

The East Kent Ploughing Match Association
Women's Section.

1951 was the first year that there was a Women's Section of the E.K.P.M.A. which was held at Adisham Court on the 18th October.

Records show that a Nonington Agriculture Association P.M. was held as long ago as 1840 and continued for about 90 years with some breaks most notably during the two World Wars and during "Difficulties in the Agricultural Situation" in depression of the 1930's".

Soon after the end of the Second World War, on 25th October 1945, the Shepherdswell and District P.M. Association, as it was then called, held the first Match at West Court Shepherdswell where, despite rain and gale force winds, it is thought about 1000 people attended

"Ladies" were involved selling catalogues at a shilling [5p] a time. Angela Coleman and Kate Hume being involved almost from the beginning.

In 1950 the Association changed its name to the East Kent P.M.A. and the possibility of a Womens Section was suggested by Ella Robertson, John Robertson's wife. of Appleton Manor, but it was not thought to be financially possible that year. However she and a number of the P.M Committee Members' wives formed a Committee of their own and were able to put on their first Show the following year.

They were a remarkable collection of Ladies, mostly Farmer's wives, the majority in their 40's or early 50's, who had worked so hard during the War coping with shortages and the worry of children being evacuated from this hot spot of East Kent, followed by a difficult 5 years trying to get back to normal.

The first Chairman was Mavis Bones [one of the younger ones] with Ella Robertson as Secretary both supported by a freindly capable committee of Marjorie Brown [Gill Bradley's Mother], Majorie Collard [who remained on the committee for nearly 50 years], Mrs Harvey [from Nonington Kay Miles' Aunt-in-Law], Peggy Hogben [Wendy Morris' Mother], her twin sister Molly Hogben [always so kind to me], Marion Hume [Kate and Alison's Mother], Mrs Mummery [Frank's wife], Enid Plommer [the best Mother-in-Law anyone could have], Mrs Poile [Roger's wife], Maud Spanton [Averil Akehurst's Aunt], and Mrs Stevens.

They drew up the "Rules" which are almost exactly the same as they are today, and had 12 Classes and a Raffle with "some hundred prizes". It is said that "the array of over 400 entries must have made the eyes of the original doubters start from their heads".

In 1952 The Women's Section was deemed "A great asset, especially as they donated 50 to the Association!"

The 'four a year' meetings were held in Committee member's houses in the afternoons followed by delicious teas of sandwiches and scones and numerous cakes and biscuits. [I remember in the early Sixties, the first held at Maydensole after I was married, I spent about a month getting the garden ship-shape and a week baking!]

The Chairman was elected for 2 years and in the 50's, after Mavis Bones, Enid Plommer, Marjorie Collard, Molly Hogben and Marion Hume all took their turn.

In 1953 Kay Miles joined the Committee and a year later she was Assistant Secretary becoming Secretary in 1955 a post she held for 14 years. So quietly capable and efficient not only writing up the minutes and any necessary correspondence but arranging the Judges, getting the Schedule and Catalogue sorted out and printed, booking the Marquee and coping with the money side of things as well as getting the Raffle tickets printed and the entry cards written up. Even after she gave up the job of Secretary Kay was always busy, usually in the Raffle tent, and, if anyone was unsure about anything, it was always "ask Kay she'll know" and she always did.

In 1954 it was reported "Experts claim that the Women's Section Exhibition has no rival in Kent, including the Kent Show.

The Rickards Cup was first presented in 1955 for the Best Cherry Cake a class in which there were 60 entries. There were also classes for Butter and Cheese. Miss Hannah Pullar first judged this year and continued to do so, usually with her sister Mrs Turnbull, until 1998. They were lovely Scottish ladies who could judge anything with speed and efficiency. Eleanor Fuller, from Sutton, joined the Committee and for many years in the 60's and 70's she organised and ran the Raffle.

The new Lord Guildford's Mother [Mrs Harman-Hunt] drew the Raffle when the P.M. was held at Waldershare in 1956 and the Kentish Express Cup was presented for the first time. The weather was exceptionally wet.

Reports of the P.M. at Cold Harbour Farm, Kingston, in 1957 include Angela Coleman in the list of Committee members and she continues to be a loyal, cheerful member 45 years on. The name of the winner of the class for Cowman was also mentioned- Mrs Denman from Hawkinge. Mrs Denman also entered Poultry and Eggs in the Women's Section right from the beginning continuing to do so for many years, often winning the Martin's Cup for Poultry. She was joined by her Daughter, who originally entered the Children's Class, and who keeps up the family tradition by winning the Cup again this year, 2002.

When the P.M. was held at Upper Rowling, for the first time in 1958, Kate Hume won the Kentish Express Cup and did so again the following year when her Mother was Chairman of the Women's Section. The Pierson Cup, for Flower Arranging was first presented that year.

