Hampshire AGS Chairman’s Report AGM 2024

It’s been a while since my last report and this being my last report I thought I’d write a review of my chairmanship. After taking over from Paddy, with huge shoes to fill, I tried to see how the group was run. Ben & Paddy had done a fantastic job building the numbers and feeding the members interest in alpine plants. But it was becoming clear the memberships interest in showing and growing plants was changing. For years the society was bolstered by keen growers who were showing their plants at every opportunity. Throughout the AGS this was the norm, but this was about to change with the new members more interested in growing plants in their gardens rather than for the show table. I believe this is about lifestyle changes and time and garden space.

Covid gave people time to rethink their garden space and time to plan a new strategy in growing their alpine collections but in their garden. Although I’ve never had an alpine house, I did have a few plants in pots either in greenhouses or cold frames throughout the winter months. But we decided during Covid to only grow plants that would be happy outside in the garden.

Covid also changed the way we held our meetings and talks. All public meetings were banned during the first lockdown, but this brought on the Zoom meeting. These were popular amongst most of the members and a lifeline for the group also the speakers. It also increased the number of speakers because with no travelling the only restriction was the time difference around the world. It also brought down the cost to the group. This meant we could have more expensive and exclusive speakers as there were no travel expenses involved. After Covid zoom has continued to be popular especially during the winter months.

We’ve had some amazing speakers during my time as chairman, too many to mention except to thank you to Paddy for the amazing live and zoom speakers that she continues to arrange. The Christmas get together has become very popular either face to face or recently via zoom. With multiple member speakers on a variety of subjects ranging from foreign trips to garden projects. Long May it continue.

Every society has to have a committee or group to organise and oversea the smooth running of the group. Our committee is the best. Loads of enthusiasm and knowledge brought to the group. I would like to thank all of those who’ve served as committee members throughout the past 3 years. A special mention to Mike & Jackie who have provided teas and coffees at our indoor events for many years. Unfortunately, they have decided to retire so at the moment we have no tea & coffee but if you would like to volunteer to take over please let one of the committee know. You will be welcomed with open arms. We are always keen for new blood on the committee, so please come forward and join us.

Last year we had a stand at Gardeners World Live at Beaulieu. This was a resounding success and an enjoyable weekend. We managed to encourage some new members into the AGS and our own group. Ben & Paddy created some fantastic troughs for the display and we were provided with tea cloths, books and journals to sell and give away by the AGS. This was very popular and we are repeating it again this year.

The visits to Ben & Paddy’s garden have continued during and after Covid and have provided a meeting place. With a selection of fantastic plants to buy as well as some amazing cakes and drinks. Their garden always in amazing condition despite some horrendous weather. This is a vital money raiser for the group and also for Keith Wiley’s memorial garden. Thank you for all who visited and supported the events.

This past 18 months has been the wettest and wildest weather we’ve experienced for a long time. Last year it was dry on only 80 days of 365. Water levels have taken months to return to normal. In some places have still not returned to normal. Let’s hope we have a warm dry spell now to allow everything to catch up.

I hope to see you all at the AGM this year when I will be handing over the chairmanship to Paddy. It’s been great fun or me, but I will be remaining as Vice chairman, unless someone else would like to apply for the honour.

Here’s to a fantastic 2024.

Malcolm Calvert