

Wishing you a Happy Horticultural New Year!

IN THIS NEWSLETTER:

- News from the Annual General Meeting in December
- See an amazing garden in the Scilly Isles from the comfort of Saffron Walden
- A mysterious piece of Horticultural Society history...
- Here's the Schedule - what can you bring to the Spring Show on 29th March?
- Other dates for your diaries - including snowdrops and cakes on your doorstep
- Society shows, talks and other events in 2026
- When the weather's too wet for gardening - make marmalade!
- Renewing your membership in February

Dear Member,

I hope you had some good times over the holiday period and managed to avoid all the colds and flu that were doing the rounds? Our own good news is that the broad beans, onions and garlic are all doing well at the allotment - though there are signs the muntjac are feeling tempted. We plan to get up there at the weekend (weather permitting) and put in a bit more protection.

Annual General Meeting in December

Though the Minutes of the 2025 AGM won't be formally approved until the 2026 AGM (which is quite a while away) I thought you would like to know about some of the things that might need some action:

- One of the things we do as a Society is organise Horticultural Shows, and these were very successful in 2025 with exhibitor numbers up, visitor numbers up, and generally a good time being had by all. Last year for the first time since lockdown we also had four Horticultural Society talks, which had been very popular pre-Covid. Sometimes a lot of people came - but sometimes hardly any... perhaps because of bad weather?! We have four more talks booked for 2026, and it would be really good to have bigger audiences. As we start thinking about talks for 2027, we'd appreciate your suggestions - perhaps there's a topic of particular interest, or maybe a change of day, or time, or format? Please let us know - you can email me at hilary@mikehibbs.net and I'll share your suggestions with the Committee.
- We were very pleased to welcome Jane Lister to the Committee, and look forward to working with her this year. However, just in case there's someone out there who couldn't get to the AGM but was thinking of getting more involved, we still need someone to help organise events for 2027. Please get in touch!

Tropical Tresco in the Scilly Isles

The Abbey Gardens

Monday 16th March, 7:00 pm at the Saffron Community Link



Photo by Cai Curtis, 2021



Augustus Smith



Photo courtesy of Robin Carsberg



Captain Arthur Dorrien-Smith

Tresco in the Scilly Isles is famous for the sub-tropical Abbey Gardens, established in the 19th century around the ruins of a Benedictine Abbey by the then-owner of the islands, Augustus Smith. The collections were greatly expanded in the early 20th century by Arthur Dorrien-Smith who was a member of the 1907 sub-Antarctic Islands Scientific Expedition. He travelled widely in New Zealand, Australia and South Africa and had a total collection of plants and seeds of about 2280 specimens. He was awarded the Victoria Medal of Honour by the Royal Horticultural Society in 1944.

The Abbey Gardens are now a sanctuary to over 2,000 exotic species from over 80 countries, with many southern hemisphere and subtropical plants from New Zealand to Brazil, and Myanmar to South Africa.

This unexpectedly lush garden dazzles with its towering palms, lipstick red flame trees, and an ever-changing display of rare and radiant plants, including King Protea and Lobster Claw, the great blue spires of Echium, brilliant Furcraea, Strelitzia, and shocking-pink drifts of Pelargonium. Red squirrels and golden pheasants roam freely.

Robin Carsberg is a well-known speaker and RHS judge, and his talk will be fully illustrated.

History Mystery?



We had an intriguing phone call from the Tourist Information Centre in Saffron Walden earlier this month. They had been given two plates that seemed to belong to the Horticultural Society, and please could we go and collect them! Apparently two gentlemen had brought them in, after finding them in their deceased father's house.

It turns out that they are part of a set of serving dishes, which must have been made nearly 200 years ago in the early Victorian heyday of the Saffron Walden Horticultural Society - and they are part of a larger set, part of which has been kept with the various trophies which are awarded at the Horticultural Society Shows.

Unfortunately the gentleman didn't give their names, so we can't thank them in person - but we are very grateful!

We've started looking into the history of this intriguing crockery, and if you have any information please get in touch! We think that they were made between 1833-47, and may have been used at the rather grand Annual Dinners held in the early days of the Horticultural Society.

SPRING DAFFODIL AND FLORAL SHOW SUNDAY 29th MARCH 2026

I'll say it again - this is my personal favourite, even though none of my daffodils is ever going to win a prize! But it doesn't have to be daffodils - this year I've planted a random selection of bulbs in a container, and if anything comes up I'll bring it along - who knows?

Do have a look - it's great fun to be involved, and you never can tell! Just glancing down the list I think I'll be able to find enough daffs in the front garden for 21 and 22. Then there's 29, 34, 36, 37 (with luck!), 39, 40, 42 and 44 maybe...

