

The John Innes Society Annual Report for January – December 2019
Registered Charity 803759 based in Merton Park, London SW19
Website johninnesociety.org.uk

The Committee –we welcomed two new members this year, and one “returnee”. Katherine Welch is a brand-new resident who was co-opted to the committee at her first appearance at an event, and Paul Millie also responded to the plea for more members at the same time! Helene Nelson-Jones re-joined after the absence of a few years. Sadly, we lost John Veale, a long-serving member who was our champion on environmental issues, who died in December. Full details of our various responsibilities are on the website in the “About Us” section.

Membership

Membership currently stands at 710 in 407 households, another small decrease over 2018 continuing the trend over the last few years.

Financial Situation

Membership subscriptions have gradually declined over the last few years, while our costs have increased, particularly for insurance and rent. We have contained costs as much as we can, but regrettably we decided this year that we should increase the subscriptions, for the first time since 2009, since when the Consumer price Index (CPI) has increased by 30%.

Our new website launched during 2019 has allowed us to offer members the ability to pay online using PayPal, with a reduced fee to the Society because of our charitable status. This has so far been used just for subscriptions, but it will be possible to pay for events this way too. Fundraising events were well supported this year and have again generated a very healthy income to spend on local improvements as described elsewhere in this report.

The Society holds reserves which have built up gradually over the decades, primarily to form a contingency fund in case of need to make a formal legal response to local planning proposals, and also for any significant repairs being required to the Coach House in Melrose Road. The Committee have sought to contribute to the costs of local Council initiatives such as street trees and repairs to the Bandstand in John Innes Park, but we are still waiting for estimates.

Newsletter – Katherine Welch, despite being new both to Merton Park and the Society bravely took over as Editor in March and has introduced yet another fresh style. Thanks to Helene Nelson-Jones we now also get the occasional cartoon to add some levity. Currently 30% of members take the Newsletter by email and we would again encourage more members to do so to appreciate the photos in colour and to help reduce our carbon footprint.

Communication - interim **E-Mail Alerts** are distributed by Ingrid Holtz and are vital as updates to the Newsletter and to impart urgent information. All contact details of committee members and those who organise related events are on the back page of the Newsletter, and we hope that members will contact us with any concerns or news. There is also an option on the website for general messages.

Website – the excellent revision started last year by Catherine Bottrill was completed by Paul Millie in the summer. The resultant version is colourful and comprehensive with full details of upcoming events, some background information on the area, and access to relevant policy documents.

Social and Fundraising Events—our regular Spring and Autumn Bring and Buy Plant and Produce Sales, organised by Ann Redfearn and Viv Tuley with considerable help from their partners and many volunteers, were as successful as ever. This year a “Sow and Grow” evening was held to encourage more plug plant growers to help spread the load for the organisers and this generated a wonderful selection of contributions and some new ideas.

The popular Putney and Wimbledon Brass Band played for our mid-summer Music in the Park with the funds raised going towards further planting in the John Innes Park.

The annual Quiz in the Parish Hall was again expertly presented by Chris Abbott and for the first time a tie-breaker was needed to separate the winning teams.

We enjoyed three excellent talks in the Coach House. Henry Wood gave a presentation as part of the Garden Vision project, on the creation and development of his French garden, then in September, Margaret Smart, a member of the Victorian Society, gave us a richly illustrated talk on the Arts and Crafts movement and the influence of William Morris as it affected Merton Park. In December, local historian and author, Clive Whichelow, spoke on the Merton Park film studios, in support of his fascinating recent book on the same subject.

At our AGM, Councillor Nick Draper came to talk to us on the local Ward Fund Allocation Scheme which our local Councillors will administer and which must be spent by March 2022.

There is an excellent community spirit in the area, evidenced by the support for all our events. Next year it will be 50 years since the Society was founded and plans are already being formed to celebrate this.

Area Embellishment – this was given a fresh impetus by Helene Nelson-Jones. She has started to get involved with Tree Planting and The Garden Vision Project, formerly led by Pauline and Catherine Bottrill who have moved out of the area and to whom we extend our thanks.

Considerable hard work took place in both the John Innes Park and Kendor Gardens which both benefit from the majority of our fundraising. The Garden Group / Friends of the John Innes Park is creatively led by Jo Pfeifer where successful liaison with the local IDVERDE team led to a clearance of weeds from the pond and installation of a gate to enable future maintenance. Davinia Miln, Simon and Viv Tuley and Michel Julien cleaned and replaced bird boxes and Fred and Megan Rayner led activities to clear overgrown flower beds and replant in Kendor Gardens where we also appreciated the work of a local group of Community Volunteers. In January three new trees were planted there by our local Tree Wardens.

Environmental issues were of continued concern and we alerted members to the local Air Quality Monitoring results.

Planning – we responded extensively to the Local Plan, and to the Merton Local Transport Strategy, and the Open Spaces consultation and sent in representations on all planning applications when we felt it necessary following committee discussions. All resultant communications are drafted in detail by Desé Child. We have also kept a watching brief on the proposed new Heathrow flight paths and attended an inaugural meeting with other local amenity societies to encourage greater co-ordination of representations and activities.

Heritage – We had a presence at Merton Heritage Service's annual Discovery Day with Alison Cousins setting up our stand once again and we also attended the Council's Heritage Forum. Regular articles from the archives are contributed to the newsletter and these often trigger memories from our readers. We also received a generous donation from Chris Spencer of further copies of his book "Elbow Room" on local architect, John Sydney Brocklesby, which has been out of print for some time. In September, John Harding produced yet another superb exhibition, this time entitled "What did the Victorians do for Merton Park?" It was well attended and extended by a day to enable two classes from Merton Park Primary School to visit. We were particularly pleased when one young visitor wrote up his account of the exhibition for our Newsletter. We persevered with attempts to get the Council's go-ahead to enable repairs to be done on the Arts and Crafts period bandstand for which we have been accumulating funds.

Thank You – the committee is hugely appreciative of all our volunteers including Keith, Simon and Martin and their team responsible for the distribution of the Newsletter, our Hon. Auditor Fred Rayner, the JI Park Friends Group and Kendor Gardens team, and of course everyone who helps out at our various events, especially those who grow plants, bake and cook.