

Bloom in



Celebrating Melksham's History of Flowers



Henry Hill
(1852-1931)
*Gardener who earned the title
"Poet of Melksham"*

MELKSHAM

Let credit go where credit's due,
I'll tell you what I'm going to do.
I mean to say a word or two – On Melksham.

Of it cleanliness I'll sing –
I've seen the palace of the King,
But nothing yet so sweet and clean – As Melksham.

This fact you strangers may not know,
As up and doen the town you go,
But if you look you'll find it so – In Melksham.

'Tis but a small town, that's its name,
Yet worthy of the greatest fame.
It is a picture worth a frame – Is Melksham.

Sweet little town ! the gem you hold,
Is better than the brightest gold.
Just next to godliness I'm told – Is Melksham.

Those spotless flags outside the door,
How often have I scanned them o'er;
I'd eat my dinner off the floor – In Melksham.

Smile on; and may thy fame increase,
And may thy sweet face never cease,
To show the world the elbow grease – In Melksham.



A Horticultural Fête at Melksham

on Wednesday, went off with great *eclat* answering every expectation, and reflecting great credit on its managers. The French Asters were very excellent, nor did the China Asters come much behind them; the cut Flowers of the ornamental collection were decidedly good. The show of stove and greenhouse plants was small; cottager's vegetables and the wild flowers numerous. The last met you on entering the tent, and we never knew before what our lanes, and hedges, and fields produce. A tripod of elegant shape and admirable mixture of colours, marked a lady's tasteful eye and hand; next to it was a larger but less classically shaped collection; made by artizans in the factory. The shops were shut, and triumphal arches, ten or twelve in number, were erected at all the entrances of the town, and in the streets.

- Wells Journal,
Saturday 25 August 1855



October 1915 - Flowering Rock Plants.

"I was interested in the list of alpine plants given by Mr. E. C. Bowell on October 16, and perhaps the following list of plants which were in flower at variety rosea. Whirlwind and Queen Charlotte are certainly very strong, the flowers being well over 4 feet above the ground, but the blooms certainly do not compare with the others for size in this favoured locality, and I think if they are given better positions than some of them are in; at present they will grow away into good specimens."

- R. H. Legg, *Melksham House Gardens, Melksham*

Correspondence transcribed from:
"The Garden, 1918: An Illustrated Weekly Journal of Gardening in All Its Branches" p 540



Robert Henry Legg
(1865-1950)
Gardener for Melksham House



MELKSHAM CARNIVAL – BATTLE OF THE FLOWERS

28 September, 1912



Melksham Garden Club



At the 1947 inaugural meeting, county surveyor Mr McCulloch (standing) informed the group that the Market Place needed sprucing up and suggested a roundabout would fit the bill. "I'll pay for it," announced Percy Hughes (first row, 2nd from left). And he did. Nelson Coles (first row, far right) listened intently.



The club's annual show c1948 was held in conjunction with St Johns Ambulance. Pictured are members of both organisations, including Fred Bailey, Charlie Andrews and Jack Newman of St Johns Ambulance. Also pictured: Nelson Coles, secretary of the Garden Club for 20 years; Mr Mortimer, manager of the Co-op; Spike Vincent, Spencer Engineering; Percy Hughes, Director at Avon Tyres; Colonel Glendenning, Chief Constable of Wiltshire; and Major Charles William Maggs, owner of the coconut matting factory.



The Weir, Melksham Mills.

The Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette.

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THURSDAY, AUGUST 24, 1864.

PRICE (25) 2

MELKSHAM - AS WE SAW IT YESTERDAY.

Could the old “friends” of years gone bye have seen Melksham yesterday, decked out as it was in all the colours of the rainbow—with triumphal arches spanning its streets, flags flying in all directions, and the front of almost every house converted into an illuminated floral bower—they would assuredly have rub’d their eyes, and fancied themselves in a dream! And well might they have done so. We, who have known the old town for something like 40 years, and have been accustomed to associate it with straight-collar’d drab coats, broad-brim’d hats, shovel bonnets,

and demure faces, could hardly have believed — had we not seen it — that here, above all other places in Wiltshire, a demonstration would have been got up, surpassing — we say it without hesitation — anything of the kind we ever before saw in this county. Talk of Trowbridge, indeed, and its “gala day!” all the displays that have taken place in that town sink into insignificance when compared with the scene of gaiety which Melksham yesterday presented. From end to end it was one continued ovation — not here and there and an attempt at display, but one universal effort, on the part of the inhabitants to dress the town in Nature’s gayest garb, and present,

“ ... it was not until we had crossed the bridge near Melksham Mills, that the full extent of the decorations became visible. ”



I thought of you when I saw this article -- from 1864!

as it were, the very best that could be procured, as an offering at the shrine of the lovely Goddess who had that day taken her abode among them.

