



The Hampstead Garden Suburb Horticultural Society

(Affiliated to The Royal Horticultural Society)

NEWSLETTER - JANUARY 2010

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Planning Ahead for a Quieter Year by Sonia Mathias, Membership Secretary

There seems general agreement that our Centenary Year was celebrated in style and gave pleasure to many. All good things come to an end so the Committee are planning that 2010 will be a quieter year, including familiar events but also a period of planning for the future.

Several matters demand our attention. Most immediate are the vacancies on the Committee that will occur in November 2010 and changes to how we distribute this newsletter.

In a year's time, three Committee officers - Membership Secretary, Show Secretary and Press Officer - will have completed their terms of office. These positions are vital. Publicity will continue to be essential to maintaining interest in the Society and encouraging new members. Our much-appreciated shows require organisation and planning. Membership of the Society needs recording and subscription fees need collecting.

We strongly encourage members to find out what these posts entail, to visit a Committee meeting or to meet an officer who will be vacating a post. They will all say that they learned on the job with the support of the Committee and their predecessor and, in turn, would welcome a member to shadow their activities throughout the coming year. Please think about it!

The second matter is the Committee's concern to save money and paper. Over half of our members have supplied email addresses. With this in mind, we plan to send newsletters to those members by email unless they object. Those who don't have this facility will, of course, receive theirs as usual by post or hand delivery. This will be put into operation at the next distribution in April 2010.

95th Annual General Meeting and Prize-giving



It had been an excellent Centenary Year for the society, with current membership standing at almost 500, Chairman Michael Franklin said. Having served as Treasurer for six years, Chris Page (see his report below) would retire from this post but remain on the Committee. Society Auditor Robert Wallis would replace him as Treasurer.

Goodbye and thank you to Committee members Anne Crawley, Carol Kemp and Gerard Wiseman. Hello and welcome to new Committee members Rosie Daniels and Lizzie Sturm.

Ham and High photographer Nigel Sutton was presented by Marjorie Harris with a bottle of champagne for his regular coverage of Society events.

Cups and medals were presented by Joan Rees Phillips, a Vice-President of the Society. A new Centenary Cup was donated and presented to Diane Berger by Erna and Harold Karton for best cut flowers at the Autumn Flower Show.

Refreshments were served and the meeting concluded. Over 50 people attended.

In what is fast becoming an AGM tradition, Chris Page had the audience in stitches when he stood up to give his report.

Treasurer Reveals Scandal at Heart of Society's Operations by Chris Page



'Before I start [Chris began his report to the AGM], can I ask if there are any reporters or photographers from the press here? ...

The reason I am asking is that I am going to discuss a sensitive subject – which the sub-editors at our local tabloids are already dubbing 'Horticultural Society Expenses Shock'.

During the year it has come to my attention that *elected* members of the Horticultural Society Committee have been claiming expenses. As a matter of probity and leadership, I am myself not seeking re-election as Treasurer as I have also been implicated in the scandal.

When I became aware of the situation, I conducted a wide-ranging review. What emerged was alarming. These were not just claims for small sums for photocopying, laminating pouches or stamps, but involved considerable sums and elected officers going right to the top of the organisation. Indeed, even past and current chairmen have been involved *and I have documentary evidence to prove it*. It goes to the very heart of our democracy, but it goes wider – sums have been paid to apparently respectable local organisations such as the Fellowship, the HGS Trust and the North London Hospice. But it doesn't stop there: £500 – yes, £500! - was paid to an agent at Buckingham Palace. To date, none of those sums has been repaid – *not a single penny*.

One member, who cannot be named for legal reasons but who lives in Willifield Way and opens her garden for the National Gardens Scheme, claimed £30 for barrels, £500 for a garden designer and over £1,600 for plants. Another member, who must also remain nameless but who also opens for the NGS and lives in Asmunds Hill, received £25 from an undertaker! Other claims included £275 for CostCo, £115 for carpentry services, £4.70 for marzipan and £17 for a centenary plaque (a dental condition?).

