designing and can show what developments there are especially in the breeding of new strains of plants. The general trend seems to be towards local visits by car rather than the larger-scale coach trips which were more favoured in the last century.

## **The Shows**

The society puts on three shows per annum- which is a remarkable achievement for a small society both in terms of entries and in terms of the huge amount of work that volunteers have to do to put the shows on.

All three shows have a very wide range of classes and the very professional yearbook gives clear specifications, hints, recipes and advice. There are always classes for children and for novices.

The Spring Show is at the beginning of April and is invariably dominated visually by the daffodils, but other bulbs are also seen particularly tulips. There are several classes for container-grown plants which also make a good show. The domestic classes are very important in this show, and the standard of floral art is very high indeed. There are five trophies to be won in this show.

The Summer show is at the beginning of July and is visually dominated by the roses and sweet peas, but pinks, pansies and Sweet William. It is the most fragrant show. Fruit and vegetables play a big part in this show. I am always impressed by people who can produce cherry tomatoes this early in the

season. Floral Art, container grown plants and the domestic classes are all on show, too and as with the other shows novice and children's classes are amongst the classes. There are nine Trophies to be awarded.

The autumn show comes at the beginning of September and it tends to be dominated by Dahlias, Chrysanthemums and Carnations. There are also the usual range of container plants and novice and children's classes. The biggest classes tend to be the fruit and vegetable classes. Some carrots, cabbages and onions are clearly grown with considerable expertise, probably above the level of the average gardener but other classes, particularly apples, peas and potatoes, look as if with a reasonable amount of preparation the average gardener could compete. As always there are invariably some excellent Floral Art Entries, and the society is lucky to have such gifted members. There are sixteen trophies to be won in this show and also the K.Y. Green Memorial Trophy for the most points won in shows in the year.

The shows are a village event and the refreshments make it a pleasant social occasion.

## Overall Trophies 1995 - 2008

	Spring Challenge Trophy	President's Cup	Champion Challenge Cup	K.Y. Green Memorial Trophy
1995	Mrs. J Ratlidge	Mr G.Hollingdale	Mr G.Hollingdale	Mr J.Ratlidge
1996	Mrs J.Brunswick	Mrs M.Eaton	Mr G.Hollingdale	Mr J.Ratlidge
1997	Mr J.Ratlidge	Mrs M.Eaton	Mr P.Greenway	Mr J.Ratlidge
1998	Mr J.Ratlidge	Mrs C.Hollingdale	Mr P.Bolton	Mr J.Ratlidge
1999	Mrs J.Brunswick	Mr J.Ratlidge	Mr P.Bolton	Mr J.Ratlidge
2000	Mrs M Redding	Mr P.Greenway	Mr P.Greenway	Mr P.Greenway
2001	Mr M.MacLaurin	Mr J.Ratlidge	Mr J.Ratlidge	Mr J.Ratlidge
2002	Mrs M.Redding	-	Mr P.Bolton	Mr P.Bolton
2003	Mrs M.Redding	Mr P.Bolton	Mr J.Ratlidge	Mr J.Ratlidge
2004	Mr J.Ratlidge	Mr J.Ratlidge	Mr G.Hollingdale	Mr J.Ratlidge
2005	Mr G.Hollingdale	Mr G.Hollingdale	Mr P.Bolton	Mr G.Hollingdale
2006	Mr G.Hollingdale	Mr G.Hollingdale	Mr P.Bolton	Mr G.Hollingdale
2007	Mr G.Hollingdale	Mr G.Hollingdale	Mr P.Bolton	Mr G.Hollingdale
2008	Mr G.Hollingdale	Mr J.Ratlidge	Mr J.Ratlidge	Mr J.Ratlidge

## Overall Trophies 2009 - 2018

	Spring Challenge Trophy	President's Cup	Champion Challenge Cup	K.Y. Green Memorial Trophy
2009	Mr G.Hollingdale	Mr J.Ratlidge	Mr J.Ratlidge	Mr J.Ratlidge
2010	Mr G.Hollingdale	Mr G.Hollingdale	Mr D.Ridgway	Mr G.Hollingdale
2011	Mr G.Hollingdale	Mr J.Ratlidge	Mr J.Ratlidge	Mr J.Ratlidge
2012	Mr J.Ratlidge	Mr G.Talbot	Mr D.Ridgway	Mr D.Ridgway
2013	Mr D.Ridgway	Mr G.Talbot	Mr D.Ridgway	Mr D.Ridgway
2014	Mrs S.Towersey	Mr G.Talbot	Mr J.Ratlidge	Mr D.Ridgway
2015	Mrs S.Towersey	Mr G.Talbot	Mr D.Ridgway	Mr D.Ridgway
2016	Mrs S.Towersey	Mr D.Ridgway	Mr D.Ridgway	Mr D.Ridgway
2017	Mrs S.Towersey	Mr D.Ridgway	Mr D.Ridgway	Mr D.Ridgway
2018	Mrs S.Towersey	Mr D.Ridgway	Mr D.Ridgway	Mr D.Ridgway
	The most points in total in the Spring Show	The most points in total in the Summer Show	The most points in total in the Autumn Show	The most points in total in the three shows combined

# Other Events

Not surprisingly members take part in other shows and the Society has been successful in competitions in other shows, both as individuals and as a society. On two occasions - in 1997 and in 2000 – RHS medals have been won.

