

Chair Report - David Bingley

Happy Christmas to everyone and good wishes for 2026. Thank you for supporting the Society throughout the year. My thanks also go to the committee for organising such a wide range of activities and talks through 2025. I am pleased to say the 2026 program is already looking very good. I was heartened to be told how much our members enjoy the friendship and how welcoming they find our Society. That is a credit to all our members, thank you. I look forward to meeting with you at the AGM in January.

The Winter Solstice has passed and we can look forward to another gardening year. Now is the ideal time to be planting bare root plants, fruit trees, soft fruit as well as shrubs and roses. I have a Victoria plum tree at the allotment that is squashed between a Red Gage and a Blue Plum. I am going to try and move it in the next few days to give it more room and light. Our Bramley apple tree in the garden needs a good prune as well.

I have started to dig up my Dahlias as the soil is cold and very wet and I think the tubers will rot or be damaged by slugs. I will try to dry and store them wrapped in newspaper.

Garden equipment care – keep shears and secateurs clean, sharp and oiled. The Abingdon Carbon Cutters offer a free service (or for a small donation) once a month in the Precinct to repair, clean and sharpen such items.

Keep winter brassicas protected against pigeon damage, they can soon strip a patch of purple sprouting leaves and spoil the crop.

Look after the wildlife – as they will look after you through the summer. The ladybirds need somewhere safe to hibernate and they will control the black fly. We are having a flock of Tits visit the garden most weeks now, beautiful and noisy Long Tails, Great and Blue. I will put some fat balls in a feeder this week.

Dobies Seeds – please use the discount code to order your seeds from Dobies – this will be our last year if we don't reach their minimum spend. The code is SUGD300P.

We were pleased to receive a Christmas card from Edna Hole addressed to us all & wishing us a Happy Christmas & New Year. She wrote, " I shall miss the Horticultural Club and all my friends, very much. I did so enjoy your company. I'm fairly well now and I will go to a nursing home."

Shows in 2026 - Barbara Bingley, Show Secretary

The scheduling committee met in November to decide on the show classes for 2026. Most class entries remained unchanged. A new class in the Spring show is a bowl of floating spring flowers.

A change not related to classes is that prize-giving and the raffle will be held at 3.30pm rather than 4pm for both shows.

The Summer garden class was already reduced to hanging baskets/containers, but this class has now been removed because of a lack of interest/entries over the last several years. However, there will be a gallery set up on the website where you may send photographs of your colourful gardens and baskets and containers. Full details will follow in due course.

It has been difficult to award the beautiful Muriel Welch Challenge Cup to a single class on an ongoing basis. The committee agreed that it should be awarded to a member who successfully exhibits in several different sections, thus demonstrating a wide range of skills & interests. The 6 sections are Flowers & Pot Plants, Fruit & Vegetables, Homecraft - Handicrafts, Homecraft - Preserves, Baking & Beverages, Floral Arrangements and Photography.

The cup will be awarded for the most points in 4 or more different sections from the Spring and Autumn Shows. Points will be required in at least 2 sections. The winner will not be eligible to win in the subsequent 2 years.

The finalised schedules will be available on the website soon. Have a look through to see the classes you can enter in 2026.

Trips 2025 and 2026 - Robin Carter

As previously reported we have had two successful outings this year.

Next year I am hoping to arrange a trip to Spetchley Park and Gardens during May. The second trip will be to Hidcote Manor Gardens in late August or the beginning of September.

I have not contacted anyone yet, as prices will change at the start of the new year. I also need to get the coach companies dates when they are free. This I will do during the first half of January and hope to get some information for our AGM.

Holidays Report - Suzanne Hamblin

AHS Holiday to North Devon 2025

On Sunday 21st September at 8.45 am we began the pick ups with our "driver" Dave from Pulham Coaches, and with all 30 holidaymakers safely onboard we then travelled to the University of Bristol Botanic Garden, the first visit of our holiday. The cafe at the Botanic Garden had a good choice of food and drinks available. We spent a lovely couple of hours exploring the different gardens, large pool and glass houses with some beautiful exotic plants & *Victoria amazonica*, the beautiful giant Amazonian waterlily and *Victoria cruziana* with large pie-dish leaves.

On arrival at the Dilkhusha Grand Hotel, Ilfracombe we were welcomed by Lyn the Manager, our cases collected and delivered to our rooms. With everyone freshened up we all met for our 3 course dinner at 7 pm which was really lovely and all left the tables feeling full. Some guests managed a walk to the harbour to get their bearings ready for our stay there.

Monday, 22nd September 8.45 am departure for RHS Rosemoor which was a warm and sunny day we were met by an RHS staff member who briefed us as to what we could see at Rosemoor and we were handed maps. Some of our party took the RHS Rosemoor guided tour with Sue at 11 am. We all enjoyed the beautiful gardens, lakes, woodland, restaurant, garden centre and shop. We departed at 3 pm to make our way back to the Hotel. Again some guests had a stroll around Ilfracombe before dinner.

