



May 2021

Newsletter

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Dear Members,

At last, some decent amounts of rain! I had started to water my garden as everything was starting to flag and the level of the pond was going down fast. I had already emptied a water butt, now thankfully refilled. I walked round our farm last weekend and was pleased to see how the grass, hedgerows and crops had perked up again. The wildflowers and blossom were looking good, although the rain does tend to batter the latter.

It was lovely to see so many members on April 24th at the rear of the Village Hall, for our Plant & Sundries Sale, plus collection of Pelargonium plugs for our show on 04.09.21. From what I saw, a good natter was had by all in beautiful sunshine! The sale of plants raised £196.10, with the sundries raising a further £150.60, all for BDHS funds. Thanks go to the members who donated plants, Helen, Angela, Sue, Alison, Wendy, and Gill who did the selling, and to Val & David Cotterrell for nurturing & distributing the plugs.

We welcome two new members to our Society, Christine Hornsby & Bridie McSorley. We also welcome back Wendy Powell – it's good to have you back!

Best wishes,

Marion

SPEAKER REPORT

The History of Oxford Botanic Gardens 1621 - 2021 –by Timothy Walker

On 29th April we were fortunate to hear the former director of these gardens regale us with its history in a very enlivening style. Since retiring from the gardens in 2014, Timothy still lectures at Oxford University, writes, and gives talks.

July 26th is the 400th anniversary of the gardens' foundation, beginning as a 17th century physic garden for the teaching of apothecary & botany students. Physic gardens are collections of medicinal plants and many later transformed into botanic gardens. Oxford is the oldest botanic garden in Britain.

When founding physic gardens, it is helpful to find a rich hypochondriac who can devote much of his fortune to the cause! Sir Henry Danvers, 1st Earl of Danby, was the founding benefactor donating £5000 (now around £5 million). Some 5 acres of land were acquired on the banks of the River Cherwell at the N.E. corner of Christ Church Meadow, belonging to Magdalen College. Originally outside the city wall, it was previously the site of a Jewish cemetery, until Jews were expelled from England in 1290. In winter, this land flooded upto 6ft, so some "4000 carts of muckye and dunge" was spread to raise it above the river's flood plain. Ultimately there was 8ft of bodies, 8ft of human effluent and 8ft of rich loam. The finished garden had 14ft high walls with 9ft foundations. The Danby Arch entrance is inscribed "To promote learning and to glorify the work of God". The term 'Director' did not exist in the 17th century and the grand term of 'Horti Praefectus' (H.P.) was used instead.

The 1st H.P. was Jacob Bobart the elder in 1642, coinciding with the start of the English Civil War. Despite this, by 1648 he had amassed 100 plants in the collection and a male English Yew tree is still present from 1648. In modern chemotherapy, drugs originally derived from Yew are used to treat breast and ovarian

cancers. Whilst the teaching of medicine has been the garden's role since it began, Botany was its principal science. In 1669 Robert Morison became Oxford's and indeed Britain's 1st Professor of Botany. He set about classifying the world's plants based on fruit characteristics but never finished the work, following a fatal accident in 1683.

Having worked for his father, Bobart the Younger succeeded him as H.P. in 1679, becoming Prof. of Botany too when Morison was killed. Young Bobart completed Morison's classification work in 1699 and promoted research. This remains important at Oxford today where new species are still hybridised. Bobart was friend to diplomat William Sherard, both sharing an enthusiasm for dried plant collections. Bobart's herbaria was the foundation of Oxford's vast collection which now stands at over 1 million dried plant specimens. Sherard endowed a professorial chair of botany at Oxford, stipulating that its 1st incumbent in 1728 was Johann Dillenius. Such was Dillenius's reputation, Carl Linnaeus (famously dubbed the 'Father of Modern Taxonomy') left Sweden in 1736 specifically to visit him in Oxford. During the 18th century, the building of glasshouses began as botanists realised that light & temperature mattered to plants. The 1st pineapple was grown in 1749. The famous naturalist and explorer, Joseph Banks, was an Oxford undergraduate during the mid - 18th century.

