



Friends News

Keeping in touch during the Covid 19 restrictions

APRIL 2021

Our thanks go to Brenda Aherne and to Barbara Cannell for this month's contributions

Friends keeping in touch
If you have an article to share, please email to
lynn_ellis@btconnect.com

I'm certain we all share a love and appreciation of beautiful gardens and landscapes. But it has been fascinating to discover that two of our Friends' members have family backgrounds in commercial horticulture - and both in the Swanley area!

First, this is Brenda's story,

My Great Grandfather lived in Swanley Village and had a small holding. He bought a plot of land in Hextable and built commercial size greenhouses. He grew crops of tomatoes, cucumbers, chrysanthemums and strawberries in season. These were all sent to the original Covent Garden Market in London.

There were a number of nurseries in Hextable and late afternoon a large transport lorry would collect all the produce from them and take them to the market.

My father then bought an apple orchard in Birchwood Road, Wilmington.

He single handedly removed all the trees and built himself heated greenhouses. Later he employed 3 men.

He then grew the same crops as his father, plus self bleaching celery and outdoor chrysanthemums. His crops were also sent to Covent Garden Market.

I worked with him for 2 years - which is why I am now a keen gardener. And my three children are too.

I arrange the flowers when needed in the Gilt Hall at Cobham Hall, which I really enjoy.

Brenda Aherne

Brenda, now we understand why the Gilt Hall Flowers always look so professional!!

Barbara's story is on the following page,

I married a descendant of a very successful horticulturist whose name was Henry Cannell.

I grew up in Eynsford in the 1950's with my parents and sister and knew nothing about growing plants, where they came from and who grew them. But that all changed when I married into the Cannell family and learned of the life and passion for growing plants of my husband's great grandfather, Henry Cannell.

When the London Chatham and Dover Railway opened boasting 24 trains a day into Victoria, Holborn Viaduct and St Paul's stations, north west Kent became an ideal spot for many businesses to

relocate or start up supplying the expanding metropolis of London.

Henry Cannell was born in Norfolk in 1834, the grandson of a market gardener. He started work at the age of 10 for a Norfolk nurseryman. By the age of 30 he was becoming an experienced and successful plantsman and set himself up as an independent nurseryman at Woolwich. By 1866 he was issuing catalogues. The firm flourished specialising in fushias, geraniums, petunias and bedding plants.

The desire for cleaner air, more land and the convenience of being close to a railway line prompted a move to Swanley. More success

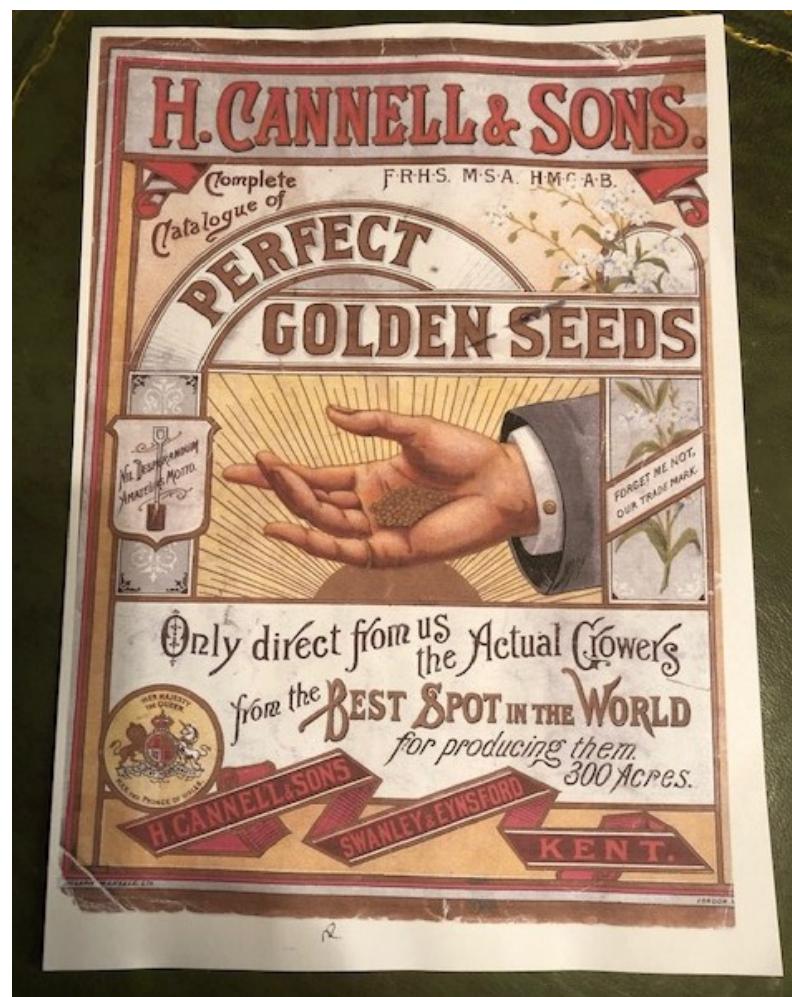
followed with exhibitions not only in this country but around the world, with gold, silver and bronze medals and silver cups being awarded for outstanding displays for plants and vegetables. Expansion of the business in 1905 included 20 acres at Cockmanings, Orpington and 300 acres leased from the Hart Dyke estate at Eynsford.

