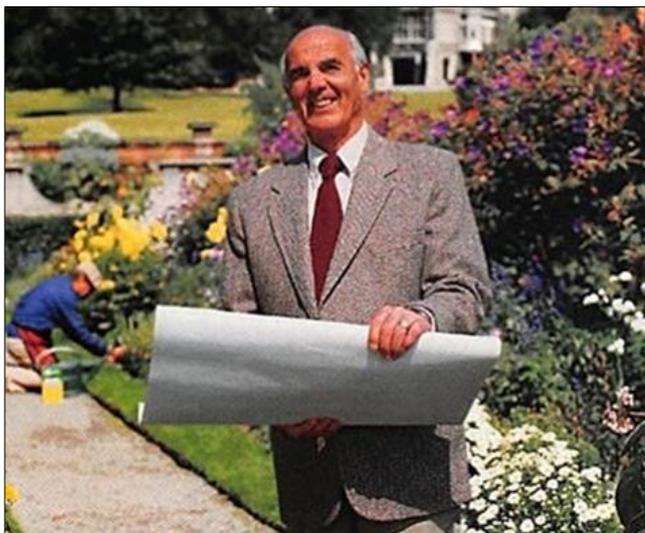


Ashley Stephenson LVO FCIH

1.9.1927 - 3.2.2021



Ashley left school at 14 and joined Newcastle Corporation Parks Department, serving a three-year apprenticeship before being called up for national service. On leaving the army he returned to gardening and was in private service in Gosforth, before moving to a landscape gardening firm near Ponteland in Northumberland. His horticultural experiences encouraged him to apply to the RHS gardens at Wisley to become a student. Competition was stiff but he was accepted and after two years obtained his Wisley Diploma.

In 1954, now armed with a professional qualification, he applied to join the Royal Parks. He was offered the post of gardener grade 2 starting on a salary of £7 per week, working in Hyde Park nursery, propagating pelargoniums. Not long after, he proposed to his girlfriend from home, Isabel, and they married in 1955.

Continuing to work his way through the ranks, Ashley eventually became superintendent grade 1 for the Central Royal Parks, which included responsibility for the gardens of Buckingham Palace. It was in 1980, when he was appointed to the Royal Parks premier role of Bailiff, that Ashley and his family moved into Ranger's Lodge in Hyde Park, the official residence that went with that position.

The title of Bailiff was set up by King Edward VII to replace the centuries old title of Ranger, an appointment always made by the monarch of the day. However, although the title had changed, the employment of the person selected to become Bailiff had to be endorsed by the Crown, in Ashley's case, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Ashley was very proud of the fact that he was the first person in the history of the position of Bailiff to have risen completely from the bottom to the top, having started as a gardener. The previous Bailiff, Robert Hare, was a trained horticulturist but came into the role at a senior level; Ashley came right through the ranks. Traditionally, one of the roles of Bailiff was to be the Queen's representative for the Royal Parks and it was with fondness that Ashley remembered his royal duties. When he retired in 1990 a farewell party was held for him in the Painted Hall at The Royal Naval College, Greenwich; quite a send-off for a lad from a coal mining village in Northumberland.

As well as his career in the Royal Parks, Ashley was active in the world of horticulture generally, both through his work with the 'In Bloom' movement and the Royal Horticultural Society. He was also a writer, at one time being gardening correspondent for both the London Evening News, where his *nom de plume* was the 'Queen's Gardener', and the Times. Ashley's connection with London In Bloom began shortly after he joined the Royal Parks when he was asked by his employer to represent them on the LIB committee, the In Bloom competition then being overseen by the London Tourist Board. According to Ashley, "this was in the early days when just eight or nine boroughs took part, the pace was very relaxed; judging was a relatively simple matter and required much deliberation under a shady tree with a bottle of wine and some sandwiches". After judging for many years he

became vice chairman of London In Bloom in 1984. Later he went on to be chairman of South & South East In Bloom and a judge for Britain In Bloom, continuing his involvement well into retirement.

On retirement Ashley took on the role of horticultural consultant for Trusthouse Forte with responsibility for their gardens at hotels, restaurants and motorway services. He was also a very popular speaker on the cruise ship circuit which became a large part of Ashley and Isabel's life in their later years. Sadly, Isabel passed away in March 2020.

Ashley was delighted when the Royal Parks Guild was set up in 2006 and, along with Isabel, proud to be amongst the first of its members. He was also rather pleased when a glasshouse plant was named after him; *Pelargonium x domesticum* 'Ashley Stephenson', reminding him of propagating pelargoniums in his early days.

Alan Titchmarsh, friend of Ashley and patron of the Royal Parks Guild, said, "I am so sorry to hear of Ashley's passing who I knew well. I have so many happy memories of cruises and talks and ... well, special times."

Ashley had a long and illustrious career and was part of that post-war golden horticultural generation. He will be sadly missed by all who knew him. We offer our condolences and kind thoughts to his daughter, Carol, his son, Ian, and their wider family.

The Royal Parks Guild