

Those English country gardens

And a glimpse of bygone village life *Witney Gazette report, Thursday 24 June 1982*

Eynsham is blooming lovely next weekend when 12 of the village's prettiest gardens are open to the public for the first time. The Open Gardens Afternoon, June 26, 2-5 pm, is part of the village's entry for the Britain in Bloom competition. But there will also be money raised for the St Leonard's Church Restoration Appeal.

Whether you are a social historian or a pure seeker of nostalgia, a gardening expert or someone who just loves colourful flower bed displays, Eynsham is the place to be this weekend.



Mollie Harris handling some Victorian underwear which can be seen in her Bygone Days exhibition. With her (from left) are Sonia May, Jean Sawyer and Olive Bungay

doilies and wedding dresses. Victorian underwear (!), century-old lemonade bottles and all kinds of domestic utensils and bric-a-brac.

If you fancy traditional country wines, there's a tippie to be had from Mollie Harris's own homemade stocks. And if country dancing is your scene, then be in the village square during the afternoon on Saturday. Eynsham is pulling out all the stops to look beautiful and attract visitors.

In fact, part of the proceedings starts today with a **Bygones Exhibition** in the Church Hall. On show you will see anything and everything, revealing glimpses of how life used to be at the turn of the century.

There are old shepherd's crooks and dung rakes,



Mollie Harris invites her two next door neighbours, Katie and Anna to model old bonnets

Then on Saturday afternoon, 2-5 pm, you can wander around 12 private gardens in the village, looking especially attractive to please judges for a run-up to the Britain in Bloom competition.

Organiser Mrs Julie Hyde says the village will be looking spick and span. There are separate competitions for the most attractive village shops, pubs, house fronts and old and new streets. From the University of Reading Mr Bernard Tattersfield will be coming along to judge the local gardens.

“We have set up an Eynsham in Bloom committee and this year for the first time we are entering the national competition”, said Mrs Hyde.

The Open Gardens Afternoon will be raising money for the village's St Leonard's Church Restoration Appeal - the target is £180,000 and £80,000 is still needed. The Bygones Exhibition will also be helping the cause, while giving some of the funds to the British Heart Foundation.

The exhibition coincides with the publication of Mollie Harris's new book, *From Acre End*, a collection of colourful autobiographies of local characters. She will be on hand signing copies.

A star exhibit in the display, which is open to the public today, tomorrow and Saturday, is a 130-year-old wedding dress. “It is really beautiful and will be hung on a life-size model to reveal its full glory,” said Mollie. Dozens of villagers have, in fact, contributed to the exhibition, raiding their attics and wardrobes to unearth anything which highlights the period of late Victorian and Edwardian times.

“The exhibition was really Jean Sawyer's idea, and it wasn't a bad one. She said why don't we put together a few things illustrating what life was like then. We have now got a catalogue of eight pages of items,” said Mollie. Among the attractions are also a reconstruction of a domestic interior and a Memory Lane photo collection, most of them provided by Jim Evans.

Visitors, by the way, should note that there is a central car park in Eynsham and that all the open gardens and exhibition are within easy walking distance of each other.

The gardens open to the public offer a variety of design, plants and shrubs. One, in Oxford Road, the home of Dr Jim and Julia Loken, is especially noteworthy for its beautiful rockeries. Julia knows quite a bit about plants as she is also an illustrator for various books.



Dr and Mrs Brian Hyde in their garden at 65 Newland Street



Park Cottage, Oxford Road - home of the Loken family

There are small and large gardens, but the overall flavour is of discreet village charm. Sue Chapman, who took our photographs, and her husband Don, who is a feature writer for the Oxford Mail, are opening up their back garden whose main feature is a split level patio. Typically modest, Don explained how they became involved.

“I was visiting Dr Brian Hyde with a bout of flu. He suggested we should take part and in my weak state I was unable to resist.”

Other gardens open to the public are at the homes of Dr Hyde and Mr and Mrs Don Richards, both in Abbey Street, Sally Moyes in Acre End Street, Dame Helen Gardner in Mill Street, and Dr George Adams, Newland Street.

“As far as we are concerned,” added Don, “it has meant putting in a lot of sweat over the past few weeks getting the garden in tip-top condition.”

Although it is only the local competitions which are being judged on Saturday, Eynsham has this year entered for the first time the Britain in Bloom competition.

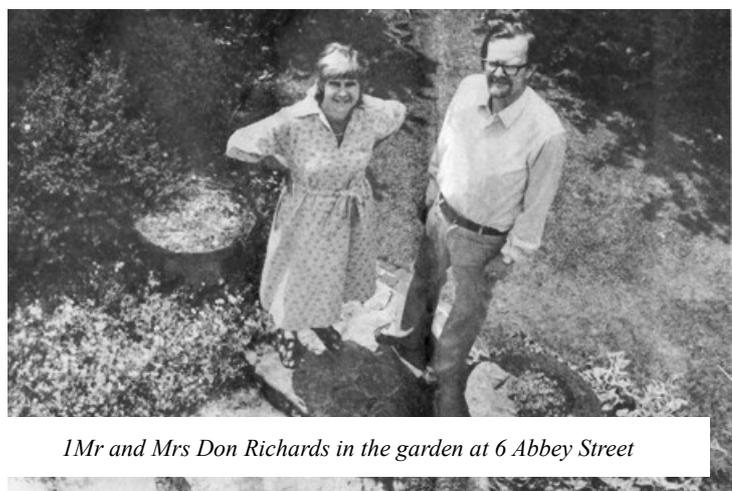
Eynsham is in the Thames and Chilterns section and, in fact, the parish has submitted two entries - one for Eynsham itself, which ranks as a “small town” and one for Barnard Gate. The judges will arrive on July 19 or 20.

One of the most important aspects of the competitions, points out Mrs Hyde, is that results depend on the care of each individual.

The judges will take account, she says, not so much the attraction of individual buildings and cottages, but the way in which people have, by their own efforts, improved their surroundings.



Mrs Sally Moyes with her children Sasha and Simon in the garden at 31 Acre End Street



Mr and Mrs Don Richards in the garden at 6 Abbey Street