



CHESHIRE
GARDENS TRUST

Patron: The Viscount Ashbrook
Company Limited by Guarantee, no. 05673816
Charity Number 1119592

Issue No. 67

July 2020

Newsletter

www.cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk

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- * Research and recording "zooming"
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Future events and gardens open:

- * RHS Tatton Park at Home 22nd July
- * Many gardens open with pre booking: Wollerton Old Hall, Dorothy Clive, Biddulph Grange, Norton Priory Museum and Garden, Cholmondeley Castle, Trentham Gardens, gardens at Lyme and Dunham Massey + some NGS gardens



A Garden in Portugal

I'm delighted to have received this article from Gordon Cooke, currently on lockdown in Portugal. As many of you will know Gordon is a Cheshire Gardens Trust member, a potter, teacher and designer, who has opened his garden in Sale on a regular basis. Here he describes the garden he has developed in Alentejo.

The house is in the south west Alentejo, the region above the Algarve, which covers about a

third of the land mass of Portugal with around 7% of the population. Our garden surrounds the house which sits on a southwest facing slope, about 40 minutes from the Atlantic coast, which is the Vicentina Coast Natural Park. It is a young garden. There was a tiny clay house ruin on the land and a row of olive trees plus a single productive fig when we bought the land 16 years ago. The olives and fig were saved but the spoil

from excavations was spread over the whole half hectare, covering what little fertile soil was present.

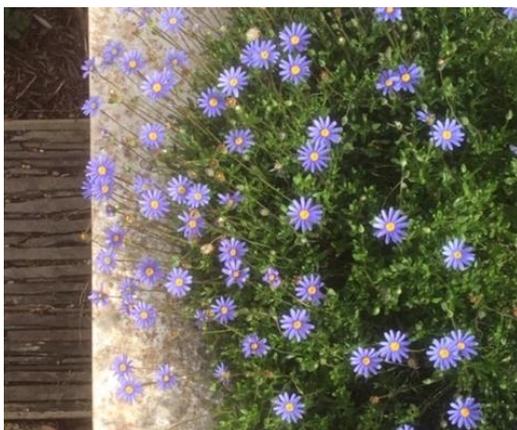
The clay soil is potentially fertile but generations of erosion have taken their toll. I've found the best earth is at the bottom of the valley as it's been washed down there and migrated through land management. My new beds have been filled with this earth and *brash* from under trees. We buy rotted cow manure every other year and this is put on specific plants and over the vegetable beds. Apart from making charcoal, I have a no fire



Cow manure delivery

policy as the area is prone to this hazard. So branches are chopped and shredded and laid down to protect the soil and encourage microbe activity. I also make as much compost as I possibly can. I make biochar, charcoal soaked in liquid nutrients, in a controlled firepit and this is added to the planting mix.

I'm in the process of making the areas of garden furthest from the house as self maintaining as possible by growing subshrubs and natives which need little or no summer water, once established. Although we have a reliable borehole, water is a precious commodity and I use it as such. I'm growing more tender exotics near the house around the walls and in microclimates produced by established hardier plants. It's a harsh climate. We get some frost. Winter is mainly bright days and cold or cool nights. We are elevated and too



Felicia amygdaloides

far from the sea to benefit hugely from its influence. Summers are hot but it always cools down at night.

Two years ago I started to grow veg in a more organised way. I made terracing and improved the drainage. I hadn't grown many vegetables since I was an adolescent on my father's farm on the Tatton estate, so it was good to revisit this and gain some respect among the locals who can't understand growing flowers!

I've been gardening all my life and when I moved here, I felt a bit smug and complacent about the challenges of growing in a hot climate. We have enough water and great sunshine, so what on earth could go wrong? I'm still learning about how plants behave in these conditions. It's quite a revelation to find that some plants can be killed by watering in summer! If not by the water itself, by the pathogens which thrive in moist conditions and planting too closely.

The main gardening season is from the first rains of autumn until the intense heat of June. The summer is the dormant season when plants simply hibernate or go into stasis. The survivors are deep rooted and silver leaved or some simply disappear, only to re-emerge with the rain.



Cork oaks in the local countryside.

Shade and drainage are the key to successful growing of many species. The hot wind from Spain can desiccate young leaves as can the equally cold wind from the same area in winter. Mercifully, these winds are not common, as the *Azores High* makes the prevailing wind come from a more equable northwest direction. I certainly appreciate Cheshire's soft climate and fertile soils after a decade of Alentejo gardening. Please watch the short YouTube films for a tour of the garden and the artworks there.

