

### HHS and Gardening Club Report APA 2023

The Hermitage Horticultural Society and Gardening Club in its current form was founded in 1957 and has generally been a thriving society; however, over recent years there has been a general decline in interest and attendance at events.

At present, the Society has 102 paid up Members, and 5 Life Members, so our Membership, which had been declining, appears to have steadied. Having said that, it would appear that at least two thirds of members re-join out of a sense of duty to ensure the society continues to exist, leaving a small core of what might be termed active members. This ever reducing core of active members meant that there was a record low level of exhibits at the recent Spring Show, continuing a trend we have seen over the past years. However, this was offset slightly by an attendance of 35 people, a significant increase on the very disappointing Autumn Show when only two non-members attended, and we even made a small profit on the day. In fact, we haven't applied for a Parish Council grant this year because of the falling numbers attending events and the fact we are in a healthy financial position.

As well as the shows, thanks to Colin Plummer we also put on a series of talks through what might be termed non-gardening months. These are not necessarily related to gardening but are often of more general interest. For example, next week we have a talk on the River Kennet and River Lambourn by Anna Forbes from the charity *Action for River Kennet*, which should be very interesting and certainly topical, given the recent revelations about water company treatment of sewage. I have to say that some of our talks have been sparsely attended, particularly in the winter, although attendances have improved for the last couple of talks.

I am deliberately making this all sound quite gloomy, and there is a good reason for this. Arranging society events falls on a small but dedicated committee and we have to review whether the hard work involved is really worthwhile. After all, there is no point in organising events if no one else is interested. The committee are reviewing the whole existence of the society and, if there really is a continued limited interest, then the decision to end the society may be taken. As I said at the Hort Soc AGM, it really is a case of use it or lose it.

Having said all that, I am slightly encouraged to tell you that we have had 20 new Members join recently, some of whom are younger and very keen on growing. Perhaps they might be interested in joining the Committee and help to regalanise the society to meet the requirements of a 21<sup>st</sup> century gardener. To that end, we already have a rather splendid website, thanks to Sue Plummer's grandson, which gives lots of information.

I should like to thank the committee members who continue to work hard to keep the society afloat; although sadly we lost Janet Burch recently who was a stalwart of the society and queen of the kitchen. She will be missed by all.

Finally, it would be great to see more members fully participating in events and we always welcome visitors to our shows and talks to enjoy the exhibits and, even better, a cuppa and some homemade cake.