

**A history of the commencement of
SHREWSBURY FLOWER CLUB
by its founder
MURIEL TIPTON**

In the late 1950's the Flower Club movement had started in a few places in England. After the austerity of the war years the idea of arranging something so beautiful appealed to women. Those who, perhaps, might have painted or embroidered were fascinated by the idea of working instead with living material to create pictures in their homes. Julia Clements was touring the country giving demonstrations and writing books and Constance Spry was designing exquisite arrangements of flowers and vegetables and, suddenly, flower arranging was all the vogue.

My father, who was a very successful exhibitor at Shrewsbury Flower Show, had died and my mother and I very much missed being backstage at Shows so I started to exhibit in the floral art classes and was fortunate enough to be very successful.

Shrewsbury Show had always had a very famous decorative tent where ladies did beautiful table decorations with an epergne in the centre and four small vases at the corners linked to the central feature with smilax and other trailing plants all exquisitely arranged. Looking at them as a small child with my chin on the table I did not think that, in 1959, I would win the coveted Gredington Cup for the highest points in the decorative section.

Shrewsbury, therefore, was ready for the "new fangled flower arranging." Soon it was said that a prize at Shrewsbury was worth four anywhere else. The two table classes in those early years of the flower arranging movement when I was exhibiting had over fifty entries in each class, one for indoor and one for outdoor materials. A class for an arrangement of nasturtiums suggested by Percy Thrower went down the whole length of the marquee.

Barbara Henderson, then Woman's Editor of the Shrewsbury Chronicle, interviewed me at home and photographed my garden and arrangements and asked, "had I thought of starting a Flower Club in Shrewsbury?" The thought had occurred to me and she strengthened my resolve. I asked her to print an article inviting anyone who would be interested in joining with me. The response was good and I decided to go ahead.

In 1958 I wrote very many letters to people who had started Flower Clubs in their town and to the Royal Horticultural Society which had just become interested in the movement. Most of these letters I wrote in the bedroom where my dear husband was in bed with jaundice.

Eventually, armed with helpful information, I called an inaugural meeting on THURSDAY, 27TH NOVEMBER 1958 in the Morris Hall, Bellstone. This was the date nearest to my husband's birthday on the 29th. I had written to Sheila Macqueen of Constance Spry Ltd asking her to give a demonstration of flower arranging and charged 3/6d admission to cover the cost of the hall and Sheila's expenses.

Previous to the meeting I called on Percy Thrower in his office in the Quarry and invited him to be our first President. He kindly consented and, of course, I was delighted to have such a famous and popular gardener in this position. I went through into the house and invited his wife, Connie, to be on the committee and, later on, she became a popular and much loved President herself. In fact, we broke a rule that a President should be in office for one year and persuaded Connie to stay for two.

I also invited on to the committee Dilys Millard Bryson, Nan East, Vera Evans, Jean Godber, Jean Rudge, B.A. Wright and T. C. Earp. Audrey Earp agreed to be treasurer and my husband, Ronald Tipton, was persuaded to be secretary to draw up the rules in a proper and legal manner. He said he would be secretary for a year. Twelve years later he managed to escape to retire. I was chairman of this committee.

175 people attended the inaugural meeting and nearly 100 put down their names to join. In December 1958 I gave Shrewsbury Flower Club's first Christmas demonstration in The Lion Hotel using fresh material as well as glittered and painted. In those early days I painted and sprayed ivy, bracken, bulrushes, cones and poppy heads and made red berries from glitterwax which I fastened on to stub wires. I wired baubles on to stub wires to use as flowers. None of the pretty things we take for granted now were in the shops and that Christmas all the members were frantically painting, wiring and glittering.

In 1959 Percy Thrower wrote in The Shropshire Magazine: -

"The recently formed Shrewsbury Flower Club has rapidly gone from strength to strength under the organiser and chairman, Mrs. Muriel Tipton. Membership has already reached two hundred and it has been necessary to limit the number to that total because of the difficulty of finding a room large enough to comfortably hold such a number for lectures and demonstrations. A very worthy achievement for a club which, only in November of last year, held its inaugural meeting."

By April 1959, the first year in which we had a printed programme, the Shrewsbury Chronicle wrote: -

"So popular has the recently formed Shrewsbury Flower Club become that, at the monthly meeting held in The Lion Hotel last week, Chairman, Mrs. Muriel Tipton, announced that the committee had been compelled to close the membership now standing at 200 but added that a waiting list would now be started."

I have all this information in my scrapbooks at home and other interesting articles about the Flower Club but I think I have covered its founding. I see in the Royal Horticultural Society's Journal "The Garden" that on October 13th 1999, my birthday, NAFAS gave a dinner to celebrate its founding in 1959 so they were not very long after us.

I remember these lines from my school days: -

"and each must build e're his time has flown
a stumbling block or a stepping stone."

I would like to think that the members feel, that in founding Shrewsbury Flower Club, I have been a "stepping stone."

MURIEL TIPTON

Christmas 1999