<https://youtu.be/JPz0mwSBfuw>

<https://youtu.be/xDzwCBw6t5E>

Phil Kay, Ness Botanic Gardens

Tenth in our Head Gardener Series



I'm very grateful to Phil Kay (above, in the potager at Ness) for agreeing to be the second of our head gardeners to try an email interview. These are his words.

I was born in Birkenhead and lived in Tranmere. I attended two different schools Rock Ferry High School from year 7 until year 10 and then joined Pensby High School for Boys for years 10 and 11. I stayed on for 2 years in their sixth form college. I spent much of my childhood in the open air and always knew I was destined to work outdoors.

I originally attempted to leave 6th form college to study a countryside management course at Reaseheath College but I didn't have enough experience at the time. I also really enjoyed studying art at sixth form and had an agreed place to study an art foundation degree at a local college. Only writing this I have remembered that I was also really considering a motorsport engineering degree. A little off topic but I grew up into motorsport as my father was a co-driver in the rallying sector.



The water garden at Ness

I came straight from Pensby High sixth form to Ness for a summer job, until I started my art foundation degree. But I fell in love with Ness and ended up staying after the summer. This was in

2005 so, apart from a year out I've been at Ness for 15 years.

I started my level 2 RHS whilst working at Ness as the course was taught there. I then went on to study an Advanced National Certificate in Horticulture at Northop college. I have had further practical horticultural and arboricultural training of various levels both at Ness and offsite. I am considering doing my master of horticulture course in the near future.



Phil (bottom right) with Chris Beardshaw and other team members at Tatton Flower Show. Back row Kevin Read, previous Director, Steve Miller (previous gardener, now volunteer), Fred Collins and Ian Myles, gardeners. Front row Paul Cook, previous curator, Nigel Powley gardener, Phil Kay

My first role at Ness was to cut the lawns as a summer job as well as strimming and weeding anywhere that needed it. This was a very enjoyable job especially in the summer months. The winter months were spent assisting with tree work. I loved and still love every aspect of the job. As I got more established at Ness and had undertaken various training, I was given more responsibility. Firstly, I worked alongside different garden team members, who had various levels of experience. This was invaluable as they passed their knowledge and skills onto me. After this I was given responsibility for two areas at Ness; they were the water gardens and the potager, two very different areas. I loved the challenge they provided and learnt a lot from both.



I did however apply for another Job working for the National Trust at Speke Hall (above) as a gardener in 2013. I only did this role for a year to gain more knowledge and experience in my career. When a job became available at Ness I felt I could transfer these skills to improve the work at Ness.

Around 2 years later the position of Head Gardener at Ness became available I offered my knowledge and passion to the team and gained the position. The rest is history...

I report directly to the Gardens & Collections Manager, Nick Lightfoot. I assist him with the planning and day to day maintenance and development of the garden, taking delegated responsibility for aspects of the work. I also deputise for Nick when he's not onsite or on holiday. I help to ensure the highest standards of horticulture, botany and visitor experience. I assist him in managing the garden operating budget and monitor and control the resources delegated to me.



Phil planting a camellia

I currently line manage six gardeners (one part-time), I assistant gardener and also one HBGTP (Historic and Botanic Gardens Training Programme) trainee. I organise regular 1:1s and PDRs (Personal Development Reviews). I also help with training needs and organise required training. I liaise with the Garden & Collections

Manager in maintaining and developing the garden according to the Management and Development Plan. I also assist in the ongoing review and updating of this plan.

I supervise and assist with the general horticultural maintenance & plant husbandry duties of the gardens (e.g. soil cultivation, digging, mulching, manuring, pruning, seed sowing, pesticide application, bed preparation and planting and deadheading).



The Mediterranean garden at Ness

Before the Covid lockdown we had identified various different planting projects around the garden as well as redevelopment of certain areas. We had allocated budgets to these projects too. We have chosen to pause these developments but will be reassessing them in the near future depending on what our budget will be when things return to normal. One of our annual projects is to plan and implement our Potager. Our garden team had started growing the necessary crops and plants for this area. We had to issue them out and sacrifice some crops and have chosen to keep the potager bare for a season. We will make the beds good and mulch them to prevent weed build up, either with green manures or simply membrane.

Lockdown has certainly been a challenge for my team but it has also been for the entire nation. We have had to change and adapt certain practices. For the early part of the lockdown we only had had a skeleton staff to assist with very basic tasks such as watering and also animal care. For a period of time we had to set the team smaller projects which were fed from the garden

plan to enable them to work from home. It was my duty to check with the team weekly either via a video call or simply a phone call. This has been a very challenging adaption to normal working practice. The decision was then made to furlough a portion of the team to limit the number of staff coming in contact with each other. For the staff who were on site we have had to set up various sanitising stations at the entrance of our building and also implement sanitation of the machinery and equipment being used. I am currently only working 2 days at Ness and then work from home.

