

# **Portsmouth Horticultural Society**

President: The Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor of Portsmouth

Founded in 1886

## **Affiliated to:**

Royal Horticultural Society

Royal National Rose Society

The Hampshire Federation of Horticultural Societies

## **HISTORICAL NOTES**

**August 1998**

# PORTSMOUTH HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

## HISTORICAL NOTES

The Society celebrated its Centenary in 1986. Two years prior to this the late Don Reynolds spent many hours closeted in the Central Library wading through microfilm copies of the old 'Hampshire Telegraph' newspapers which in those days contained many reports about the Society's activities.

This research provided the material for a 16 page booklet called 'Growing Old'. This booklet went out of print about 8 years ago, which is what prompted Don to produce an abridged version which I have updated. Without Don's attention to detail and hard work we would not have such a good historical record of the Society for our new members to read ..... so history goes on.

*Roger Young, August 1998*



On 10 June 1839 the following appeared in 'Public Notices':

### PORTSEA ISLAND HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

The **Portsea Island Grape Society** having, at the General Annual Meeting, extended its field of operations so as to embrace within its sphere all the Productions of the Garden, including Hothouse and Greenhouse Plants ....

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT  
THE  
**FIRST SHEW FOR THE PRESENT SEASON**  
WILL BE HELD AT  
THE YORKE ROOMS, SOUTHSEA  
ON  
WEDNESDAY, THE 26TH DAY OF JUNE INSTANT, WHEN **FIRST AND SECOND**  
**PRIZES**  
WILL BE GIVEN FOR THE FOLLOWING:

(Then follows a list of 11 classes of flowers and vegetables for Amateurs, a similar number for Nurserymen and 3 classes for Cottagers).

Every competitor who was not a Member was required to pay 15 shillings to entitle him to exhibit (which would be about the equivalent of £207.60 by today's standard!).

It should be remembered that in 1839 Portsmouth was a small town largely concentrated in what we now know as the Old Portsmouth district, the remainder of Portsea Island and, of course, the mainland being farmland. Southsea was being developed, the Yorke Rooms being sited in what is now the Clarence Pier area.

Subsequent newspaper reports indicate that the 'Portsea Island Horticultural Society' continued to exist until about 1865 and seems to have no connection with the 'Portsmouth Chrysanthemum Show' which was the subject of a report in 1885 and which encouraged a group of Town Councillors, led by one **Alderman Power**, to form the 'Portsmouth and Southsea Chrysanthemum Society' in **1886**. The Shows at that time were held in what was then the 3rd Hants Volunteer Drill Shed in Alfred Road. The building of the 'Town Hall' (now the Guildhall), was completed in 1890 and the annual Chrysanthemum Show began to be held there soon afterwards. Traditionally the Mayor, nowadays the Lord Mayor, has agreed to be the Society's President for the duration of his term of office.

Unfortunately, most of the Society's records were destroyed in the 1939/45 bombing of the City but, as far as we can ascertain, the roll of Principal Officers is as follows:

### **CHAIRMEN**

1898 - 1913	Alderman Mark Gill
1918 - 1921	Mr R Burridge
1922 - 1934	Mr W E Gill
1935 - 1938	Dr Montague Way
1939 - 1946	Eng Rear Admiral H Bone
1947 - 1956	Alderman J A Griffiths
1957 - 1984	Mr E W Studley
1984 - 1991	Mr P Maunder
1991 - 1998	Mr P Harden
1998 to Date	Mr R Young

### **Treasurers**

1886 - 1913	No Records
1919 - 1921	Mr W Stevens
1922	Mr R Burridge
1923 - 1931	Mr W Stevens
1932 - 1933	Mr E J Butler
1934 - 1935	Mr E Smee
1936 - 1947	Mr F J Saints
1948 - 1949	Mr F J Waghorn
1950	Mr A G Kingswell
1951 - 1957	Mr W Brinded
1958 - 1962	Mr J Tennant
1963 - 1969	Mrs A Hawkes
1970 - 1972	Mr A Cole
1973	Mr T Lawson
1974	Mrs E Young
1975 - 1979	Mr H Court
1980 - 1985	Mr R Eckersley
1985 - 1989	Mr L Ward
1990 to Date	Mr R Hayward