The ex-chairman made no fewer than 13 claims during the last year, including £21 for a band licence. The current chairman claimed £65 for lunch – sounds a good lunch! – and £180 for plants. A request for a duck house was declined (he doesn't have a pond).

Among other esoteric claims was £19.20 for lantern slides - presumably a euphemism for adult movies - and one that I didn't understand (but then I'm quite naïve). Perhaps someone can explain it to me: it was £98.31 for 4 studs fired to rear and 2 stainless steel stakes attached.

I hope we can manage this business in-house but obviously, if the *Daily Telegraph* gets wind of it, there could be difficult times ahead. I thought I owed it to you, dear members, to be made aware of the facts.'



Now You See It Now You Don't by Diane Berger

After three years, for those of you who may not have noticed, the raised bed on Willifield Green has gone. It has been a focal point for the suburb since 2007. Loved by many, disliked by a few. It was great fun for the children who helped plant it and has given great pleasure to those who love plants and colour ever since.

The first bed (it seems so long ago) was a 'written' Centenary Flower arrangement celebrating the suburb's inception. The lettering used red alternanthera with a backdrop of the green/golden variety.

This award-winning bed was then turfed and under-planted for winter with spring bulbs including narcissus and crocus flowers.

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Summer 2008 brought a profusion of colour: yellow, orange and purple dahlias broken with box ball planting and heuchera. This bed was replanted with wallflowers to give continuity through the winter and, again, the display received wider recognition.

In spring 2009, the ever-present and ever-stocked barrels (thanks to Finchley Nurseries) were replaced with wooden square containers. This summer, the theme to commemorate the Horticultural Society's centenary was a celebration of horticulture: fruits - apple trees, strawberry plants, gooseberry bushes, tomatoes - and vegetables including cabbages, broccoli and chard, interspersed with herbaceous perennials and shrubs - another award-winning display.

The three radically different summer beds were all designed by Stephen Crisp, a long-time supporter of 'communal gardening and displays' whose ideas and support have been a constant inspiration to us all.

I would like to give very special thanks to the silent few who each year have watered, tended and weeded: Derek Epstein, Jackie Murphy, Pia and Carlos Duran, Jill Ambrose, Gill Read and those of you on the Committee (you know who you are!).

Last but certainly not least - thanks to Paddy Orchard, who let us use her water tap and hose, without which it would have been very difficult to maintain the bed to the standard required.

The bed has now gone and will be missed. Some of you would have been lucky to have purchased plant mementos from the final display auctioned on 25 October. Hopefully, there will be some longstanding living reminders of what has been a very special year that will give pleasure for years to come.

Thank you once again to everyone who helped, including, of course, our very generous anonymous financial donors. We couldn't have done it without you.

My Years as Harrods Florist by Wendy Parry

In 1948, when I left school, I went to work in Flower Department 11 at Harrods in Knightsbridge.



I was taught how to look after the flowers and, in the workroom upstairs, shown how to make bouquets for brides and wreaths for funerals and buttonholes too. We supplied Sir Malcolm Sargeant with his buttonhole every day. Sometimes he came in and collected it himself, or one of his secretaries came, or I delivered it to his home near the Albert Hall. When Prince Charles was born, I took a dozen roses for Princess Elizabeth to Buckingham Palace, via the tradesmen's entrance. On that occasion, I had my picture in the *Evening News* under the caption 'Flowers go in to the Princess'.

After the war, many people started to 'see the world' and Interflora was born. I was given a department of my own - Department 13 was born. Customers would come and order flowers for their friends - all over the world. Once, I was asked to send a wreath to Australia – in the 50s the lines to Australia were 'eerie'. I felt I was in a very large hall which echoed – but the wreath arrived on time!

At Christmas and New Year, I had two assistants as it was very busy taking orders all day and telephoning orders when Harrods was shut. Shops didn't open on Sundays and Saturday afternoons but in the two weekends before Christmas I had to go to get all the orders sent to the various shops around the world.

