

## A PLANTSMAN'S VIEW OF THE FUTURE PLANT COLLECTION AT INVEREWE

JOHN ANDERSON

*Inverewe Garden (National Trust for Scotland) Poolewe, Ross-shire IV22 2LG*

Much has been written about the wonders of Inverewe Garden - its wonderful geographical location, the climate gently warmed by the North Atlantic Drift (a branch of the Gulf Stream), the splendour of its man-made landscape, and especially the vistas of Loch Ewe. Articles have been written about the impressive plant collection with emphasis on the magnificent collection of Rhododendrons and of plants hailing from the Southern Hemisphere. What is it that makes Inverewe a great garden? Where do the plant collections go from here?

Those of us who garden on the western seaboard of Scotland already know some of the answers to the first question. We rely on a great combination of factors one of which is the warm current - the North Atlantic Drift - that impinges on our coastline: it provides the cool temperate conditions that allow us to garden on the fringes of the subtropical. Another important factor is the mix of precipitation, wind, shelter and light intensities that together provide the perfect mix for growing lush vegetation.

For me gardening has always been about plant collections. The challenge at Inverewe is to move forward with one of the most exciting plant collections held by the National Trust for Scotland (NTS). Having travelled widely in both hemispheres to see and learn about plants in their natural habitats I have a strong desire to bring these experiences to Inverewe also to replicate some of the natural plantings that I have observed. Fascinatingly, the West Coast of Scotland and Tasmania have many topographical (landscape) features in common. Because of this, I think many of the plants native to Tasmania have the potential to do very well at Inverewe. Already a reasonable collection has been scattered through the garden. My vision is to continue natural planting, so as to impress on the visiting public the importance of plant collections in maintaining diversity and the survival of the plant kingdom.

In the past eighteen months, and alongside new introductions, a start has been made with the re-introduction of plants that may, at one time, have been at Inverewe. Plants such as the "Tasmanian Laurel" (*Anopterus glandulosus*) of the Escalloniaceae, a delightful evergreen shrub which has most delightful pink buds breaking open during early summer into white waxy bell-shaped flowers. I used to grow this shrub on the east coast of Ireland where it reached over 4m (13ft) in height. Tasmanian laurel is not difficult to propagate: it should be grown more frequently than at present in the milder coastal gardens.

The "Tasmanian Groundsel", *Brachyglottis brunonis* (Fig.1), is a gem of a shrub – easy to grow from seed but very difficult to propagate from cuttings. This year more than 20 young specimens have been planted around Inverewe:

others have been distributed to NTS properties elsewhere also to some private gardens. This species is noted for its evergreen, linear leaves (which are often sticky to the touch), the charm of its mature bark, which peels like the distinctive New Zealand *Fuchsia excorticata*. The small composite yellow flowers of “Tasmanian Groundsel” appear in June and give the plant its common name.

*Bauera rubioides*, a native of E. Australia and Tasmania, is a real favourite of mine – it is a low shrub with the capacity to cover many hectares of ground in the wild. It is one of the most profusely flowering of shrubs suited to a cool, moist, sheltered corner of the garden. Although it is rare to find *Bauera*



**Fig.1** – The Tasmanian Groundsel  
(*Brachyglottis brunonis*)



**Fig.2** – *Olearia glandulosa* -  
a species of daisy bush

growing outdoors in the British Isles it can and has been done. Another aspect of this plant may be a threat – it can root and sucker to it’s hearts content. It often starts to flower in May and continue, on and off, for six months.

Within the group of botanically interesting plants - a term that some people translate as ‘those plants with small insignificant flowers, which have a licence to bore everyone except about a handful of dedicated plants people’, is *Asterotrichion discolor*, a member of Mallow family and native in Tasmania. It is a tall and elegant tree growing up to 10m (17ft). I grew this plant in my back garden, and cut it back every year after flowering. The female form



**Fig.3** – *Weinmannia racemosa*

produces insignificant flowers but the male form gives a better display of medium-sized creamy flowers worthy of any plant collection. Cultivate it against a south, or west-facing wall in fertile, well-drained soil.

Inverewe has five National collections – including those of *Olearia* (Daisy bush) and *Brachyglottis*. In general, progress has been slow but propagation of *Olearia colensoi*, now seems to have been resolved. Young specimens of *O. fragrantissima* and *O. megaphylla* have enjoyed a year in the garden, with the latter flowering in May in 2004. Other Olearias on the wish-list include *O. ledifolia* (ex Tasmania), *O. rotundifolia* (ex eastern Australia), *O. glandulosa* (Fig.2) and *O. frostii* (ex eastern Australia); the latter is on its way to the gardens kindly sent by Jeff Irons of the Australian Plant Society. *O. glandulosa* will be planted with a careful eye on its progress.