### **SECRETARIES**

1886 - 1898	Councillor Power
1898 - 1913	Mr W H Berry
1913 - 1918	Mr W E Gill
1919 - 1922	Mr F Hope Terry and Mr C Davies
1923	Mr E J Butler and Mr C Davies
1924 - 1929	Mr E J Meredith and Mr E J Butler
1930 - 1932	Mr W B Jeffreys
1933 - 1934	Mr H S Humphreys
1935 - 1947	Mr F J Waghorn
1948 - 1956	Mr W R Crofton
1957 - 1959	Mr D Reynolds
1960 - 1986	Mr L G Salter
1986 - 1997	Mrs D Hayward
1997 to Date	Mrs C Rumsey

### **Excursions Organisers**

1960 - 1974	Mrs K Whyley
1975 - 1976	Mr A Cole
1977 - 1988	Mr A C Rorke
1988 - 1995	Mrs D Hayward
1995 to Date	Mrs N Young

## **SHORT BREAKS AND HOLIDAYS**

In **1959**, during Don's brief stint as Honorary Secretary, he managed to organise a short break for a group of members to cross the Channel in May to travel via Ostend to Brussels overnight and then via Antwerp and Rotterdam to Amsterdam. Then followed a day trip to the bulb fields and the Keukenhof Gardens and another to the Cheese Market at Alkmaar and to Volendam before returning to Ostend via Breda. That was followed in **1961** by a short stay in the Black Forest at Triberg, travelling by coach via Brussels, Luxembourg, Trier, Bernkastel, Wiesbaden, Heidelberg and Karlsruhe and returning via Strasbourg and Paris (visiting Versailles) to Calais. In **1964** a small group travelled by train to Innsbruck and then continued to Vienna for what Don believed was the first International Garden Show, before returning via Salzburg.

Kit Whyley, during her six years as Excursions Organiser, also arranged some longer breaks. Records do not exist and memories have faded but it is believed that there was a short break to the Channel Islands and another based in Ludlow in the **early 1970's**.

Andrew Rourke kept excellent records and Don was indebted to him for the following information as well as for much of that included under the heading of 'Day Trips'.

- 1978 Llandudno**  
Trips to Bodnant, Tatton Park, Penrhyn Castle, Beddgelert and Cyder
- 1979 Great Yarmouth**  
Trips to Wildlife Kessingland, Norwich, Heveningham, Sandringham and Wroxham Broads
- 1980 Lake District**  
Trips to Windermere, Ullswater, Muncaster, Keswick, Levens Hall and Ravenglass to Eskdale Railway
- 1981 Llandudno**  
Trips to Bodnant, Chester, Plas-Newydd, Festiniog and Portmerion
- 1982 Torquay**  
Trips to Dartmouth, Totnes, Exeter, Knightshayes, Buckfast, Dartington, Plymouth and Brixham
- 1983 Falmouth**  
Trips to The Lizard, Trengwenton Gardens, Helston, Trerice, Lanhydrock, Mevagissey and Trelissick
- 1984 Scarborough**  
Trips to Castle Howard, Sledmere and Studley Royal

## DAY TRIPS

- 1966 *May - Wisley : June - Wolf Tools : October - Winkworth Arboretum*
- 1967 *June - Great Dixter : July - Harkness Rose Nursery : August - Warnham Court (LCC Nursery)*
- 1968 *June - Compton Acres : July - Polesden Lacy : September - Coles, Privet : October - Woolmans*
- 1969 No record
- 1970 *May - Syon House : June - Wisley and Cranbourne : August - Sheldon Manor*
- 1971 No record
- 1972 *May - Leonardslee : August - Clandon Park*
- 1973 *June - Kew : July - Wareham Priory : July - Cranbourne : August - Wilton : September - Polesden Lacy*
- 1974 *May - Athelhampton : June - Buscot Park : August - Kew : September - Mapledurham*
- 1975 *June - Breamore : July - Pewsey : August - Greys Court : September - Luton Hoo*
- 1976 *May - Great Dixter : June - Waddesdon Manor : July - Wakehurst : August - Forde Abbey*
- 1977 *May - Borde Hill : June - Dodington, Jenkyn Place, Loseley and Parham : August - ICI Fernhurst : September - Hatfield House*
- 1978 *June - Sparsholt (Quiz Final) : July - Wisley and ICI Fernhurst : August - Lacock : September - Compton Acres*
- 1979 *June - Savill Garden : July - Hampton Court and Kew : August - Claverton Manor : September - Nymans*
- 1980 *May - Leonardslee : June - Hever Castle : July - Broadlands and Cliveden : September - Littlecote*
- 1981 *May - Stourhead : June - Claremont and Clandon Park : August - Polesden Lacy : September - Stonor*
- 1982 *June - Savill Garden and Sheffield Park : July - Wakehurst : August - Oxford and Sherborne : September - Waddesdon Manor*
- 1983 *June - Borde Hill and Brympton d'Eversey : July - Wisley : August - Leckford : September - Syon House*
- 1984 *June - Exbury and Furzley : September - Penhurst*
- 1985 *June - Leonardslee, Parnham and Bath : July - Greenwich : August - Mapledurham : September - Breamore and New Forest Butterfly Farm*
- 1986 *July - Windsor : August - Buscot, Kingston Lacy, Lacock, Nymans, Savill Garden and Sheffield Park*
- 1987 *May - Wisley : June - Arundel (Birds) and Parham : July - Luton Hoo and Mottisfont : August - Oxford : September - Wakehurst*
- 1988 *May - Stourhead : June - Abbotsbury : July - Leeds Castle : August - Kingston Lisle and Michelham Priory*
- 1989 *May - Bowood : June - Forde Abbey : July - Highclere : August - Great Dixter*
- 1990 *May - Leonardslee : June - Woburn : July - Sheldon Manor : August - Kew*

