



## Charlton and Blackheath Amateur Horticultural Society Annual Report 2025

President: Nicolas Bevan

Joint Vice-Presidents: Jillian  
Smith, Ron Roffey

Chair: Vija Vilcins

Treasurer: Kathy Aitken

Secretary: Chris Bartleman

2025 was another successful year for CABAHS. Our numbers stand in contrast to those of many other societies who are being forced to close due to lack of members. Speakers who come to present for us almost always comment on how well attended talks are, although this number is significantly less than the membership total. Our success is undoubtedly due to an amazingly active committee and our dedicated membership. At the beginning of 2026 we have a total of 146 paid up members, slightly down from 153 the previous year, with 69% of these having joined before 2022. An average of 61 members attend meetings. Although membership was slightly down on the previous year, our activities continued at pace.

Our programme of speakers kicked off spectacularly in January with Fergus Garrett talking to us about succession planting in the gardens at Great Dixter. This continued with a mix of talks across a range of subjects from garden history (Fiona Davidson on women who became professional gardeners in the early twentieth century despite the odds stacked against them); to a focus on particular plants (Tim Ingram on bulbs for succession) to some art and horticultural history from Ruth Cornett. Angela's absence has been keenly felt. Her reviews of talks have been superb and a rota of committee members now struggle to take on the role.

Our Shows continued to attract a large number of entries. Our Spring Show, held in April, saw a stunning 18 Narcissus 'Pipit' in pots, with judge Joe Woodcock struggling to choose, finally awarding Maggie T for best in this class. Best in Show went to Viv P. for her beautiful Camellia. Then, held one month earlier than usual and after one of the most consistently hot summers, we had been a little concerned that the number of entries would be much reduced for our Autumn Show. Not at all! Across the 18 classes there were 150 entries and we had to extend the show tables! The display was fabulous. As this year celebrated 75 years of CABAHS, we were delighted to welcome back Jillian Smith, former Chair of the CABAHS committee, to judge entries. In addition, members read out snippets from past Newsletters which provided some entertainment as well as a historical perspective! Winners at the Autumn Show were Mandy A who won the Crystal Fuchsia Bowl for Class 7 (Five Fuchsia blooms); Anna L who won the Silver Spade for Class 11 (Display of Vegetables). And Best in Show went to Ali H. for her splendid pot of *Adiantum venustum*

In addition to our talks and shows, members were also able to enjoy a number of garden visits which we are grateful to Anna Lainé for organising. As well as our annual outing to an RHS garden – Wisley this year – Anna also organised a visit to Audley End, which took place on what was probably one of the hottest days of the year, with temperatures soaring to 30 degrees, and which members may well remember for years to come.

As has become our usual practice, we held two main plant sales this year: in May and October. For the May sale we had more plants for sale than ever before, with people queuing to get in and a record amount of money achieved. These sales now involve stalls staffed by both OPG volunteers, as well as CABAHS members. Both were hugely successful and, as a result, we were able to make a sizeable donation to the Greenwich and Bexley Community Hospice.

Our Gardener's Question Time was held in August with a panel made up of Joe Woodcock, Pat Kane and Nicolas Bevan. We are indebted to Nicolas for all the support he gives us from judging the Show Table, to chairing meetings and contributing to panel discussions and occasionally standing in to draw the raffle!

Our Show Table, held regularly each month, draws a variable number of contributions. Looking back over Newsletters from the past, this is not a new phenomenon! Hoping to attract more support, we introduced a small prize in the form of a gift voucher for the winner each month.

We are seeing a year-on-year increase in the number of views of our website, with the biggest increase between 2024 and 2025 (29,356 to 50,287 views annually) and we are indebted to Ali who maintains the site and posts the news and views sent to her. *Plant of the Month* and *Jobs for the Month* are consistently popular and we are grateful to Anna and Pat respectively for consistently producing content month in and month out. In the report that Ali compiled for the committee, she points out that periodically a topic will 'hit a nerve', which happened when Long Barn Gardens and Sissinghurst featured on *Gardeners' World*, which generated more visits as people looked for them in search engines.

The Old Pond Garden volunteer scheme, which began as a CABAHS project in 2020, was taken over by Royal Greenwich Heritage Trust (RGHT) in 2025 and now has a life independent of our Society. Nevertheless, there are close links between the two, with 27 CABAHS members who are also garden volunteers, while 60% of Volunteers are also CABAHS members. Sharon Cass, a Committee member, has taken on the role of Volunteer Lead for RGHT working closely with Head Gardener Jason Sylvan.

Most of our communication with members is now by email, a change from the Monthly Newsletter which we used to write and distribute as paper copy at our meetings! Over the course of the year, 11 were sent to members' mailboxes, as well as the individual posts about plants, visits and jobs referred to above. All of this is a huge endeavour and would not be possible without the commitment of the CABAHS Committee. I would like to thank my very capable and hard-working Committee for all their help and support and to all our members who so willingly step-up to help out, whether it be with providing plants for sale, help in staffing sales tables, organising the raffle and selling tickets, serving refreshments. All have been involved in the work of the Society and it is greatly appreciated.

Committee members 2024-5: Kathy Aitken (Treasurer), Chris Bartleman (Secretary), Melanie Aspey, Angela Burr, Pat Kane, Kay Pemberton, Maggie Taylor, Fran Alderson, Ann Fagan, Clare Sweetapple (resigned September 2024), Sharon Cass, and Mandy Allen (Joint Membership Secretaries), Ali Holder (website).