In the autumn a new planting of *Weinmannia racemosa* (Fig.3) from New Zealand will complement the Chilean *W. trichosperma* which flowers in June and in no time reaches 3m (10ft) in height. These plants are in the same family – Cunoniaceae – as *Bauera rubioides* – and are typically found in Oceania and Australasia. Two specimens of *Knightia excelsa* (New Zealand honeysuckle) a member of the Proteaceae, have settled well in different parts of the garden. These New Zealand trees are rarely seen in our gardens: I planted a young tree fifteen years ago in Ireland where, by 2002, it was over 5m (17ft) in height. *Carpodetus serratus* (Fig.4), another New Zealand large shrub/small tree, produces abundant small white cupped flowers at Inverewe in the courtyard by the main house: it was planted by Mairi Saywer, the daughter of Osgood Mackenzie the



Fig.4 – *Carpodetus serratus*

(7ft) specimen is already growing at Inverewe, albeit indoors, where it will remain until its wood is thick enough to go out into the protected area of the woodland. The vagaries of the weather will also be a test for the beautiful South-east Asian scented genus of *Michelia* which is related to *Magnolia*. *Michelia maudiae* has come through a couple of winters further south, in protected areas. At Inverewe, two specimens will be planted out to test their hardiness and their ability to withstand the conditions. Several other species of *Michelia*, are also strongly scented, and have proved themselves hardy to -10°C (15°F). These include *M. compressa* and *M. doltsova* (Fig.5), and to a lesser extent *M. figo*. One of the plants that excites me is a rare and little known

founder of the garden at Inverewe. The best time to see this beautiful plant is in July. I would dearly love to try Kauri (*Agathis australis*) the giant of the native forests in N. Island, New Zealand. Having seen them in the wild, it is on my must-try-again-list. The records at Inverewe show that it was cultivated in the Gardens at one time, but they do not indicate for how long.

Sustained climate change in the future may allow frost sensitive trees like *Itoa orientalis*, native to Vietnam and with attractive foliage, to grow into a medium sized tree. Already tested outdoors in Ireland, the west coast in Cork and Co. Wicklow, a specimen growing outdoors reached 3m (10ft), before being knocked back by frost. A 2m



Fig.5 – *Michelia doltsova*



**Fig.6** – *Ourisia macrophylla* var *robusta*

Chinese plant called *Melliodendron xylocarpum* a member of the Styracaceae family. It looks like a broad-leaved *Styrax hemslyana*, with its terminal racemes of pure white flowers showing in June.

In the woodland garden several additions have been made to the collection of Magnolias. One of my favorites, and one that I think should be planted more widely in gardens is *M. x weisneri* a superb hybrid between *M. hypoleuca* x *M. sieboldii*, embracing the fragrance and red sepals of both parents. It has creamy-white flowers, flushed pink outside and with crimson stamens. This large shrub/small tree produces its flowers in June.

On the peat bank opposite the little pond, a small but neat collection of Arisaemas, with their slender green hooded spathes, are doing very well, with *A. griffithii* and *A. jacquemontii* sharing the leading role. Around them there is a good selection of *Ourisia*. *O. macrophylla* var *robusta*, (Fig.6) is doing particularly well with its tall stems and abundance of ivory white almost rosette flowers in early spring. Close by is *O. crosbyi* another white flowering species. One of the best dwarf forms of *Ourisia*, *O. Loch Ewe*, was raised at Inverewe over forty years ago by the then head gardener Geoff Collins. The cross between *O. coccinea*, a Chilean species with red flowers, and *O. macrophylla*, a white flowering New Zealand species, gave rise to ‘Loch Ewe’ with amazingly pure pink flowers plus the dwarf habit of the former parent.

The collection of Rhododendrons will continue to grow steadily. The aim is to plant newly collected species from locations which have already yielded species that do particularly well at Inverewe. We will also continue to add to Inverewe’s National Collections of *Rhododendron barbatum* subsections *glischra* and *maculifera* that are medium-sized shrubs or small trees whose flowers have a five-lobed corolla, tubular to more or less hare-bell shaped.

Another venture being planned, is the creation of a Victorian Fern Garden in part of the garden known as “Upper Japan”. At present it contains several good clumps of the New Zealand tree fern *Dicksonia lanata*, which will be joined by the rare *Cyathea dregei* from the Drakensburg mountains in South Africa, given to Inverewe by Barry Unwin, Curator of Logan Botanic Garden. It prefers a drier sunnier position than *D. lanata* - wouldn’t we all! It will be interesting to see how it fares at Inverewe.

Now, to look to the future! If global warming becomes a reality in the Highlands, it should be fascinating to see how plants at the margins are affected, remembering that the western shift of the North Atlantic Drift may lead to cooler conditions. I personally look forward to admiring *Franklinia alatahama*, now virtually extinct in its native habitat (Georgia, USA). It is a tree of the first order for beauty and fragrance of blossoms; the flowers are very large, snow white and ornamented with a crown or tassel of gold coloured stamens (William Bartram, 1791) – it is a member of the Tea family. This would be my idea of heaven on a late summer’s day hopefully too hot to be bothered by midges.

