

The background of the entire page is a detailed painting of a traditional English cottage. The house has a steep, gabled roof covered in reddish-brown tiles. A brick chimney is visible on the right side. The walls are a light, off-white color. There are two prominent windows with white frames; the one on the right is slightly open. The garden in front of the house is lush and overflowing with a variety of flowers, including large pink and red roses, yellow daffodils, and blue flowers. A wooden picket fence runs across the bottom of the image.

SADGA

**Sunningdale & District
Gardening Association**

125th anniversary

£2

Message from Alan Titchmarsh



I have so many happy memories of allotmenting in Sunningdale. I was newly married and short of a bob or two so the plot down by the church was a Godsend, in spite of the fact that it was shaded by an old oak tree. But the camaraderie was second to none and the runner beans not bad. Since then I've been lucky enough to have a larger garden, and I don't have to strap a Dutch hoe to the handlebars and cycle down the road to attend to my onions. But they are the happiest of memories and I am delighted that the collective enjoyment of gardening goes from strength to strength through SADGA in my old neck of the woods. Happy days!



Outing to Hever Castle



Plant sale

It was back in 1889 that Sunningdale formally became part of the then five-year-old Ascot, Sunninghill & District Horticultural Society, which held two flower, fruit and vegetable shows each year at Ascot Racecourse. The Society was disbanded during World War I, and started again in 1919. But within a few years it was decided to form a separate organisation in Sunningdale.

In April 1936 nine professional gardeners from estates or big houses around Sunningdale met at The Gardens, Kingsmoor, Titlarks Hill, to form a provisional committee for a local gardeners' association.

The pioneers were Mr J. Wareham of Greenaways, Mr A. Day of Hills End, Mr K. Bowering of Kings Beeches, Mr Warrington of Sunningdale Park, Mr Reed of Coworth Park, Mr J.O. Jones of Wardour Lodge, Mr C. Jones of Broadlands, Mr J. Cameron of Little Paddocks, and Mr A. Dennett of Kingsmoor who was elected hon sec pro-tem.

The provisional committee met again on 7 May at The Chequers (now The Sunningdale Lounge on the A30) and agreed "that a Gardeners' Association was badly needed but that it should be confined to bona fide gardeners and that the best means of attaining this object was to arrange for a visit to some prominent gardens and invite prospective members to attend."



The Chequers Sunningdale early 1900s

It was decided to hold a general meeting at Little Paddocks (now the Royal Berkshire Hotel) to formally launch the association which would cover a five mile radius from Sunningdale.

The meeting was in fact held at Titness Park on the evening of 28 May after some 100 invitations were sent to professional gardeners in the area, and the local papers had carried adverts and editorial items about the inaugural meeting.

About 25 men attended, and immediately over-ruled a committee recommendation of a higher subscription for head-gardeners by voting for a flat annual fee of 2s 6d (12½p in today's money, but in terms of relative earnings about £12). Ironically, 75 years later members again over-ruled the committee when subs were increased to £10.

Col Horlicks of Little Paddocks was elected hon president, with hon vice-presidents Admiral Cochran of Windlesham House, Capt Lindsey of Greenaways, Col Green of Queens Hill, Ascot, and Mrs J. Martin of Kingsmoor.



Little Paddocks c1920

A separate set of working officers was appointed with Mr Cameron as president, and a vice-president from each of the four districts covered by the new association including Mr Dennett who was also secretary/treasurer.

It was agreed that monthly meetings would alternate between Sunningdale, Sunninghill and Windlesham, and if possible would not be at licensed premises. Maybe to get their own back the committee held their next meeting at The Chequers!

The meeting also confirmed that the Association's ordinary members would be professional gardeners only and hoped that the educational and social opportunities provided would be to the advantage of both

gardeners and employers. And it decided that the first event would be a visit to the Reading seed trial grounds of Messrs Sutton and Sons. That visit took place on the evening of Wednesday 29 July and 42 members and guests attended. The local paper reported that the secretary of the Reading Association, who acted as a guide, congratulated the Sunningdale Association on “the rapid progress” it had made.

Monthly meetings, with a guest lecturer, were held at the Working Men’s Institute (now the CMI building, used as a children’s nursery) in Church Road, Sunningdale, which became the regular venue. By the end of the year the Association had nearly 70 members, decided to affiliate to the RHS, and bought its own lantern for lecture slides.

At the end of the first year it was decided to allow members’ wives or lady friends to join the outings, and a few months later the first lady member, a Miss J.M. Paten, was signed up.

The next year 1937 started with a warning from the President, Mr Cameron. He said there was a shortage of trained gardeners due to World War One and the subsequent depression which meant that many gardens which had been good training grounds in the past were now being run on a reduced staff which didn’t allow the work to be done properly.