We provisionally plan to reopen mid-July; starting with 2 days for volunteers to come back and enjoy Ness, then 10 days for members and then open to members of the public from the start of August. These times are a little flexible as we need to have all our buildings safe to open before that happens.



Autumn display at Ness

I have been lucky enough to work in the majority of areas of Ness over my years. I can say that I



Spring at Ness Botanic gardens

have enjoyed working in them all. I really enjoy the various practical horticultural tasks that each area brings. I do however very much enjoy the different seasons that come and go each bringing a new flush of wonderful plants. I think spring is one of my favourite seasons. The specimen area (towards the northern end of the garden at the back of the potager and foot of the rhododendron border) at Ness shows a wonderful display of what spring has to offer. So I think that has to be my favourite area.

Throughout all my time at the gardens and also working in each area I will say that all the different people currently at Ness and the people that have come and gone are what make Ness such a special place to work.

Phil Kay

Photos Phil Kay and Sue Eldridge

Enriching the List

Do you have hundreds of photographs of parks and gardens stored on your computer? Well undoubtedly some of them could be put to good use. English Heritage has a scheme called “Enriching the List” whereby anyone can add to information on listed buildings and registered parks and gardens, see <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/enrich-the-list/>

All you have to do is register and then you can upload images or add additional information about a property. Photographs must be taken from a public vantage point and should not include people that could be recognised unless you have their permission. As many of the listings were done decades ago there is plenty of scope for adding new information. A scheme to create a photographic record of every listed building was undertaken around the millennium, but this is just

one image and changes may have occurred. Take a look and you may be surprised to see how few registered landscapes are accompanied by images. Even Tatton Park only has one image, and that is of Tatton Old Hall, but I may have added a few more by the time you read this.

Additions don't appear immediately as all are checked and then the contributor is sent a confirmatory email. Notwithstanding lockdown and home working, I received a very prompt and helpful response when I had a query. It is good to know that there is a human being on hand.

If you would like to find out more about “Enriching the List”, the Gardens Trust included a note in their recent list of online training packages, see <http://thegardenstrust.org/conservation/hlp-hub/cgt-guidance/research-and-recording-2/>

Barbara Moth

Plans in the Pipeline

Although planning applications appeared to slow as we entered lockdown, planning authorities are now receiving increased numbers of applications. Cheshire Gardens Trust is receiving a constant stream of notifications, not all of which require our response, but do require checking.

Two of the more diverse or perhaps challenging cases that have come our way are in Chester. One is a pre application for The Royal Chester Rowing Club situated below Grosvenor Park on the River Dee, and the other for the erection of 3m high fencing to the rear of the school grounds at the Catholic High School south of the river.

The Royal Chester Rowing Club pre application expressed an aspiration to improve facilities which involved partial rebuilding of the club and adding an upper storey. We wrote expressing concern that the proposal, if permitted, would have a detrimental impact on one of the principal views from the park, registered Grade II, namely the view from the octagonal terrace terminating the formal walk from the Lodge. As lockdown eased the club treasurer requested a site meeting to discuss. Looking at the situation on site was beneficial with both parties gaining understanding of the other's point of view.

The club was founded in 1838, and sits on a constrained site adjacent to the other rowing clubs on the north bank. They had plans to combine facilities with Queen's Park High School rowing club on the south bank, a site by the meadows on council owned land, but after years of discussion this idea has come to nothing. The clubs facilities are antiquated and they are unlikely to be able to provide appropriate changing facilities to meet child safeguarding guidance for



View from the octagon at Grosvenor Park. The boathouse proposal would increase the height of the building to almost the top of the flagpole.

younger members. Adding an additional storey to provide contemporary facilities would undoubtedly limit views from the park to the river and beyond. The Royal Chester Rowing Club has yet to make a decision whether to move forward with a full planning application or raise the necessary funds.

Two observations from the visit: it seems that several of the rowing clubs have aspirations for refurbishment/expansion but in the current climate are likely to struggle for funding, so one wonders if there should not be further dialogue between them to share resources and facilities. Views to the river, Queen's Park and the Meadows are currently partially obscured by unmanaged park and riverside vegetation, something within the authority's power to address.

The application for fencing and entrance improvements for the **Catholic High School, Old Wrexham Road**, initially seemed innocuous, but the school is situated adjacent to the Curzon Park Conservation Area and the Grade II* registered parkland of Eaton Hall. The registered landscape of Eaton includes the former drives and is so extensive that it is the only registered landscape within the County of Cheshire to have its own landscape character area under the Cheshire West and Chester Landscape Strategy 2016 (LCT 11 Estate Farmland, 11a Grosvenor Estate.) The application mentioned none of this and did not comply with National Planning Policy guidance.