When King George V1 died, Central Hall had lots of rails with wreaths hanging on them. All the embassies sent wreaths 6 feet across - very colourful and more working late in the workroom upstairs!

I enjoyed my ten years at Harrods working 8.30 to 5.30 weekdays and 8.30 to 1.30 on Saturdays. My wage was 37 shillings and 6 pence (£1.75) per week. I took a treat on pay day to my parents every week. At first, it was half-a-pound of Harrods' chocolates in a box. I saved up a little every week and eventually had £150 to buy my own car.

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A Wonderful Garden to Visit **by Chris Page**

Lorna and I were fortunate to visit many great gardens last year. All of them were wonderful and inspirational in their own way but, if we had to choose our favourite, it would have to be Sherwood in Devon. The garden had been brought to our attention at a lecture on the National Garden Scheme's Devon Gardens held by a local horticultural society.

Situated south-east of Crediton on the Exeter to Barnstable road, it is open every Sunday. It is owned by the Quicke family, whose famous eponymous cheese is still manufactured in the local village of Newton St Cyres.

We visited on a wet mid-October day, when we were the only visitors and even the owners had decided to stay indoors and light a fire - hardly the best of conditions to show off a garden. However, despite the rain, we were captivated not only by its size (15 acres) or dramatic landscape reminiscent of some of the great Cornish gardens, but also by the selection of established trees, shrubs and plants all apparently perfectly located for their demands. Despite the lateness of the season and the inclement weather, a profusion of dragonflies darted over

naturalistic ponds and, in an area where aircraft are a rarity, only birdsong and rain broke the silence.

As one would expect, with an acid soil there is an abundance of rhododendrons, camellias and acers (their leaf colour about to turn), tree ferns and wonderful hydrangeas in every hue and still in full colour (*Hydrangea Macrophylla* Rotschwauz was particularly striking). It is a rich dark red and quite different from anything we had seen before. There is a border (perhaps 100 metres long) of varieties of buddleia and they hold the National Collection of berberis. If, like us, you thought berberis was uninteresting, think again – there is an amazing selection of size, shape, colour and leaf texture! At different times of the year, there are apparently striking bulbs and wild flowers.

As I remarked to the owner, through the window, gardeners tend to be plant-people, collectors or artists and it is rare indeed to find all three qualities in one garden. Not only this, but the garden is maintained impeccably without the fussiness you sometimes experience elsewhere.

Sherwood is a bit off the beaten track but well worth a detour if you're in that part of the world at a weekend.

Sadly, since writing the above, I read the obituary in *The Times* of Sir John Quicke, who died aged 87. It is to be hoped that his beautiful garden will remain a fitting tribute to him.

Comfrey: The Green Way to Go - Grow Your Own Plant Food for Free

by Ruta Teteris



Much has been written about the humble comfrey plant. Some see it as a rampant weed, others as a decorative addition to the flower border. For the organic gardener, it is the most valuable, non-food plant available and one that every gardener should grow and use. The trick is to manage it as part of a natural cycle, to turn otherwise lost or unavailable nutrients into an organic plant form.

There are many ways to use comfrey: as a mulch, as a compost accelerator, as a high-nutrient compost ingredient, dried and crumbled to make powdered feed, or as liquid plant food as it contains silica, nitrogen, magnesium, calcium, potassium and iron. It is a high potash feed N-P-K of about 8 - 2.6 - 20.

To make comfrey concentrate, put the leaves in a large barrel or bucket with a lid and a hole or tap in the bottom. Weigh the leaves down with stones or bricks. Put on blocks to raise high enough to get a container underneath. Don't add water (when the leaves rot, the smell will be evil!) After three to six weeks, the liquid will begin to fill the container. Dilute with water 1:15. It will boost failing plants, greedy house plants and greenhouse crops.