Tuesday, 23rd September 9.45 am departure for Hartland Abbey and Gardens where we had a guided tour of the Abbey and a very enjoyable day taking in the different areas - shrubbery, bog garden, fernery, mulberry, vegetable, rose and walled garden. Hartland Abbey being used as the school in Enid Blyton's film "Mallory Towers". Light lunches, homemade cream teas and cakes were enjoyed from the Old Kitchen Team Room. Some of our party undertook the one mile walk

down Blackpool Mill Drive to the South West Coastal Path and some ventured down to the beach. We left at 3 pm to return to the Hotel.

Wednesday 24th September 9.45 am departure for Marwood Hill Gardens, nestled in the heart of North Devon, home to four National Heritage Plant Collections - this private valley garden spans 20 acres and showcases three stunning lakes. The Gardens were created by and home to the late Dr Jimmy Smart MBE, VMH, a much celebrated 20th century plantsman. Lovely homemade lunches and cakes were served in the Garden Tea Room. Plants were on sale in the Walled Garden and quite a few were purchased by our party. We then departed at 3 pm to make our way back to the Hotel.

Thursday 25th September 10 am departure for Arlington Court where we were greeted by National Trust staff with our maps. It was another lovely sunny day, visiting this jewel on the edge of Exmoor, a complete family estate held by the Chichester family for over 500 years and holds the National Trust Carriage Museum which offers an early insight into early travel. Graham who was driving the buggy between the house and museum, stopped for some of our party and let them hug the oldest living beech tree. Some of us were told it was 300 and some 500 years old! Again lovely lunches and cakes were available from the Old Kitchen Tea Room. We left at 3 pm to return to the Hotel.

Tips from our party were handed to Dave, our coach driver, and Lyn at Reception for the Hotel staff and they were all very well received. After dinner a birthday cake with candles arrived for one of our party who was to celebrate their 80th Birthday.

Friday 26th September our suitcases were all left outside our rooms for collection and then loaded onto the coach. 9.45 am departure from the Hotel to travel to Knightshayes, an extraordinary 19th century gothic revival house and a glorious 20th century garden - created by the Heathcoat Amory's, a family at the heart of the local community, who made their money in the lace industry. A few more plants were purchased from the Plant Centre to make their journey home to Abingdon.

At 2 pm we then boarded the coach for our return journey back to Abingdon, with Dave keeping a careful eye on the traffic taking the best route to avoid the traffic on a busy Friday afternoon.

Overall, the holiday was a great success with sunshine every day. I was very pleased that everyone looked out for each other, circulating & making new acquaintances, we were very fortunate with the hotel and staff, the choice and food at meal times and with Dave our "driver" who was very calm, patient and a great driver which was a bonus when travelling through the narrow streets, bends and hedgerows.

Thank you to everyone who came along and made it a lovely holiday and for the cards and messages received on my return, which are very much appreciated and thanks should also go to Carly Wheeler-Ellis at Just Go Group Holidays who helped with our arrangements. Time to start planning the next holiday for 2026!

2026 Holiday to Kent

We have had a very good response to the Kent holiday scheduled for 30th July to 4th August visiting Kent's houses, castles and gardens, staying at the Bridgewood Manor Hotel and Spa. The cost per person is £833 for non members of the National Trust and £773 for those who are National Trust members, the price does include £1 per person to cover the bank charges for holiday deposits and final balances. 34 people have signed up for the holiday and deposits of £100 per person have been banked together with insurance holiday premiums that 10 people have taken out. The Deposit Invoice has been received and Karen Fisher, our Treasurer has kindly settled.

If anyone else is interested in joining the holiday we do have one single room and two twin rooms still available. Please contact Suzanne Hamblin mobile number: 07490 581673
email: suzanneis@hotmail.co.uk

Requests

If any members have any useful garden tips, tasty menus they wish to share or any other items of interest they would like to have considered for the next newsletter then please forward these to Suzanne Hamblin, suzanneis@hotmail.co.uk for future newsletters.

Donations for the raffle would be greatly appreciated. Barry and Diana Wiggins, who organise the raffles, would like to thank all those who have already donated this year.

Anyone who has unwanted packets of seeds please bring them along to a talk to pass on to members who would like them.

Items of interest

Holly: Evergreen Symbol of Winter's Hope

When the days grow short and frost clings to the hedgerows, one plant stands defiantly green: **holly**. With its glossy leaves and bright red berries, holly has been a beacon of resilience for centuries, weaving its way through myth, religion, and tradition.

 **Ancient Roots** Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) is native to Europe, thriving in woodlands and gardens alike. Archaeological evidence shows it has flourished since prehistoric times, and the Romans celebrated it during **Saturnalia**, their midwinter festival. Holly wreaths were exchanged as tokens of goodwill, symbolizing renewal at the year's turning. Early Christians adopted holly into their own seasonal rituals. Its **spiny leaves** came to represent Christ's crown of thorns, while the **scarlet berries** symbolized drops of blood - a reminder of sacrifice and redemption.

 **Festive Traditions** By the Middle Ages, holly was firmly established as a **Christmas decoration**. Hung above doorways, it was believed to ward off evil spirits and invite good fortune. Today, holly remains a staple of holiday décor, adorning wreaths, garlands, and greeting cards with timeless elegance.