The site visit proved a revelation. Parking near the school I walked the route of the drive, now part of a footpath and cycleway, and entered the grounds via a well worn path through the trees. The high school playing fields are part of an irregular open space largely surrounded by mature trees, with a lovely 'soft edge' of long grass, wildflowers and overhanging branches particularly evident along the drive boundary. Installing a 3m high fence would not only totally change the character and subdivide the flowing open space but would also cause physical damage to the mature trees of the registered landscape. The style of fence would increase the sense of urbanisation, destroying the sense of 'natural' landscape that has developed over time, a characteristic valued by local people for its accessibility and rarity within Chester.

We wrote at length explaining how the proposal



The school playing fields looking west towards trees along the drive from Eaton Hall to Chester.

would impact on the significance of the registered site and is contrary to national and local policy. Look for 20/00691/FUL on Cheshire West and

Chester's website if you would like to see the details.

Responding is time consuming but instructive, as were the site visits. I hadn't appreciated the importance of the Eaton drives and would love to be able to use them to explore the landscape further. We will increasingly seek to engage members in planning applications in their area, hopefully benefitting from their local knowledge in making appropriate and robust responses.

Postscript: As a result of objections to the proposed fencing, the school has invited objectors to a community consultation and will be resubmitting an amended planning application. A promising outcome.

Text and photos Barbara Moth

Notes from a (less) Locked-Down Allotment

I said we wouldn't do any more lockdown stories, but I couldn't resist Tina's sequel to her last episode.

Although, in truth, it doesn't feel particularly different on site – if anything, there are fewer of us than at the height of lockdown. Younger folk are steadily going back to work or have more interesting things to do! Finally, there are some welcome playground shrieks from the local infant school.

Water Wars

But enough about lockdown – what about water wars. Weeks without rain in May meant endless hours spent watering. Standpipes fill water butts which fill watering cans (woe betide anyone who attaches a hosepipe – Paddington hard stares all round). Even so, with all taps running, plot-holders furthest from the mains get only a meagre trickle. So, imagine our consternation when tap no 1 (a veritable Niagra among faucets) suddenly ran dry. Much standing around the standpipe in bafflement. Call in Sherlock a piece of potato had been rammed up the spout! How on earth did that get there? Before Jean de Florette tensions escalated – rain, and relief, all round.

A heart-warming story of Lost and Found

No, not cats. A round-robin email from our secretary asked plot-holders to look out for a diamond ring ("of great sentimental value") – lost, she said, 'twixt plots 1 and 6.' We dutifully scoured the paths for days – neither glint nor glimmer. We shook our heads and blamed the magpies – the persecuted of the avian world. But, as is the way in allotment communities,

somebody knew somebody who knew somebody whose husband (it's always a husband) was a metal detectorist. Trusty metal detector was brought, and ring and owner were re-united. More relief.

In the brief pauses among all the excitement, work on the plot continues apace – weeds, like wonders, never cease; and we continue the timeless battle to stop birds, bugs and beasties from eating all our crops before we do.

The cutting flower bed now has one or two flowers with the promise of more to come. And here is a picture to prove it. You can just about see the foundations of the old shed.



Next time **Steptoe Rides Again** and **The Great Potato Theft**

Text and photo Tina Theis

Research and recording back to work



9.45 on Wednesday June 10th 2020 saw the resumption of meetings of CGT's Research and Recording Group headed by Barbara Moth. Of course, with social distancing still the norm, we resorted to a Zoom Meeting online. We were all present except Peter Young who had a serious broadband failure. The group quickly got familiar with the Zoom system and after a short discussion on long hair styles, we got down to business.

At all our meetings we discuss the current status of our **Research into Cheshire's gardens** but since we have all been in Lockdown, we have been unable to visit sites or walk the boundaries that we would have done earlier. And since CALS (Cheshire Archive and Local Studies) is closed just now, we have been unable to access any documents or maps we would normally want to study. Fortunately life might be easier soon with the strict Lockdown coming to an end.

Some examples of our reports can be found on the CGT website under the Research banner. They are also lodged at CALS and Cheshire Historic Environment Record where they are available for public viewing. Although CALS is closed, their blog with news updates can be viewed at <https://www.cheshirearchives.org.uk/pdf/Cheshire-Archives-news-May-2020.pdf>.