- 1991** *May* - Sudeley Castle : *June* - Hampton Court : *July* - Hever Castle : *August* - Hatfield House
- 1992** *May* - Sheffield Park : *June* - Blenheim Palace : *July* - Syon House : *August* - Polesden Lacy
- 1993** *May* - Savill and Valley Gardens : *June* - Berkeley Castle : *July* - Knole  
*August* - Basildon Park
- 1994** *May* - Wisley : *June* - Bath : *July* - Waddesdon Manor : *August* - Knebworth House
- 1995** Wakehurst : Hilliers and Mottisfont : Hampton Court Flower Show : Sissinghurst : Secretts and Forest Lodge Garden Centres.
- 1996** RHS Show and National Trust Paintings Exhibition : Stourhead : Denmans : St Albans and National Rose Gardens : Stapehill : Longstock and Houghton Lodge.
- 1997** Quiz Final at Sparsholt : Saville Gardens : Abbotsbury : Painshill and Claremont : Colegrave Seeds : Bowood.
- 1998** Quiz Final at Sparsholt : Selborne : Colegrave Seeds.

## **SIGNIFICANT EVENTS**

- 1886** 'Portsmouth Chrysanthemum Society' founded.
- 1898** Annual Chrysanthemum Show moved from Alfred Road Drill Shed to Victoria Hall.
- 1898** } Portsmouth Chrysanthemum Society won national trophy for NCS Affiliated  
**1900** } Societies.  
**1936** }
- 1901** Chrysanthemum Show moved from Victoria Hall to Town Hall.
- 1903** Several Councillors donated medals and prize money.
- 1907** Executors of The Dowager Lady Ashburton of Melchett won the Society's Premier Award.
- 1908** First Summer Show held at South Parade Pier.
- 1928** Portsmouth granted City status. Town Hall became Guildhall.
- 1929** An ambitious Summer Show was held on Castle Field which continued annually until 1935. Probably the forerunner of today's Southsea Show.
- 1933** Membership : 156
- 1934** Membership : 110
- 1935** Membership : 137
- 1941** Guildhall destroyed in Air Raid.
- 1946** First Post-War AGM held at Foresters Hall, Fratton Road. Attendance : 25. Arrangements made to re-start Autumn Show in October at Wesley Central Hall (since demolished).
- 1948** 'John' Studley inaugurated a Spring Show at Southern Secondary School for Girls (now known as Priory School). Small profit due to sponsorship and generosity of members.
- 1949** 'City of Portsmouth Flower Show' inaugurated by City Council at Wessex Drill Hall and subsequently held at Connaught Drill Hall before moving to Castle Field under the title 'Southsea Floral Fete and Fayre'. Later renamed 'Southsea Show'. The Society invested in 100 exhibition vases.