There is plenty of information about comfrey on organic gardening websites, the different *Symphythum* species and how to establish your own comfrey beds. There is no need to buy any plants as comfrey can very easily be grown and increased by root cuttings.

An Engaging Speaker: Great Dixter Head Gardener Fergus Garrett

by Diane Berger



In 2008 Marjorie Harris, Yvonne Oliver and I went to Wisley to hear a talk by Fergus Garrett on his work at Great Dixter, where he is the head gardener. Afterwards, I asked him if he gave talks to horticultural societies. I was a little apprehensive as Dixter is on the Kent/Sussex borders. To my delight, he said 'Yes' and agreed to come to us in our centenary year. I was really looking forward to this as Great Dixter has always been my favourite garden and Christopher Lloyd my hero.

November 24 finally arrived and we were ready and waiting for the world and his wife to arrive. We were not disappointed. The Free Church Hall had 92 very keen gardeners listening to Fergus talk us through the fascinating history of Great Dixter and its inhabitants and then on to succession planting - what it involved, its trials and tribulations. We had had a coach trip to the garden earlier in the year so the garden was fresh in our minds.

The enthusiasm and love Fergus has for the garden and Christo was really moving. The wonderful slides he brought showed the amazing combination of leaf shape and plant height and how the pair had combined them with the dramatic use of vibrant colours; and how some were hits, others misses and how it was always worth experimenting with plants, colours and ideas. It was so inspiring: I'm sure lots of us will be trying out new combinations for our own plots. Fergus was a very approachable and engaging speaker and allowed time to answer the many questions his talk provoked. The evening ended with wine and canapés and members chatting enthusiastically.

Dates for Your Diary 2010

THURSDAY 14 JANUARY - FASCINATING INTERACTIVE/ HANDS-ON TALK ABOUT ORCHIDS

by Daryn Milbank of Ivans Orchids (Chelsea Gold Medallist) Fellowship House 7.30 pm Free to members, £2 for non-members

SATURDAY 6 FEBRUARY - GARDENING SUPPER QUIZ Fellowship House 7.30 Entry £10, including first drink
Booking: Diane Berger 020 8455 0455

WEDNESDAY 31 MARCH - GUIDED WALK with David Bevan, Queen's Wood Conservation Officer

Queen's Wood, Highgate. Meet at 2 pm at Queen's Wood Lodge. Entrance Muswell Hill Road, £5.00
Queen's Wood is a vestige of ancient forest. It is managed by coppicing, which allows for a wide range of plants to grow and a rich ecology to develop. It has been a Local Nature Reserve since 1990.

THURSDAY 22 APRIL - TALK: A BRIEF GLIMPSE INTO THE LIFE OF BEES AND BEEKEEPING

by Peter Dalby of Pebadale Apiaries Fellowship House 7.30 pm

SATURDAY 8 MAY - PLANT SALE Fellowship House 10.30 am - 12.00 noon

SATURDAY 15 MAY - COACH VISIT TO MARKS HALL ARBORETUM AND THE BETH CHATTO GARDEN

£30 See *booking form for details*

TUESDAY 8 JUNE - SUBURB IN BLOOM COMPETITION Contact Michael Franklin for entry form (8458 5846)

TUESDAY 15 JUNE - ENTRY NIGHT Fellowship House 7.00 – 8.00 pm

SATURDAY 19 JUNE - 269TH FLOWER SHOW Free Church Hall 3.00-5.30 pm

SUNDAY 18 JULY - COACH VISIT TO CHENIES MANOR, PLANT/GARDEN FAIR £25 See *booking form*

SATURDAY 24 JULY - SUMMER PARTY, PROBABLY AT FELLOWSHIP HOUSE

TUESDAY 7 SEPTEMBER - ENTRY NIGHT Fellowship House 7.00-8.00 pm

SATURDAY 11 SEPTEMBER - 270TH FLOWER SHOW Free Church Hall 3.00-5.30 pm

TUESDAY 19 OCTOBER - COACH VISIT TO CAMBRIDGE BOTANICAL GARDENS AND SECRET GARDENS OF CAMBRIDGE

Price to be confirmed

TUESDAY 9 NOVEMBER - 96TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING & PRIZE-GIVING Fellowship House 7.30 pm