The first 10 years success was summed up by the report that "The exhibits demonstrate that Country Women have apparently unlimited skills and ingenuity, not to mention artistic taste."

In 1960 Pat Solley and Monica Powell joined the Committee, both long term loyal members. Even after she retired Pat helped on the Day for many years.

1961 saw Betty French take the Chair. It was always a pleasure to have a meeting at her interesting home, an old Oast at Kingston, and to see her garden which was such a picture and in which she worked so hard. She was always smiling and welcoming even though she had more than her share of difficulties. The Adisham Match on 17th October 1961 was my first introduction to the Ploughing Match where I was a Steward on the Handycraft Section under the watchful eye of Maud Spanton.

The return to Waldershare, 17th October 1962, my first year on the Committee, was a beautiful sunny day and I remember a number of people wearing summer dresses.

The number of people entering was still over 100, and during the next few years Peggy Hogben and Rosemary Mowll took their turn at being Chairman.

The pre Match preparation was much the same except the tables were already up [so we managed without the Men!] and we covered "our" Class tables with white sheets which we had taken with us. Along the center, between the tables, half bushell apple boxes were arranged, these had all been brought by Betty and Jack French. The Flower alcoves were made with white corrugated cardboard carefully clipped together and fixed to the tables.

I remember, I think it was 1965 at Eastry Court, I was in the Raffle tent busy filling in counterfoils, when two men came into the tent requesting a couple of books. When on asking "name please" I was told "David Ennals", none the the wiser I asked for his address only to be told "Houses of Parliament". The ground was too hard to swallow me up!

In 1966 when the P.M. was at Ileden Farm, Kingston, it was suggested we should ask the local School to put on a small exhibition at the end of our marquee and so it came about that Barham Primary School were the first of many delightful additions to our Show.

In 1967, at Nonington, after everything had been arranged in the Marquee, there was a terrific storm and a great deal of work had to be done to replace wet sheets and soggy, collapsed cardboard before the entries could be displayed.

Having been the mainstay of the Women's Committee for 14 years, Kay Miles said she really wanted to relinquish her post, so in 1968 I said that if the tasks could be divided up a bit I would take on the job of Secretary for a couple of years. As Michael was 4 and Anne 1 life was quite busy! Anyway Angela Coleman took over the money side of things for a year and Gladys Arter was Judges Secretary from 1970. It was in today's jargon "a steep learning curve" but I had Kay's moral support and got to know so many people that I am so pleased I had the opportunity to do it.

In the early 70's Ellen Arter, Helen Bradshaw, June Francis, Madelaine Phillips and Sheila Ratcliffe joined the Committee, all of whom went on to make a great contribution to the Women's Section. Eleanor Fuller took her turn as Chairman. Then Betty French took the helm again, followed by Mavis Bones who had set the ball rolling 20 years before. In 1972 we celebrated our 21 years with a special cake.

In 1974 the P.M. was held at Goodeston Park. It rained nearly all day. I was particularly disappointed as I had special permission for Michael and Anne to miss School and they had to spend the day sitting by me at the Secretary's table crayoning their books as it was too wet for them to be out and about!

1975 brought some changes with Kate Hume taking on the job of Secretary, with June Francis in the Chair and Valerie Styles as Treasurer.

Originally the Association A.G.M's were held at the County Hotel in Canterbury followed by a formal Dinner to which the "Ladies" were invited, one of whom had to reply to the Toast! In 1969 and 1970 the Dinners were held at the Dover Town Hall and then in '71 it was changed again to Slatters in Canterbury for a Social evening.

Because of the increasing cost of the formal Dinners a Buffet Supper was held at the Chiesman's Pavilion, Canterbury Cricket Ground, in 1975, where Helen Bradshaw and June Francis organised our first "money making" Raffle.

After a break of a couple of years the "After The Match" get together resumed in 1979 with a Cheese and Wine Party at Neil and Margaret Smith's home. They very kindly made room for all of us even to the extent of moving out of their bedroom. The food was provided by the local Pub.

It proved to be very popular and when Dick Hume was Chairman of the Men's Committee in 1981 he and Pat hosted the evenings at their home for 2 years and then it was at Kate and Alison's for a further 2. This was when the home made food contributions first began which have grown over the years into a veritable feast.

For 3 years it was at Maydensole, when John was Chairman, then at West Court, the lovely old home of Amy Weir, when Roger Bradshaw was Men's Chairman.

We then ran out of old Farm houses in which to hold the event and so began the Village Hall "Era"; Tony and David McEwen arranged several with various entertainments including a Magician and interesting Quizes.

Percy Spanton gave us an Annual Prize for Handicraft in memory of his wife, Maud, who was a founder member.