Humphry Sibthorpe succeeded Dillenius in 1747, but during his tenure botany studies declined at Oxford and his son John followed in 1784. A big improvement on his father, John's major work, 'Flora Graeca', was well received but he contracted TB on his Greek travels, dying young in 1796.

At the beginning of the 19th century, 2 chemistry students started at Oxford, but both also loved botany. William Harcourt felt there were insufficient trees locally and began planting the Harcourt Arboretum on the family estate 6 miles south of Oxford. This became part of Oxford Botanic Gardens in 1963. The other student Charles Daubeny became Sherardian Professor 1834 – 1867. He collaborated with H.P. William Baxter in re-designing the garden to make it more appealing to the public, also changing its name from 'Oxford Physicke Garden' to 'Oxford Botanic Garden'. John Lawes, a student of Daubeny's, took great interest in plant nutrition and went on to found Rothamsted Experimental Station at Harpenden in 1843. In 1849, Daubeny was invited to Chatsworth to view the giant water lily, *Victoria amazonica*. On return to Oxford, he set about having more glasshouses built, one of which had a large tank to house his own giant specimen. Timothy showed us a photograph of his son as a child sitting safely on one of its floating leaves! After Daubney's retirement, the gardens became neglected as the new professor preferred microscopy work in the lab. This was corrected in 1884 by the next professor, Isaac Balfour, who laid out the Botanical Family Beds. George Baker, H.P. 1888 – 1942, started Oxford's collection of Bearded Irises and improved the glasshouses to extend the range of plants for viewing by visitors. A popular plant is the *Agave ferox* which flowers every 100yrs. Into the 20th century, Baker built Oxford's 1st rockery garden, and the 1st women gardeners were employed from the 1940s.

William Robinson replaced Baker from 1942 and started extending outside the walled garden, laying out the Herbaceous Border in 1947. Ken Burras took over in 1963, and with a passion for carnivorous plants, created the Bog Garden the same year. Burras added an Acer Glade to the newly acquired Harcourt Arboretum, rebuilt the glasshouses in 1971, and took on the NCCPG National Collection of Hardy Euphorbias in 1983. A young Timothy Walker spent 2yrs with Burras as a trainee gardener after completing his Botany degree at Oxford. Two years before Burras retired in 1988, Timothy returned to the garden as General Foreman, before becoming the 16th H.P. With conservation and climate change coming to the fore, the gardens were ever evolving. Whilst continuing to teach university students, the gardens became famed for teaching all age groups through community outreach and schools programmes. The 8 Medicinal Beds each concentrate on plants treating a particular type of disease, eg the cancer drug Vincristine from the Madagascar Periwinkle (*Catharanthus roseus*). Vegetable Beds grow food from 5 different areas of the world, with the public events to partake in cooking & tasting. Palmer Leys was purchased in 2006 for conserving British meadow flora & fauna. The Merton Borders followed in 2008 – 9, growing drought tolerant plants from 3 dry regions of the world and exemplify sustainable horticulture.

Throughout a long history, these gardens continue to support learning and share the scientific wonder and importance of plants. They have endured into the 21st century, adding research, conservation, and public engagement to their original teaching role. They also survived the visit by BDHS members on 21st May 2017!

NOTICEBOARD

- Our **next speaker meeting** is on Thursday 27th April at 8pm via Zoom. The topic is 'Buttercups in our Gardens?' by Howard Drury. Please sign up to attend by emailing David Ashcroft on dja@krystalservices.plus.com **no later than 12noon on Weds 26th May**. It is preferable that you log your intention to join the meeting even if you are not sure until Thursday evening. David will always acknowledge your request to join but should you not receive this, please check your SPAM file first in case his email response has gone in there, before you contact him again. **David is unable to take late requests to join**, due to the amount of work involved logging on the speaker & members on the evening of the meeting.
- Entries for **this month's photographic competition** must be received by Angela Shaw on ange_shaw@hotmail.co.uk **by Sunday 23rd May**.
- Our re-arranged **Members Annual Show** on 4th September at St Peter's Church Hall will have less classes than usual to reduce the congestion between the show tables. There is also likely to be a one-way system in place. It is uncertain whether refreshments will be available. As we are holding a monthly photographic competition, there will be no photographic classes at this year's show. The pot diameter for the pelargonium plug class is 6 ins, with a 12 ins diameter for the patio planter class. There will be some amendment of classes to reflect what flowers, fruit & veg will be in season in September. It is unlikely that there will be any produce (cooking) classes, to avoid any cross - infection in the tasting of exhibits.
- **Berkswell Open Gardens** is being held on Sunday 27th June from 11am – 6pm under the National Gardens Scheme (NGS). Of the 8 intended gardens, 2 belong to BDHS members, the Shaws and Flick Wheeler. An admission of £6 will give admission to all 8 gardens. Refreshments and plant sales will be available at some gardens. Further information can be found on the NGS website, as well as the Berkswell Society (www.berkswellsociety.org.uk).

