

As keen gardeners prepare their fruit and veg for the annual Parish Show, it is interesting to look back on earlier years of the original Horticultural Society (est.1837). David French's research into Jackson's Oxford Journals includes a series of annual reports on them between 1850 and 1859. The 1858 show seems to have been a particular highlight as the following extract (*newspaper quotes in italics*) from David's article tell us:

"The 1858 show was a joint celebration of the 21st anniversary of the Horticultural Society and the first anniversary of the Buccleuch Archery Club, Adderbury (Hon. Secretary, Mr. C.D. Faulkner (31)). The Great Western Railway Company *in the most handsome manner*, advertised special return fares to Aynho station. The preceding week, the Banbury Guardian's correspondent was *anticipating one of the largest and most fashionable gatherings which this town has witnessed for some years*. The great aim of the Society was *especially to create in the minds of the labouring population that spirit of rivalry, in the cultivation of their gardens, which is so conducive to their happiness, by drawing them insensibly from idle pursuits*. When show day arrived *the quiet town of Deddington presented a very cheerful and animated appearance*. The 1858 show was the largest the Society had ever held, attracting nearly 1,000 visitors to the Castle Ground. Musical entertainment was provided by the Band of the Oxfordshire Militia. The archery competition was highly successful in its own right. *Nearly all the ladies were in appropriate uniform, consisting of a white muslin dress, green jacket, and white felt hat trimmed with green velvet and green feathers. This costume had a very graceful appearance, and when the fair competitors were in the attitude of shooting, it displayed their figures to great advantage, and as they proceeded to and from their targets, they looked quite bewitching, and formed a striking contrast to the gentlemen, not two of whom were dressed alike, and several sported the very extreme of undress*. The Oxford Journal report continued *all the interest appeared to be concentrated in the ladies, who not only dressed much better, but shot much better. Miss Caparn, of this town, far out-shot her fair competitors, her arrows, at almost every flight, hitting not merely the target, but the bull's eye, with a precision worthy of Maid Marian*. The Oxford Journal's correspondent concluded his report on the 1858 show with the following gratuitous observation: *It was a source of congratulation that the horticultural shows are no longer held in the Town Hall, which now has more the appearance of a cow shed, and looked extremely ugly, dilapidated, and insecure. It would indeed have been a matter of regret if so much loveliness in flowers, fruits, and last, though not least, the gentler sex, had been driven, as on many former occasions, to waste their sweetness in such an uncongenial shed*." The Oxford Journal correspondent clearly had a good sense of humour, although one wonders if the reference to the attractive figures of the lady archers was not, perhaps, a little risqué for the times."

The full article about all the other shows can be found via a link on the History home page.