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REDDITCH BONSAI

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EDITOR'S REMARKS.

The MBS has now been in existence for 50 years which is a significant period of time and represents a great milestone. The society started life all those years ago in an upstairs room at Hall Green Library before relocating to the church hall at St Alphege in Solihull. In those days there were over 100 members and most meetings comprised a talk and/or demonstration by the likes of Harry Tomlinson, Corin's father, who was a regular visitor. Other bonsai societies were springing up at around this time (1980's – 1990's) and eventually the MBS moved its "H.Q." to Moseley Cricket Club. Membership dwindled, possibly in part to the proliferation of other societies such as Heart of England and Ambien, but we often wonder whether it was perhaps due to a slackening of interest around that time?

Currently the Society has 37 full members and looking at past records it is interesting to note that in 2012 for example we had 38 but as many as 52 in 2011. We think that we did well to survive covid which was undoubtedly helped by our use of "Zoom" meetings which allowed us to keep in touch and in December 2023 there were still 35 members. The membership is now quite mixed in terms of experience and we do try to encourage newcomers.

We are very fortunate to have David Cheshire as a member and he has a fund of bonsai knowledge which he is only too willing to impart. He has won many prestigious medals/prizes for his art including more than one Chelsea Gold. Malcolm Hughes is also a regular and welcome visiting speaker.

We have always done our best to promote ourselves to the wider public and activities in this area include staging the Annual Show at the Botanical Gardens, which is always well attended, and

other “display tables” at events and garden centres. Our website and Facebook pages keep the public informed of our existence and activities as well.

So, “Well done” and “Congratulations” to the Society upon reaching this 50th year and let us hope that the MBS carries on long into the future.

YOUR MEMORIES.

Early history of the M.B.S.

The Midland Bonsai Society was founded in 1975 by Joan Rushforth and her husband together with a small group of enthusiasts drawn largely from the Hall Green area of Birmingham. One of the founder members, David Joyce from Sutton Coldfield, had already learned a fair amount about bonsai from Dan Barton who, in turn, had founded a bonsai society in Bristol.

George Rushforth, son of Joan became Chairman with his mother in the role of President. The early meetings of the Society took place at Hall Green Library.

Kath and Malcolm Hughes joined the Society in 1978 following the Midland Society’s second Annual Show which was held at a church hall on the Stratford Road in Shirley. Shortly afterwards, they were both members of the Society committee, with Kath vice-chair and Malcolm as Show Secretary. Kath would become Chairman when, in 1981, George Rushforth had to step down following a near-fatal aneurism.

Speakers were few at this time; those who came to give talks and demonstrations included such notables as Peter Adams, Dan Barton, Harry Tomlinson and Craig Coussins whilst the likes of well-informed bonsai enthusiasts from within the membership included David Joyce and George Davis, both founder members of the Society.

During that early period and up until the mid-1980’s, the Society exhibited at the Horticultural Show held at Perry Barr and were successful in winning a number of top awards. Kath continued as Chairman and was asked to remain when Birmingham (in the guise of the M.B.S.) was invited to host the 3rd Annual European Bonsai Association (E.B.A.) Convention at the Loudon Suite of the National Exhibition Centre, the first occasion this event had been held in the U.K.

Following the success of the E.B.A. event, Kath stood down as Chairman being succeeded in the role by Graham Gavin who also, at this time, was to become Chairman of the Federation of British Bonsai Societies. Sadly, Grahams period of office ended less than a year later when he died suddenly following the Federation Convention in Scarborough. Keith Kirtland succeeded him as M.B.S. Chairman whilst Malcolm Hughes became Chairman of the Federation.

From around 1985 – 86, the membership of the M.B.S. had grown significantly as bonsai was now becoming an increasingly popular hobby. By now, the membership reached around 120 members. At this time, the Society had moved from Hall Green Library to the Oliver Bird Hall in Solihull which provided more space. During this period, some members of the Society from other parts of the West Midlands talked about setting up satellite societies. Thus, from the original M.B.S. the South Staffs Bonsai Society was established near Sutton Coldfield to cater for the north of Birmingham as well as the Heart of England Bonsai Society near Leamington Spa, Ambion Bonsai Society in Nuneaton, and later Stourbridge Bonsai Society catering for the west of the region.

Kath and Malcolm Hughes.

First meeting.

I came along to our first meeting following a demonstration at the Botanical Gardens. I’d taken Mom because of her interest in trees in pots! What I wasn’t really expecting was to become so involved myself. That is down to the members who made it so welcoming. Thank you! Teanah Rowland.

Crowd control.

We think that what stands out most in our memory are trips and shows at the Botanical Gardens. So far as trips are concerned the one to Peter Chan's Nursery stands out, not only because the weather was good and the day as a whole was a big success but because of the sheer panic prior to departure. Arrangements had been made to park the coach hired for the trip, a 50 plus seater, in the cricket club car park prior to our leaving but when we arrived, at 8.00 o'clock in the morning, we found the car park and the surrounds rammed with cars and there were crowds of people everywhere! The cricket club had somehow omitted to tell us that they would be holding a car boot sale that morning! The good weather had brought the crowds out in their hundreds, but eventually we were able to relocate the coach to the neighbouring club premises, much as we did this year for our trip to Cottered and we got away on time to enjoy a great day out.