We believe it was the first time that a floral fete had ever been held in Melksham; the first time certainly that the Keevil District Society had pitched its tents there; and had that Society cast its eyes over the whole county, it could not have met with a warmer welcome. We have said that the town was decorated from end to end; but such an elaborate display deserves something more than a general description.

The first thing that struck us on leaving the railway was a splendid triumphal arch, composed of evergreens and flowers and surmounted by flags, spanning the road leading to the station; but it was not until we had crossed the bridge near the Melksham Mills,

that the full extent of the decorations became visible. From this point, to the bridge on the Devizes road, along the Semington road to the turnpike, along Church Street, Lowbourne-street, and in fact every street in the town, there was a continuous line of fir trees planted, whilst arches, beautiful in design, were thrown across the thoroughfares at almost every 20 yards. Passing under one of them near the Bear Inn, — and which by the way formed the entrance to “the Mead,” where the flower show was held — our attention was drawn to the front of Mr. Berry’s house, which was decorated with an illuminated floral crown, supported on either side prettily constructed chaplets of evergreens and flowers, from whence hung a number of Chinese lanterns and a row of variegated lamps, which, as evening set in, produced an extremely picturesque effect. Next to Mr. Berry’s we noticed the house Mr. Newman, on which there

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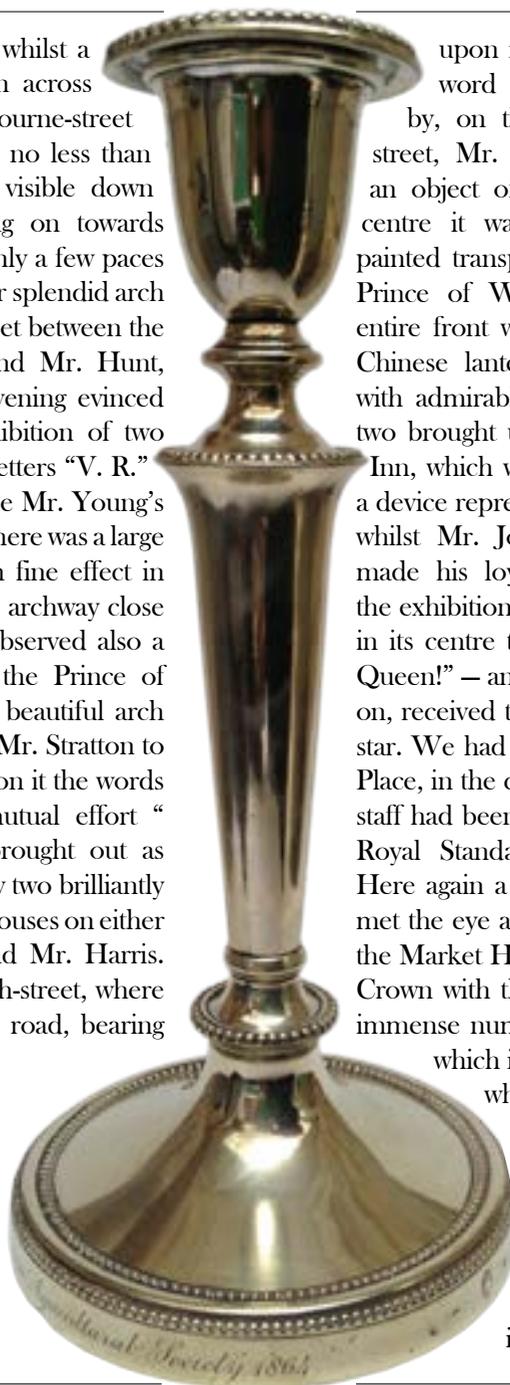
was a brilliant illumination representing the initials of the Prince and Princess of Wales — “A and A.” Next came Mr. Cochrane’s house, the entrance to which was wreathed with flowers and evergreens, whilst along the front

“ *From end to end it was one continued ovation ... one universal effort on the part of the inhabitants to dress the town in Nature’s gayest garb, and present ... the very best* ”

of it we observed, later in the evening, a splendid star of gas, with “V. R.” on either side. A few steps further, and we passed under another triumphal arch. This brought in front of the Mutual Improvement Rooms, from the exterior which, as the evening advanced, shone forth a brilliant star, with the letters “V. R.” Then came another triumphal arch, spanning the road from the North Wilts Bank to Mr. Arthur’s house on the opposite side, and surmounted by a crown, which in the evening lit with striking effect. Another arch followed, across the street from the George Inn to Mr. Baines’s, (the chemist), along the front of whose house, constructed of bright flowers, were the words

