



WHALEY BRIDGE Allotment & Gardeners' Society



THE FIRST THIRTY YEARS!

BEFORE THE BEGINNING

In November 1991, the Buxton Advertiser reported as follows in "Peeps from the Past" – 50 years on"



(In 1941) "Whaley Bridge and District Allotment Association, formed less than a month ago, is starting a membership drive by taking the front portion of the Home Guard headquarters in Market Street. There will be a pamphlet and poster show in the windows and inside members of the committee of the association will serve as an information bureau. By this means, it is hoped to attract the widest possible public interest in this most useful type of war-time organisation". When or why this organisation lapsed was not reported.

THE BEGINNING

Fast forward to 1983. Several plot-holders at the Sunnybank allotment site, in particular, felt a little uncomfortable about some pressures they were facing. A meeting was held on 22nd June at Bob and Pam Pierce's house attended by Bob, Walter Booth, Ernest Ball, John Goddard, John Howes, Thomas Beech and Ron Johnson. They proposed that "an association be

formed with the object of benefiting allotment holders in Whaley Bridge and District and safeguarding their interests". What were these pressures? According to the invitation to the meeting, they felt that local council members did not understand "The Allotments movement in general, the Sunnybank allotment site in particular and the various Allotments Acts of Parliament". In addition, North-West Water (precursor of United Utilities) planned to construct a pipeline between Fernilee Reservoir and Audenshaw. This was intended to go through the Sunnybank site, rendering it unusable for two years. The founder members felt that the allotment holders' interests needed to be protected and proper compensation paid. According to Bob Pierce, the working of allotments at this time was not only about recreation. These plots often played a key part in making household budgets stretch far enough. In this way, the Whaley Bridge and District Allotment Holders' Society was formed.

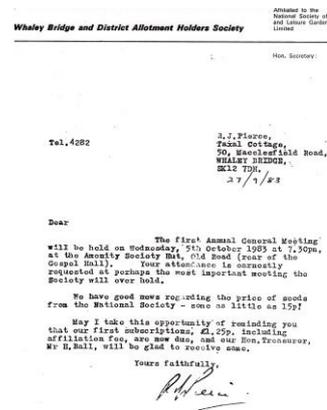
THE FIRST FIVE YEARS - A HANDFUL OF BUSY PEOPLE



Mary Howes resting on the allotment she and John worked. These were low infrastructure, hard work days!

In these early years, formal membership of the Society was

between six and fourteen people. They arranged bulk purchase of seeds, negotiation of discounts on fertilisers, tools and seed potatoes, undertook publicity to attract new affiliates, developed a Constitution, attracted formal Council recognition, developed letterheads etc., became affiliated to the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners, sought accommodation for future meetings and developed plans for a communal shed (postponed until after the completion of the pipeline project). In addition, they worked their plots!

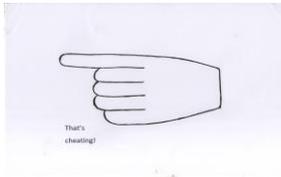


Invitation from Founder and Secretary Bob Pierce to attend the first Annual General Meeting. It includes the quote "Your attendance is earnestly requested at perhaps the most important meeting the Society will ever hold".

BEDDING IN THE SOCIETY

With the groundwork done, more members were sought and a Buxton Advertiser article reported in late 1987 that "All local gardeners are welcome to join the Society". A speaker and an outing were planned for 1988 and the excellent tradition of having some social activity after AGMs was started (a "hot-pot supper" in that instance). A social role in the community was also

established: a coffee morning with a Valentine's Day theme was held in the Mechanics Institute. It was remembered in the press for the heart and flower decorations and for a sign pointing the way – a hand with six fingers ("We have heard of gardeners being green-fingered but SIX fingers!")



The caption says "That's cheating!"

By 1989 the membership had risen sharply to 42 and by 1990 to 60+. More people, more help and lots of ideas and imagination came into play. A very successful Gardeners' Question Time was held. Fund-raising was focused on the provision of the proposed communal store and there were wine and cheese parties, plants sales and continuing coffee mornings. Santa Claus was scheduled to be in attendance at one of them and Pam Pierce reminisces as follows:

"Bob dressed up as Santa and most of the ladies dressed up as well. The Greengrocers (there were two or three in the village) donated oranges, etc. to go with the allotmenters' home-grown apples and the children, who visited Father Christmas free, had free fruit as well, so even the poorest were provided for."



In 1988 the Constitution was changed, making it applicable to all gardeners and the name was changed to Whaley Bridge Allotments and Gardeners' Society.

There was a lot of fun – but also a shadow as the plan to bisect the allotments with the new pipeline was now imminent.

THE NINETIES – A GROWING ORGANISATION AND A CHANGING ROLE

The pipeline was installed and compensation negotiated and paid. In 1991, the Whaley Bridge Advisory Committee was inaugurated with three town councillors and two members of the Society. The early anxieties had largely passed and the Society had broadened into an organisation supporting the gardening activities and enthusiasms of many around Whaley Bridge. The Buxton Advertiser of 4th April 1990 reports as follows:



"FRUITFUL START TO THE NEW SEASON

Whaley Bridge Allotment and Gardeners' Society summer season got off to a good start with a plant sale and coffee morning.

