

Presidents Address to the 2015 AGM

Nick Hamilton

Friends, Romans, Cottage Gardeners, lend me your ears or a *Metasequoia glyptostroboides* or two!

I have to start by letting you all know how gutted I am not to be at the AGM – not a phrase you hear very often I know! Unfortunately, Barnsdale takes priority over everything and this weekend I have a staffing crisis, so muggins has to step in, as usual. It's not just missing the AGM and the opportunity spent talking to members I don't get to see for the rest of the year – as well as some I see quite often! The main reason for my disappointment of missing the 2015 AGM as opposed to any of the others I have been involved in is the fact that it's Caroline's last as Chair. I wanted to express my own personal thanks to Caroline for the monumental work she has done as Chair in moving the Society forward, making it more appealing to a whole new group of potential members. It is an unfortunate fact that, in this day and age, all the specialist societies and many, many of the general gardening groups are struggling to maintain their membership numbers. Therefore I feel we desperately don't want to allow all of the committee's efforts, under Caroline's leadership, to go to waste by not progressing that forward momentum. We are all restricted by finance, but there are many, many more modern things we can do which will appeal to new members, as well as those loyal ones we already have. During my everyday life I hear and notice so often how people's habits have changed and how the new digital world is affecting every aspect of our lives and if we perceive to make things too difficult, too long and complicated, too time consuming for people they just won't bother – not an attitude I agree with, but you can't deny it's there.

There definitely are new members out there, a few who have heard of the Society and lots who haven't. On a daily basis I speak to visitors who love the planting here at Barnsdale – cottage garden, as you already know. At Chelsea this year and the recent Gardeners' World Live flower show I spent most of my time talking to people about each display, the gardens at Barnsdale and, just as importantly, their garden at home. It never ceases to amaze, not only how many of these people loved the cottage garden style of planting in the displays, but how many of them garden in just that style at home – all of them unaware that there was a group of enthusiasts. I mentioned the CGS to many visitors, explaining the broad spread of the local group network, as well as focusing on the fact that not everyone was an expert – lots of novices keen to learn – and that it was a great way to improve their gardening knowledge generally.

I truly believe we have made giant steps in the right direction over the last few years, but there are still giant steps to take and I know the whole committee has the desire and ability to keep on going. However, it is vitally important that we don't just turn off, as a group, and leave them to it – no-one can think of everything. Ideas – ones you think are superb and ones that may seem ridiculous at the time, stimulate discussion and will enable every group to take part in the development of the CGS and therefore enhancing the appeal to a wider audience. Start this new year of the CGS as we need to go on!

Now to return to the beginning of this absent Presidents address. I hope you all join with me in wishing Caroline all the best for the future, bearing in mind how much extra time she will have now that the Chairs reins have been passed on to someone new, and thank her not just for all the hard work she has done during her tenure, but also the passion and commitment she has shown to the Cottage Garden Society.

Finally, I'm really miffed to miss Andrew's talk, lunch (I am a growing boy after all!) and then the afternoon visit to Wollerton Old Hall Gardens, but I'm sure you will all make the very most of each.

See you all next year!