He blamed the employers as many gardeners were now underpaid, and this was liable to lead them into temptation – including taking payments from “unscrupulous nurserymen who were trying to sell unsuitable products.”

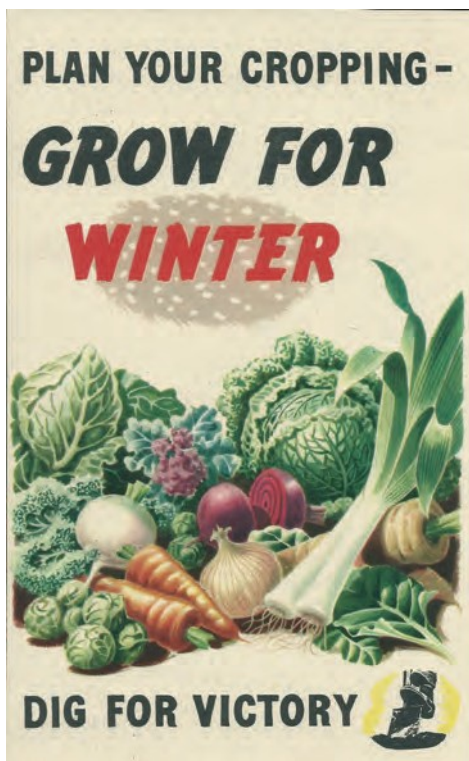
Mr Cameron said gardeners had to show that their labours deserved proper remuneration, and one of the first steps was to become more efficient – which the new Association would help them achieve. Another step the Association took was to encourage young gardeners by holding a competition for the under 30s to write a paper on any horticultural subject. Sadly, despite three cash prizes being on offer,

only one entry was received. Mr J. Souster duly won the first prize of £1, but what happened to him is a mystery as his name never appears again in the Association's records.

The first annual report in January 1938, covering the 19 months since the formation, showed that membership had grown to 101. Although membership was still confined to professional gardeners, it was decided to admit the general public to the monthly lectures in the hope that some of them might be gardeners who would become members.

As the storm clouds of war rolled across the country in 1939, attendance at the summer outings dropped and membership declined. In the autumn the Association held a public meeting in Sunningdale Village Hall to advise on "Growing Vegetables in Wartime," and set up an advice bureau on the subject.

The Association kept going with visits and lectures until March 1941 when a special general meeting at Russell's Nursery unanimously agreed that "as owing to the war many members had been called to the Forces and other war activities, all activities of the Association should cease until the war with Germany was over." With the ending of the war in Europe, the committee met again at the nursery and decided to re-start activities. A general meeting on 18 July 1945 attracted about 40 members and prospective



Brochure at 1939 meeting

members - the Hon Secretary Mr Brown was among those still on active service - and endorsed the committee's recommendation.

There was a proposal to admit women to membership as many were now taking up gardening for a living. But it was pointed out that there was nothing in the rules to prevent women joining (one had become a member back in 1937). The other proposed change was the venue – and the first post-war monthly meeting was held in the WI Hut, which later became the Association's home for several years.

The big change that ultimately led to the Association becoming what it is today came in January 1946 when it was decided to admit anyone interested in gardening as an honorary member (full membership was still restricted to professionals). At the same time the Association re-affiliated to the RHS.

Later that year the Association enjoyed great success at the RHS autumn fruit show in London, winning the Affiliated Societies' Cup. After a last minute appeal for more cooking apples, 13 members put together an array of fruit which clearly impressed the judges – although controversy was to follow.

The following January the Association was notified that it was ineligible to enter the competition again in 1947 – unfortunately the minutes cite no reason. Mr T.J. Russell, of nursery fame, went to see the RHS secretary but to no avail.

The decision was obviously not as acrimonious as might seem because in the autumn the Association submitted an "honorary" exhibition of fruit to the RHS show, and was rewarded with the Hogg Silver Medal.

The year 1947 saw several efforts to change things. Ascot Horticultural Society (operating then from their wartime activity as North Ascot and District Produce Association) approached us about "co-operation".

After meetings between the two organisations, and lengthy discussions at our committee meetings, it was decided that all we could do was to encourage our members to submit entries to the Ascot shows.

There was also a plan to hold our own spring show in Sunningdale the following year, but this was later dropped due to transport problems largely caused by the post-war fuel crisis.

One small change was to ban smoking at meetings – but only during the slide shows so the screen could be seen more distinctly! The big reform in 1947 concerned prizes. Since 1936 members had sometimes brought produce to meetings, and in 1940 points were awarded for pot plants, flowers, fruit and vegetables, with the winners getting certificates.

When the Association started up after the war, Sir Stephenson Kent, a retired colliery owner of Hills End, Sunningdale, donated a trophy known as the Sunningdale Cup for the winner of the most points over the year. Miniatures were produced so the winner each year had a memento.

