

Deddington Horticultural Society

According to the contemporary press reports, the highlight of the social calendar in Deddington during the 1850s was the annual flower show, in 1850 in its 13th year.

The show was usually held in September on the Castle Ground, courtesy of Samuel Field, the town's leading lawyer, who appears to have held a long-term lease from the owners, the Dean and Canons of Windsor. The only exceptions were in 1853 and 1855.

The local press gave extensive coverage to the proceedings at events such as local flower shows. The coverage would include a lengthy list of principal visitors (the local gentry and clergy), detailed descriptions of the more notable exhibits of flowers, fruit and vegetables, and an exhaustive list of prize-winners in each class (by 1857 over 200).

As noted below, the press reports record the steady progress of the Deddington Horticultural Society over the decade. The Committee was not afraid of innovations, in particular joint events, which contributed to the growing success of the Society by the end of the decade.

On the day of the **1850** show, Deddington was "all alive", exhibitors hurrying into the town. The Deddington amateur band "by their varied performances, added to the hilarity of the proceedings". More amusement was provided by an excellent game of cricket between the Deddington and Sandford Park Clubs. 30 specimens of wheat, oats and maize were exhibited by Charles Faulkner from his museum.

The **1851** show was not as well supported as in some previous years. This was attributed to the counter-attraction of the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace. In addition to the exhibits, there was a band, and a game of cricket was played between eleven gentlemen and eleven tradesmen of the Deddington Cricket Club. The day was further enlivened by a match between the married and the single.

The **1852** show was a success despite very unfavourable weather at the start of the day. Proceedings were enlivened by the strains of the Deddington amateur band. The show was combined with the annual treat for the children of the National and Sunday Free Schools, who processed to the Castle Ground headed by the Banbury Sax Horn Band, to be "heartily regaled with plum-cakes, buns, and tea", followed by games.

The **1853** show was held in the newly completed National Schools buildings, on the corner of Earl's Lane and Banbury Road, in conjunction with a 2-day Fancy Bazaar (under distinguished patronage) in aid of the building works. The exhibits of flowers, fruit and vegetables were in the Boys' School Room, and the bazaar in the Girls'.

All trains between Oxford and Banbury were to stop at Aynhoe station, "and there will be Conveyances to meet the Train".

Mr. W. Sturch, of the Unicorn Inn, provided his usual cold collation at 1/6 a head, and the Banbury Saxe-horn Band played for the occasion. The combination of the flower show and the Fancy Bazaar proved to be highly successful. The *Oxford Journal's*

correspondent commented that the annual flower show "has for some years been the gala day for our little town".

The **1854** show on the Castle Ground was favoured by fine warm weather. A "goodly muster of fashionables" was present, and music was provided by the United Saxe Horn Band. The show took place in five marquees, including a lunch tent where visitors sat down to the usual cold collation. The poorer classes availed themselves of reduced price late entry tickets. Beautiful music, fine weather and location rendered the day one of the most delightful and agreeable character.

The *Oxford Chronicle* carried a very lengthy report, including the following comments:

The show on the whole was rather small, but, all things considered, highly creditable to a rural district like Deddington, which is necessarily destitute of the accessories usually found in more populous localities.

The *Oxford Chronicle's* correspondent regretted the lack of contributions by the local gentry, since the beneficial influence of persons in the higher walks of life can assist greatly in improving the public taste.

Despite a long report (almost a whole column) in the *Oxford Journal*, the **1855** show, which took place in the grounds (or Park) of Deddington House, in New Street, courtesy of the Rev. W.C. Risley, seems to have been a pleasant but uneventful occasion.

The **1856** show, described as a "floral and musical fête" by the *Banbury Advertiser*, returned to the Castle Ground. An innovation was the display of exhibits in a spacious new marquee dubbed the 'Deddington Pavilion'. Musical entertainment was provided by the Oxfordshire Militia Band, under the direction of Herr Viesohn.

The show in 1856 was combined with a treat for the children of the National Schools, 200 of whom walked in procession to the Castle Ground, where they enjoyed tea and cake, followed by games.

The *Oxford Journal* concluded its report by "reiterating an observation passed by many, that they had never spent a more pleasant or agreeable day in their lives."

The **1857** show on the Castle Ground "fully maintained its celebrity". An additional attraction was a cricket match between two elevens drawn from the Deddington Club. The Oxfordshire Militia Band, as well as playing on the ground in the afternoon, also gave a concert at the Unicorn Inn in the evening. The programmes of music were subjoined to the press reports.

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 **1859** show "fully sustained the reputation won by the former ones of the society". The Band of the First Warwickshire Militia, after playing through the town, performed a "grand military concert", with a programme of 17 pieces, and several able vocalists. Mr. Sturch of the Unicorn provided his usual cold collation.

Much amusement was provided by the ascent from the Castle Ground of a Nassau hot air balloon. After rising with evident difficulty, the balloon sailed slowly about at a very low altitude. Suddenly it rose on a breeze, but then descended far more rapidly than it went up, crashing into a tree, where it burst.

The crowning feature of the day, we think, however, was the brilliant display of fireworks.