

## **High Wych History 65**

### **Webster's Nursery**

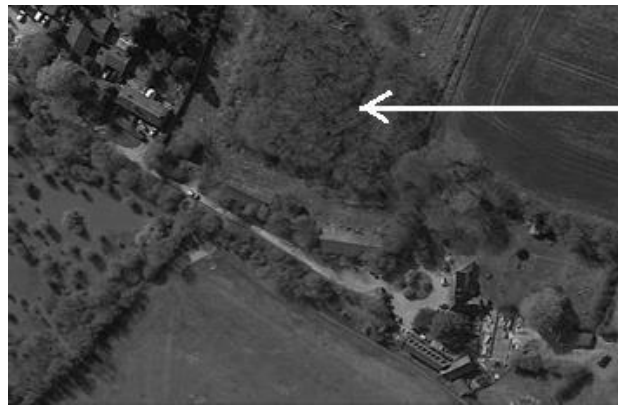
Mentioning nurseries locally usually brings up just one name: Rivers. There were however other nurseries. This time we talk about Webster's, or to give them their official name Triangle Nursery, an enterprise that was situated at the top of Chaseways. Mushrooms, carnations and cucumbers, that was what Webster's were known for.

The Websters originally came from Waltham Abbey where in 1932 Charles Webster together with his son Jim founded a company called C & J R Webster. After a while Jim decided to branch out on his own and started an enterprise which he named Triangle Nurseries. Shortly after the Second World War he purchased Rowney Farm Sawbridgeworth from a Mr. Jensen.



On the left Jim Webster in an informal setting. On the right, a picture from 1972, Jim Webster being installed as Master of the Worshipful Company of Fruiterers of London by the Lord Mayor.

John Whitbread, formerly employed at Rivers became foreman at Webster's in the late forties and stayed working there until the early sixties. John's son Chris worked at Webster's towards the end of that period. From 1958 the Whitbread family lived in one of two tied houses near the nursery, the other one was occupied by Des Jones and his family. Around 1960 some 35 people worked for Webster's some of them part time, many of them local women. This made for more flexibility. In the busy season work was hard, employees often putting in 12 hour working days.



On the left, an aerial picture from 1957. On the right, a recent picture from Google Earth showing roughly the same area. The square area indicated is where the green houses were situated.

Jim's daughter Mary also worked for the company overseeing work in the all important packing shed. Mary later married Michael Sykes who hailed from Pishiobury Drive.



The above picture from the early days of the company shows workers proudly posing next to the steam generator used for sterilising soil. Second from left is Harry Mascall, standing next to him wearing a beret is Jimmy Walker, on the extreme right is Joe Mascall. In later years John Whitbread got injured when his head was nearly crushed between that machine and a lorry.

In 1960 Michael Sykes, husband of Jim's daughter Mary, left military service and became general manager of Triangle - Webster's Sawbridgeworth. He looks back fondly on his days at Triangle particularly praising the 'tremendous ladies that worked for us'. In the late sixties Triangle started a second nursery in Frinton. Around the same time Mary and Michael started Highlands a small nursery based in Allens Green which was run in parallel with work at Triangle.



The picture on the left, also taken in the late forties shows two Webster nursery workers next to one of the greenhouses. One of them could be Harry Mascall. The picture on the right dates from the early sixties and shows left to right Chris Whitbread, Des Jones and Tony Mascall.

In the mid seventies Jim Webster started having difficulties with his health. It became clear he could not continue living at Rowney Farm. The company meanwhile needed to invest in new technology and aluminium rather than wood based greenhouses. After some consideration it was decided to make these investments at the company's Frinton site rather than in Sawbridgeworth.

So the assets at Rowney's Farm Sawbridgeworth were sold to Thomas Rochford houseplants, a well known name in horticultural circles. For a while Michael and Mary Sykes continued working at both Frinton and Allens Green.

Nowadays Triangle is based in Woodbridge and their managing director, Mary Wilson is now amongst the 4<sup>th</sup> generation of her family involved in horticulture. Her great grandfather was the Charles Webster mentioned at the start of this article. Look them up on the internet at <https://www.trianglenursery.co.uk/>

The respect for Triangle, the Websters and the Sykeses was and is shown by their involvement in the Company of Fruiterers of London. We have already seen that Jim Webster became their master in 1972; 20 years later it was Michael Sykes's turn and 20 years after that Mary and Michael's daughter Jane Anderson was given the honour, the first woman in that role and the third one from the same family

Jim Webster passed away in 1981. Mary and Michael Sykes, now retired, continue to live in Allens Green.

With thanks to Eric Willison, Mary and Michael Sykes, Chris and Val Whitbread,. Contributions to and help with this continuing History of High Wych are (is) always welcome. Please get in touch. Contact me at [theo@vandebilt.co.uk](mailto:theo@vandebilt.co.uk) or phone me at 01279 725468