When two other trophies were also donated (by T.J. Poupart and W.H Evans) new competition rules were drawn up with three sections: A (Evans Cup) for cut foliage, flowers or berries; B (RHS Affiliated Societies' Silver Medal) for pot or pot grown plants; and C (Poupart Cup) for fruit and veg.

These two cups, plus the annual Sunningdale Cup, were to be won outright by the first members to win them two or three times. There is more on these, and subsequent trophies, in the section on trophies.

The booming membership is clearly shown by the attendance at the two outings in 1948. Sir Stephenson's garden was visited by 70 members, and more than 80 turned up to go round Mrs S. Raphael's gardens at Queen's Hill, Ascot.

Incidentally, at the end of the latter visit Mr Albert Dennett (a founder member and former secretary and president who had been made a life member in February) drew attention to the fact that many members had been refused a further issue of post-war supplementary cheese coupons. This led to a letter to the MP for Chertsey, Captain Marsden, who subsequently said there had been various questions in the House on this, and the Food Minister had agreed to put the matter right.

This growing membership meant the WI Hut was bursting at the seams during meetings and in 1949 it was decided to move to the Parish Hall in Church Road, starting with the AGM in January 1950. It was also decided then to have an open meeting for all garden lovers.

This led in turn to proposals to change the name either to the Sunningdale Gardeners' Association or the Sunningdale Gardeners' Mutual Improvement Society. The membership was divided, and after two extraordinary general meetings finally voted on 1 November 1951 by 22-16 to drop the word professional and take the name Sunningdale and District Gardeners' Association. Fifteen other amendments to the rules were also passed, including dropping the hon member section so non-professionals could be full members.

In post-war Britain big estates were being broken up, and there was less work for professional gardeners. Homeowners did not enjoy today's interest in gardening, although in those days of austerity vegetables were keenly grown in gardens and on allotments. The result was a drop in interest and membership, and meetings returned to the WI Hut in 1953.

Various efforts were made to boost membership, including items in gardening magazines, the local press and letters to all homes in the area. Things ticked over, and despite an oak tree falling on the WI Hut in 1956—which meant meetings being held in the old British Legion Hut for a year—the Association began to prosper and won the cup and first prize for the best display of fruit at the Reading Show that year.

The final change to today's SADGA came at the end of 1958 when there was a proposal to call it Sunningdale and District Horticultural Association. The committee countered with a suggestion of changing Gardeners' to Gardening, and this was carried unanimously at the AGM in January 1959 along with an amendment to the constitution opening membership to "anyone interested in horticulture."

The other changes that year included coopting a lady onto the committee, having a competition for ladies only, and starting a monthly newsletter.

The next decade saw membership top the 100 mark – reaching 120 in 1965. The annual quiz against Ascot Horticultural Society began in 1962 (they were then known as Ascot Produce Association, a throw-back to post-war years when they had joined a national produce network). One of the monthly meetings became a ladies' night. And the first social event, which grew into the annual Christmas dinner, was held at the Frimley Hall Hotel.

Membership remained high throughout the 1970s. A series of lectures by Roy Lancaster of the RHS proved so popular attracting audiences of up to 150 that they had to be held in the Village Hall. The Christmas event was by now well and truly established, although the venue moved around including the Cricketers at Bagshot, Dormy House near Sunningdale Golf Club, the In-Between Restaurant at Sunningdale (now The Tiger's Pad) and the WI Hut with outside caterers.

Then in 1981 came what, to many, was the highlight in the history of SADGA: the visit of the BBC Gardeners' Question Time to Sunningdale, hosted by the Association and recorded in the Village Hall in Church Road.

The whole thing came as a bolt out of the blue, as it was 15 years since the Association had originally inquired about GQT coming to Sunningdale and got a rather unpromising reply from the BBC. But late in 1980 came a letter saying they planned to record the programme in

the village on 17 June 1981 and broadcast it a month later.

The membership rallied round. Two hundred tickets were printed (they had to be free, but a collection was taken), the hall was beautifully decorated with flowers, and a pre-recording meal laid on at the WI Hut for the BBC team and the committee.

It was a great success with questionmaster Ken Ford, and a panel consisting of Peter Seabrook, Bill Sowerbutts and Professor Alan Gemmell. Mr Ford began by querying whether Sunningdale was in Surrey or Berkshire (the Radio Times had wrongly listed the Village Hall venue as Surrey, although the Chobham Road/A30 part of Sunningdale was in Surrey in those days), and described the local soil as acidic Bagshot sand, which drained well and was good for conifers and azaleas.