As an advertisement Clift Oil paid for the printing of our 9000 Raffle tickets in 1980, and also gave us a Raffle prize, so we celebrated our increased revenue by buying the Flower alcoves for 36 from the E.K. Rose Society and decided to increase the Class Prizes to

1. 75p. and 50p. It was a struggle to get agreement to this 100% increase even though they had remained the same
50p [10/-], 35p [7/6], 25p [5/-] since the beginning in 1951!

Toni McEwen joined the Committee in the late 70's, became Chairman in 1981 and then took on the job of Secretary for several years.

We were very sorry to lose June Francis in 1981 when she and John moved away. However she came back and judged the Flowers for us a couple of years later and again in 1990. She also gave the Cup for the Best exhibit in the Childrens Classes.

Kay Miles retired in 1982 after 30 years on the Committee during which time she did so much to make the Women's Section what it was and still is today. She continued to give invaluable help in the Raffle tent for many more years.

Eleanor Fuller organised the Raffle for 20 years. She made the job look easy by running it so smoothly but, as anyone who has had to do it realises, it entails a great deal of work and the money it raises is vital because it is our only income apart from the entry fees and the money we make on the Suppers. Eleanor continued on the Committee for a few more years always coming to help on the Day.

Kate Hume finished her 8 years as Secretary and then took on the Raffle before becoming Chairman in 1985. She retired from the Committee in 1998 but continues to be closely involved. She has entered right from the beginning often winning Cups and Prizes.

Mavis Bones retired after 30 years on the Committee. She had played such an important role in keeping the event at a high standard all the way through. It is often easier to improve things from a moderate start than maintain things at the top.

Helen Bradshaw took her turn in the Chair and went on to be minutes Secretary for a number of years, as well as being the brains behind the Marquee layout and many other important duties.

Janet Bradley, Amy Weir and her Daughter Sheila Romney joined the Committee in 1983 all of whom have made great contributions to the smooth running of everything. Janet ran the Raffle for several years, was then Secretary and took her turn as Chairman. Amy took over being Judges Secretary from Gladys Arter and Sheila was Chairman before taking on the job of Treasurer.

In 1985 the Day and Date of the P.M. was changed. This was a big move because it had always been on the third Wednesday in October. However with more and larger ploughs needing more ground and the change to more Autumn drilling, it was felt that it was only fair on the host farms that the Match should be brought forward. As the traditional Sheep sales were on the Wednesday it was finally decided to have the P.M. on the first Tuesday in October.

The first one was at Waldershare on a beautiful day with a record number of ploughs and visitors.

Helen Mummery was then on the Committee and she together with Amy and Sheila decorated the tent poles, such an added attraction.

There were 600 entries and the Raffle made 913 Madelaine ran this with the help of Linda Laslett.

For the first time we gave small packets of sweets to the children who entered to give them encouragement.

Peggy Hogben and Margaret Smith retired, but a link with the past was Caroline Bell, who judged the Flowers, her Mother Rosemary Mowll was a founder member.

Colin Brudenell took over providing the lunches which he continues to do now.

So the change of date, far from being a disaster, proved to be very beneficial.

The following year, 1986, we replaced the sheets with white plastic table covering. Much easier [we did not have to take the sheets home and launder them afterwards!] and we could do away with the muslin. This was one of Helen Bradshaw's good ideas. Mrs Ramsden stewarded for the first time. She kept us up to scratch and was a genius when it came to displaying the photographs, a task she is still asked to do today.

1987 the Match was on Derek and Pat Solley's Farm at Ham, Eastry. Everywhere was muddy, cars needed pulling out, roads cleared and the land was in a sad state due to the heavy rain. Little did we know that the Great Storm was about to hit us only a little while later. It was touch and go as to whether we could have the Supper at Maydensole with so many trees down and no electricity for about a week. However things returned to some sort of normality and we were able to have it after all.

Over the next couple of years we were joined by Val Smith and Wendy Morris [Peggy Hogben's Daughter] and then by Mary Jenner [Eleanor Fuller's Daughter-in-law], Averil Akehurst [Maud Spanton's neice] and Gillian Bradley [Marjorie Brown's Daughter].

It was not long before Wendy took over the Raffle and we made 1000 for the first time, the Raffle tickets having been put up to 20p or 1 a book.

At the start of the '90s we put the Prize money up to 1.50, 1, and 75p.

Gillian Bradley's Husband arranged for us to have the attractive new Trellis made to go down the center of the Marquee. Prior to this we had white cardboard which served its purpose, but was not nearly as attractive or easy to assemble.

We celebrated our 40th anniversary in 1991. A number of the Original members were invited to the Autumn Supper and Kay Miles cut the celebratory cake which was in the shape of a Marquee.

