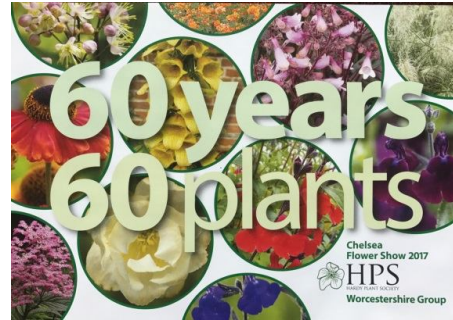


Chelsea Adventure Beverley Powlesland

It's not often that you are tapped on the shoulder and asked to join something that turns out to be an adventure.....

Well HPS Worcestershire Group member John McGhee tapped ME on the shoulder at the HPS Autumn Weekend in Northumberland and asked if I would join the team doing the Chelsea exhibit. There was no delay in answering.



John is an organiser and loves networking. So meetings were arranged, plans unveiled, rotas drawn up, passes ordered and instructions were given, then written and confirmed. The design included a rotating stand which was a novel idea. John found a freelance engineer who produced it. They spent many hours working to try and perfect the speed at which the stand turned - too fast and the motor would become too hot, too slow and the motor would ALSO become too hot. Finally the ideal rotation speed was arrived at - and maintained. The stand was flanked by large curved screens, painted with a blue sky and soft clouds to set off the plant display.

The planting was designed by Linda Marsh who chose 60 plants to represent our 60th anniversary. She chose plants that would be in flower in May. Some plants were purchased a year in advance and grown on at Bob and Ed Brown's nursery. Team members were on a rota to look after the plants although day to day management was very kindly provided by the nursery staff. Plants were looking fairly dead at the beginning of the year, but surprisingly put on a lot of growth during the warm March. Plants were potted on under supervision, watered and dead headed to ensure maximum flowering in May. Of course several plants did not behave as predicted. The plant list was revised up till the day before we left for Chelsea when we made our final selections! The final list was then put onto the website, and could be accessed via a QR code. Labels could then be produced.



On the Monday of the week before Chelsea, John and the engineer headed for Chelsea with the stand and the side screens. The stand and the screens travelled well with no damage. Then on the Thursday, Mick (chairman of Worcestershire group) and I met at the nursery at 7am to load the chosen plants under Ed's supervision. We drove to London where the "reception team" was waiting to help load off the plants, as the time slot for unloading is strictly limited. I stayed in London to help with the planting over the next few days.

The BBC interviewed the team at the nursery in early May, when we did a mock up of the stand, and again at Chelsea after we received a Silver-Gilt award. We had excellent coverage on BBC2 on the Thursday of Chelsea and this raised the HPS profile considerably. I was on the stand on the Friday, and the visitors flocked to the stand to see this novel rotating stand which was shown on the TV. Although we had 2-hour stints scheduled, the number of visitors meant that we all did 4 hours with just a short break before returning to the stand. We had several enquiries about the rotating mechanism from other exhibitors and John had the pleasure of providing chapter and verse!

We sold off most of the plants on the last day. The team dismantled the stand in about 2 hours, but we had another 2 hours to wait for the vans to enter on our allocated slot. We left Chelsea at 9pm and arrived in Gloucester just after 11pm. It was a fantastic adventure. Linda had built a show garden before and John and Linda spent a lot of time at Chelsea the previous year, but for the rest of us, we thoroughly enjoyed the outing to Chelsea.