

## **The John Innes Society Annual Report for the year ending December 2025.**

We welcomed Louise Hosking as a new committee member for the role of Secretary by the end of the year. We drafted a new business/succession plan to help potential new committee recruits and updated our Equality and Diversity Policy to take account of new legislation.

### **The Financial Situation.**

The Society's finances continue to be healthy. Though total income from all sources is lower than in 2024, it is still comfortably adequate to cover the costs of running the Society and of our activities described elsewhere in this report.

Members' subscriptions are continuing to gradually reduce, as membership declines. This year we claimed Gift Aid on subscriptions only, and not on other cash receipts. Interest, while good, suffered from falling rates.

Our largest running costs relate to the Coach House in Melrose Road which we lease from London Borough of Merton. Costs have been lower in 2025, though we anticipate needing to pay for exterior painting in 2026.

The events described below all raised a surplus of nearly £4,000. In particular, the Bridge sessions have continued to be very well supported, with table fee income back to pre-pandemic levels.

In terms of Area Embellishment, in 2025 we supported plants and equipment for the volunteers helping in Kendor Gardens and the John Innes Park, nesting boxes for the Glebe Field and John Innes Park, a donation of £2,000 to the appeal for the renovation of the bells at St Mary's (John Innes himself contributed to the costs of the bells over 100 years ago), and a contribution of £500 towards the costs of a garden at Poplar School.

### **Membership**

Continuing the trend of the last few years, membership numbers continue to fall and at the end of December 2025 numbered 599 in 352 households.

### **Planning**

With so many domestic extensions and alterations now being classed as Permitted Development, there are fewer opportunities for the John Innes Society to influence design and density. Many houses have been modernized and increased in size, but not always with regard to preserving the character of the area. With more control in Conservation Areas, especially where Article 4 Directions are in place, the Society continued to monitor those applications and comment where appropriate. Thanks to our membership of The London Forum of Amenity Societies, we are kept up to date with increasingly frequent changes in the rules, including proposed revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework, overriding Local Plans and the London Plan, and imposing very high minimum density requirements, as well as limitations on decision making by Local Planning Committees.

Morden is at the Southern end of our Area of Benefit, and permission granted for a hotel on Crown Lane, at the end of Windermere Avenue, has caused considerable disquiet. Its height and bulk will be very visually intrusive in the adjacent residential area, wiping out the convenience of living near a town centre and transport hub. The Society supported objections from many local residents, but to no avail. Once the first set of plans were approved, as so often happens, the developers successfully returned for more.

Trees are not only visually and environmentally vital to the character of Merton Park and in the past year the Society has opposed several applications to fell significant mature garden trees. We are grateful for the cooperation we have enjoyed with Merton's tree officers who have responded when the Society has drawn attention to potentially damaging work.

## **Events**

Our first event of the year in March was a talk on William Kilburn, a local calico printer, then in April the AGM, which included a presentation on behalf of the Muslim Women of Merton Community Gardeners with an update on their work in Mostyn Gardens. Blessed with a sunny day our May Plant Sale was as successful as ever with over 200 visitors. In June fine weather continued for our stall at the St. Mary's Church Summer Fair as it still did by the end of the month for Music in the Park, which saw the return of the Collier's Wood Community Orchestra. We supported the London Borough of Merton's annual Discovery Day in Morden Library with a display featuring the development of the John Innes Horticultural Institution. In September we hosted a talk on cyanotype printing which saw the Coach House interior covered in colourful wall hangings. In October we set out an exhibition on the provision of education in Merton Park from the earliest beginnings to recollections by recent scholars. We ended the year with a get-together for our volunteers to thank them in person.

## **Newsletter and Website**

Our **newsletter** editor generously continued to support us remotely as we had been unable to find a replacement and this is still a worry. Regular articles on "The Way We Lived" are a popular feature, as are illustrated updates on the parks and gardens.

The **website** is regularly updated especially with details of key events and usage figures are provided at the committee meetings.

## **Heritage**

Concerns remain regarding the condition of the Grade 2 listed wall around the Church Lane playing field. Despite our constant updates to Merton's Heritage Strategy requesting action on this, little has been forthcoming but we bid for Civic Pride funding. Also, unexpected work on the area opposite the church caused access problems for neighbours and removed without reason existing paving and railings previously supplied by the Society. We put out a call for potential authors of a local history booklet to continue our coverage of the development of Merton Park, but response was minimal.

## **Area Embellishment**

The continuous summer heat was a challenge for our parks and gardens. We distributed leaflets to encourage residents to water street trees where possible. In the John Innes Park a magnolia tree was replaced by a Prunus Padus Pandora and two new standard roses were added to the area near the entrance, all funded by the Society. In Kendor Gardens a new herb bed was planted (under supervision) by pupils of the nearby school and we await instructions as to a plaque to honour a former tree warden. Duke of Edinburgh Award boys are progressing well and also training newer recruits. Our thanks to all members of the Friends Groups. We have received an estimate for redecoration of the Coach House and await a start date. A small orchard with heritage fruit trees linked to the original John Innes Horticultural Institute was advertised for sale and we are keeping an eye on developments.

## **External Links**

We are members of the Independent Merton Green Spaces Forum which meets to monitor the efficiency (or otherwise) of the council's parks and gardens contractor. We await a decision on the renewal of this contract. The John Innes Centre in Norwich supported our education exhibition with some archive material and we subscribe to The London Forum whose weekly updates are invaluable.

For our regular main events and all ongoing activities we are indebted to our wonderful volunteers but to have more committee members as well would of course be a bonus.