

# **WALTHAM GARDENERS' SOCIETY**

## **FOR WALTHAM AND SURROUNDING VILLAGES**

### **The Road to Chelsea** **by Sue Shaw - Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> March, 2017**

Sue provided a wonderful, passionate presentation on her road to Chelsea with the Kent Branch of NAFAS.

Sue first visited the Chelsea Flower Show in 1989 with her mother and that turned her into a gardener but her second visit with the NAFAS team in 2008 changed her from a shy individual into a practices presenter.

Sue's love of flowers and their display meant she joined the National Association of Flower Arrangement Societies (NAFAS) in early 2000 and in 2006 she was asked to join the team for the 2008 NAFAS display at Chelsea. They met in early 2007 to plan their display and following much discussion fixed on the title of Nature's Kaleidoscope for their Kent Area display.

It was to be something the public could interact with, bold and vibrant colours over 16ft high with 5ft rings across a 20ft square. Such displays are not cheap and thus their Chairman gave each of their Kent Clubs £10 and asked them to grow the money, this created wonderful team cohesion across the county with all sorts of fund raising schemes.

Next to create a team or corporate identify for the team and a green uniform was decided upon. They visited M& S and came away with Pink Jackets not quite what was initially envisaged but what was to become an iconic uniform choice.

They found a suitable venue for their practice sessions at an industrial unit which the owner donated free of charge and practice in earnest with trial scaffolding and sectional displays started. South East Flowers from Ashford became their wholesale flower supplier.

The BBC even visited their industrial unit engaged by their story and they became media stars.

Over 6,000 Blooms were used in the display plus a mountain of leaves. Three men were pressed into action to erect the scaffold framework on the stand and the ladies got to work, they had to finish on the Sunday before the Show opened for the press and Royal visit on the Monday. They actually finished at 3.30am on Monday morning and then grabbed a few hours sleep before being back at the stand by 10.00 am on Monday morning with smiles, iconic Pink Jackets and black skirts or trousers.

Not finished yet whilst the Royals toured Chelsea most of the ten ladies went off to prepare 30,000 booklets on the display. Alan Titchmarsh had visited the stand during the morning and again the ladies became media stars with him in front of the camera and film crews.

Alan Titchmarsh asking where they had obtained their lovely Pink Jackets gave the ladies a chance to give M & S a plug on air. M & S have subsequently worked with Kent area NAFAS.

The whole experience bonded the Pink Ladies of Kent as a Team they spoke to thousands of the public all who wondered at their vibrant display and most could not understand why they had been awarded a Silver Gilt medal not a Gold. As a lovely sequel the Ladies still do Pink Jacket lunches.

A wonderful story.