**John Anderson** is Head Gardener at Inverewe having worked and studied at (a) the National Botanic Garden, Glasnevin, Dublin (3yr) and (b) the Royal Botanic Garden, Kew and its “country garden”, Wakehurst Place (3yr) before being made Head Gardener/Curator, Mount Usher Garden, County Wicklow (20yr). He has lectured worldwide and has radio and TV experience.

## THE GARDENING SCOTLAND VOLUNTEERS

### Come and join us

IVOR SANTER

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Recent years have seen the Caley pursue a number of initiatives with increasing confidence and vigour. Most notable among them must be the Society's involvement with, and commitment to, Gardening Scotland. With uncertainties and difficulties at the start this annual extravaganza has blossomed into one of the largest and most prestigious gardening shows in the UK.

Gardening Scotland's Board of Trustees has representatives from a variety of gardening and horticultural organisations, including the Caley, ScotGrow and the Horticultural Exhibitors Association (HEA), the Horticultural Trades Association (HTA) and Scotland's Gardeners Forum (SGF). In its quest for excellence the Members of the Board decided at an early stage to engage Rural Projects, based at Ingliston, to mastermind the detailed arrangements of their event. Together Members of the Board and Rural Projects, with their distinctive and complementary skills and interests, decided to deliver a top class show that would provide exciting ideas and inspiration for gardeners of all ages and with different levels of commitment.



**Fig.1** – Visitors to Gardening Scotland waiting, with high expectations, for the opening of the gates

The success of the venture can be seen for itself. During the four years of the Show's existence numbers of visitors at the three-day event, held on the first weekend in June, have swelled to reach around thirty thousand annually (Fig.1): with improved and extended facilities at the Royal Highland Centre there is an expectation of even greater interest in the future.

From the outset it was recognised that Gardening Scotland would not succeed without a reliable and dedicated team of stewards - 'The Caley Volunteers'. Because of the number and diversity of tasks needing to be done, this band of cheerful, enthusiastic volunteers has been joined by members of other gardening and horticultural organisations, including the Friends of the RBGE and in particular those organisations affiliated to Scotland's Gardeners Forum. Without them Gardening Scotland would find it exceedingly difficult to operate – the volunteers provide an effective service with great courtesy and charm.

In 2004 numbers of volunteers, some retired, others in full-time employment, on duty during the three days of the Show totalled 127. For a variety of reasons some give a few hours of their time while others are able to make longer commitments of up to seven days. With his computerised facilities, developed by the Caley, David Sinclair, the team leader and the epitome of tact, allocates tasks, one per volunteer per session of 5 hours either in the morning or afternoon.

The volunteers are the first people that the general public meet on arrival at the showground: they usually seek information and advice. Some of the tasks accepted by the volunteers are low profile and mundane but nevertheless vital to the success and orderly management of the Show. Their responsibilities include welcoming people to the Show and checking tickets, car parking and traffic control, assisting exhibitors, helping the less able with the provision of wheelchairs etc, answering questions and providing information, directing the hungry, thirsty and lost to venues and people that they can't locate, maintaining a plant crèche, noting comments and taking criticism and some times unwarranted abuse, providing cheerful banter and encouragement to tired visitors as they make their way home and very importantly discretely helping with many aspects of security and health and safety. All duties, there are 38 of them, are undertaken in the best of spirits by an admirable, extremely tolerant and responsible band of volunteers.

Although each session is timed for approximately five hours (the morning session overlapping with the afternoon session), the time spent on duty soon passes with welcome comfort breaks for a sit-down, refreshments and lunch at the 'Caley office' and the occasional time-out to take a quick look around the Show; the timetabling is structured in such a way as to make the job as pleasurable, varied and as interesting as possible - most volunteers enthusiastically agree that this is achieved. Each day David Sinclair and his key supervisors, hold briefings prior to the start of each morning and afternoon to ensure that all volunteers are aware of what is expected: there are also opportunities to get to know each other's colleagues. Once on duty there is nearly always a person with previous experience nearby to give encouragement and support to those new to the task in hand.

A major show like Gardening Scotland just does not happen overnight. Indeed, 24 hours before and 24 hours after the 3 day event would be insufficient to prepare or vacate the vast site. One group of volunteers commits itself to a 7 to 8 days stint, helping with the build-up and 'break-down' of exhibits and restoring

normality throughout the Showground. Rubbish bins, signs, seating areas, fire fighting equipment and the whole gamut of health and safety measures have to be in place by the start of the show and passed as 'safe practice' by the relevant official authorities. The D.I.Y. skills of the 'Hit Squad' - a talented group - are to the fore at this time - there are always things to be dismantled modified, moved and rebuilt or rearranged. In fact one stand was dismantled three times before an exhibitor was satisfied - it won a prize which members of the 'Hit Squad' claimed should have been theirs!

