

New Ambassadors spread the word

The HPS is delighted to have four horticultural heroes who are now acting as Ambassadors for the Society. They are helping to raise our profile throughout the gardening world, promoting the HPS wherever they go. Report by **Geoff Hodge**.

Matt Biggs

Matt is a Kew-trained gardener, writer and broadcaster with a passion for plants. He writes regularly for the *The Garden*, *Gardens Illustrated* and *BBC Gardeners' World*; he's a regular on BBC Radio 4's *Gardeners' Question Time*; and he's written several books – his latest bestseller is *RHS Lessons from Great Gardeners: Forty Gardening Icons and What They Teach Us*.

Matt likes nothing better than to relax by working his Hertfordshire garden, with its collection of rare and unusual plants of all kinds. "For me, gardening is all about the plants. I have a 'weakness' for uncommon plants, anything with an interesting backstory – from heritage apples to hardy herbaceous perennials." He is always on the lookout for new ones.

But his garden provides him with plenty of gardening challenges. "The soil is a combination of clay with flints! I've overcome this problem with the addition of lots of organic matter, gypsum, horticultural sand and grit; using raised beds; ensuring I've got 'the right plant in the right place'; and lots of hard work!"

Matt says: "I was hugely honoured to be asked to be an HPS Ambassador, especially



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when the Society is celebrating such a notable birthday. It's a wonderful opportunity to tell those who are unaware of it about the important work the HPS does, but also to encourage everyone to enjoy the celebrations and encourage them to join.

"The HPS is vital for conservation, and increasing knowledge and enjoyment of plants. It also plays an important role in enabling people with similar interests to meet, discuss and enthuse about the plants that give them so much pleasure, and buying, swapping and conserving them, too. I have always found HPS members to be generous and knowledgeable, but they wear that knowledge lightly and are

always willing to share. One thing is noticeable – whatever the level of expertise, guests and new members are always made welcome. Everyone can offer you advice, information and the benefit of their experience – from practical information to stories about the discovery or breeding of the plant.

"I support the HPS because it is championing the cause of a wonderful group of plants that contribute so much to all gardens. It is promoting horticultural excellence, too. Any group that brings a bunch of likeminded gardeners together, with all the benefits that brings to both the people and the plants, deserves everyone's support."



Val Bourne

Val is an award-winning author, lecturer and garden writer who is a committed plantaholic. She is a *Daily Telegraph* regular, but also writes for *Saga*, *Amateur Gardening*, *Garden Answers*, *The English Garden* and, of course, this journal.

Val joined the HPS in the 1980s, initially attracted by the seed exchange as she didn't have a lot of money while her children were growing up.

"I've always enjoyed growing plants from seed, and this seemed the perfect answer to my woes."

However, an important

offshoot has been meeting lots of knowledgeable people through the HPS, some of whom have become good friends. "I'm so glad I met Olive Mason of Dial Park in Worcestershire, and Sue Ward from Eastleigh, Hampshire. It's so important when you're starting off in gardening to be able to meet and talk to other people and to be able to swap plants with them. Many Hardy Planters are really good gardeners and they're willing to share their knowledge.

She says that joining the HPS is a bit like joining a fellowship of plant 'custodians' who care for,

and share, a wide range of plants that are often difficult to find anywhere else.

"I believe the HPS is of vital importance at this time. We're in a dangerous situation at the moment – lots of specialist nurseries are closing down, and there's a tidal wave of plants coming in from Europe – many unnamed or wrongly named."

Val is committed to gardening organically and has pioneered the idea that you can have a lovely garden without chemical props. She firmly believes that naturally run gardens have fewer problems, not more, and many parts of her garden are organised with wildlife in mind. But, she says firmly, "I don't like the 'glorious jumble' of cottage gardens. I like structure and colour sequences; I go for themes. But I do have my plant passions, particularly snowdrops, peonies, dahlias, roses and hardy ferns."

She admits that time is her greatest gardening challenge – or rather the lack of it! "Life is supposed to become easier as you get older and give you more time for hobbies and interests. But I was more-or-less housebound last winter writing my latest book [*The Living Jigsaw*, reviewed in the Spring 2017 edition]. And I now realise how important doing just those essential winter jobs is. I didn't have the time then and now I can't catch up!"