While researching gardens we take hundreds of modern photographs but we also collect many more historic images that could be added to the **Cheshire Image Bank**. To learn more about

donating images, have a look at the instructions www.cheshireimagebank.org.uk/Donating.php

Cheshire Gardens Trust Facebook page is being developed so we would encourage members to view it from time to time. Other Facebook pages include **The Gardens Trust** and the **Welsh Historic Gardens Trust** where there is always something new and interesting about garden history, people and plants.

Conservation of historic landscapes is a subject always covered in our meetings. In this Newsletter (page 6), Barbara reports on the innocent-sounding proposal to fence around the Catholic High School in Chester. Innocent sounding until it was discovered that it would break up the historic landscape surrounding the Chester Approach (Duke's Drive) from Eaton Hall. You will find the Grosvenor Estate landscape and the drives are described on the Cheshire West and Cheshire website.

https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/documents/planning-and-building-consultancy/total-environment/landscape-assessment/LCT11_Estate_Farmland.pdf

Our Next Meeting

Wednesday 15th July at 9.45 is booked for our next ZOOM meeting. If you have an interest in gardens and history and would like to join the R&R Group and attend our meeting, just contact Barbara at barbara.moth@btinternet.com. You will be very welcome!

Text Freyda Taylor, photo Jacquie Williams

A visit to Arley

As my birthday treat we visited Arley on the 9th June. This was our first large garden visit since we went to the gardens at Lyme Park on the 19th March, just before lockdown, almost twelve weeks ago.

Arley was very well organized to facilitate safe social distancing, and unlike many other places starting to open, we did not need to book in advance. I did wonder just how the gardeners would have managed to maintain such extensive gardens with so few staff, but it was looking wonderful. For nine weeks only two gardeners, Gordon and James, have been working – seven days a week.

There was a volunteer weeding in the flag garden; it was her first day back, and she said it was like the first day of term.

Having a half plot allotment myself, I was very impressed by the potager (below) in the walled kitchen garden. All beautifully laid out and fewer weeds than on my small plot!



Again in the kitchen garden, the peonies were beautiful, and the bearded irises in the same beds were just starting to go over, but *Clematis* and roses were taking over centre stage. The lawns had all been cut, and edges trimmed, so important to making everything look well cared for. The greenhouses were not open to visitors being indoor spaces but peering in, the tomatoes were extremely large and healthy.

The magnificent double herbaceous borders were a symphony of greens, purples and blues from the alliums, hardy geraniums and delphiniums which were just starting their display, and *Ceanothus* on the walls. Lady Ashbrook was busy there with groups of dahlias in pots; she was deciding just which gaps in the borders they would be planted in. She was referring to a hand written planting record dating back some years that I would have loved to have a proper look at.



Planting dahlias in the herbaceous border

There were some *Mecanopsis* (blue poppies) still flowering near the pond in the Rootree beside candelabra primulas and a clump of very dark purple *Iris siberica*, a beautiful colour and form combination.

Shrub roses in the area of the garden near the Tea Cottage were just coming into bloom, but roses in the walled gardens were in full bloom. Although there were some weeds, they were few and far between. The gardens at Arley are always a delight, but I think the circumstances made them even more precious to those visiting.



Peonies and clematis in the kitchen garden

On the information sheet we were given it said “if you spot two weary looking gardeners please thank them for the tremendous work they have done.” So this is my thank you!

Text and photos Isabel Wright

Roland Edgar Cooper (1890-1962)

This article first appeared in *The Gentian*, the magazine for members of Ness Botanic Gardens.

In the first of a short series of articles on the plant hunters with links to Ness, Nick Lightfoot (Gardens & Collections Manager) explores the career of Roland Edgar Cooper (below).

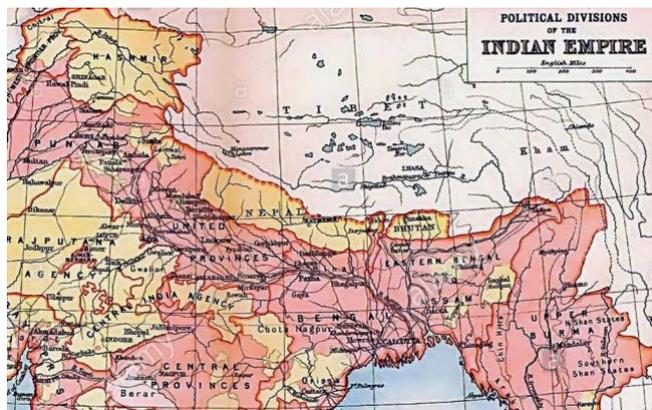


Arthur Bulley first met Roland Edgar Cooper at Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. Cooper was the third plant hunter introduced to Bulley by Issac Bayley Balfour, Regius Keeper at Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh – following on from George Forrest and Frank Kingdon Ward.