Parking, policing and countless other security-related tasks, like everything else at the Show, require constant attention particularly in the days preceding the start of a Show. Exhibitors, for obvious reasons, want to park their vehicles as near as possible to their stands but because of health and safety requirements this is not always possible and needs an authoritative but understanding steward to use commonsense to bring some sense of order to traffic flow in exhibition and access areas. It would seem that our lady volunteers have rapidly established a rapport with drivers when on car parking duty: friendly but firm. Untroubled by a disgruntled driver insisting that he should be allowed to park in a restricted area (so blocking access), a lady volunteer told him in a delightful polite manner that the last vehicle to park in such a position was towed away 'Had he (the driver) read the small print on the papers that Gardening Scotland had sent explaining parking arrangements for exhibitors'? Dumbfounded and not wishing to incur a recovery fee the driver quickly moved on.

Many of the tasks seem trivial but the group of volunteers came of age during the last afternoon of Gardening Scotland 2004 when they showed how professional they are. For the first time they had to arrange the immediate evacuation of the Floral Hall following a fire alarm which proved to be false but not before the Fire Brigade arrived – the evacuation was carried out in exemplary fashion without, at any time, sacrificing security. Although it turned out to be a false alarm, the way the volunteers handled the incident including the evacuation procedures was praised by the Senior Fire Officer – praise indeed.

Acting as a steward has its lighter moments. One elderly gentleman commented on his way out that he 'enjoyed the Show but when he was younger there were animals and lots of farming things to see!' When it was explained that Gardening Scotland was centred on flowers and gardening he said he'd never been to such a big flower show in all his 93 years! An excited, enthusiastic lady who arrived by bus at the south end of the Showground walked determinedly straight down the main avenue, not looking to her left or right, past the floral hall and proceeded out through the north gate thinking, to her dismay, that the show was sited in the car park to the north of the north gate. When she realised her mistake she had some difficulty explaining to the north gate volunteers what she had unwittingly done but luckily she had retained her special bus pass and was delighted to get back into the show, to receive a map and be told where she should connect with her bus for the journey home. A young lad of 4 or 5 had lost his parents and was

most upset. The volunteers at the information post calmed him down with a fizzy drink, ice cream and some sweeties and immediately got a message over the public address system. In minutes the distraught parents arrived but the little boy was reluctant to leave the 'nice' ladies who had looked after him so well - all part of a day's work!

The Caley, which aims to be outward looking, endeavours to assist and involve organisations and individuals with an interest in gardening and horticulture: the volunteers wish to be part of Gardening Scotland. With the encouragement of Scotland's Gardeners Forum, the ranks of the Caley volunteers have now been swelled to ensure that Gardening Scotland is endowed with sufficient 'volunteers'. The 100 or so friendly and cheerful people who freely give their time and enthusiasm to this most vital of functions have fun, enjoy the company and look forward to meeting each other at next years' show, and at other times of the year, all to Gardening Scotland's great advantage. Come and join us! If you would like to please contact David Sinclair of the Caley or enlist through your own local gardening club or society via Scotland's Gardeners Forum. You would be made most welcome.

**Ivor Santer** had many years teaching students of land-based industries before retiring from Oatridge College as Deputy Principal. He is a Vice-President of the Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society and a Trustee and Secretary of Gardening Scotland.



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## BLOWING THE MISTS AWAY ....

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It might appear that the art of bonsai is surrounded by myth and misconception. In this article I would hope to disperse some of these myths and show that it is a hobby which can be enjoyed by all.

Bonsai originated, as far as we know, in China in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century. The emperor of the time was confined to the Forbidden City and the Summer Palace as these were the only enclaves not hostile towards him. There are vast courtyards in both these buildings and in order to soften the architecture somewhat, huge “Cloud Trees” were set up in enormous pots and clipped regularly to keep them in shape. Gradually, these trees were incorporated into the buildings themselves which necessitated their being smaller; these trees were not bonsai but “Pening”

Later, the Japanese invaded China and as with many other things took away the idea and refined it. They called it *Bonsai*, the word and the art that we know today (Fig.1).



**Fig.1** – The author tending a specimen of Field Maple (*Acer campestre*)

The word “bonsai” really means “a tree in a tray” but for us it means “in a pot”. Strictly, the tree can be any size; in Korea, huge “bonsai” are used as roundabouts in roads but for us, the height rarely exceeds 4ft. (1.2m). The next size down is called “shohin” which is a tree you can almost hold in one hand, not more than 12-14 in. (30-36cm) tall. The smallest is called “mame”, no more than 5-6 in. (13-15cm) high.

Almost any tree can be trained into a bonsai provided it has branches. A palm tree, therefore, cannot. It is preferable to train trees with small leaves as they look in better proportion. It may take many years to reduce the leaf size of a larger leaf tree but it can be done. Once the leaves have set in the season, strip them all off the tree and the second set of leaves will be smaller. Always do this before the longest day in order to give time for the next year’s buds to develop; leave it too late in the season and leaves may not grow again. The more branches you can create on a tree, the more leaves there will be and the smaller the leaves will become.