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Daffodil Classes

1. 6 varieties of daffodil from not less than 3 divisions
One stem of each in individual vases

Division 1 - trumpet

2. 1 stem - yellow petals with yellow trumpet
3. 1 stem - white petals with white trumpet
4. 1 stem - any other colour combination
5. Any 3 stems in Division 1

Division 2 - large cup

6. 1 stem - yellow petals with large cup
7. 1 stem - white petals with large coloured cup
8. 1 stem - white petals with large white cup
9. Any 3 stems in Division 2

Division 3 – small cup

10. 1 stem – yellow petals with small cup
11. 1 stem – white petals with small cup
12. Any 3 stems in Division 3

Division 4 - double

13. 1 stem – Division 4
14. Any 3 stems in Division 4

Division 5 - triandrus

15. 1 stem – Division 5
16. Any 3 stems in Division 5

Division 6 - cyclamineus

17. 1 stem – Division 6
18. Any 3 stems in Division 6
19. 1 stem from any other Division not listed above
20. 3 stems from any other Division or Divisions not listed above
21. 1 stem, any Division for novices (open to anyone who has not previously won a first prize exhibiting daffodils)
22. 3 stems, any Division or Divisions for novices (open to anyone who has not previously won a first prize exhibiting daffodils)
23. Container of 9 to 12 cut daffodil stems arranged for effect

Other Flower Classes

24. Heathers – a container of 3 cut sprays
25. Flowering Tree or Shrub – 1 container, 1 kind, 3 sprays
26. Flowering Trees or Shrubs – 1 container, more than 1 kind, 3 sprays
27. Tulips – 1 vase of 3 stems
28. Dwarf Tulips – 1 vase of 3 stems
29. Bulbs – 1 container any bulb or bulbs growing in a container
30. Primulas (Auriculas /Primroses) 1 container of 5 stems
31. Pansies or Violas – 6 blooms Society boxes are available if required
32. A container of cut Spring Flowers, excluding flowering trees & shrubs, arranged for effect.
33. One Alpine in pot or pan as grown
34. One Cactus or Succulent in a container as grown (see regulation 10)
35. One Pot Plant in flower (excluding Orchids) (see regulation 10)
36. One Pot Plant for foliage (see regulation 10)
37. One Orchid Plant in bloom (must have been in exhibitor's possession for 6 months (see regulation 10)
38. A container of Spring Flowers as grown

Domestic Classes (see regulation 11)

39. Petite Floral Arrangement not exceeding 17cm width and depth, 25cm height
40. Chocolate Sponge Sandwich (see recipe)
41. 4 Cheese Twists
42. 4 Fruit Scones
43. Lemon Curd – 1 jar
must have wax discs and cellophane tops, with no commercial markings on jars
44. Marmalade – 1 jar
must have wax discs and cellophane tops, with no commercial markings on jars
45. Photograph 'Bulbs'

Junior Classes (see regulation 11)**Age up to 6 years (age must be given on entry form)**

46. An article made from a 2 litre or 4-pint plastic milk container. Accessories allowed
47. An Easter Greeting card (max size A4)
48. An arrangement of daffodils in a jam jar
49. An insect or spider made from vegetables and/or fruit

Age 7 to 14 years (age must be given on entry form)

- 50. An article made from a 2 litre or 4-pint plastic milk container. Accessories allowed
- 51. An Easter Greeting card (max size A4)
- 52. An arrangement of daffodils in a jam jar
- 53. An insect or spider made from vegetables and/or fruit

You'll find the full schedule for the Spring Show along with all the other information (Regulations etc and the recipe for the Chocolate Sponge Sandwich) on the Society's website at swhortsoc.org.uk/schedule_spring.html

Grove Lodge Garden Openings for Charity

Sunday 22nd February & Sunday March 8th, 14:00 to 17:00



Our member Chris Shennan is opening his garden at Grove Lodge again in 2026 under the National Garden Scheme, to raise money for charity (mainly nursing charities such as Macmillan, Marie Curie, Parkinson's UK, Hospice UK, Maggie's and others). In 2025, the garden openings raised over £3000, all thanks to the generosity of visitors.

This year, the early Victorian walled garden will be open on February 22, March 8, and June 14 (all Sundays, 14:00-17:00, with tea/coffee and cake available). Admission is £6.

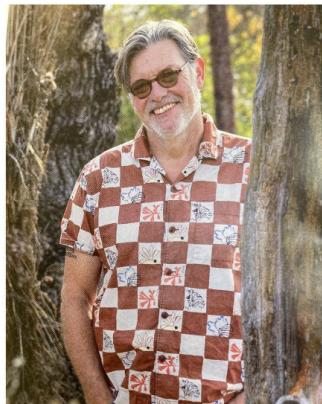
The garden is also open throughout the year to group visits by prior arrangement.

