

Eulogy for Henry Wallace on his Presidency of the Gifford Horticultural Society

President- November 2003 to November 2009

A man that you hardly know, buys you a beer and asks you to be Vice President of the Horty, if he becomes President, what do you say? He seemed a decent guy, well regarded, so yes seemed the best shot. I found out later that Henry had theorised with John Sheldon that every newcomer to the village would soon have two ambitions- one to become a church elder and the other to be a member of the Horty committee. Neither of them wanted to achieve the first and had no ambition to achieve the second. Then both of them found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time when they stepped into the Presidency. However

As a Society of 155 years old, the Horty had survived many difficulties and in 2003 it was facing poor finance, ageing assets and becoming dated. Henry created a management team of Kath and Ian Blundell as secretary and treasurer and me as Vice. We spent most of the year earning money to pay £1,600 for the Flower Show marquee. However, we shared it the first year with the Golf Club Centenary Ball held after the Show and got some payment back. It was a start.

In the process, we found from the Council that the village was entitled to a free marquee, which the Gala committee used. Henry persuaded the Council to let us have the big marquee free and we paid for the Gala marquee. That saved about a £1000 a year. A huge step financially.

There was a bit of a stoochie in the Society when we found that the Council could only provide two good sized marquees, so we joined them together. Henry's casting vote sorted that. Entrenched views of how things are done still prevailed though!

A little event at the next Flower Show by chance fixed that. A lady member, well known for her colourful language, was changing the agreed layout. I took issue, then Henry intervened rather more forcefully. What the "blank" are you doing? Henry, we don't "blank do it that way". We "blankety blank do now so blank off". Unfortunately, Henry still had his remote microphone to our new Personal Address system on. The visitors were greatly amused and bemused. Henry though, quick as a flash, said "now I have your attention, there are still lottery tickets left and in the village hall are very good teas and cakes". Never missed a chance for publicity and there was no more interference!

Over the next couple of years Henry oversaw a great deal of work to rewrite the 1937 Constitution to remain a charity. There was much work required to meet various regulations, rebuilding Show assets for exhibiting, power, signage and Health and Safety. The Show admin was decidedly "elderly and needed computerising. Henry admitted his limitations, but Ian and Kath provided a modern system to run the Show more smoothly and give Henry the necessary statistics.

What we appreciated was his no nonsense, pragmatic, practical and down to earth approach to the job. He stuck to his intentions and spoke his mind. This upset some, but it got things done, and most importantly it brought in grassroot support right across the village. Cometh the hour, cometh the man.

By 2006, we could deal with Henry's pet concerns, this meant widening the Society's appeal and increasing villagers' involvement. Funds now allowed free buses for outings, a good range of talks and a more modern spread of Show Classes. There

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was more involvement with the school and more local interest for in-situ window boxes and patio containers.

You can see now how keen Henry was to make real improvements to the value of the Horty in the village and its image outwith. No longer strapped for cash, we could make serious decisions without worrying. The 2008 financial crisis didn't help but then we had £10,000 banked so could ride the storm.

Henry and Sandy Boggon, another veteran member, didn't always agree but here is an extract of the minutes in 2009, when Henry stood down.

Sandy proposed the vote of thanks as follows "Henry instigated many successful forward-thinking changes over the 6 years. Like any good Chairman, Henry understood the art of delegation to ensure all concerned worked together effectively and successfully".

Sandy concluded by assuring Henry that "he can retire in the full knowledge that the Society continues very actively, is financially sound and very well able to meet its constitutional objectives. For this, we are indebted to him".

The meeting heartily agreed.

A good home run, you might say! Well done Henry, and God Bless.