And so to the questions: Miss Frances Fluit wanted to know why primulas give some people a rash; SADGA chairman Joan Ford sought advice about shading her new lean-to greenhouse; John Cullington asked whether his climbing rose Marigold should be cut back severely to encourage new growth; Raymond Christie asked about the make-up and use of hoof and bone; Robin Lack queried whether modern garden centres carried a wide enough range of plants for discerning gardeners; Gerald Pinkney wanted pruning advice on azaleas and rhododendrons; and David Doderell asked how he could stop evergreen trees growing too big.



The recording was edited before it went on air on Sunday July 12, and repeated the following Wednesday. The Windsor and Eton Express, which carried a lengthy report and photo of the panellists, reported that two other questions from the audience had been cut out. One was from Charles Kaynes, a former president and chairman of SADGA and father of today's chairman David, who wanted to know about asparagus; and Mrs Edna Salt who asked about how her son could rid his greenhouse of whitefly.

2.0 News
2.2 Gardeners' Question Time
visits Surrey
where members of the
Sunningdale and District
Gardening Association put
their questions to
Peter Seabrook
Bill Sowerbutts and
Professor Alan Gemmell
Questionmaster **Ken Ford**
BBC Manchester
(Repeated: Wed 10.2 am)

Extract from the Radio Times

In the AGM report later that year Gardeners' Question Time was described as "unique in the history of the Gardening Association."

This was followed in early 1982 by a visit from the young Alan Titchmarsh, who gave a talk on alpiners. Alan was about to get his first break on national TV with a weekly spot on the new BBC Breakfast Time programme. A few years earlier he and his wife had lived in Sunningdale, and Alan had cultivated an allotment at the Church Road site.

In 1985 he returned to Sunningdale again to help publicise the battle to save the allotment site from developers who wanted to build 29 houses there. Many members of SADGA were allotment holders, and the Association threw its weight behind the opposition to the plan. The development was eventually rejected, but a later proposal to build three large houses on the best acre of the allotments went ahead – with the rest of the site being given to the Parish Council to maintain as allotments.

Meanwhile attendances at meetings were booming – one had to be held at the Village Hall, and a proposal to move there permanently



Alan Titchmarsh with the Save the Allotments committee in 1985

from the now-crowded WI Hut was only narrowly turned down. The introduction of a car boot style plant sale in 1983 proved both popular and produced some much-needed extra revenue.

The Christmas dinners were also proving popular. After one at the Berystede Hotel, Royal Ascot Golf Club hosted the event for several years in their former clubhouse. The numbers were so large, and the kitchen so small, that for four years it had to be held on two successive nights.

After a change of caterers at the golf club, the dinner was held at a Bagshot hotel, then for several years at Royal Holloway College, Egham. In 2000 a highly successful millennium banquet was held in the magnificent surroundings of the picture gallery at the college, with nearly 100 members and guests in attendance.

But the Crossland Suite we were allocated at the college the following two years proved rather less successful, and in 2002 we were given a refund after unacceptable noise from another nearby function – and so in 2003 we switched to Chobham Golf Club.

One feature of the Christmas dinners had been musical entertainment, ranging from a Gilbert and Sullivan choir to handbell ringers to a harpist. They have now given way to a highly entertaining quiz, organised by Chris Parnell, which has rounded off many excellent evenings in Chobham.



Christmas Dinner 2013

The 1990s saw several other changes, including regular table plant sales and raffles which raised much-needed funds for the association. The competitions for flowers, plants, fruit and vegetables became even better supported under the eagle-eyed competition secretary and judge Elizabeth Morgan. And in 1994 it was decided to scrap the two month mid-summer break in meetings.

The monthly meetings finally did move to their present location, the Village Hall, when an arsonist destroyed the WI Hut in the summer of 1997.

The new millennium saw other innovations: a seed growing competition, a photographic contest, a stall at the annual Sunningdale and District carnival, and the end of anachronistic ladies-only classes in the produce competitions. Annual outings continued to be popular, none more so than a trip to Prince Charles's Highgrove House.

The first decade of the 2000s brought the introduction of the SADGA acronym (initially to make the writing of cheques simpler) and a website. But with these symptoms of the modern age of technology came the dreaded Health and Safety regulations – so the meetings had to include risk assessments, fire exit signs, evacuation procedures and an attendance book so we'd know everyone was accounted for in event of an emergency.

Recent years have seen some sad times as well, with the deaths of a number of long-standing members and in particular ex-presidents and chairmen including Charles Kaynes, Bill Sarney, Gerald Pinkney and John Bond.

Today in 2014 Sunningdale and District Gardening Association is as blooming as its members' flowers. Around 50 members pay an annual sub of £10, monthly meetings are held on the first Thursday of the month from February to November with a wide variety of top quality speakers on different aspects of horticulture.

Most of us are gardeners, even if it's just a few pots on a balcony. So, if you've never been before why not pop along to one of the meetings at the Village Hall in Church Road? If you are a member, then thanks for your support in keeping our 125 year tradition going.



Sunningdale Village Hall in bloom