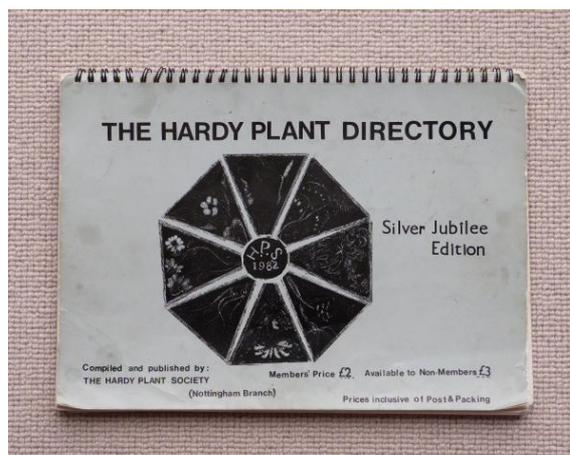


The Hardy Plant Directory and The Plant Finder

Rob Cole



The Nottinghamshire branch of the Hardy Plant Society first published a Plant Directory in 1975 as a guide to assist its members in finding a source for the rarer and more unusual plants. It was updated in a second edition in 1978 to commemorate the 21st Anniversary of the Hardy Plant Society, and again in 1982 to celebrate their Silver Jubilee, and I have a copy of this edition which was given to me a few years ago by a member of Plant Heritage upon hearing of my interest in the origins of The Plant Finder.

In this 1982 third edition, the country was split into seven regions and each of the nurseries in each of the regions was allocated a number, identifiable by a key. Then, in a simple matrix, plants were listed alphabetically in a column on the left hand side of the page, alongside seven regional columns, wherein the number of each nursery which sold that plant was listed. Using the number key, you could then find which nursery in your region sold the plant you were looking for. The listing ran to 88 pages, all of which were typed manually and then photostatted and ring bound. Around 2,500 plants were listed, and 93 nurseries.

The Directory is a fascinating look back into the plant and nursery world of over 30 years ago. So many of the nurseries or nurserymen no longer exist, including famous names like Jack Drake, George Osmond, Helen Ballard, Joe Elliott, Walter Ingwersen, and Elizabeth Strangman. Others such as Beth Chatto, Blooms of Bressingham, and Hillier Nurseries are, happily, still with us.

The Hardy Plant Society finally updated the content and presentation of the Directory and published The Plant Finder in April 1987, devised and compiled by Chris Philip, and edited by Tony Lord. Its purpose was still to list the availability of ornamental plants, the nurseries from which they could be bought, but now also to update nomenclature changes. The book was an instant success and has grown in size and standing ever since and is reissued every year to keep pace with current naming and plant availability, and is the reference work which Plant Heritage uses to determine which plants are eligible for inclusion in their annual Plant Exchange.

The first edition comprised just over 400 pages, cost £6.95 and listed around 22,000 plants from some 300 nurseries. The current 2015 edition has 928 pages, costs £15.99 and lists more than 70,000 plants and nearly 600 nurseries, and is now compiled by the Royal Horticultural Society.

I have a copy of that first edition which I found a few years ago in a jumble sale at Feckenham Village Hall, priced at 50p! I am so pleased to own this little piece of horticultural history.



The Plant Finder - First Edition