For a beginner, the best trees to use are those native to the UK because they can withstand the extremes of our summers and winters. Hedgerow trees,



**Fig.2** – Bonsai specimen of Common Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*)

[hawthorn (Fig.2), privet etc], grow quickly and back-bud readily. If you make a mistake by cutting off the wrong branch it will only take a short time to replenish itself. With slower growing trees, for example pine, it may be ten years before a branch grows again.

All trees have a period during the year when they look at their best, for example Deshojo maple with its wonderful red leaf colour in spring. The flowers of apple, wisteria and hawthorn also come into their own in spring whereas in summer, we have rhododendron (Fig.3), pomegranate and potentilla all with magnificent blossom. In autumn we have the spectacular golden leaf colours of the English elm and the reds and bronzes of the maples and beech. The winter display relies on trees that have berries, (pyracantha and apple), and the wonderful winter structures of the Korean hornbeam, oak and the green needles and cranky trunk textures of the pine.

As always with nature, there is something to enjoy in every season of the year.

Let us move on to an area which can at first seem quite frightening: styling. There are about fifteen basic styles and in this article I am not going to venture into a debate on the merits or demerits of any of them apart from saying that it is your tree and it is only you who needs to be satisfied. You do not have to be a great artist to create a pleasing bonsai; after all, if you draw a triangle with a leg sticking out of the bottom of it and you show this to a child, he or she will



Fig.3 – A Bonsai specimen of *Rhododendron obtusum*

immediately say “it’s a tree!”. So do not get too complicated at the start; as you progress the styles will become more apparent.

A few words on growing bonsai. The best soil mixture for a beginner is a mixture of John Innes No.2 and alpine grit, about 50/50. You will then need a pot to plant your tree in. It must have drainage holes and if possible it should be of a colour

which matches or enhances the tree. I use browns, fawns, greys and creams because my show stand has a cream background and everything blends well. There is no objection to your using blues, reds or greens. For example if you have a red-leaved maple, a blue pot would look spectacular.

Eventually you will need special tools to do specific jobs but you can manage perfectly well with a pair of secateurs and some wire cutters. As for putting the tree into shape (styling) you can either use the “clip and grow” method (as you would in topiary) or to hold larger branches in position, use wire of varying thickness according to branch size. If it is a quick growing tree wiring will only be necessary for four months or so; for a slower growing tree up to two years or more. You must check regularly that the wire does not cut into the bark. If there is a danger of this happening, you must cut the wire off and rewire. Never unwind wire from a branch as you may break it – it’s not worth the risk!

May I offer some advice on starting your collection? Do not bother growing from seed; it takes far too much time and for the amount of money it costs to buy three-year-old seedlings, 60p - £1.50, it’s just not worth the effort. You can buy discarded trees from garden centres which may be just the thing you need for your bonsai; you do not need a perfect specimen. You can also dig trees from the wild, first making sure you have had permission! I always make the point that there is no such thing as an “indoor tree”. There are imported trees which are not frost hardy: serissas, sageretias, carmonas and the like which must be brought indoors in winter or they will die. Nevertheless, these must be taken outside again after the frosts to reap the benefit of good light.

Bonsai can be looked after like any other pot plant: water them if they feel dry, don’t when they are wet; they are not bog plants! Feed in spring and summer every two weeks with tomato feed. The best way of watering is to submerge the tree in a bowl of water so that it covers the surface of the soil. It will bubble – that is the air coming out. When the bubbles stop, it is watered. Take it out immediately and do not water again until it is dry. Keep your trees in a semi-

sheltered position away from high winds and baking sun. From time to time the tree will become pot-bound. Take it out of the pot in spring, trim about one third of the root away, put it back into the pot and fill up with good compost. Sometimes with older and slow-growing trees, this may not need to be done inside a five year period. If you are worried about this process, take it to a club for advice.

Once you have a starter collection, help is always available from Bonsai clubs and their members. These clubs often run workshops which you can attend and gain knowledge from visiting speakers. A lot of skill can be acquired in quite a short space of time in this way. Look at as many good trees as you can; this will give you an excellent grounding in creating and bettering your own trees. Buy specimen trees from reputable dealers who can give you helpful advice on their care and maintenance. My advice would be not to buy your trees from supermarkets, DIY or garden centres which do not have a dedicated salesperson to offer help if things go wrong.

Finally, the more care you give your trees, the better will be the results. I wish you every success with this fascinating and rewarding hobby.

**Louis Hawksby** was a Founder Member, also President, of the North of England Bonsai Association. He has been exhibiting for 15 or more years and in the process has won over 250 Gold medals and 70 Best-in-Show Awards including that of Gardening Scotland 2004.

