

The John Innes Society
Annual Report for January – December 2021
Registered Charity based in Merton Park, London SW19
Charity Number 803759
www.johninnesociety.org.uk

We never imagined that our activities would be affected for a further year by the prolonged pandemic, but we built on procedures adopted in 2020 and were able to hold key events and still raise an amazing amount of money. We also reviewed some of our policies. We decided to continue our committee meetings via Zoom, especially as one member presently lives outside our area, and has kindly enabled use of her account. We also decided to hold the postponed 2020 AGM along with that for 2021 using the same platform plus the option for members to phone in. Both were well attended, and the latter was followed by a preview of our 50th anniversary exhibition which was also well received.

Financial Situation

Although the income from members' subscriptions is still gradually declining, it remains the largest component of our income, coupled with Gift Aid tax relief thanks to those members who have signed Gift Aid declarations. The John Innes Foundation in Norwich is another regular donor, and again gave us £500, which is much appreciated. Our largest running costs relate to insurance and the costs associated with the Coach House.

As described elsewhere in this report, we still managed to hold a number of fundraising activities, particularly the Plant Sales.

We supported the Friends of the John Innes Park and of Kendor Gardens, paying for compost, bulbs, plants and small items of equipment. We feel that this was a great use of our funds, particularly during the periods of lockdown. We paid for new signs in the John Innes Park which were then installed on our behalf by LB Merton's contractors at no additional charge to us. We are delighted with the improvement and have now ordered replacements for the remaining signs for installation this year.

The Society holds reserves which have built up gradually over the decades. These primarily form a contingency fund in the event of a need to make a formal legal response to local planning proposals, and also for any significant repairs needed to the Coach House. The Committee have also sought to contribute to the costs of local Council initiatives such as street trees and repairs to the Bandstand in John Innes Park.

Membership

Membership was 670 in 391 households, a fall from 2020 due to the deletion of members from whom no payment had been received for 2 years. We continue to aim to attract more members, especially from people new to the area.

Newsletter

We have significantly increased the number of issues in colour, including a very notable one to mark 50 years of the Society. This additional expenditure can be justified as more members receive this in an electronic format, reducing printing costs. The content, ranging from historical articles to updates on local matters, remained very varied and we are most grateful to all our contributors and photographers.

Social and Fundraising Events

The most significant exhibition of the year celebrated the Society's 50th birthday. Expertly curated by John Harding with skill and enthusiasm, it was held over the weekend of September 11th and 12th and good weather enabled us to use the Coach House courtyard as well .

We were delighted to welcome John Innes, a descendant of John Innes' brother James, and Yolande Yates, grand daughter of Rose Lamartine Yates. While we noted how much the neighbourhood has changed, many of the challenges we face, especially as regards planning issues still predominate.

The Spring Plant Sale and the Autumn Plant and Produce Sale were again arranged across a number of front gardens in Melrose Road and the Coach House and contributed over £3500 to Society funds. Visitors appreciated the well spread-out locations and Melrose Road became a social hub. We are very grateful for the support of the householders who loaned their gardens and to all the volunteers who donated plants, cakes, produce etc and gave their time to help. Feedback from visitors and participants was very positive. Ann Redfearn and Viv Tuley, who have organised both sales for the last ten years are stepping back. Their hard work, planning and expertise, which has raised many thousands of pounds, has been greatly appreciated. Now, new volunteers are sought to take on their roles.

Heritage

We were delighted to receive from Finches the extensive collection of the architectural plans of H.G. Quartermain, the architect employed by John Innes to start the development of the area.

We took part in Merton Heritage's revived Discovery Day in the local library and were asked to identify heritage projects we were planning. Sadly, most of ours are still outstanding as they are dependent on Council action. A talk on John Innes and The Society was given to the local Wimbledon Guild and we kept a watching brief on developments as to the state of Dorset Hall, a property with local suffragette connections, currently needing urgent repairs.

Area Embellishment

We continued our mission to stimulate the care of street trees and encourage the greening of front gardens. New information signs were installed in the John Innes Park thanks to the head of the Friends' Group, who is also working with the Council to keep abreast of repair work to the rose arbour. Ward funds enabled additional work. Regrettably, the park was affected by vandalism to the Bandstand which is already awaiting urgent repairs. New planting and new beds created with the support from a local Payback team have improved Kendor Gardens considerably. A donation was also made to support a local church garden project. The Coach House window continued to enjoy inspiring displays in particular for the anniversary exhibition.

Planning

2021 saw a profusion of National, London and Local Consultation Plans and papers, which we studied in detail to assess their impact, particularly on our Area of Benefit, and then submitted responses.

We also monitored and made representations on local applications for tree works, rebuilds, extensions and major developments, such as the flats proposed for the White Hart site on Kingston Road. Change and intensification are inevitable, but our aim is for those to be achieved in such a way as to respect the character of the area and minimise damage to the environment.

Liaison and Links

We continued with membership of and participation in groups such as the London Forum of Amenity Societies and Plan Wimbledon.

As ever, we acknowledge that our successes could not be achieved without the support of our members and volunteers in so many ways, and our thanks are extended to them .