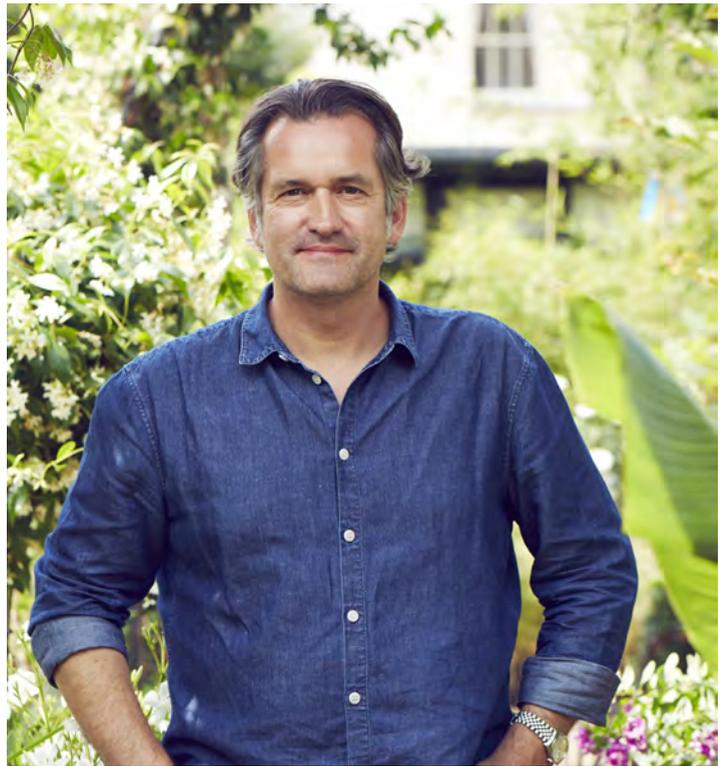
Matthew Wilson

Matthew is an award-winning garden and landscape designer, a lecturer, writer, and a radio and television broadcaster. He was dubbed 'The Landscape Man' after the Channel 4 series. At Chelsea last year his show garden won the prestigious People's Choice. Matthew worked for the RHS for a decade, as Curator at Hyde Hall then Head and Curator of Harlow Carr. He found developing both gardens incredibly rewarding.

"I'm probably best known for my quite 'naturalistic' planting, such as the Dry Garden at Hyde Hall and the Main Borders at Harlow Carr, but my taste is quite eclectic. My own garden is a mixture of flowering perennials and grasses, along with structural elements, including shrubs, roses – I love roses – and simply clipped and shaped box. Clients I design for come to me because they like that style: loose and natural perennial planting in a framework of structural woody plants."

Matthew's first experience of the HPS came 20 years ago at Hyde Hall. "The Society organised – and still does – an Autumn Plant Fair. I was warned it was a popular event, but it wasn't until the traffic backed up for more than a mile down the road that I realised just how popular!"

He has admired the work of the HPS ever since. "The enthusiasm of members and the great breadth of



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knowledge make for an invaluable resource and ensure membership is a fun experience for anyone with an interest in hardy plants.

"Throughout my gardening life, I've enjoyed so much advice, direction and support from HPS members, especially nurserymen and women. My garden is full of plants I've bought at HPS plant fairs, where every purchase comes with expert advice from a person who knows exactly how to grow it."

As for being an HPS Ambassador, Matthew believes that the need to promote hardy plants in as great a variety as possible is important, as diversity in garden plants is just as important as it is in wild

plants. "There's such a fantastic range of plants out there, but the constraints of commercial production mean many aren't widely available."

As for his own gardening challenges: "For the first time in my gardening life, I have decent topsoil instead of pure clay, clay mixed with flint, or dust-dry chalk. It's a revelation! However, as I've discovered, even this comes with limitations. The subsoil is so far down it means the topsoil dries out very quickly, and nutrients can easily leach through. It's also quite an exposed garden. But then I simply follow the credo of 'right plant, right place' to ensure horticultural happiness!"



Carol Klein

Carol is a passionate plantswoman and her enthusiastic approach arguably makes her one of the most recognisable television gardening presenters. Her TV programmes and magazine and newspaper articles regularly feature cottage-garden and hardy plants, making her an ideal HPS Ambassador.

Carol made her television debut on *Gardeners' World* in 1989, and she's been a regular presenter since 2005. Among other programmes, she presented *Real Gardens* and *Life in a Cottage Garden*, which followed a year at Glebe Cottage in North Devon – her home for the last 40 years.

Last year Carol presented a TV piece featuring the educational HPS stand at Tatton Park, designed and

built by the Cheshire Group. The display, which proved very popular, used the RHS hardiness ratings to show the wide range of hardy plants that grow well in the UK.

Carol was introduced to the HPS by her great plant friend and active HPS member, Sonia Roffey, of *Polemonium* 'Sonia's Bluebell' fame. "We just used to talk and talk about plants. I knew all I wanted to do was grow plants from seeds and cuttings, and when I asked Sonia what I should do with all the plants I'd grown, she said 'Sell them!'" So for 30 years Carol raised many of her favourite unusual herbaceous perennials, selling them as Glebe Cottage Plants.

"I'm honoured to be an Ambassador for the Society and thrilled that my good friend Roy is our President.

The HPS plays a vital role in spreading the word about how marvellous and how important hardy perennials are – as well as spreading the plants themselves to a wider audience of gardeners." She also thinks it's important in the current economic climate. "Someone told me recently that their view of growing plants was all down to 'how many you could fit on to a Dutch trolley'!

"It's great to meet up with other HPS members and just talk about plants – true plant conversations. HPS members don't try to outdo each other and their generosity is fabulous, giving you seeds, cuttings or any little bit of a plant they can spare. It's not a 'posh shop' – we involve everyone.

"Organic gardening is central, but my philosophy is actually very simple – go with it. Follow Nature's lead, grow your own plants – and enjoy every chance to garden."

As you'd expect, her garden is crammed full of herbaceous perennials. "Yes, it looks informal and naturalistic," says Carol. "But the plants need to do their own thing and it's then my job to put them together so they look lovely. I guess I'm a bit of a 'variety snob', concentrating on the best cultivars of each species!"

Like Val, Carol's biggest gardening challenge is just not having enough time. And this year it's not helped by the fact that she's growing all the flowers – literally thousands of them – for her daughter's wedding! 🌸