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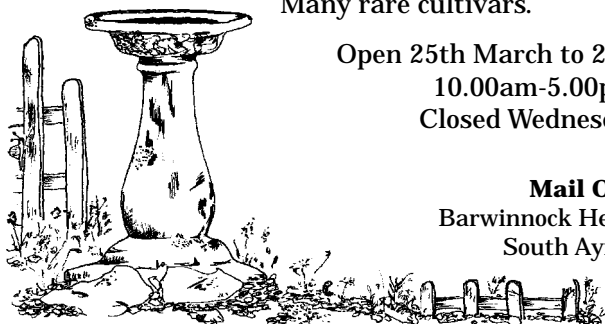
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# BOOK REVIEWS

## George Forrest Plant Hunter

BRENDA McLEAN

*Antique Collectors' Club, Woodbridge in association with the  
Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh 2004 Pp239, Price £29.50 ISBN 1-85149-461-8*

The story of George Forrest's escape from the Tibetan lamas is one of the great stories of plant hunting literature. The lamas had sacked the French mission at Tskeou in Yunnan and they murdered two elderly French missionaries, who Forrest had become friendly with, and later ate their hearts and brains. For twenty-one days Forrest evaded them, "tracked and hunted like a wild beast", abandoning his boots and getting almost nothing to eat. This incident occurred in 1905 on the first of his seven expeditions to Yunnan, Western China, and Brenda McLean gives an exciting account of it with many quotations from his letters. It reveals much - an adventurous life and an extraordinary character - which make Forrest such an excellent subject for a biography. It is surprising in

fact that there has not been one before. Forrest, unlike his rivals, Frank Kingdon Ward and Reginald Farrer did not write books, although his letters show him to be a graphic and lively writer and he did publish a number of articles.

Forrest was born in 1873 in Falkirk, the youngest of 13 children. He came from a religious family with a very strong work ethic and from an early age he showed an interest in the natural world. At the age of 30 he was taken on by the then Regius Keeper of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, Isaac Bayley Balfour, in a poorly paid post in the herbarium. This was a crucial launch pad in several respects. It not only allowed him to familiarise himself with a huge variety of plants but his training in the methods of producing dried specimens meant that the specimens he sent back from the field were done to a very high standard and won universal praise. It enabled him to maintain links with Edinburgh - and most important was the unwavering support of Balfour - which were to be vital to the success of his collecting, the propagation of his introductions and the distribution of his seeds. Working in the herbarium he was on the spot when in 1904 AK Bulley, the Liverpool cotton broker and owner of Bees Nursery (about whom Brenda McLean has also written a biography), asked Balfour for someone to collect for him in China. He also met his future wife, Clementina Traill who worked in the herbarium and to whom he became engaged before his first

**NB:** *The vignettes - George Forrest, Lilium ochraceum var. burmanicum, Rhododendron griersonianum, satellite photograph of NW Yunnan - embellishing these book reviews are reproduced with gratitude from "George Forrest Plant Hunter."*

expedition. This charming relationship permeates the whole book as Forrest's letters to Clementina, as well as those to the rest of his family and to Balfour, are one of Brenda McLean's main sources.

Many of these letters are in the library of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh but the author also enjoyed the benefit of some chance finds of other family papers, including a diary of the first expedition. Many of Forrest's photographs are also in the library at the RBGE and many were exhibited there in 2004. They add a huge amount to the book: we get many different images of Forrest himself and we can also see what the local people looked like (and the poor French missionaries), what towns like Dali were like and even what mules were expected to carry and the bridges they had to cross. Add to this some modern colour photos, mainly of plants, and you have a book which is very interesting to look at as well as to read.



We learn a lot about the backers of Forrest's expeditions, Bulley, J.C. Williams of Caerhays, Reginald Cory, Lionel de Rothschild among others, and the not always easy relationship between them and Forrest. There is much detail too about the finances and Forrest's anxiety about them and his determination to provide his backers with what they wanted. Of course the plants Forrest collected - the rhododendrons, primulas, meconopsis and many others - weave their way through the book but Brenda McLean never lets it become a list of plants and you don't need to know a single Latin name to enjoy the book.

During his career Forrest sent home a staggering volume of plants, seeds and herbarium specimens, as well as animals including many insects and birds. He was a man who inspired love and respect, a man who was extremely tough and tough on himself, who worked extremely hard and was an outstanding organiser, and now there is a biography of him which does justice to his memory.

*Anna Buxton*

## **Tales of the Rose Tree - Ravishing Rhododendrons and their Travels Around the World**

JANE BROWN

*HarperCollins, London 2004 Ppxi 307 Price £20.00 ISBN 0-00-712995-5*

The author's choice of title for this admirable "history" of the rhododendron is apt. Whether one thinks of the geographical origins - European, North American or Asiatic - or of the plant hunters, nurserymen and famous (English) gardens the

book develops grand themes. As she admits both in the foreword and in a concluding passage that seeks to bring her ‘tales’ up-to-date, it is a daunting task. The rhododendron and azalea family runs to over a thousand species including more than 300 equatorial vireyas (named after a nineteenth century French pharmacist Julien Joseph Virey, she tells us). Discovery abroad and introduction into Britain go back 400 years so it is hardly surprising that her ‘tales’ follow many paths and stretch over divers family histories.

