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The History of the Tilehurst Horticultural Association.

“Dig for Victory” many will remember that slogan of the war years when we were urged by the Government to produce all the food stuff possible, and it was in 1941 when we gardeners and allotment holders of Tilehurst took up the challenge, for in that year I approached Councillor Inkson on the possibility of forming an Allotment Association. Two months later Mr Inkson informed me that leaflets to call a meeting of interested persons had been prepared and were ready for distribution. Fortunately I was able to have the leaflets distributed without hardship, for being a Scout-master at that time I was able to allocate the job to the boys. A meeting was held one Monday evening during October 1941 attended by a fair number of people. It was agreed to form an Association, which was to be called the Tilehurst and South Reading Allotment Holders Association, and the following officers and Committee were elected:

President – Councillor H.T.Inkson

Treasurer – The Rev. G Sherwood

Chairman - Mr R.Hudson

Hon.Sec. – Mr A.L.Heath

Committee – were Messrs. F.Pike; S.Rice; R.Brocks; F.W.Allen; E.Brown; J.R.Page; A.Viney; and myself.

It was agreed that the annual subscription should be one shilling. Membership rose steadily but suitable accommodation for storing fertilizers etc. was difficult to find, and we had to resort to storing numerous consignments of lime etc. in sheds owned by Officers and Committee.

After about a year, Mr Heath found the duties of Secretary too much for him and was forced to resign, Mr Saunderson, a School teacher evacuated from London, agreed to take his place. The Committee frequently changed as members were called up for war service but the Association continued to progress throughout the remaining war years.

The Peace of 1945 brought further changes. Mr Saunderson left Tilehurst and Mr Alderton of City Road took over as Secretary, resigning office through pressure of work after about a year, and was succeeded by Mr Parkins. The Rev. Sherwood became President when Councillor Inkson left the district and Mr Chittendon and Mr Jennings took over as Chairman and Treasurer. A lively Committee was formed and things began to move. We entered the Reading Show, improvising with tin lids as trays and empty cans painted black as vases. Competition was keen for we were up against the foremost societies in the district but unfortunately members did not respond to our appeal for fruit, vegetables and flowers for our exhibit and we had to be content with an “Highly Commended” award.

A shed was bought for the sum of £60 and permission was granted to erect same at the Laurels. The annual subscription was raised to 2/- per annum to help defray costs. Members living in the Lower Tilehurst area decided it was too far to come to the Laurels for fertilizers etc. and wished to break away to form their own Association. As a result of lengthy discussions it was decided that a shed belonging to Mr Slatter on the Scours Lane allotment would be opened for the benefit of these members.

The membership increased to about the 300 mark and the committee of 16 met monthly at the house of Mr Perkins. The sales from the sheds increased and despite protests from

the Reading Federation we decided to buy our goods direct from the suppliers and were able to re-sell to members at prices far cheaper than any other Association in the district. We became known at the Tilehurst Horticultural Association.

In 1951 Mr Perkins was forced to retire through ill health after sterling work for the Association. I accepted the office on a temporary basis while the Committee circulated all members asking for volunteers to fill the position stating that this would now carry an Honorarium of £15 per annum. There were only two applications and Mr Suggett was elected. Business went well for a time but through pressure of work Mr Suggett was unable to attend to the work and the Committee meetings. There followed a grim period in our affairs. On the death of our Chairman Mr Chittendon, the duties of Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary fell upon the shoulders of Mr Jennings. Many Committee members resigned and others could not be found to replace them. Members became uninterested and membership dropped considerably.

In 1956 fate struck another blow with the sad death of Mr Jennings. A Committee meeting was called and new Officers were elected at the Annual General Meeting. Mr Bradley became President; Mr Perkins became Chairman, Mr Herbert Treasurer and Mr P Maxted Hon. Sec. A Committee of 16 members, most with previous service was formed, determined to put the Association back on its feet, for at this time the membership had dropped to less than 120 members. Before long, but not without a lot of hard work, membership had again reached the 300 mark. I had been appointed topic distribution agent and registration secretary. Contact was kept with members who soon reached 400.

In 1957 Mr Perkins resigned as Chairman and I was appointed his successor. Mr Maxted was proving himself a driving force as Hon. Sec. He bought cheaply and our turnover increased. With members now numbering approximately 500 a new shed was opened at the Oak Tree Rd Allotments.

Members cultivating the Scours Lane Allotments were given notice to quit during 1958 so trading at the shed was discontinued. We were now doing business in a big way and Mr Bohey was elected Asst. Hon. Sec. relieving me of my duties as distributing agent and registration secretary. I resigned as Chairman of the Committee early this year (1959) and as you know my place was taken by Mr Pickthorne and Mr Bohey succeeded Mr Herbert as Treasurer.

The membership at the time of these notes is over the 700 mark and as you can see from this condensed history we have made great progress during the last few years and at this rate should soon become the largest Association in the Reading area.