No history of the society would be complete without mention of the famous Plant Sale which takes place annually in May at Ellesborough Village Hall – Butler’s Cross. This is a not to be missed event although you need to turn up promptly and it can be a bit like the January Sales used to be – or perhaps Black Friday. Thanks must go to the gallant individuals who propagate, plant and tend a whole range of plants sold at bargain prices – a significant source of income for the Society. Extra volunteers are always welcome.

At Christmas time the December meeting have provided several interesting and stimulating events, including quizzes and seasonal cheer. There is always a pleasant social event.

At the millennium there was a celebration and Barn Dance which was a lasting memory for at least one member.

The Society is so much more than just people talking about plants.

# Conclusion

The Society has a long and distinguished history and has shown an ability to change with the times. It remains a valued institution not only in Ellesborough and the Kimbles but we also have members from the wider area. At the same time we should not be complacent because the Society has twice folded in the past and had to be revived. Perhaps there are three things that we could think about.

Firstly, it is important to get younger people involved and I know that moves are being made to involve the Village School – Perhaps Griffin House would also be interested. Do you have a young neighbour who might be encouraged to come? Let's mention the high standard of talks in the society and perhaps we can get some more younger people to come.

Secondly we need more volunteers to do more things. It would ease the load on those people who we sometimes take for granted if half of the membership volunteered to do just one thing.

The shows are amazing in the standards shown and speaking personally I find the standard so high I feel reluctant to try – but this year I will try and enter something in each show – even if I can't compete with the experts.



## **Officers of the Society**

### **President**

J. Cheetham	1980 – 1999
M.Rees	1988 – 1991
R. Coughtrey	1991 – 1994
Mrs D.Ellis	1994 – 1999
Miss P.Southgate	1999 – 2000
J. Ratlidge	2004 – 3013
Mrs I. Baxter	2013 – 2017
M.George	2017 –

### **Chairman**

J.Cheetham	1975 – 1978
R.Bull	1978 – 1983
M.Rees	1983 – 1988
R.Coughtrey	1988 – 1991
Mrs T.Coughtrey	1991 – 1993
J.Ratlidge	1993 – 1996
Miss P.Southgate	1996 – 1998
M.George	1998 – 2001
J.Alford	2001 – 2004
R.Jennings	2004 – 2014
B.Butler	2016 -

## **Treasurer**

J.Stacey	1975 – 1978
Mrs P.Nobbs	1978 – 1980
Mrs J.Brown	1980 – 1984
R. Coughtrey	1984 – 1987
J. Ratlidge	1987 – 1989
Mrs I. Baxter	1989 – 1991
B.Butler	1991 – 1994
M.George	1994 – 1998
R. Jennings	1998 – 2005
J. Alford	2005 – 2010
P. Marsden	2010 –

## **Show Secretary**

M.Rees	1975 – 1982
Mrs D. Ellis	1982 – 1986
R. Coughtrey	1986 – 1989
J. Ratlidge	1989 – 1992
G. Hollingdale	1998 – 1999
Mrs. M. Redding	1999 – 2001
Mrs J. Cook	2001 – 2003
B.Butler	2004 - 2015

## **Show Co-ordinator**

D. Ridgway	2016
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## **Membership Secretary**

G.Hollingdale	1996 - 1998
Mrs J Brunswick	1998 - 2000
M.George	2001 - 2002
Ms S. Harrington	2003 - 2004
Ms T. Madden	2005 - 2013
M.Hopkins	2014 - 2017
B.Butler	2017 -

## **Social Secretary**

Mrs I. Baxter	1996 – 2000
Mrs M. Redding	2001 – 2014
Mrs N Wier	2015 – 2016
Mrs C. Fletcher	2017 -

## **Programme Secretary**

M.McLaurin	1996 – 2005
P.Daly	2006 – 2007
C. Ells	2008 –

## **Newsletter Editor**

Mrs C. Hollingdale	1996 – 1998
Mrs E. Butler	1999 – 2000
Mrs C. George	2001 -

## **Publicity Secretary**

Mrs Mary Eaton	1996 – 2001
Mrs L. Ells	2006 –

## **Yearbook Manager / Editor**

M. McLaurin	1996 – 1999
P. McLaurin	2000 – 2004
Mrs T.Madden	2005

## **Area Representative Co-ordinator**

Mrs I. Baxter	1998 -
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## **Outings Secretary**

Miss P. Southgate	1996 – 1998
Mrs J. Brunswick	1999 - 2000

## **Plant Sale Organiser**

J. Ratlidge	1998 – 1999
R. Jennings	2000 – 2014
Ms L. Kilbride	2015

## **Seed order coordinator**

J.Ratlidge	2009 – 2013
Ms J. Sturley	2014 -

Also so many volunteers and supporters without whom the society could not function – especially those who make the tea and run the raffle.