Cooper was born in 1890 and started his botanical career in the herbarium at Royal Botanic Gardens, Calcutta before moving to Edinburgh. His time in British India made him a good candidate for Bulley to sponsor to search for new plants in the great arc of the Himalaya, first to the east in monsoon-soaked Bhutan and Sikkim, then to the west in the drier climate of Himachal Pradesh.

Sikkim (1913)

Following a suggestion by Balfour, Bulley first sponsored Cooper to hunt for plants in the small Himalayan kingdom of Sikkim, north of Darjeeling, in the summer and autumn of 1913. The rhododendron forests of the area had already been explored by Joseph Hooker in the mid-nineteenth century, but it was hoped that higher slopes would yield new primulas and other hardy herbaceous plants suitable for British gardens. Cooper did collect new *Primula* but they proved difficult to grow and sell to British



Sikkim, north of Darjeeling, due north of Calcutta

gardeners. Importantly however Cooper gained valuable experience.

Bhutan (1914-15)

Directly east of Sikkim lay the little-explored Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan and Bulley dreamed 'how rich the loot of hardy plants might be'. After protracted negotiations to seek permission from the maharaja and British India, Cooper entered Bhutan in July 1914, the month before the start of the First World War, aiming again to collect new plants of horticultural interest, especially *Primula* and *Rhododendron*. Seed and herbarium specimens were to be shared with the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew, Edinburgh and Calcutta.



Cooper collected over 2600 plant specimens including *Viburnum grandiflorum*, one of the parents of the popular *Viburnum x bodnantense* cultivars, raised first at Edinburgh and the following year by the Head Gardener at Bodnant in 1934/35; and *Rhododendron dalhousiae* var. *rhodotum* (above), a spectacular plant with large white flowers with bands of crimson. There is a plant of *V. grandiflorum* in the Rock Garden at Ness – Cooper 2023, grown from wild-origin

seed sourced via Edinburgh – and a plant of *R. dalhousiae* var. *rhodotum* at the foot of the Terraces, which was kindly donated this year to Ness by Ted Brabin.

Although Cooper collected a number of species new to science in Bhutan, there were few ‘easy’ garden plants and Bulley felt dispirited; however, he decided to make one last throw of the dice.

Himachal Pradesh, India (1916)

In 1916 Bulley supported Cooper to visit the western end of the Himalayan range, among the snowy heights bordering on Kashmir in what is now Himachal Pradesh, travelling out from the city of Shimla, then still the summer capital of the Indian Empire. Cooper was able to collect some seed, but found no new species and this proved to be the last expedition in which Bulley was sole sponsor.

Cooper initially failed a medical exam when trying to enlist but later in 1916 was commissioned as a

lieutenant in the Indian Army, eventually serving in Egypt. After the war Cooper served as the superintendent of Maymyo Botanic Garden (now the National Kandawgyi Botanical Gardens) in the Shan Hills of Burma before returning to Edinburgh as (eventually) Curator until he retired in 1950 to Westcliff-on-Sea in Essex.

Nick Lightfoot
Member of Council of Management

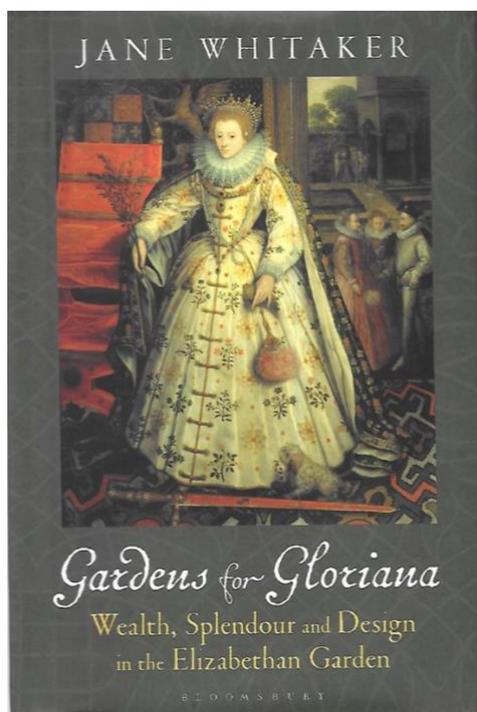
For more information about Ness Botanic Gardens please check out their website <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/ness-gardens/>

References

Alan Elliott, *A Founder Member: Roland Edgar Cooper (1890-1962)*, available at <http://files.srgc.net/fund/RECooper.pdf>

Brenda McLean, *A pioneering plantsman: A K Bulley and the great plant hunters* (London: The Stationery Office, 1997)

Gardens for Gloriana



After reading Patricia Hazlehurst’s recent excellent articles in our last two Newsletters, “Plant names” and a review of “The Making of the English Gardener” I thought I would draw your attention to a recently published book by Jane Whitaker on Elizabethan Gardens.