From the Appalachian (USA) *R. catawbiense* and the Swiss *R. hirsutum* and *R. ferrugineum* the earliest trickle of introductions to Britain became a flow following that of the (controversial) *R. ponticum* and a whole series of 19<sup>th</sup> century arrivals from the Himalayas. By the 20th century the propagation of hybrid varieties colours the waters! The writer now faces a difficult question, what to omit? Chapter Two, *Sinogrande’s Story* and Chapter Three, *The King’s Botanist’s Tale* (the American John Bartram, 1699-1777 figures prominently) are perforce ‘specific’. By Chapter Six ‘*Pink Pearl*’ *Queen of the Bagshot Sands* all is merry confusion, the author’s judgement becomes the reader’s guide. Although Jane Brown manages her material skilfully there will be differences of opinion on hybrids.

The book is replete with delightful anecdotes. As if to show up those who complain that rhododendrons only flower in one or two spring months she cites the instance of Miss Walker of Drumsheugh, better known (in Edinburgh certainly) for her legacy to fund St Mary’s Episcopal Cathedral. With her ‘Rhododendron Almanac’ and the help of a cool conservatory she had rhododendrons in bloom

every month of the year. Famous rhododendron gardens e.g. Exbury, Savill and Valley Gardens at Windsor receive appropriate accolades as do celebrated nurserymen such as the Waterers of Knap Hill, Woking. The garden that rang lyrically for this reviewer was the plot of ground of little worth in Surrey that became the property of Harry Mangles in 1872. He named the place Littleworth Cross (SE of Farnham). It was here, Jane Brown tells us, that Gertrude Jekyll met Edwin Lutyens “who remembered the day for ever afterwards”. The Mangles family (see Chapter 4) produced Beauty of Littleworth: a *griffithianum* cross, quite beautiful – H. A. Mangles was an early hybridiser of rhododendrons. Later the property came into the ownership of the Gordon family who renamed it ‘Hethersett’ (Note: the reviewer himself lives in a house called Hethersett, strange coincidence.) The writer confesses that this “most enchanting garden has been the prime inspiration for this book”.

Noting that many people have a prejudice against *R. ponticum*, as if it were the only rhododendron, the writer shows herself both up-to-date and well informed.



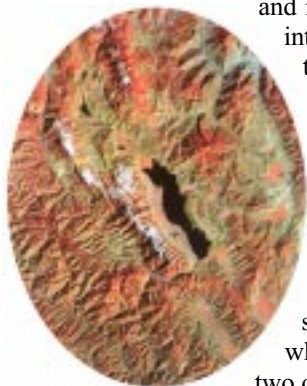
Noting that valued hybrids have ponticum parentage she adds that in its native Turkey it is now an endangered species! Her penultimate chapter, *The Ecologists' Tales*, has much to say on changing attitudes to conservation, and a useful account of the RBG Edinburgh's links with the Kunming Institute of Botany. Her style and command of English make for easy reading, an appropriate present for 'rhodoholics'.

Ian G. Stewart

## Some Gardening Magazines

Gardening magazines have a long and venerable history, the earliest one dating back to the 1720s, many seeing the light of day in the 1820s and 30s, and the first issue of the long-running *Gardeners' Chronicle* coming out in 1841. Since then they have been an important channel of communication for gardeners and have

played a significant part in educating and encouraging them, and in spreading new ideas. Because books of specific interest to Caley members were a bit thin on the ground this year, and as I am something of a magazine addict, I was pleased when the Editor liked my idea that we carry out an informal survey of gardening magazines.



I started at the supermarket where I picked up *Gardeners' World*, *Amateur Gardening*, *Gardens Monthly*, and *Garden Answers* for my survey. At first glance they look identical, they are all the same size, all have orange on the cover and their titles in white, two of them have a photograph of Monty Don, two of them of Alan Titchmarsh.

I learn that easily the most successful of these is *Gardeners' World* (£2.95), the monthly magazine of the BBC programme of the same name which benefits from frequent plugging and has a summer circulation of about 360,000. It is rather predictable and you can never get away from Monty, Chris Beardshaw and Titchmarsh but there are plenty of other contributors too and there are a great many interesting and informative articles. *Amateur Gardening* (£1.50), which comes out weekly and has fewer pages, seems to be a clone of *Gardeners' World*, with the same people and same subjects. It is however more practical in emphasis and I can imagine it being a useful guide to what to do in the garden every week. *Garden Answers* (£2.90 monthly) describes itself as the UK's most practical garden magazine and offers in its October 2004 issue 9 free plants - if you are prepared to pay £9 postage that is! But, of course, here too there is much to learn and many ideas to be gleaned, and surprisingly the usual suspects are not in evidence. I liked the photographs from readers for the container competition and the idea of

a weed-free border and the article on *Secret Salvias* in September 2004. There is nothing very distinctive about *Gardens Monthly* (£3.35). In the October 2004 issue there is a ridiculous amount about Titchmarsh (billed as the nation's favourite gardener) (Ed. A parochial view?) but a nice article on *Berried Treasures* and a good review of Japanese maples. In fact it was here that I learnt the single most useful fact from all my perusal of gardening magazines, that the cluster of gelatinous balls that I sometimes find in the compost of my pots is neither slow release fertiliser nor water retentive gell as I had imagined, but eggs of the dreaded slugs which should be immediately exterminated, although the magazine can hardly bring itself to say so. I also like their regular feature, *What's New on the Web*. Strangely the web does not seem to feature very much in any of these four glossy look-alikes.

