



# SUSSEX AREA OF NAFAS

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
OF FLOWER ARRANGEMENT  
SOCIETIES

CHARITY No. 292377

[www.SussexAreaNAFAS.org.uk](http://www.SussexAreaNAFAS.org.uk)

[www.facebook.com/SussexAreaNAFAS/](https://www.facebook.com/SussexAreaNAFAS/)

## Week 9 – From Solitary Confinement to Open Prison

Dear Members,

Didn't we do well? The first NAFAS Area to run a virtual Council Meeting! Thank you very much for your support – we were only a few participants down on our usual number. We've saved time, mileage and expenses, and lowered our carbon footprint but it's not quite the same as meeting up and having a chat and a catch up. After all, it's what we're all about: fun, friendship and flowers. Perhaps there's a compromise there somewhere and we can do a bit of both. Our next virtual Council Meeting will be on Monday 10<sup>th</sup> August 2020 and, remember, any member is entitled to attend.

This week we're having a Chelsea Flower Show retrospective. We're fortunate in our Area to have some super flower arrangers who are great competitors. Some of their stories are told overleaf. Get your remotes ready for Virtual Chelsea on the telly.

Jilly

Me in my profile pic vs. me in the zoom meeting



### My Chelsea by Jilly Griffin

I took over as Chief Steward at the Chelsea Flower Show in 2014. Many of the "Old Hands" had resigned after the Centenary Celebrations of 2013. So, it was a new team of young (well some of them us!) and enthusiastic people hell-bent on making sure the competitors and the general public had a good time. Gone were the days of old sourpusses sat behind a desk. I instigated meeting and greeting the public, explanation of competitive flower arranging (I got it down to 2 sentences!) and how the judging worked. We even displayed the schedule last year which people found most interesting.

Two contributors overleaf mention a TV company in 2017. They were filming to see if it was possible to translate a Bake-Off style programme to flower arranging. They just loved Callie Meers and her sister because Callie had a big panic. Her paeonies had blown. Her sister had to run over to the Grand Pavilion (where the florists and last-minute titivators were) to find some replacements, closely followed by the film crew.

By 2014 we were ensconced in the Floral Design Studio, next to M&G and the tunnel linking Main Avenue and Eastern Avenue. Over the years, the carpet changed from royal blue to a more flattering grey; but the lighting was always bad, the flooring bounced and some of the stands and plinths were past their use-by date. A little tricky to find but by 2019 we had signage and that year we welcomed over 28,000 visitors into the Studio. My favourite time was the overnight staging as well as at either end of the day when the Studio looked just like an art gallery. My Chelsea week was always over 110 hours long (partly due to the two overnights) and the parting gift was a cold!

Now, it's all change with all floral art taking place in the Grand Pavilion; florists, flowers arrangers and anyone who thinks they can do it will be altogether in the same area, one session not two (so halving the number of competitors), and long-life designs. Let's see how they get on next year and let's hope the BBC will be filming it.

**Linda Porrett:** The exhibit I liked most has to be the one where the overall title was “Tangled” in 2014. My title was “Oh what a tangled web we weave, when first we practise to deceive”. Award: Gold and Best in Show.

“Tangled” was so inspiring and immediately made me think of the poem Marmion by Sir Walter Scott, from which this quote is taken, and not from Shakespeare as many people may think. A quote which speaks of lies and deceit, and a tale of romance and passion resulting in battle.

I love titles where research and storytelling are involved. The inspiration for this was easy but the process of constructing mechanics usually takes some time to get right. This one consisted of several heart shapes made from wire and muehlenbeckia vine.

Superstitious? No but I do always take my “Chelsea” fleece from 2006 when I was the Sussex team’s designer for the exhibit in the main marquee, which happily produced a gold medal.



Man dressed like a dog to avoid police during lockdown



**Ruth Collingridge & Jennie Thomas,**  
Crowborough Flower Club:



First time 2013, excited, nervous of the unknown and thrilled to be there. We were placed next to Horam & Heathfield club which helped to calm the nerves and they are now firm friends. We were walking on cloud nine to have received a silver medal first go, we felt amazing. We'd got the bug, back we went the year after. Always lots of fund raising, which was great fun, bring and buy, lunches, teas you name it we did it. Couldn't have done it without the help of our two husbands making mechanics, driving us up to London, then having to sleep in the car while we arranged. Staging through the night was fun it really didn't seem like the early hours you are just so in the zone with a great atmosphere.

We always felt well prepared with lots of mock ups until 2017: nothing went to plan, there was a film crew there that night which didn't help matters. We finished at 5min to 6am, not very happy bunnies, didn't like the final design. Low and behold a Silver ward!!

Then came 2019, Diamond Anniversary, thought we'd have another go: Silver Gilt! Both of us have been NAFAS members for very many years and it has been an honour and a privilege to have competed at Chelsea, and receiving 4 Silver and 2 Silver Gilt awards.

**Stephen McDonnell:** Of all the flower shows, Chelsea is my all-time favourite. Planning starts many months ahead. Converting my kitchen to a design studio for the month before. Drawings, mock-ups and endless attention to detail are the hallmarks of a Gold medal. My designs are usually large with many components so organisation is a must.

My stand-out design was five years ago. That year the show was heavily over-subscribed and I failed to secure a space. A week before the show Jilly rang me and asked could I help as someone had dropped out at short notice. I said yes and set about creating a design for the following week. Many mock-ups later I had a design. I ordered my flowers online accompanied by two large glasses of wine! My class title was "Bizarre". I enjoyed setting up the design as I was creating what my mind's eye was seeing. The finishing touch was to glue some life size blue bottle flies into the design. I called my design The Return of the Triffids. The design won Gold and Best in Show. A Celebration Champagne lunch was with friends at Fortnum & Masons. A day to treasure.



**Jean Plaskett:** I was the NAFAS National Affiliates Officer for 7 years from 2003 and this included stewarding the Floral Art marquee at the Chelsea Flower Show. My first show was in a marquee by the bandstand and restaurants, just along from the small gardens. We were not allotted cleaners so after the competitors had gone home, we had to brush and clear the floor before the judges arrived. My second marquee was in a much more prestigious location right in the heart of the show just outside the Grand Pavilion at the top of the main walk where all the big show gardens are and quite close to the Pimm's bar - such a good place to meet friends because they all knew where it was! This was a much more up-market marquee and we had cleaners. Along with the floral art we had children's competitions, so the National Children's Liaison Officer was part of the NAFAS contingent plus the National Publicity Officer and many's the time we had a sneaky Bucks Fizz together behind the screens in the corner of the marquee. All three of us would be on duty on the two overnight stagings making sure the competitors were well watered with lots of tea and coffee and fed with sweets and biscuits - we had to do something to keep ourselves awake from 9pm on Sunday and Wednesday nights until 6am the following mornings apart from having Cup-a-Soups and filling our hot water bottles - it gets very cold in the wee small hours in a marquee. Walking around the show ground and the Grand Pavilion at 3-4 am on Sunday is something I will never forget - the stands and the show gardens are having their final tweaks, and all is peaceful and quiet I even saw a fox wandering round the Pavilion one morning. Talking to the visitors once the show is open was always fun - Carol Kirkwood came in complaining about the terrible weather so I had to tell her to go out and do something about it! Teaching Chris Beardshaw how to do a triangle on TV was fun although he did admit that his Mother was a flower arranger so he sort of knew what he was doing - I didn't wash my face for a week after he kissed me. We had several different flats to stay in over the years some were OK some not - three sleeping in one room was not ideal - we could have had a snoring competition! There was only one bathroom and we had to be at the show by 8am so getting on well with each other was important and it's still fun to reminisce and have a laugh when we see each other at National events. One highlight of the week was a lunch given by the RHS to thank all of the firemen and police officers and other voluntary workers - who wouldn't enjoy that? Although I was promoting NAFAS at the show I was actually working for RHS Chelsea. Jolly hard work but fun and I wouldn't have missed it for the world.

**Phyllis Stevens & Kathy Cade, Horam & Heathfield Flower Club**



Having the chance to experience the Chelsea Flower Show was like a dream come true. From start to finish it was a wonderful learning curve with emotions running high, exhilarating one moment - total panic the next, but we sallied forth and set about the task.

After months of preparation we decided on the letter C for our stand/display. The letter C in Roman numerals stands for 100, for Celebration and Chelsea. The Chelsea Flower Show 2013 was celebrating its 100 year anniversary. The title for our exhibit was "Centenary".

Monday was the day of judging, also for Exhibitors, Film Stars and Camera Crews only, with the Royal Family visiting in the afternoon.

We were ecstatic on arrival to find we had been awarded a Bronze Medal.

The beauty, the atmosphere and the people made it an experience of a lifetime. Do give it a go, you will never regret it.

**Thanks to all the contributors for their tales and memories.**

**Gaenor Circus:**

**2017:** The 2017 Chelsea Flower Show was a memorable occasion for me in more ways than one. For a start it was my first involvement competing in the Floral Art section. And what an experience as one works through the night to be ready for the early morning judging.

However, we all had some extra visitors during the night - a television camera crew taking various shots for a possible pilot television programme. When we had finished our exhibits in the early morning, one of the crew came up to me and asked whether I would mind being interviewed, together with my sister. Seeing as I don't have a sister, I was intrigued - even more intrigued when I found out he thought my 'sister' was Linda (Porrett)! What happened to that tape no one knows, but perhaps that's just as well!

**2019:** When I was awarded a Gold medal as last year's Chelsea Flower Show, I was so excited I couldn't wait to tell Philip (my husband) back home and so I rang him immediately. 'What's happened?' he asked expectantly. 'I've got a Gold' to which Philip responded 'You've got a cold?' Oh dear, perhaps he needs to go to Specsavers - after all, they provide hearing tests as well.



joe heenan  
@joeheenan



My son lost a tooth last night.  
I just saved myself £2





Usain Bolt practising social distancing:

## The Big Flower Fight

Starting on Thursday, 18<sup>th</sup> May 2020 on Netflix, The Big Flower Fight pitches 10 pairs of florists/designers against each other to design giant floral installations. They will be judged by Kristen Griffith-VanderYacht (apparently, he is a famous florist from New York) plus a special co-judge each week.

The Big Flower Fight is an 8-part series hosted by comedians (so they say) Vic Reeves and Natasia Demetriou.

## Virtual Chelsea

It's that time of year again and I've already been spluttering with the Chelsea cough from plane tree pollen.

It's the RHS's Virtual Chelsea Flower Show this year. If you're a silver (or any other colour) surfer, go to:

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/virtual-chelsea> Create an account on the RHS website for additional special content.

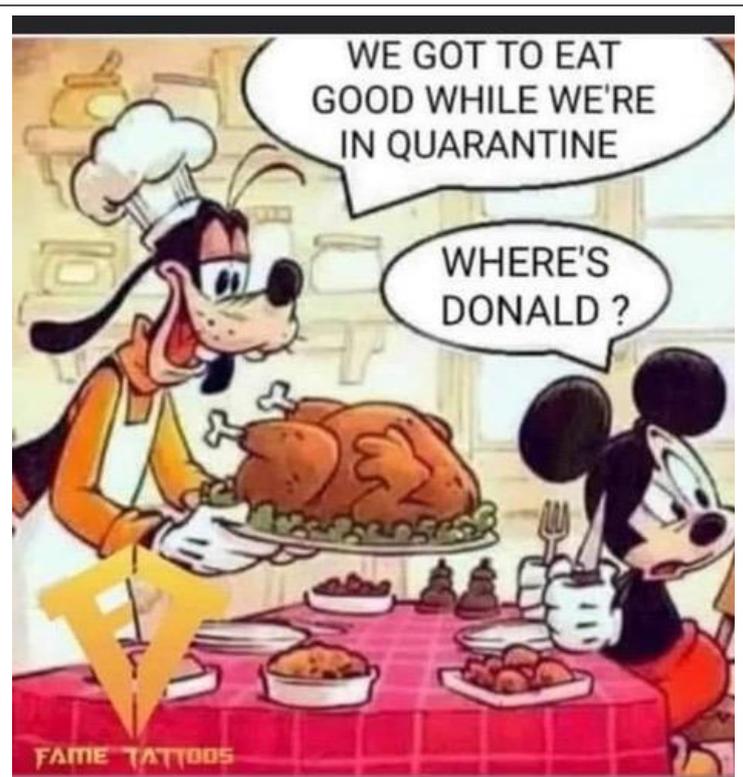
Otherwise, stick with the BBC:

- Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> May (BBC One) - Two 60 minute programmes presented by Sophie Raworth and Joe Swift
- Monday 18<sup>th</sup> to Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> May (BBC One) - 45 minutes a day presented by Nicki Chapman
- Monday 18<sup>th</sup> - Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> May (BBC Two) - 60 minutes a day presented by Monty Don and Joe Swift

I know who I'll be watching avidly - my favourite: Monty Don!



Friends are the fruitcake of our lives. Some are nutty, some are soaked in alcohol, some firm, some sweet, but altogether, they are great to have in your life.



## The Mask

Is there light at the end of the tunnel? The Prime Minister has slightly reduced the lockdown for those who do not have underlying health conditions or are shielding loved ones at home. It's self-evident to keep your distance but, if you can't, you should wear gloves and don't forget your mask:



If you have no mask, just improvise!