- 1950** Crisis! Overworked Secretary only continued in office with appointment of a Treasurer and two Show helpers.
- 1951** The Society was first represented on Council's Southsea Show Committee. Autumn Show moved to South Parade Pier Theatre.
- 1953** Spring Show moved to South Parade Pier Minor Hall. Tom Stillwell appointed Show Secretary (later to become Show Manager).
- 1955** Increasing interest noted in floral decoration classes.
- 1956** Portsmouth and District Floral Decoration Group formed.
- 1957** A milestone! John Studley was elected Chairman. Bank balance almost non-existent. Early Autumn Show started as a means of boosting funds. Autumn Show (October) held at new school in St Mary's Road due to use of South Parade Pier for a Conference. Venue for meetings also transferred to school.
- 1958** Southern Independent Television (now superseded by Meridian) filmed the Opening Ceremony of Autumn Show to go out the following Sunday, but it was ousted by live broadcast of London-Brighton Veteran Car Rally. Early Autumn Show suffered a loss and was discontinued.
- 1959** City Council set a scale of charges for rent of the Guildhall Main Hall, the lowest £35 per day being 'for Flower Shows and the like' which we accepted as a 'royal command' to return to the Guildhall. Parks Department filled the stage with a solid mass of Chrysanthemums. The Show made a modest profit.
- 1963** ICI sponsored Percy Thrower for a lecture at Guildhall followed by a Questions Session with John Studley and Bill Boyd, both of whom became 'anchor men' in BBC Radio Solent 'Top Soil' programme.
- 1967** Spring Show at South Parade Pier caused us a major headache as City Council had sold the Pier and the Minor Hall was being converted to an amusement arcade. Despite the dust and hassle the Show went ahead as planned.
- 1968** Spring Show held at St John's College where it continued happily until 1984. John Studley retired from his position as Director of Parks and was succeeded by his Deputy, Peter Maunder.
- 1970** 'Garden News' dated 6 November turned the spotlight on Portsmouth with flattering features about Tom Stillwell (whose garden was the grounds surrounding an electricity sub-station!), Eddie Manns (who was then employed in the Parks Department as a professional florist), John Hunt (Headmaster of HavantTrosnant Junior School - both he and his pupils exhibited at our Shows), Alfred Purdue (a blind but active exhibitor whose mother acted as his eyes), Elsie Meader (the wife of an old, disabled, friend), Don and his wife Joan and a bit about the Parks Department's work at Leigh Park and in reclaiming 100 acres of Langstone Harbour for playing fields and open spaces.  
The Autumn Show was cancelled at short notice due to industrial action by the Council's manual workers.
- 1971** Autumn Show limited to Wednesday/Thursday due to another booking of the Guildhall taking precedence. We also heard 'on the grapevine' that rental of the Guildhall was about to be massively increased. We made an

- 1972** impassioned appeal to Councillors which resulted in a most valuable concession, ie that the Autumn Show should become a joint venture with the City Council under the title 'Autumn Horticultural Show'. It was almost too good to be true and very much to the Society's financial advantage. At John Studley's suggestion we mounted a floral display at the Southsea Show to publicise the Society. It continued annually thereafter in an increasingly sophisticated form.
- 1974** Structural alterations at the school in St Mary's Road resulted in our meeting place being moved to Alexandra Bowling Club in Northern Parade. It was decided to augment the annual Portsbridge Lifeboat Fair with a Flower Show. The event continued until 1984.  
A regular Newsletter was started with Mrs Joan Wood as Editor.
- 1975** Tom Stillwell retired as Show Manager for health reasons and was succeeded by John Vautier.
- 1977** Attendance at Autumn Show (Guildhall) was 1477. Raffle income : £128.
- 1978** Membership over 400. Sadly, Tom Stillwell died. Attendance at Autumn Show : 1635.
- 1979** Society's exhibit at Southsea Show, to the theme 'In an English Country Garden' was awarded a Gold Medal as 'the most artistic display in the Floral Marquee'. Autumn Show severely curtailed due to double booking of Guildhall.
- 1983** Structural alterations at Alexandra Bowls Club reduced its suitability for our meetings.
- 1984** By unanimous decision of members at an Extraordinary General Meeting, the venue for meetings was changed to the Function Room of the newly-built Mountbatten Centre, despite the extra expenditure.  
Sadly, John Studley died in August aged 81, but his memory lives on and the next year, his 27 years excellent service to the Society was commemorated in the establishment of a border of Flowering Shrubs (his favourite lecture subject), subscribed for and physically planted by his fellow members. It is located in Northern Parade, about 100 yards distant from The Lodge at Alexandra Park which, when he first came to Portsmouth, was his home and, subsequently, his office as the City's Director of Parks. Nearby is a tree (Zelkova) planted in memory of Tom Stillwell and a shrub to the memory of John Vautier.
- 1985** Spring Show merged with April meeting at Mountbatten Centre.
- 1986** **Centenary Year**  
The year was marked by a series of celebratory events:
- (a) An above-average list of Speakers at monthly meetings.
  - (b) A Centenary Luncheon at the Mountbatten Centre, attended by the Lord Mayor and by representatives of Hayling Island Horticultural Society (who were also celebrating their hundredth birthday that year).
  - (c) A visit by the BBC Gardeners Question Time team (Clay Jones, Geoffrey Smith, Dr Stefan Buczacki and Daphne Ledward) to the Society at the Rock Garden Pavilion (now demolished). Attendance was about 300, including VIPs from Havant as well as Portsmouth, for the event was in conjunction with Hayling Island HS.