The full address is Grove Lodge 3 Chaters Hill, Saffron Walden CB10 2AE All are welcome! Do please spread the word to friends and family.

We've been asked to let you know about the next meeting of the Great Chesterford & District Gardening Society on Wednesday 4th February.
Visitors always welcome - £5

GREAT CHESTERFORD & DISTRICT GARDENING SOCIETY

(Affiliated to the Royal Horticultural Society)



ARE STRUCTURE, SOIL, TOPOGRAPHY & GARDENERS MORE IMPORTANT THAN PLANT DIVERSITY?

Wednesday 4th February 2026 at 8.00 p.m.

Speaker : John Little – The Brownfield Gardening Guru

As featured in the January 2026 issue of The Garden, John's pioneering interest is in green roofs and public space gardening, which led him to explore the ecological potential of brownfield sites. Today, he's a crusading campaigner for biodiverse gardens, and is one of the most influential figures in contemporary horticulture

MEETING VENUE - Ickleton Village Hall, Frogge Street, Ickleton

Competition Subject : Flowering Bulb

MORE DATES FOR YOUR DIARY IN 2026

Flowers From Garden to Table All Year Round

Monday 13th April 2026, 7:00 pm at the Saffron Community Link

A vase of flowers on the table is a lovely sight! Anna Taylor has over 20 years experience as a horticulturalist and plantswoman and writes, talks and teaches about growing flowers to cut. She has a micro flower farm and studio in Saffron Walden, and advocates for naturally and locally grown cut flowers to increase our connections to nature and reduce the huge impact of the cut flower industry. Her illustrated talk will be about the plants we can grow in our own garden borders to keep our flower arrangements bright - and local - throughout the year.

Summer Rose and Floral Show

Sunday 14th June at Seward's End Village Hall

Lots of flowers from our gardens, early veg from our allotments, as well as cakes, jam and crafts on show. Great fun!

Summer Garden Outing to Anglesey Abbey

Sunday 28th June

In July 2025 we enjoyed a special visit to the gardens at Audley End House, led by an expert guide. In 2026 our Chairman, David Livermore, will be taking us on a guided tour of the grounds at Anglesey Abbey near Cambridge, where he has been volunteering in the gardens. Though I've often visited Anglesey Abbey, I'm really looking forward to an insider's view...

Members' Garden Party

... probably in July or August, date and venue to be announced. Strawberries and scones are definitely on the menu.

Autumn Flower and Produce Show

Sunday 13th September at Seward's End Village Hall

Often the biggest show of the year because the flowers are still blooming and the veg are at their best!

September Talk - topic to be announced

Monday 14th September, 7:00 pm at the Saffron Community Link

Low Impact Gardens & Long-Term Gains in a Changing Climate

Monday 19th October, 7:00 pm at the Saffron Community Link

Jacq and Wills Landscapes is an award-winning family run business designing and maintaining gardens in and around Saffron Walden. They will be sharing their expertise in creating sustainable, manageable and enjoyable gardens suitable for local conditions.

Christmas Social and AGM

Monday 30th November, 6:45 pm at the Saffron Community Link

Mince pies and planning for 2027...

Entry to Saffron Walden Horticultural Society Shows is free.

Entry to talks organised by the Society is £2 for members, £5 for non-members.

Marmalade - now is the time!

You can do it - even if you've never tried before!



We love marmalade at breakfast time, and I used to make about 100 jars every January! Nowadays we're a bit more conscious of our waistlines so the pressure's off, but I still make enough for the year with a few to spare for friends and family. The method I use is surprisingly easy and I've included all the information you need even if you've never tried making your own jams or marmalades before. You boil the oranges whole which makes it much easier to slice them up, and there's no faffing about putting pips into muslin bags... It makes quite a hearty marmalade (pictured above about to be eaten). And remember, if you want to enter a jar in the Spring Show (44) you'll need to use a waxed disc and a cellophane top - I've got some to spare if you drop me an email. Seville oranges for marmalade are usually available until about the end of February.

Note: Take care with boiling marmalade and hot jars - they can splash! and burn!

You will need:

A big pan, with a lid - and I mean big enough to hold about 9 litres of boiling hot liquid!

A sieve and three bowls

A wooden spoon and a ladle

A roasting pan and an oven tray

12 or 13 jam jars, with lids (also wax discs, cellophane circles and rubber bands for the Show!)

1.5 kg Seville oranges

2.5 to 3 lts water

3 kg jam sugar

Juice of 2 lemons

• Stage 1:

- Remove the button from the stem end and clean the oranges by giving them a good scrub in warm water (no soap!) using a stiff nailbrush or something similar. Scrape off any persistently mucky bits and thinly slice off any damaged peel.
- Put them in a big pan with the water and boil them gently with the lid on for 2 to 3 hours, until the skins are nice and soft. If you press a knife against an orange the skin should give way easily and the pith should look orange rather than white - in other words, cooked.
- Leave everything in the pan to cool down, which could take a while. Don't throw any of it away - you will need all the liquid - I often leave it overnight.