JANUARY – MARCH

JOBS IN THE GARDEN: HELPFUL TIPS

- **Protect your patio plants by wrapping pot with bubble wrap**
- **Prune apple trees**
- **Keep lawns free of wet leaves**
- **Prune hard – summer flowering clematis**
- **Dead-head winter bedding such as pansies to keep tidy and to encourage more flowering**
- **Reposition shrubs which are in the wrong place**
- **Take cuttings of your favourite perennial plants to plant outside later**

To cheer yourself up, buy a brightly coloured houseplant such as cyclamen or azalea.

HAPPY WINTER GARDENING!

MEMBERSHIP FORM

**Complete and return to Sonia Mathias, 87 Willifield Way, London NW11 6YH
tel 020 8455 7334, email soniamathias@waitrose.com**

I/ We wish to join HGS Horticultural Society

I/ We wish to renew subscription to HGS Horticultural Society for 2010

NAME(S)

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TITLE

ADDRESS

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.....

POSTCODE

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TELEPHONE

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EMAIL

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I enclose a cheque (payable to HGS Horticultural Society) for £5.00 (single subscription)

I/ We enclose a cheque for £7.50 (family subscription)

I/We enclose a cheque for £ ... which includes a £ ... DONATION

No need for an envelope but a postage stamp would be appreciated.

BOOKING FORMS FOR 2010 COACH OUTINGS

MARKS HALL ARBORETUM AND THE BETH CHATTO GARDEN, SATURDAY 15 MAY

Marks Hall is a modern transformation of a 17th century walled garden. There is also an arboretum with a vast collection of trees in an historic and picturesque landscape, plus a lakeside walk, walks for all seasons and a well-stocked plant centre and gift shop. The Beth Chatto Garden founded in 1960 is famous. There are four main areas to visit. The **Water Garden**, against a backdrop of swamp cypress, redwoods, ancient oaks, including the rare Pin Oak (others can be seen at Kew), has lush planting, including gunnera, miscanthus and eupatorium. The **Secret Garden** is built using raised beds and dry stone walls to create an 'alpine' effect. The **Gravel Garden** contains drought resistant plants. In our erratic weather and with the threat of global warming, we should look for inspiration. Finally, there is the **Woodland Garden**, established after the 1987 hurricane. This offers an ever-changing herbaceous tapestry of ground cover plants. There is also a plant centre and refreshment area.

For further information, please contact Jane Epstein on 8455 0353

To: Joint Events Secretaries, 25 Asmunds Hill, NW11 6ES

I would like to book ... seats for Marks Hall and The Beth Chatto Garden, £30 per person.
Contact details of my guests appear below.

Total £ ... (cheques payable to HGS Horticultural Society)

NB We have a no-refund policy.

Name

.....
.....

Address

.....
.....

Email

Emergency Tel Number

Signed Tel/mobile

Name Tel/mobile

Name Tel/mobile

Name Tel/mobile

Details of where and when to meet will be sent to you a week before the trip.

CHENIES MANOR, SUNDAY 18 JULY 2010

This very old Tudor House, set in an attractive estate, is surrounded by enchanting gardens, including a physic garden. We plan to visit the annual Plant and Garden Fair, which is host to over 65 exhibitors.

To: Joint Events Secretaries, 25 Asmunds Hill, NW11 6ES

I would like to book ... seats for Chenies Manor, Plant and Garden Fair
£25 per person

Total £ ... (cheques payable to HGS Horticultural Society)

NB We have a no-refund policy

Name

Address

Email

Emergency Tel Number

SignedTel/mobile

Name.....Tel/mobile

Name.....Tel/mobile

Name Tel/mobile

Details of where and when to meet will be sent to you a week before the trip.