“Much pleasure to all!” whilst a second arch was thrown across the entrance to Lowbourne-street from “the George,” and no less than two other arches were visible down the same street. Passing on towards the Market Place, and only a few paces from the George, another splendid arch was raised across the street between the houses Mr. Simpson and Mr. Hunt, both of whom in the evening evinced their loyalty by the exhibition of two beautiful stars, with the letters “V. R.” on either side. Next came Mr. Young’s house, in front of which there was a large crown, which lit up with fine effect in the evening; and over an archway close to the latter house we observed also a large representation of the Prince of Wales’ plume. Another beautiful arch spanned the street from Mr. Stratton to Mr. Harris’s, bearing upon it the words “No success without mutual effort “ and which were well brought out as evening began to close by two brilliantly illuminated stars on the houses on either side, of Mr. Stratton and Mr. Harris. We next came to Church-street, where another arch span’d the road, bearing

This candlestick was awarded as a trophy to W. H. Gotch by the Melksham Agricultural Society on 20 May, 1864



upon it, in large characters, the word “Welcome!” and close by, on the opposite side of the street, Mr. Tonkin’s house formed an object of great attraction. In the centre it was placed an exquisitely painted transparency, representing the Prince of Wales’ plume, whilst the entire front was decorated with pretty Chinese lanterns and flags, disposed with admirable taste. Another step or two brought us in front of the Crown Inn, which was aptly illuminated with a device representing its own regal sign; whilst Mr. Jones, a near neighbour, made his loyal aspiration known by the exhibition of a floral shield, bearing in its centre the words “God save the Queen!” — and which, as evening came on, received the addition of a beautiful star. We had now come to the Market Place, in the centre of which a high flag staff had been erected, from which the Royal Standard waved triumphantly. Here again a profusion of decorations met the eye at every turn. The front of the Market House had on it a splendid Crown with the letters “A. A.” and an immense number of variegated lamps, which in the evening lit up the of whole of the Market Place with really dazzling effect. Mr. Hinder’s house and the Old Crown were here also objects of attraction; and, close by, was another immense arch spanning

the road, surmounted with the letters V. R.; whilst further on, at the turnpike gate, we observed a second arch, bearing its centre, in large characters, the word “Welcome!”

After taking a survey of the decorations along this street, we returned and crossed over to Mr. Phelps’s, where another beautiful arch was reared across the road to Devizes, adorned with a crown, and set off with some score or more small flags; — and,

“ *Every part (of the tent) was well filled, and with an eye to effect which elicited an exclamation of admiration from every one who entered it* ”

the work apparently of the same master hand, were the decorations upon and around the house of Mr. Phelps, the entrance to which was embowered with evergreens and flowers, tastefully set off with some score or more small flags, each bearing upon it a different motto. Nearly opposite to Mr. Phelps’s, Mr. Pickett’s factory claimed attention, the gateway to which was decorated with a bright garland hanging from trees planted on either side, and from which depended the words “God bless the
continued on next page

Prince and Princess of Wales! “whilst further on, even after we had passed over the bridge on our way to Devizes, the road was lined with fir trees and decorated with flowers and evergreens. In short, to give a description of all the decorations, would to mention nearly every house in the town; for there was



Celebrating May Day c1900 in the field commonly used for large exhibitions and events, such as the flower show in this accompanying article

hardly one which did not put forth some sign of rejoicing, either the way of floral display or the exhibition of flags.

Leaving the streets therefore, for the time, let us return to the ostensible object which had induced the good people of Melksham so completely to metamorphose their town – we mean the Horticultural Show. This, as we have already intimated, was held in a large meadow immediately behind the Melksham Mills, admirably

adapted for the purpose to which it was devoted, both from its convenient situation, and its extent, being capable of accommodating almost any number of persons. Here as many as a dozen large marquees had been erected for different purposes, with orchestras for the bands, and numerous triumphal arches; but it was in the three largest of the tents that the show was held. The first contained the flowers, cut and in pots; and it was remarked by several experienced nurserymen that a more judiciously arranged tent they had not seen this season. There were none of those awkward naked gaps that we

saw at Trowbridge last week; every part was well filled, and with an eye to effect which elicited an exclamation of admiration from every one who entered it. Two beautifully arranged floral devices, the one representing the Prince Wales's Plume, set off with numerous other floral displays (by Mr. M. Sloper of Seend); the other an immense floral crown (by Mr. S. Moore of Poulshot), occupied a conspicuous place at either end, and attracted crowds of admirers; whilst the flowers and plants with which the tables were covered were pronounced by every one as gorgeous

and beautiful in the extreme.