This was followed by a most entertaining lecture on fruit growing by Mr DC Leaman of Caldwell's Nurseries, Knutsford, who also gave a demonstration of bush pruning. The bushes were then donated as raffle prizes.

Two days later the discount shop was open for members to obtain materials for the busy time ahead.

The next event in the summer diary is a coach trip to Harlow Carr Gardens, Harrogate on 5th May to coincide with the Northern Horticultural Society's plant bring and buy sale. This trip is open to members of the public."

The Society also took its community role seriously and sought to make its mark in the village. During a drought one summer, 16 members took on the watering of Whaley Bridge's 22

flower tubs. A leading light in this was Anne Eden-Green, the Society's long-serving Auditor. Bob Pierce commented at the time "As a group, we want to be part of the community and we want to be seen giving something back to the community. All the same, as soon as the weather breaks and rain comes, we are looking forward to a break from our watering duties!"

The nineties saw some inevitable but less welcome changes. The rapid increase of membership brought some disappointments to organisers of activities from time to time. Not everything that was tried worked. Newcomers did not always have the same zeal as the early members. Plant and equipment "swap shops" were discontinued "due to very poor support" and some trips planned did not attract the anticipated numbers.

Other initiatives thrived. The proposed permanent, communal store was bought and fitted out in 1993. In its first year of operation, it had to be replenished three times. In 1996, John Howes re-introduced a regular Newsletter and Ethel Hallam took over the organisation of the social programme including coach trips, coffee mornings, talks and garden parties.



Ethel Hallam and Chairman John Pressman

Ethel's fresh ideas were welcomed and she revitalised the social aspect of the Society's offering.

In the mid-1990s the Society made a step-change into the modern era – some 11 members received their newsletters by email. (This rose to 48 by 2008 and is now 120+)

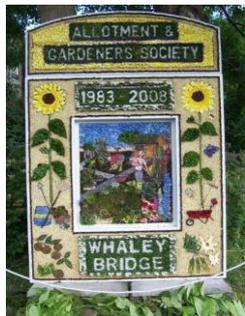
THE MILLENIUM AND THE NEXT 10 YEARS!

The society's first big garden-party, celebrating the Millennium, was held at Whaley Hall....



Members pictured at the Millennium party include Mary Howes, John and Muriel Pressman

The membership of the Society had reached 160, sixty of whom came. It set the tone and provided the stimulus for similar events thereafter. Ron and Audrey Hill hosted an excellent Garden Party to celebrate the Society's 20th anniversary in 2003 and Joan Macbeth hosted the 25th anniversary Garden Party. The well-dressing team of Whaley Bridge also marked this anniversary in their stylish way.



The first decade of the new century brought joys and sorrows. The Society had many successes. It continued to increase its membership. It had a strong committee and many dedicated volunteers, introducing ideas and making things happen. It was a period, also, when age and illness began to take its toll on some of the founder members and big contributors. The Society remembers with gratitude Walter Booth, Ernie

Ball, John Howes, Tom Beech and Ethel Hallam.



John Howes, who gave so much

THE PRESENT

We are an ageing population and there is no sign that our activities and methods of communications are attracting the next generation. We are holding our own in terms of numbers but the age structure is not being refreshed. Committee members are looking carefully at which activities remain popular and at ways of keeping them accessible to as many members as possible. Trips to Highgrove, run by Rosemary Kellock and publicised amongst other gardening groups in the area have been a great success. So also have been the twice-yearly talks (by outside speakers) and the social evenings. Visits to gardens a little further way, involving journeys which members would probably not undertake on their own, have also been popular on several occasions.



Rosemary took over from Ethel Hallam. Seen here at the 20th anniversary garden party.

Mike High, our Webmaster, developed the WBAGS website in 2010 and it is an attractive additional medium for publicising the Society. www.wbags.co.uk

The store remains very popular amongst that considerable element of the membership still active in

gardens and allotments. The Newsletter now includes articles relating to the broader gardening and natural environment in which we live, cultivate our flowers and grow our produce. A member writes regularly for the Newsletter on environmental themes (pen-name Podiceps Cristatus).



From time to time the Newsletter describes the many ways members are still contributing to the Whaley Bridge community through the employment of their gardening skills.

THE WAY AHEAD

We will need to adapt further, providing for members who no longer garden but want to keep in touch with gardening friends. We may need to cooperate more widely with other gardening organisations, in order to have sufficient numbers to make certain activities viable. As our volunteers age without younger replacements being available, some activities may have to be discontinued or done in a different way. This could include paying others to provide services or using technology to a greater extent.



Members chatting in Joan Macbeth's garden during the 25th anniversary garden party. It was a full garden, with people perched on rocks and walls, as well as benches and chairs.

We may need to find new venues, so all members can continue to enjoy what is on offer. We do not know what the future will bring – but whatever comes to pass will be the story of the next 30 years and the subject, maybe, of a 60th anniversary newsletter!