Stage 2:

- Place two bowls side by side, near the cooled pan, with the sieve over one of them. Use your hand to fish the oranges from the pan one at a time. Break them open over the sieve and use a dessert spoon to scoop the insides, with the pips, into the sieve. Put the peel scraped clean of pulp and pips into the other bowl.
- Slice the peel to whatever thickness you prefer and put it in a third bowl ready to weigh.
- Now go back to the bowl with the sieve. There will be some liquid in the bowl - tip it back in the pan. Then use a wooden spoon to push the pulp through the sieve until only the pips are left behind. Now throw the pips away - they're the only bit of the orange that doesn't end up in the jars.
- Add the sieved pulp to the bowl of sliced peel, and weigh it. This is your "Fruit" amount, and it probably won't be the same as the 1.5 kg of oranges you started with. Don't worry!

Stage 3:

- Now it's time to make the marmalade, so start by putting about four small plates in your fridge (you'll need them later to test for a set).
- Check the liquid left in the big pan to make sure there are no pips, and measure the liquid.
- Turn the oven on – very low, so you can warm the sugar, and then the jam jars.
- Put the fruit in the now empty big pan, and for every 500g of "Fruit" add 750 to 900 ml of liquid, starting with the water that the oranges were boiled in. It probably won't be enough – top it up with plain water, or freshly squeezed orange juice if you've got some. Add the lemon juice. Put the pan on the hob and bring it to a gentle boil.
- Weigh out the jam sugar. For every 500 g of "Fruit" you'll need about 900 g of sugar. Beware of trying to reduce the amount of sugar much more than this, because that could make it difficult for the marmalade to set, and if you have to go on boiling it too long, it gets a bit heavy in texture and treacle-tasting. Put the sugar in a roasting pan or something similar, and pop it in the oven to warm up.
- When the mixture in the big pan starts to bubble gently, add the warmed sugar a few table spoons at a time and stir till it all dissolves and you don't feel any graininess when you stir the pan. Then turn up the heat till the marmalade reaches a rolling boil. Keep it boiling for about 20 minutes, stirring occasionally.
- While the marmalade is boiling, get your jam jars ready. I use old jam jars with metal lids, all well washed before you start. Put the metal lids in a bowl, scald with boiling water and leave to cool down. Put the clean jam jars on a baking tray to warm in the oven so they don't crack when you fill them with boiling marmalade.
- When the 20 minutes are up, take a cold plate out of the fridge, put a teaspoon of marmalade on it and put it back in the fridge for 5 minutes. Then take it out and give it a push with a (clean) finger. If the surface wrinkles, the marmalade is ready to set. Taste it - if it's too bitter, add a bit more jam sugar till it's the right sweetness for your personal taste. (If it doesn't wrinkle keep it boiling for another 10 minutes and try again, and again, until you get a wrinkle.)
- When you've reached setting point take the pan off the heat. Skim any scummy stuff off the surface. Take the warm jars out of the oven and fill them with marmalade. (You'll probably have a few jars left over.) For ordinary storage and eating at home, dry the lids and screw them on tight while the marmalade is still very hot, the faster the better. Let them cool, wipe the outsides clean, and label them. But if you want to try your luck at the Spring Show, take a wax disc, trim it to fit snugly on the surface of the marmalade in the jar and slip it in, being careful not to burn your fingers. Take a cellophane circle, splash a few drops of water on one side, stretch it over the top of the jar wet side up and secure it with a rubber band.

Enjoy delicious home-made marmalade – all year! And/or enter a jar in the Spring Show on 29th March and see if you win a prize!

Almost time to renew your membership!

MEMBERSHIP OF SAFFRON WALDEN HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

Subscriptions of £5 per person for 2026-27 are due at the beginning of March, and we won't complain if you renew your membership a bit early! Membership for young gardeners up to age 16 is free. Your support is what enables us to hold the Spring, Summer and Autumn Shows every year, and it helps to subsidise the talks.

You can pay your subscription on-line to:

Account name: Saffron Walden Horticultural Society

Sort Code: 40 40 45

Account No.: 91054651

Please make sure you put your surname and first name/initial as the Payment Reference.

Alternatively, you can send cash or a cheque made payable to Saffron Walden Horticultural Society to:

Hilary Shibata, Membership Secretary, 4 Mount Pleasant Cottages, Debden Road, Saffron Walden CB11 4AE.

Membership cards can be collected at any of the Society's events and Shows.

That's all for now - and I hope there are lots of jars of marmalade at the Spring Show!

With best wishes from your Membership Secretary,

