

# WHARFEDALE GARDENERS' GROUP HISTORY

## *IN THE BEGINNING*

Initially inspired by the Ministry of Agriculture's "Dig for Victory" campaign in the Second World War, Holmes Whiteley from Pool-in-Wharfedale and his fellow gardeners were so enthusiastic that after the war ended they were determined to continue with their efforts. In March 1947 they set up the Wharfedale Gardeners' Discussion Group (the Group) to promote and extend an interest in gardening.

In the first couple of months there were two pruning demonstrations, this was very much an activity of the times when professional gardeners were keen to keep tight control of shrubs and roses. There followed the first of many plant sales, with both popular and rare specimens changing hands at bargain prices and raising money for the Group.



The Group's original emblem

For many years the committee and general membership was predominantly male. In fact, in 1967 a special ladies' evening was held on the subject of "The Preparation and Cooking of Vegetables". Things are very different today!

In 1950 the Group was one of the first to become affiliated to the Northern Horticultural Society, which was responsible for Harlow Carr Gardens for many years.

The Group became the "Wharfedale Gardeners" in 2002 and then the "Wharfedale Gardeners' Group" in 2014.

## *LECTURES*

The first lecture was on "The Preparation of Spring Bulbs", a subject which is still popular today.

Lectures since then have featured a mixture of head gardeners from some of the country's most famous gardens, garden designers, nurserymen and women and plantsmen and women, including Geoffrey Smith, Roy Lancaster, Chris Beardshaw, Bob Flowerdew, Fergus Garrett, Matthew Wilson and Christine Walkden.

The Group moved premises when the Otley Civic Centre closed in 2009. It now meets in the beautiful Methodist Church in the centre of Otley.

## *TRIPS*

Every year the Group offers a number of trips to the best local and regional gardens and nurseries. The original trip was to the Riverside Nurseries at Linton by private bus. On the second trip, to John Mitchell's nursery at Askwith, twenty members walked there and back from Otley.

In 1988 the first weekend trip, to Kew Gardens and RHS Wisley, was organised as part of the 40th anniversary celebrations by Alan Wilson, the then Secretary, who has made a huge contribution to the Group for many years and is now an Honorary Life Member.

Since then there have been trips to Norfolk, the Cotswolds, Cornwall, the Netherlands, France and Ireland. In 2009 the Group visited The Royal Gardens at Highgrove.

## ***GARDENERS' QUESTION TIME***

In March 1949 the Group were invited by the BBC on to the "How does your garden grow?" series on "Gardeners' Question Time".

We have also held several "Gardeners' Question Time" sessions of our own.

## ***60th ANNIVERSARY***

Our 60th anniversary in 2007 featured a visit to Alnwick Castle, and we welcomed the Duchess of Northumberland as our celebration speaker. There was a five day visit to the gardens of Kent, including Great Dixter, a special trip to Maspin House in vintage coaches and period costumes, and an Open Day of members' own gardens.

## ***70th ANNIVERSARY***

2017 will be the 70th anniversary of the Group and special events are being planned to celebrate this. These will be publicised in our syllabus programme and on our website when confirmed.