- 1987** Changes in the administration of Local Government to comply with Government policy brought an end to the 15-year old agreement in respect of the 'Autumn Horticultural Show'. We were offered the use of the Sports Hall at the Mountbatten Centre but on a Saturday and Sunday in September. The experiment was a dismal failure and resulted in a large financial loss.
- 1989** The Shows were moved to the Civil Service Sports Association premises in Copnor Road, Hilsea to try and curtail further monetary losses. At the Autumn Garden Show the Top Soil team was present to answer questions. The Society won the Hampshire Federation Quiz Final.
- 1991** Severely reduced funds forced an end to meetings at the plush but expensive Mountbatten Centre. We were fortunate to be offered the use of the much cheaper Civil Service Sports Association premises in Copnor Road which we were also able to use for an evening Spring Show in place of the April meeting and for a full day Autumn Show in September (we had already ended the October Shows in view of declining interest in growing greenhouse Chrysanthemums). Runners-up in Hampshire Federation Quiz Final.
- 1993** Peter Maunder awarded Associateship of Honour by the Royal Horticultural Society.
- 1997** Runners-up in Hampshire Federation Quiz Final.
- 1998** Increased rent charges at the Civil Service Club resulted in move to City of Portsmouth Boys School for monthly meetings and Copnor Methodist Church Hall for Committee meetings. Runners-up in Hampshire Federation Quiz Final.

## **PORTSMOUTH AND SOUTHSEA SHOW**

As already mentioned, the Society in 1972 began exhibiting annually at the Portsmouth and Southsea Show. In 1973 the space allowed was set at 15' x 10' (which it has remained ever since) and it had become a competition between local Garden and Allotment Societies. Over the years the rest withdrew one by one until we were left on our own.

- 1973** An asymmetrical display of petunias, fibrous begonias, fuchsias and lilies against a black background and with a paving slab foreground.
- 1974** Similar contents but with the addition of hanging baskets, the whole edged with large tree slices.
- 1975** Fibrous and tuberous begonias with ferns against an arcaded background made of white plastic coffee cups. The foreground was also of plastic coffee cups but upturned and infilled with peat.
- 1977** We had by now begun designing to a theme and this year's celebrated Her Majesty's Silver Jubilee with a cardboard model of St Edward's crown topping a white Ionic column round which a royal purple drape was entwined leading down to a row of cineraria maritima. There was also a group of tuberous begonias and foliage plants and a small collection of vegetables.

- 1978** The displayed title was 'A Tribute to Portsmouth Parks 1878-1978' celebrating the centenary of the opening of Victoria Park.
- 1979** As already stated in 'Significant Events' this was to the theme 'In an English Country Garden'.
- 1984** 'Chinese Chequers'. A pattern of squares, some containing square pedestals made of bamboo canes.
- 1985** 'Potty' - plants in plastic flower pots, in chamber pots, in teapots and in pottery vases, the whole edged with upturned plastic pots which were also used to form an arcaded background.
- 1986** '100 Golden Years'. Messrs Alders kindly loaned a lifesize model which we dressed in Victorian style. The foreground was a mass of golden pansies, African and French marigolds backed by ferns and foliage plants.
- 1987** This exhibit celebrated the bicentenary of the colonisation of Australia. Flying an Australian flag on loan from Australia House, the plants on display were all Australian natives, an upturned wooden crate supported cans of Fosters Lager and a signed read 'G'day Cobber'. It attracted much attention, not least from visitors from 'down under'!  
This was the first year our new logo was displayed at the Show.
- 1988** The theme was 'The Spanish Armada' and was complete with a typically Spanish balcony, sinking ships and a bowls rink on Plymouth Hoe.
- 1991** Display by Steve Dearing.
- 1993** Display by Jack Chantler and team.
- 1994** Display by Jack Chantler and team.
- 1995** Gold for Best Exhibit } Pam Formhals, Jack Chantler  
2nd Prize for Most Colourful Display } and Team
- 1996** Display by Pam Formhals and team.
- 1997** Gold Medal - display by Jean Aitken and team.
- 1998** Large Gold Medal - the highest award possible - for a garden display of flowers and vegetables featuring Bill and Ben made out of flower pots which caused a great deal of interest and many clicking cameras.

I hope you have found these historical notes interesting - I certainly have! Hopefully the Society will be able to keep them updated periodically in future years.

Roger Young  
**Chairman**