Equally glossy, but far more distinguished aesthetically, is *Gardens Illustrated* (monthly £3.85). Here I admit I am biased as I have subscribed to *Gardens Illustrated* since issue number one in April 1993 and, the odd period of boredom apart, have consistently enjoyed it. The standard of photography and overall look of the magazine has always been impressive. I particularly like the series on particular plants, and nurseries. In November 2004, for example, Old Court Nurseries in Worcestershire, which specialises in asters, was featured with stunning images from Clive Nichols in all shades of pink and purple and a good page of basic information in the form of a Fact File. I also like the series, started fairly recently, on international design projects. Almost as stylish as *Gardens Illustrated* is *The English Garden* (£3.20 monthly), which claims to be English in the sense that it covers gardens of classic English-style rather than confining itself to England. In the October 2004 issue there is a good article about Branklyn (Perth) and its autumn colour; Rudbeckias and Cannas are also featured.

*The Scottish Garden* (£3.20, quarterly) is no relation of *The English Garden* but has something of the same style about it. This has the great advantage that the gardens which are featured are likely to be within visiting distance of most of its readers, the craftsmen such as potters or woodworkers are usually in Scotland, and so are the great majority of firms which advertise in its Directory. It also has a useful Events Diary. It has a carefully judged slightly 'ecological' viewpoint, and one eye always on what grows wild in Scotland. I recommend supporting this publication which is always happy to publicise the events of local societies.

By chance when I was thinking of this article, someone I met wanted to get rid of their old copies of *Gardening Which*. I was amazed by how much good information there was in it and the trials conducted on different products are very valuable - liquid feeds, petrol machinery and garden furniture were given in-depth treatment in the June 2004 edition and there was a very interesting survey of composts in January 2004 (peat-based won all the red stars). *Gardening Which* is only available by subscription, which is a hefty £55 for the year, a fact which the spokesperson was understandably coy about but she assured me that there were many extra benefits. The trials, she said are expensive and the magazine

acts as an independent voice, has no advertising and so can write frankly about who, and what, it wants.

Members of the Royal Horticultural Society will need no persuading of the value of the journal they receive free with their membership. *The Garden*, which is mailed to the 360,000 members monthly, is for serious gardeners and I think this is the best of all these magazines. It has the weight of the RHS behind it, with its scientific staff, its plant trials, its shows and gardens, its library and publishing expertise. It knows that its readers are keen, and in many cases knowledgeable; it sets out to keep them informed and abreast of developments.

For those who like a more meaty read there is the quarterly *Hortus*, owned and edited, since it first appeared in 1987, by David Wheeler: it has his personal stamp on it. This is a literary magazine, very elegant, with no colour and no gloss, but fine wood engravings and many very interesting articles. With the intention of enabling the expertise of the horticultural staff to reach an interested audience, the Botanicus (RBGE) produced last year the first issue of *Sibbaldia* (Sibbald was one of the founders of RBGE). This is to be a regular annual publication and is edited by David Rae, Director of Horticulture. Most of the articles are scientific and technical, but valuable for those with a serious interest in the work of the Botanicus.

I started on my personal survey with rather a jaded palate but end up thinking what a fantastic resource we have in all these miles of newsprint. There is so much expertise on offer, so many excellent photographs, so many wonderful plants and we are lucky to have so many magazines to choose from.

*Anna Buxton*

*Scottish Garden* cost £12.80 for 5 issues. Write to Symposium Publishing Ltd, 25 Station Hill, North Berwick EH39 4AS. Telephone: 01620 895195.

*Gardening Which*. Telephone: 0800 920106 website: [gardening@which.net](mailto:gardening@which.net)

*The Garden* is only available to RHS members, cost £40.

Telephone: 0207 821 3000 or email: [membership@rhs.org.uk](mailto:membership@rhs.org.uk)

*Hortus* comes out four times a year and subscriptions cost £34 from Bryan's Ground, Stapleton, Herefordshire LD8 2LP. website: [www.hortus.co.uk](http://www.hortus.co.uk)

*Sibbaldia* costs £4.99 + postage £1.20 and is available from the Botanicus Shop and/or the Publications Department, RBGE.

Telephone: 0131 248 2991 or email: [pps@rbge.org.uk](mailto:pps@rbge.org.uk)