Crowds feature in our recollection of one of our annual shows at the Gardens. Prior to the event Judith had asked us how many People's Tree voting slips she should get printed, as we had run out. We said get 1000 done as they will then last for a few years. What we didn't then know was that the Gardens and the Council had done some sort of financial deal and the Gardens were to allow visitors in free of charge and the Council were promoting all sorts of events from steel bands to sales of all types of goods (we call them "cloth kits" but that's another matter) and food stalls. The car park was full when we arrived and later the crowds just kept coming as the council had obviously advertised their event pretty well everywhere. This meant, of course, that there were plenty of people viewing our Show – it was standing room only! The 1000 voting slips had all been used up by lunch time but somehow we survived. We don't think we got any new members as a result however!.

Angela's other memory is simply the sheer number of members at MBS meetings when we first joined. A real bun fight!!

Angela and Richard.

COMING UP AT THE MBS.

The November meeting features WINTER PREPARATION. We wonder whether anyone would like to talk about the use of a winter wash on their trees – it has always been something we have steered away from but more from ignorance than anything else. The use of Mortegg or Jeyes Fluid are what we have in mind.

COMING UP AT REDDITCH BONSAI.

Our October meeting comprises an evening with David Cheshire and features forest groups so you might need to dig a few oaks or even something more exotic out of the hedge, allotment or wherever you can find them and come ready to have a go!

GARDENING TIP OF THE MONTH.

To dig up or not to dig up, that is the question. We are talking about Dahlias of course. Some do and some don't – although I suspect that most do dig up their tubers. We just couldn't contemplate leaving those prize tubers in the cold frosty ground on an exposed allotment site. If, however, your garden is protected and not exposed to the northerly/easterly winds it might be a different story. You will however have to cut the stems back and cover with a very liberal covering of leaf mould/leaves. (and then keep your fingers crossed!) If you dig up then the procedure is 1. Cut stems to about 6 inches, 2. scrape off as much earth as possible, 3. store upside down in a shed or

greenhouse etc for about 3 weeks to drain and then 4. put them in a frost free shelter/greenhouse until spring. Some people put them in dry compost but we never bother – the key is keeping the tubers relatively dark and definitely frost free. We usually do pretty well. None of this needs to be done until the first frosts have started to blacken the stems. We will deal with your chrysanthemums next time. We bought some new ones this year but have signally failed to keep the number of stems to a minimum so they are more like sprays than anything else but still colourful!

BONSAI TIP OF THE MONTH.

Having treated the trees and other miscellaneous pots for the dreaded vine weevil earlier in September we turned our attention to crane fly/daddy long legs having found some grubs in a pot bought some years ago – albeit not from an MBS or Redditch member! A timely drench of the appropriate strain of nematodes has now been applied which should keep them in check. These are easily obtained on line from Green Gardener. We will never forget the concern of the postman when he first delivered a consignment of, we think, vine weevil nematodes. He couldn't get rid of the envelope quickly enough and when we looked we saw why, because written in large red letters was the warning "CAUTION LIVE ANIMALS!"

RBS ANNUAL SHOW RESULTS SEPT 2025.

Redditch held a small in house show at its last meeting. Here are the results posted by Judith

Starter	tree no	Points	Owner	Species
1st	31	11	Jay	Juniper
2nd	12	8	Ann	Cotoneaster
Shohin				
1st	7	13	Wes	Yew
2nd	6	7	Wes	Larch
Chuhin				
1st	24	16	Judith	Crab-apple
2nd	25	11	Peter	Hornbeam
Groups				
1st	22	16	Judith	Zelkova
2nd	-	-	-	-
Landscapes				
1st	-	-	-	-
2nd	-	-	-	-
Open				
Joint 1st	39	9	Richard	Cedar
Joint 1st	37	9	Richard	Juniper
3rd	38	8	Peter	Mugo pine

Judith reports upon the scoring:-

I scored them with two points for each winning vote and one point for each vote as second. Unfortunately, when I did the scores on Thursday evening on a scrap of paper I got the Open class wrong – saying that tree 39 won and there were joint seconds, whereas there were really 2 joint firsts and one second as shown as above.



Still putting ourselves about!
The MBS/Redditch stand at Winterbourne Gardens Plant Fair in July 2025
(We assure you that the MBS pop up stand is out of shot on the left!)

CHRISTMAS HAMPER.

Robert will be putting together such an item so he would appreciate contributions of suitable items for same at the November meeting please.

Well, we think everyone has had ample opportunity to contribute to this edition, so, here's what we have been able to put together. Angela and Richard Gilkes. 30th September 2025.