

The Evolution of a Village Institution

Ewelme News, Oct/Nov 2026

From small beginnings in 1923 Ewelme's Horticultural Show held this August Bank holiday was surely the most impressive in its long history, enjoyed by a huge crowd of locals and visitors.

In a past age when most homes had a garden and the man of the house took pride in providing fruit and vegetables to feed his family, horticultural shows were held in most communities. The very first recorded Ewelme Show was held in 1923 in conjunction with the village fete, in the grounds of the Old Rectory. President Sir George Kemball and Vice-President Rev R Wortley invited Lady Osler to perform the opening ceremony. Notwithstanding 1923 also being a drought year, there were 250 entries for the flower category, and peas, onions, red currants, loganberries and cut flowers came in for much praise by the judges - however they noted there were no entries for marrows and runner beans.



The Old Rectory was again host for the 1926 Annual Flower Show and Fete held on 28th July. Most of the pre-war shows were held a month earlier than the modern ones. However, there was an exception in 1927 when on 26th August, very wet conditions were experienced and the attendance was small.

Newspaper reports reveal several venues hosted the Show; in 1930 at the old Mill House on 30th July, and again in 1931 on the 29th July. In 1934 on the 25th July in Ewelme Manor grounds with *'Many valuable prizes open to exhibitors residing within 5 miles of Ewelme.'*



In 1936 and 1937 the 14th and 15th the Annual Shows were held at New Place, now called 'Loreto' on the Benson Road. (New classes added included best knitted jumper by person under 20 years; jar or bowl of cut flowers, and fruit cake). Altogether there were 120 classes, most of which were open to competitors living in a five-mile radius of the Post Office.



With the outbreak of war looming in 1939 a Reading Mercury report of 6th May stated '*The Ewelme Horticultural Society is one of the few remaining societies in the district that has continued to hold its show every year without a break, and at the AGM it was agreed to hold the 17th annual show on July 26th.*' The last pre-war show was held in the grounds of The Old Rectory, by invitation of the President the Right Hon. Sir D B Somervell KC. MP. and Lady Somervell. So great was the enthusiastic support for the Show the Mercury listed 13 Vice-presidents (some lifted from the pages of 'Who's Who'), plus Vice-chairman Fred Grenway, Joint Hon. Secs. Messrs J Strevens and J Harris, and 20 named Committee members! [Many hands made either light work or a muddle?]

**Ewelme Horticultural Society
Show 1981**

R.H.S. Affiliated

**Saturday,
5th September**

In the grounds of
The Greyhound

by kind permission
of R. L. Cox, Esq.



**Entrance to Show: Adults 20p; Children 5p
or by Schedule 20p**

PROGRAMME

Sept. 3 Closing date for Show entries.

Sept. 5 Show Tent open 9.00 a.m. for staging exhibits
11 a.m. Show Tent closed to exhibitors
11.30 a.m. Judging of exhibits
2.30 p.m. Show Tent open to public
Prize Giving 3.30 p.m.

— Chalgrove Band will play during the afternoon —

— Refreshments available —

After 1945, older villagers recall a modest flower and vegetable show being added to the annual village fete, which remained the main event. The Horticultural show was not revived as a separate event until 1982, when it was held in the garden of The Greyhound Inn with the permission of Mr and Mrs Cox. In later years, a small marquee was erected on the grass bank between the Old Pottery and the School. George Cannon recorded the 1992 show there, and the footage reveals an impressive number of exhibits packed into a relatively small space. The recording has been transferred to a memory stick and is available from the Archive on request.

The Show's popularity increased so much the move to the sports ground and a larger marquee was essential - resulting in the magnificent event we experienced this year. Ewelme is a small community, and gratitude is due to the small bands of volunteers who are willing to work hard to keep up the Horticultural Show, and the following weekend the Horse & Dog Show - the traditional rural village institutions we continue to enjoy.