This richly illustrated book is not only informative in explaining the key elements in the garden designs, but it interweaves with the social and cultural history of the elite and aristocracy of the day. Indeed the construction and presentation of

their formal gardens were as much about complementing their great houses as illustrating the aspiration of the owners.

In many ways this period of the now lost gardens was in its day an expression of the design of gardens which originated from Italy and France and were an integral part of the rich European Renaissance culture that extended through all forms of art in Elizabethan England.

With Jane Whitaker as our guide, we travel with Queen Elizabeth and her Court as she journeys around the country in the warmer months between May and October, staying in the many magnificent houses and spending time in the gardens not only feasting, but being entertained with playful surprises and sensory delights.

It is here in the gardens we meet many of the leading and fascinating courtiers of the day and become absorbed with the characters in the mythological theatre of the entertainment provided at enormous expense.

From knot gardens and mazes, fountains and water gardens, dining al fresco and banqueting, masques and fireworks to botany, medicine and royal entertainment this book is a wonderful, entertaining and informative insight into the opulent reign of England’s Protestant Queen, Elizabeth I. An excellent read and I thoroughly recommend this book.

Gordon J Darlington

Book Reviews

Modern Plant Hunters. Adventures in Pursuit of Extraordinary Plants by Dr Sandy Primrose 2019

Dr Sandy Primrose MBA PhD is a biologist who has worked in academia and in pharmaceutical, diagnostic and life science companies and worked on issues of food fraud and safety and who is also a keen gardener.

This lovely book, which is lavishly illustrated with photos of exotic plants and spectacular scenery, is a fascinating introduction into some of the issues faced by modern day plant hunters. It sets out the importance of continuing to search for new plant species before they are lost forever. There is a brief history of plant hunters from John Tradescant to Frank Kingdon Ward to set the context for modern collecting. There are chapters on why and where to go plant hunting, the difficulties faced by modern day plant hunters, ranging from bureaucracy to dealing with insect attacks, plant hunters and their contributions, the role of scientific institutions, orchid hunters, ornamental, economic and medicinal plants. There is lots of scientific information but

presented in a very accessible manner and with lots of interesting asides.

Plants, Poisons and Personalities by Dr Sandy Primrose 2010

This little book is made up of 50 essays of a few pages each, ideal for dipping into, with intriguing chapter headings ranging from "Linnaeus, Latin and Lust", "How to Avoid being Poisoned by your Relatives", "Who was Granny Smith" to "Tall Tales at Christmas". There are separate chapters on tomatoes, potatoes, onions, dahlias, daffodils, primulas, roses and orchids and lots more. Dr Primrose is a knowledgeable and entertaining writer and I thoroughly enjoyed this book, I also learned lots of fascinating information. I've learned that the African Marigold actually came originally from Mexico although it was discovered by Europeans in Tunisia in 1535; that vanilla comes from an orchid; and the origin of potato crisps!

Very easy to read and ideal for reading a chapter at a time.

Patricia Hazlehurst

Harry Wheatcroft



Who – well those of us of a certain age (he died in 1977) – can forget the idiosyncratic appearance of Harry Wheatcroft? His whiskers were his physical trademark in the way his roses were his business trademark. Trawling through one of the Caldwell Archive ledgers, I discover that Caldwell purchased roses from him and his brother in

1922/23. A check on the internet turns up some fascinating information: he and his brother did not get on, being polar opposites; he nearly went into politics instead of rose-growing; Wheatcroft Bros. was formed in 1919 and their nursery – about an acre in extent – “must have been the worst rose growing place anywhere in Nottinghamshire”. Yet they went on to become one of the most famous rose-growing and rose-breeding firms of the twentieth century. I could write reams, just from the information on the internet, but why bother when you can check it out yourself:

try <https://thegardenstrust.blog/2015/07/04/harry-wheatcroft-the-red-rose-grower/>. This has plenty of photos, including one without his shirt. It is said that at one Chelsea, this was how he was when the then president, Lord Aberconway, came across him: ““A hot day, Harry!” “Indeed, my lord.” “Tell you what, Harry, if you’ll put a shirt on, I’ll take my jacket off!””. A great personality – what a loss to politics!

Harry’s books are available second-hand.

