Horticultural History.* Published by Oxford University Press for the Royal Horticultural Society, this attractive and substantial volume has good claims to be regarded as an official *History* of the Society from the time of its foundation in 1804 to the present day. Within some 440 pages (excluding Appendices and Index) is compressed a vast amount of information about the origin of the Society, its manifold activities and occasional falls from fortune; about large numbers of plants of special interest or of horticultural value; about collectors and nurserymen who introduced many of them into British gardens; about notable gardens and equally notable gardeners, professional and amateur alike. In addition to all this, the story is interwoven with numerous references to the progress of botany and horticulture over a long period of time. There is reference, for instance, to Bateson's Evolution Committee, out of which arose the Society's first Conference on Hybridisation held in 1899, perhaps the most important in its history, and only a year before Mendel's long-neglected experiments with garden peas were brought to light. At the third Conference on Hybridisation and Plant Breeding in 1906, Bateson christened the newly born science by the name *Genetics*, and thus early in the twentieth century the Society played a leading part in promoting the scientific approach to plant breeding and plant improvement. It has continued to do so ever since.

The author, Dr. H. R. Fletcher, Regius Keeper of the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh and a former Director at Wisley, dedicates his book to all those who in many capacities have given great service to the Royal Horticultural Society and yet are not mentioned in its pages. If he has not found it possible to mention all, he has succeeded in referring to a very large number of men and women who have made outstanding contributions to the Society's progress and achievement, and he pays special tribute to Mr. A. Simmonds, who, in several capacities, had steadfastly served the Society for forty years.

As with many new adventures, however, the pioneers were few in number. Among the seven "Founder Members" was John Wedgwood, the man who first proposed the formation of a horticultural society, and whose portrait forms a pleasing frontispiece to the volume. Another was Sir Joseph Banks, who did much for the Society in its early years, "the greatest botanical and horticultural impresario the world has ever known". A formal meeting held in March 1804 resulted in the election of twenty-eight persons. They became the "Original Society". Within fifteen years the number was approaching 600; by 1904, the centenary year, it was 8,360 and by 1966 it was to be almost 75,000.

Wedgwood resigned after five years, but one of the dominant figures at the time was Thomas Andrew Knight, a distinguished botanist and horticulturist, who presided over affairs from 1811 until his death in 1838. But the Society has been fortunate in its Presidents throughout, four of whom served in this capacity, in the aggregate, for almost a hundred years, each contributing to the Society's welfare and to the promotion of horticultural science and education. Indeed, the training of young gardeners was discussed as far back as the days of Knight and Lindley, and by 1826 ninety-two young men had been admitted to the Society's garden for training. The nature and scope of this, and the system of examination to be adopted were often hotly debated, but the establishment in 1913 of the National Diploma in Horticulture was an important advance.

If Presidents have played a prominent role in the history of the Society, so also have many loyal and able officers—men like Lindley, Wilks, Chittenden and Simmonds. Of these and others, including the Presidents, the author gives interesting biographical sketches, accompanied by good photographs, and he concludes his book with several useful Appendices and a comprehensive Index.

In 1809, when the Society obtained its first charter, members resolved to designate themselves 'Fellows'. Perhaps at that time they did not get a great deal for their money. But after reading Dr. Fletcher's book I am persuaded that 'Fellows' of today do get a great deal, and this authoritative Story of the R.H.S. should be evidence enough. It covers not only every significant event in the early years, but gives a very complete picture of the immensely varied work in all branches of horticulture still actively pursued by Council and Staff alike at Wisley and Vincent Square.

J. R. MATTHEWS.

* The Story of the Royal Horticultural Society 1804–1968, by Harold R. Fletcher, Oxford University Press 1969, xii + 564 pp., 28 plates (4 col.). Price £5 5s.