After 15 years Valerie Styles relinquished her job as Treasurer to become Chairman and a few years later she moved to the West Country after being on the committee for over 20 years.

Sheila became Treasurer in 1992 and continues to have everything at her finger tips, such a help and relief to the rest of us!

Val Smith became Chairman in 1991 and we invited the Y.F.Clubs to enter. Baskets were supplied for the Egg entries which made them much more attractive and safer.

Val then took on arranging the Catalogue for seven or eight years which made life much easier for the Secretary and this important though frustrating task was then taken on by Averil and Ros Brown.

The 1993 Match at Nonington and Barfreton had to be cancelled because everywhere was so wet. A sad and difficult decision especially as the Day itself dawned bright and dry but there was no way vehicles could have got on and off the field.

The Raffle was drawn at Maydensole as many of the tickets had been sold prior to this. For the first time 100 was the First Prize after 40 odd years of Radios, Tea Sets, T.V.s etc! Financially it was a blow because we had to pay for the Marquee again the Men's Committee having paid for it for several years.

The next year Ros Brown joined the Team and Averil arranged for new boards to be made to display the photographs.

We had a lovely celebratory Dinner at The Webbs Hotel in Dover to mark the 50th Anniversary of the post war Association.

The next few years Liz Preston organised the "After Match Supper" at the Ickham Village Hall with a variety of entertainments. It proved to be a popular and attractive venue.

The "After Match Tea" was originally provided by the Caterer and paid for by the Men's Chairman. Then in the 60's the "ladies" offered to provide the refreshments. Marjorie Collard and Ellen Arter organised this for very many years and Members contributed something in the food line. A very welcome break at the end of a long busy day.

Marjorie was the last of the Original Committee and she was sorely missed when, after 47 years, she retired in 1997. She still helped in the Raffle tent for another couple of years.

Ellen too retired in '97. we miss her kindly smile, sweet nature and willing help.

We were pleased to welcome Trish Cornwell, Jean Ryan and Jean Clough, and it was not long before Trish was persuaded to become Secretary. It is said if you want something done ask a busy person and this was certainly the case. How she finds time for everything is a mystery and she certainly takes after her Mother with her skillful exhibits.

1998 was very wet and muddy and it was, sadly, the last time Miss Pullar and Mrs Turnbull judged. This made it more difficult for Lynn Laslett who had been contacting, getting to know and looking after the judges for many years.

In 1999 the date of the P.M. was changed again this time to the last Tuesday in September

Sadly the 1999 Match at Eastry had to be cancelled. It is the most horrible and difficult decision which has to be made in the early hours of the Monday morning before the Trade Vehicles try to get on the site. So disappointing for so many people who have worked and planned and cooked and made for "the Day".

However the 2000 Match held at Dick and Pat Hume's the following year was fine and dry and a great success all round.

The turn of the Century was celebrated with a Dinner at the Webbs Hotel again, at which the Men's Chairmen were presented with engraved Glass Tankards, a lovely gesture much appreciated by the recipients.

Maggie Twyman joined the Team and it was not long before she was persuaded to help Wendy with the Raffle and then take it over, so giving Wendy a well earned break.

2001 was most remembered because of the horrendous worries over the Foot and Mouth outbreaks. All meetings were cancelled and most of the planning was done over the phone. However by the end of the summer life began to get back to normal and most of us could breathe a sigh of relief. The P.M. at St. Margaret's on Alastair and Janet Lyon's farm was able to go ahead, although there were no Cattle or Sheep exhibits and no Sheep Dog Trials. There was though an exhibition of Steam Ploughing and it was a lovely day with a good crowd.

The Autumn Social, held at Gt. Mongeham on a Saturday was a "sell out" and everyone was pleased to get together again.

In 2002 Liz Phillips [Madelaine's Daughter-in-law] and Vera Hunt came on the Committee under the Chairmanship of Liz Preston and the P.M. at Lower Harges went off smoothly and well. Brockhill School won the Y.F.C Cup and seem keen and interested which augers well for the future.

The year was rounded off with an excellent Supper where over 100 people enjoyed the delicious food provided by all the expert cooks. [How did we manage before Vera efficiently provided the catering equipment?]. We were kept occupied trying to do the Quiz which Wendy's Husband again produced for us and the Raffle brought in a welcome boost to the funds.

Personally, I am so grateful to that kind, capable collection of Country Folk whose ideas and forethought set up the Women's Section. I have made many friends and learnt a lot, as well as enjoying the Days out and the opportunity to visit other farms and farmhouses.

I'm sure that they would be pleased and proud that the traditional country skills are still giving interest and pleasure to so many people and that the Womens Committee continues to be a friendly, co-operative group of Countrywomen.