

Green Hammerton Horticultural Society

The York Herald in September 1847 mentions that the first exhibition of the “Green Hammerton Gardeners, Amateurs, and Cottagers Horticultural and Floral Society” was held in a field in the occupation of Mrs Buck of Green Hammerton on the 5th September 1847 in a marquee borrowed from the Harrogate Floral Society. Mrs Buck at this time ran the Blacksmiths Arms which is now the Village Club.

The objects of the society were to “extend the culture of fruits and flowers in Green Hammerton and the neighbourhood, both amongst gardeners, amateurs and cottagers”.

Whilst the show was comparatively small and the weather unpleasant the “turnout was both numerous and highly respectable, embracing the principal families in the neighbourhood.”

Produce was judged for each category, the gardeners from the local manor houses, the amateurs being the clergy and freeholders, and the cottagers the farm workers.

Mr Bell a gardener from Thorp Green gets a particular mention for his flower display with the newspaper column also reporting that “in the evening a small party sat down to dinner at Mrs Bucks in celebration of the establishment of this society and the evening was spent in a very harmonious manner”.

The show continued to be held in the field adjacent to the Blacksmiths Arms, later to become the Three Horse Shoes, until 1886 when it moved to a field close to Green Hammerton Hall.

In September 1848 the Yorkshire Gazette reporting on the “Second annual exhibition of this institution” mentions that Mr H Powell who had established the society had passed the presidency on to a Mr Clark. The show attracted some local VIPS namely The Right Honourable Lord Stourton and JP Westhead MP for Knaresborough. The Knaresborough brass played at the show and whilst the afternoon started well it turned unpleasant by the time the show closed at 6pm.

By 1851 the show was attracting more visitors from the surrounding area with the Yorkshire Gazette rather disparagingly reporting that “many of the York connoisseurs who revel in their splendid horticultural and floral displays would find that this rural show has all their spirit but lacks their capabilities to rival them.” The weather was fine but overcast.

In 1853 Jos Clarke was president although the show came very close to folding due to the retirement of Henry Powell as secretary. At the last moment the treasurer Samuel Jackson came forward to act as secretary and the show was saved.

1854 saw poultry being exhibited for the first time.

By 1857 the organisation had changed its name to the Green Hammerton Horticultural Floral and Poultry Society with the Saturday 12th September edition of the York Herald reporting that the show on the previous Tuesday had been held in torrential rain. It did however comment that “the displays are quite equal and in some respects decidedly superior to anything of the kind hitherto witnessed at the annual displays”.

The weather for the 1858 show held in late August was generally fine following a wet morning, which was held a week earlier than planned owing to the Queen's visit to Leeds the following week. James Wills from Hopperton had a particularly good show winning many prizes in the Cottagers section for his fruits and vegetables. Poultry numbers had increased to 91 with Mr Hunter from Green Hammerton being particularly successful in a number of categories.

Poultry continued to be very popular with the 10th September 1859 edition of the York Herald reporting that "three jet black ducks valued at £100 and exhibited by Mr Hunter of Green Hammerton Hall attracted a considerable amount of attention and the judges very properly awarded to these birds the first prize in their class".

The August show in 1861 was held in fine weather with the public being entertained by the brass band of the Knaresborough volunteers. Joseph Firth son of the secretary W Firth of Stourton Park received specific praise for a miniature representation of the flower garden of the Duke of Devonshire at Chiswick surrounded by a shrubbery with a fountain in the rear. Also owing to a mistake on the day, some of the poultry exhibits were excluded from the show. Games were also provided in the shape of foot races and the game of Aunt Sally*. A ball was held in the floral marquee in the evening.

Finances of the society improved and the September 6th edition of The York Herald in 1862 reported that "the society had flourishing finances so they were able to purchase a pavilion of their own of 670 square yards." The paper also went onto comment that "Sergt Stringer of the West Yorkshire Constabulary rendered efficient aid in keeping one or two troublesome characters quiet". Heavy thunderstorms spoilt the evening ball.

The York Herald 19th 1863 reported that "George Manners was summoned for assaulting police constable Bradley at the Green Hammerton Flower show. He threw the officer onto the marquee, stripped himself and wanted to fight. The defendant was an old offender. The bench imposed a penalty of £10 and 15 shillings costs and for non-payment was sentenced to 2 months imprisonment."