We might specify several that struck us as especially handsome; but as they will be found mentioned in the prize list which we append, we will pass on to the next tent. This was devoted to fruits and other garden products; but conspicuously entwined around the pillars which supported the canvas were some fine specimens of this year's harvest, in the shape wheat, barley and oats. One sheaf of wheat which leant against the pillar at the entrance to the tent contained the remarkable number of 380 ears, the produce of a single ear of last year's growth on the farm of Mr. Cooper, of Erlestoke. The ear from whence this prolific return had been obtained was picked last year by Mr. Cooper out of a crop then growing on his farm, and the corns taken from it were planted with the view of seeing how many ears they would produce. The result was now shown. It was red wheat, with very large ears, and the seed, Mr. Cooper

informed us, was purchased by him of Mr. Norris of Fiddington three years ago.

The corn sheaves however were merely decorations to the fruit and vegetables with which the tables in this tent were covered, and which

were remarkably fine, especially the vegetables, which seemed to attract universal attention. But the tent was not without other objects of interest. There were, for instance, several admirable devices, constructed of wild flowers, the best of which was the handiwork of the excellent Secretary (Mr. J. I. Watts), and for which was justly awarded the first prize. But fine as the vegetables in the amateurs' tent appeared, they were completely eclipsed by the cottagers, whose tent contained the finest display of produce we have seen this year. In this department of the show there were no less than 100 competitors occupying cottages and gardens of the annual rental of £6 and under – most of them agricultural labourers, amongst whom

“... the flowers and plants with which the tables were covered were pronounced by everyone as gorgeous and beautiful in the extreme.”

the liveliest interest is excited. As the potatoes, they were splendid! and such roots, in the way of parsnips and carrots, could hardly be matched, we should say, throughout the county. In this tent also we observed several excellent

devices in wild flowers; one especially at the entrance. “Live and let live!” must have occupied days in its construction; also, a house and gay parterre, the handiwork of some ingenious cottager, whose sketch of a happy country home

continued on next page

would have done discredit to an artist of greater pretension.

But while the tents were crowded with admirers inside, there was no lack of amusement without, and certainly no lack of company to enjoy the gay scene that was going on around them. The families of nearly all the gentry in the neighbourhood were there, including



Melksham's pride of its flowers carries on, from Floral Fete Melksham, through to this carnival entry c1950, and no doubt well into the future.

a large party from Rood Ashton, with Lady Bisshopp. Miss Long, Mr. and Mrs. Hawkesworth, and Mademoiselle Celigy; and we may add, nearly every person in Melksham and for miles and miles around; for the price was adapted to admit all—the charges being at first 2s.; after 3 o'clock 1s.; and at 5 o'clock 6d. It was after the latter hour that the masses poured in, and at 6 o'clock there could not have been less than 7000

persons in the field. The scene was then at its height. It was a scene such had not been witnessed in Melksham within the memory of man, and a happier scene it would be almost impossible to imagine. The whole place teemed with good humour and a sense of the most thorough enjoyment, stimulated by excellent music, but supported principally by good fellowship, and a desire on every one's part to make the day a holiday in its best and truest light.

The closing scene in the show field was the display of fireworks by Professor Gyngell, his concluding piece, "Good Night! Success to the Keovil District Society!" eliciting universal applause.

As soon as this display was over, the company wended their way into the town, which was now brilliantly illuminated. The effect produced by the lighting of the devices on the arches and amongst the decorations, it is impossible to describe. We can only compare the town to one vast fairy land; and filled as the streets were by crowds of admiring visitors, the scene was animated in the extreme, and such as will not readily be forgotten in Melksham.

The gaieties however did not end

with the illumination. At 9 o'clock at the Assembly-room of the Town Hall (which had been specially decorated for the occasion), was thrown open,

THE BALL

Commenced, to the strains of an excellent quadrille band; and for hours afterwards—even until this morning—did the merry dance continue, polka, waltz, and galop, following each other with unabated vigor, and with mirth and gaiety that seemed to bid defiance to Care—and in fact to everything else, save the one object on which the happy throng were bent.

So ended the Floral Fete Melksham yesterday! And well indeed may we congratulate every one connected with it upon the success with which it was crowned. Of Mr. J.