Joy Uings

The Editor's Tree story



Well, I asked for no more lockdown stories for this edition of the newsletter but I'm afraid I've broken my own rules; I couldn't resist telling you about the tree.

Some time in April there were very high winds and the noise from the trees at the back was horrendous. I had a very tall birch, originally a seedling, which over the years had got very big, despite regular pruning. I loved it but I'm not sure anyone else did. One night I got really worried about it being too near the house so the following day I started contacting tree surgeons. North Cheshire Forestry came to the rescue; they also felt it was too big for the site.



They felled it in a morning, quite a spectator sport from the bedroom window. It was hard work for them as they had to drag everything through a very narrow passage to the shredder at the front.

I thought that there would be a large hole left but it was actually filled with two very large *Choisya*

shrubs which we had planted years ago. Not particularly attractive, they had to go. So, I called the same tree surgeons back, they removed them and then there really was a big space. I spent a pleasurable time trawling through online nurseries and picked a Rowan (*Sorbus commixta* 'Olympic Flame'). Eventually it came and I managed to plant it with the help of my new gardener to bash in the stake. But then what else? I had a beautiful red *Rhododendron*, with bell-like flowers in a pot which had outgrown its site. I thought this would be ideal in the new 'woodland' garden. After a lot of blood sweat and tears I managed to extricate it from its pot (below), wheel it to its new site and plant it. It wasn't perfect but it had to do.



It still needed more so I managed to transplant a white *Hydrangea serrata*, previously in a pot, an *Acer palmatum* 'Orange Dream', which was in the wrong spot on the garden and various geraniums. Doesn't look fantastic yet but I'm looking forward to the autumn when the foliage on the rowan is supposed to be spectacular. Now, what's next...

Sue Eldridge



Virtual AGM 2020

This year's AGM was held on 29 June via Zoom with 14 attending. Well, it was certainly different but we accomplished something the National Trust did not manage and fulfilled our legal obligations as a limited company and a registered charity. Two key areas were resolved: first, the approval/acceptance of the 2019/20 accounts and the election of members for the Council of Management. Three members had to step down from the CoM: David Cash, Margaret Blowey and Gordon Darlington. Thankfully all agreed to be re-elected and the Trust is operating with the minimum number of seven on the Council.

The Chair pointed out that the Trust is in a precarious position as Joy Uings wishes to resign from the CoM leaving the roles of company secretary and treasurer vacant, and Ed Bennis needs to step down as acting chair. Barbara Moth has said that she would like to step down from her responsibilities for leading Research and

Recording and Conservation and Planning in the next couple of years. It was thought that the best solution is to identify individuals who could positively contribute to the Trust and approach them directly.

Two other issues were discussed. The CoM had proposed donating some funds to a suitable charity associated with Cheshire gardens. We discovered that we were not legally able to do this; that is donate to another charity. The CoM will review its proposed budget for 2020/21 with consideration to events and extending the student travel bursary. The second issue was the bursary. The Chair informed the AGM that it had to be suspended for this year due to COVID-19. The meeting concluded after 40 minutes with no AOB.

A more complete report will be issued after the CoM meeting on 14th July.

Ed Bennis

Typos

Typos can be expensive – and they are nothing new. I was confirming the name of a nursery in Bath – Rich & Co. – and came across one of their newspaper adverts in December 1922. “BLACK or RED CURRANTS: GOOD BUSHES 3d each; 7s Dozen”.

Now I know I rely on my calculator more than I should – but even a glance told me that this was wrong. If one bush costs 3d, then 12 bushes

would be 3s.

So I looked further and lo and behold, the same advert appeared the following week. But this time it was 8d each! That made more sense. A 12.5% saving when buying by the dozen.

But I wonder how many people tried to buy a bush for just 3d!

Joy Uings

A plea from Grappenhall Heys

Graham Richardson, Head Gardener from Grappenhall Heys Walled Garden, who featured in a recent newsletter has asked if I can put the following request to members. “Does anyone know of a specialist company that may be prepared to repaint our glasshouses? As you know, they were restored in 2014 but unfortunately the paint work started to fail almost straight away. The contractors went into liquidation soon after and now we have learnt that our architects have gone the same way! We did approach the company that recently restored the glasshouses at Walton Gardens but they didn't get back to us”. Please contact g Richardson@ghwalledgarden.org.uk with any suggestions.

Copy date for summer newsletter is 14th August 2020

Contributions to the Newsletter are very welcome. If you want to comment on articles in this edition or would like to contribute one for the next, please contact the Newsletter Editor, 148 Chester Road, Hazel Grove, Stockport SK7 6HE or email newsletter@cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk