

Mick Dunstan talks to **President Roy Lancaster** at the start of the **Hardy Plant Society's diamond anniversary celebrations**

2017 is a landmark year—the Society's 60th anniversary. Formed in 1957 – like the Common Market– it has changed enormously and now faces fresh challenges.

A member since the early 1960s, for Roy this year also marks a decade in the role of President. He's been taking stock of where the Society stands and its future challenges.

He said, "You know, the people who drew up the original constitution of the Society did a pretty good job. A lot of what they decided still holds firm, and some will be even more important in the future.

"One of their objectives – to advance the culture, study and improvement of hardy herbaceous plants, other than rock plants – remains totally true.

"Another was the preservation of older, rarer and less well-known hardy plant varieties to save them from being forgotten

or lost to cultivation. That's a very positive side of what we do. Given what's happening in the natural world, it'll become increasingly important.

"I've heard people say that that's best left to conservation organisations, but that's really not good enough. Anybody who's growing a plant successfully is part of this great conservation project. That was true in 1957, it's true today, and it will still be true in 60 years' time – perhaps even more so. It's a valuable part of what our members do and must be maintained and pursued with vigour."

From the start the Society aimed to cooperate with other bodies with similar aims. "This really matters because we need to know what other societies are doing," said Roy. "In recent years the RHS has realised that it can do more good not by competing with societies like ours, but helping them out and helping them to stay as independent entities. That's good news."

"Changes in society have led to the demise of several societies in recent times", said Roy. "The internet, for example, is now providing very attractive activities.

We have to find an alternative and what can be exciting to a younger audience – especially after some of David Attenborough's TV series – is our natural world and the effect

of humankind's activities on it. A lot of young people want to know how they can do their bit – and growing plants is part of the answer. I really believe the Society should look at increasing and broadening its interest in plant conservation.

"If you talk just about plants you're labelled a gardener, and that's perceived in some circles as boring. If we switch the emphasis to something to do with our world, our children's future, it becomes far more vital."

Roy sees the Society's relevance also to people keeping active and healthy as they live longer. "It's not as though we'd be jumping on that bandwagon", he said. "We are that bandwagon, and the social value of the HPS should not be underestimated." I've always referred to it as the friendly society. There's no doubting the feel-good factor it brings to so many members.

"We want to reach out to many who who want to feel their lives mean something, that they can make a contribution. What we all do can help save the planet and what can be more important than that?"

Roy said he'd enjoyed every second of being President. "I've loved meeting people at our meetings and talking about plants. I have no executive powers, but I am always happy to help contribute to the Society's continuing success." 🌿