It is thought Henry was the first seedsman to send packeted seeds by post.

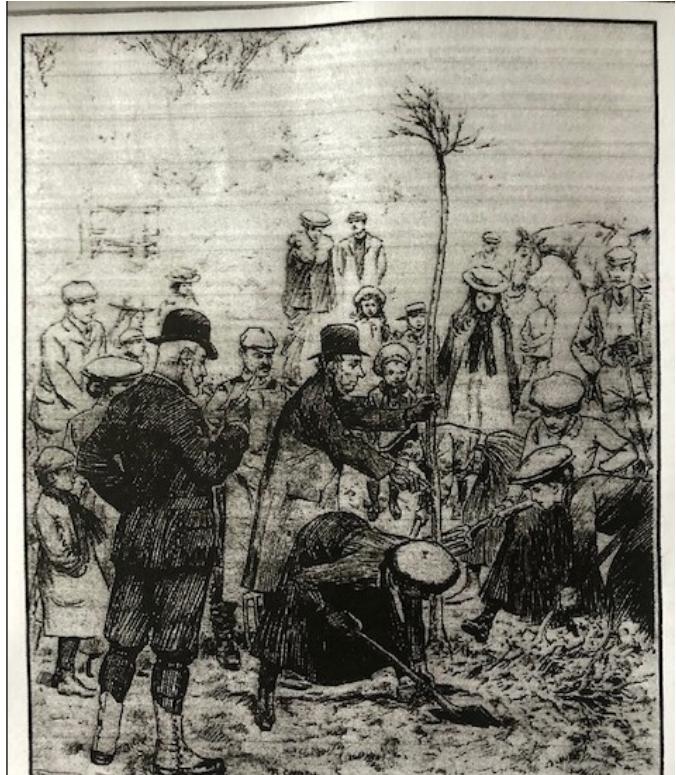
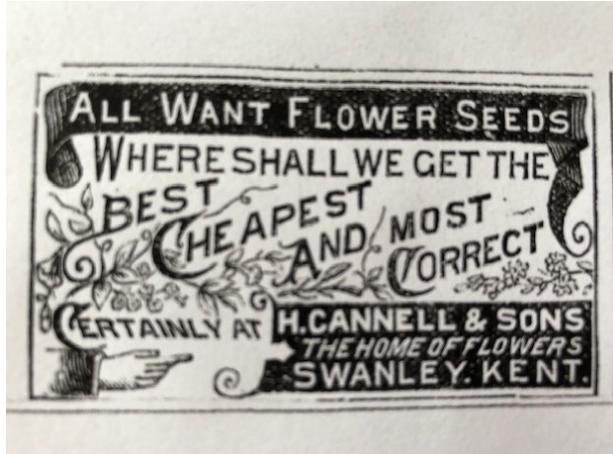
He died at Swanley in 1914 at the age of 80.

Barbara Cannell

*The start of Mail Order
from
“The Best Spot in the
World”*



H. Cannell & Sons



Arbor day 1904. Till on left, Henry Cannell in centre, with lady students from the Horticultural College, Swanley

Henry with lady students in 1904

"The largest complete supply nursery in the world"
supplying "Nearly all the Royal Families in the world"