I. Watts, the excellent Secretary the Society, we hardly know how to speak in terms of sufficient praise. Those who see the completion of these Floral Fetes are little aware of the immense trouble they entail upon the working hands before the arrangements, on which they so much depend, are made and on the present occasion the work which could have produced such a splendid result must have been great indeed. Mr. Watts, therefore, the public ought to feel exceedingly indebted for

all the pains he took to make the event pass off as it did; and we cannot omit to mention another gentleman who has always kindly exerted himself on these occasions—we allude to Dr. Seale of Steeple Ashton, one the most active members of the Committee, and who yesterday gave himself to the work with a good will that entitles him to the thanks of every one.

We can only say, in conclusion, as we said in the beginning, that it was, without exception, the gayest affair of

“ We can only say, in conclusion, as we said the beginning, that it was, without exception, the gayest affair of the kind we have ever seen in this county ”

the kind we have ever seen in this county; and we do not hear that a single event happened to mar in any way the universal happiness with which it was accompanied, or to cast a cloud over the sunshine which prevailed. The day itself was all that could

be desired—pleasantly bright, without being too warm. Let us hope, that the showers which have so kindly kept aloft until this Gala Day was over, may now descend upon the pastures with which we are surrounded; and we shall then indeed have reason to be thankful, on account of the stock upon which the staple produce of Melksham so much depends, and able to look back with all the more satisfaction upon the brilliant event which was yesterday witnessed in the good old town.



October, 1941 –

Queen Mary visited the Avon factory where it was noted 2,500 men and women were then employed and took tea in the canteen, sitting with workers, and was presented with a bouquet of bronze chrysanthemums which had been grown in the firms' gardens.



Queen Mary's Garden
Bath Road, Melksham
c1978

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MELKSHAM.

MELKSHAM HORTICULTURAL FETE. — An horticultural *fête* in aid of the Melksham Mutual Improvement Society was held on Wednesday, in a field near to the Railway Station, in which a very large marquee was erected for the flowers, fruit, and vegetables, and tent for the sale of refreshments. The show of flowers was very good, particularly in dahlias and asters; which, however, were greatly surpassed by the fruit and vegetables, which were exceedingly fine, and in large numbers. Besides the description of flowers usually exhibited, there were several nice collections of wild flowers, which showed well by the side of their highly-cultivated neighbours. There were also several prettily designed and well-executed devices, one of which, shown by Mr. Curtiss, of Warminster, attracted much attention. Ambrose Awdry, Esq., of Seend, who kindly officiated as one of the judges, sent a number of flowers, not for competition, but to decorate the marquee. There were two bands of music; the town was hung with garlands and flags, and the streets were spanned with triumphal arches which were illuminated at night. In the field, archery, football, and other amusements were going on during and after the show; and, indeed, all that could

be done by the energetic committee was done to make it a day of pleasure. Among the visitors were the Rev. T. Heathcote, of Shaw-hill-house; the Rev. J. Wilkinson, the Rev. E. B. Edgell, the Rev. Meredith Brown, Ambrose Awdry, Esq., E. Edmonds, Esq., J. L. Phillips, Esq, W. E. Tugwell, Esq., – Fowler, Esq., of Elm-grove, T. Bruges, Esq., &c.



Ambrose Awdry



Melksham says it with flowers

Flower arrangement made with train tickets, crafted by Miriam Zaccarelli for the grand opening of The Well House Collection on 12 May, 2012, the first theme being transportation.

Melksham Lowbourn School Speech Day 27 July, 1939 -

A present of flowers to celebrate her 90th birthday is given to Miss Caroline Stratton, a member of the School Board management for many years.



St. Michael's School headmaster and pupils Dig for Victory in April, 1940.



Hurn Bros. was an established family business in Melksham spanning 400 years; they were leading makers of trellis fencing as well as major suppliers of flower and tree stakes.

HURN Bros, English & Foreign
Timber Merchants,
STEAM SAW MILLS, G.W.R., -
- and THE ARK SAW MILLS,
MELKSHAM.



This rear garden at 34 Church Walk overlooks The Ark, the sawmill factory where Hurn Bros. was located. The business moved in 1854 to be closer to the railway, which came to Melksham in 1848.



The Well House Collection

is proud of Melksham's roots and pleased to be able to share with you these memories of Melksham's Bloomin' Past.

A special thank you to Simon Brewer, Linda De Santiz, Tony Seager, Brian Thomas, Miriam Zaccarelli, Alison Christie, Melksham and District Historical Association, Melksham Town Hall