The 28th August 1868 edition of The York Herald mentioned that "the show being an extremely good one, the favourable weather, and the fact which very seldom occurs at this time, that the harvest had as nearly as possible been completed, all tended to draw together a numerous and highly respectable company".

Entertainment was provided by the Kirk Hammerton brass band. Mr Buck from Green Hammerton won 1st prize for his 12 stalks of beans and 2nd prizes for his 12 ears of barley and 12 ears of oats. Mrs E Holgate of Green Hammerton won 1st prize for 2 rolls of butter.

The 1871 September 2nd edition of The York Herald reporting on the 25th anniversary of the show reported that "the show was smaller than previous years due to others being held so near at the same time" which also resulted in a fewer number of exhibitors. The Knaresborough rifle volunteers played during the afternoon and various "amusements" were provided for the children. The flower displays were disappointing although a very fine display of vegetables was on show.

Regrettably the 1874 show was also poorly attended which was attributed to the fact that it was held in the middle of the harvest period.

The 1877 show was also suffered heavy rain and poor attendances although in the York Herald edition of the 11th August "Mr Butland gardener to Mr Atkinson of Kirk Hammerton Hall was the chief prize winner carrying off the awards for bouquets, decorative plants, stove and green house plants, gloxineas, diasimilar, fancy zonala, and variegated geraniums, lycopods, fuchsias, petunias, coxcombs, plant in flower, asters and stocks this securing as many as seventeen first prizes." Mr Cooper gardener to Mr H R Farrar of Green Hammerton Hall received the second prize for gloxinias.

Unfortunately the 1878 show again had low attendances, put down to the proximity to harvest, but show was apparently successful, with a particular improvement in the fruit department, with the comment that it was the best for 12 years.

By 1882 attendances had improved and mention was made that it was one of the best shows in the district. The cottager's class was however disappointing due to a lack of completion with Mr Naylor, possibly the landlord of The Three Horseshoes, monopolising the prizes in this class. The evening as usual was concluded by sports and dancing.

The 7th September edition of The York Herald also reported on a nearby accident on the afternoon of the show. "A mare belonging to Mr Hunter of Green Hammerton was drawing a waggon laden with corn in the adjoining road, and when near the Bay Horse Inn, owing to the steep road, the animal lost power over the weight behind and was carried with great force down the decline and dashed head foremost against a wall. Several willing hands were quickly at work and when the animal was got out from the large quantity of corn which fell upon it was found to the wonder of everybody, that it had merely sustained a bruise upon the eye and back."

By 1887 the show was called the Green Hammerton Floral and Agricultural Society and was held in a field owned by the shows president HR Farrar adjoining Green Hammerton Hall. The 20th August edition mentions "rain fell in torrents during a greater portion of the time the show was open, and a more miserable meeting, meteorologically regarded could not be conceived. The financial loss must be considerable". The weather played havoc with the judging and a tent had to be erected specifically for judging the dogs. Harness horses attracted a large number of entries with over £120 in prize money for the winners at the show.

The York Herald in the 1st September 1888 edition reported that "the show was held in fine weather and due to the late harvest the show was well attended. The £50 loss from the previous year owing to the bad weather had been paid off by liberal donors and the society commenced operations yesterday with a balance in hand of £9 4s 1d."

This is where the trail goes cold. There are no further recorded instances of this society after this date in any of the newspaper archives accessed to date.

In 1891 The Kirk Hammerton Horticultural society was formed and Mr Farrar from Green Hammerton Hall is reported as exhibiting at the show. It may well be that after 1888 the Green Hammerton Horticultural society ceased to exist and Kirk Hammerton took up the reigns of the show.

Since the 1890s shows in various guises have been a regular feature of Green Hammerton life with events reportedly held in the field where the current village hall is sited, in a field down Back Lane and on The Green.

The two dinner plates shown below are the only known surviving memorabilia from The Green Hammerton Horticultural Society. (Courtesy of Dougie Mack).



*Aunt Sally is a traditional throwing game which was traditionally played in central English pubs and fairgrounds. An Aunt Sally head was originally the modelled head of an old woman with a clay pipe in her mouth or later a ball on a stick. The object was for players to throw sticks at the head in order to break the pipe. The game bears some resemblance to coconut shy or skittles.

Sources: The British Newspaper Archive, Yorkshire Gazette and the Yorkshire Herald.

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