 **A Gift to Nature** Beyond its symbolism, holly plays a vital role in the natural world. Its dense foliage offers shelter to small mammals and nesting birds, while its berries — though mildly toxic to humans — provide a crucial winter food source for thrushes, blackbirds and other wildlife.



🌰 **Practical Uses** Holly wood, pale and fine-grained, has long been prized by craftsmen. It was used for **walking sticks, tool handles, and decorative inlays**, valued for its strength and smooth finish. Even today, it finds a place in traditional woodworking.

✨ **Enduring Symbolism** From pagan rituals to Christian iconography, holly has always carried a message of **hope in the darkest season**. Its evergreen leaves remind us that life endures, even when the world seems bare. Whether brightening a mantelpiece or feeding a hungry robin, holly continues to embody resilience, renewal, and joy.

📖 **Holly is more than decoration — it's a living link between past and present, nature and tradition, reminding us that even in winter, life shines bright.**

Mistletoe's journey from mystical plant to holiday kissing tradition is rooted in ancient myth, fertility rituals



🌿 **The Ancient Roots of Mistletoe** is no ordinary plant—it's a **parasitic evergreen** that grows high in the branches of trees, feeding off their nutrients. Despite its clingy nature, ancient cultures revered it as a plant of **mystical power and fertility**.

- **Celtic Druids** considered mistletoe sacred, using it in rituals and fertility elixirs.
- In **Norse mythology**, mistletoe played a tragic role in the death of Balder, the god of light, when Loki fashioned a deadly arrow from its wood. Balder's mother, Frigga, the goddess of love, later decreed mistletoe should bring peace and love instead of harm.
- Romans and Greeks used mistletoe medicinally, despite its poisonous berries, believing it could cure ailments like cramps and epilepsy.

💋 **The Birth of the Kissing Tradition** The custom of kissing under mistletoe **emerged in England during the 18th century**.

- The **earliest recorded mention** dates to 1784 in a song from a musical comedy, where characters kiss beneath the mistletoe.
- By the Georgian period, mistletoe was hung in homes as part of the "**Kissing Bough**", a festive decoration of greenery and ribbons.
- A quirky rule developed: **each berry represented one kiss**. Once all berries were plucked, the kissing privilege ended.

- Social customs of the time dictated that a woman could not refuse a kiss under mistletoe, or risk bad luck in love.

 **Victorian Popularization** The tradition gained momentum in the **19th century**, appearing in illustrations of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843), which helped spread the custom across Britain and America. Washington Irving also described mistletoe rituals in his writings, cementing its place in holiday traditions.

 **Modern Symbolism** Today, mistletoe is less about strict rules and more about holiday fun and romance.

- Artificial mistletoe often replaces the real plant, with berries mistakenly depicted as red instead of their true white.
- The tradition has softened: kisses under mistletoe are now playful gestures rather than binding social obligations.
- It remains a **symbol of love, peace, and goodwill**, echoing Frigga's decree that mistletoe should unite rather than divide.

 **Conclusion** From **sacred fertility rites** to **Georgian flirtations** and **Victorian storytelling**, mistletoe has evolved into one of Christmas's most charming traditions. Its history reminds us that even a parasitic plant can become a symbol of joy, romance, and festive connection.

Recommended - Manor House Cake recipe from the Autumn Show - beautifully moist fruit cake - recipe below

Ingredients: 1 large carrot, 225g self raising flour, half a teaspoon mixed spice, 150g butter, 175g mixed dried fruit, 100g soft light brown sugar, 2 eggs - beaten, 3 tablespoons milk, 1 tablespoon Demerara sugar (for the topping)

Method:

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C/160° Fan/Gas 4. Grease a deep, 18 cm round tin and line the base with nonstick baking paper.
2. Peel the carrot and grate it finely. Sift the flour and spice into a mixing bowl, cut the butter into small cubes and add the butter to the flour
3. Rub the butter into the flour with your fingertips until the mixture resembles fine breadcrumbs. Stir in the sugar, dried fruit and grated carrot. Make a hollow in the centre and add the beaten egg and milk. Beat with a wooden spoon until it forms a soft dropping consistency.
4. Spoon into the tin and smooth level. Make a dip in the centre and bake for 45 to 55 minutes, or until a warmed skewer inserted into the centre comes out cleanly.

5. Leave in the tin for five minutes, then turn out to cool on a wire rack. Peel away the lining paper, then sprinkle with the Demerara sugar while the cake is warm.

Help Wanted

If you are interested in joining the committee please come forward, it does not take up much time and would help support the society.

Blue Sky Eco Cafe

Susan Hammersley, an AHS committee member, is one of the volunteers who open the Blue Sky Eco Cafe on the first Tuesday of every month (except January and August) from 12 noon – 2 pm at Long Furlong Community Centre OX14 1XP. Menus and more details are available at <https://blueskyecocafe.org.uk>

Sponsor

Charlton Park Garden Centre - Wantage, sponsors our Society by supplying us with plants for raffles. Their Garden Centre has an extensive range of quality plants and garden requisites. They also bring a wide range of seasonal plants and bulbs to the Abingdon Market on a Monday. We hope you will continue to support them.