MAY TOPICAL TIPS

Cannas and Dahlias can be hardened off and planted out but protect from late frosts.

Harden off bedding plants but only plant them out when all risk of frost has passed.

Flowering shrubs, which have finished flowering on last year's wood, should be pruned and their flowering shoots cut out.

Rhododendrons may be moved. Ensure to lift with a good root ball. Any newly planted trees and shrubs need to be watered regularly until established.

Trim box hedges as soon as new growth is four or five leaves long.

Old Cyclamen finishing flowering should be allowed to dry off and stood outdoors for the summer.

Divide large clumps of primroses when they've finished flowering.

Feed and water container plants.

Water lilies can be lifted and split. Pond plants can be planted.

Plant up hanging baskets and tubs but protect from late frosts.

Dead head daffodils and tulips, feed them if the leaves are still in growth.

Divide congested clumps of daffodils after the leaves have died down if flowering has been poor.

Cut back clumps of spring flowering perennials such as Pulmonaria and Doronicum to encourage fresh growth.

Divide Hosta as they come into growth.

Continue successional sowings of salad crops.

Sow French and runner beans, carrots, cauliflowers, sprouting broccoli and leeks.

Earth up potatoes.

Feed strawberries with tomato fertiliser every week or two and place straw under the plants to keep fruit clean, to help protect from botrytis and to discourage slugs and snails.

Hang pheromone traps in apple trees to reduce damage by codling moth caterpillars.

Feed lawns with high-nitrogen fertiliser and mow once a week, gradually lowering the blades with each cut.

Weeds galore!

Whilst the rain was very welcome, it has made the pesky weeds grow too. Here are some clues to lead you to 10 annual and perennial weeds, although some of you might manage 12 answers!

Eg. I'm green but not a reclined potato. (5, 5) ANSWER Couch Grass

1. A fancy cat! (9)
2. Netflix but without the 'flix'? (6)
3. This one's bound up! (8)
4. A money receptacle for sheep minders? (9, 5)
5. A chubby chicken! (3, 3)
6. Old earth? (6, 5)
7. An equine fly swat! (5, 4)
8. I'm circular with l,e,g,s added? (9)
9. A ramble with a bee? (7)
10. This one has several names so take your pick from:
 - a. Implements to chop meat (8)
 - b. Greenery for a gander's mate (5, 5)
 - c. Something that could be construed as a bit rude!! (6, 5)

Please send your answers to me **by Monday 31st May** on marion.keeley@btinternet.com
or The Cottage, Fen End Farm, Oldwich Lane East, Fen End, Near Kenilworth, CV8 1NR.

Answers to April's Quiz

ACROSS: 1.Sycamore 6.Trap 7.Alpines 8.Ericas 9.Smith 10.Acanthus 12.Moss 15.Insects 19.Lamium 20.Balloon 21.Lime 22.Shredder

DOWN: 1.Stags 2.Capsids 3.Mentha 4.Reseda 5.Paraquat 6.Thistle 11.Climber 13.Oxalis 14.Spikes 16.Salad 17.Clove 18.Sand

All entries received were correct, coming from Wendy Boulton, Mary & Edward Cotterrell, Val & David Cotterrell, David Felthouse, Christine Hornsby, and Gill Whitehead.

The entrant whose name was pulled from the hat to receive a copy of the RHS magazine 'The Garden' is David Felthouse.

Results of the monthly BDHS website Photographic Competition

1. Angela Shaw (Narcissi)
2. David Cotterrell (Erythronium)
3. Ken Shaw (Tulips)