



Operculum

Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens Inc

Newsletter No. 12

September 2012

Invitation to a Garden Party at
'Oldbury',
Saturday 27 October 2012
at 5.00pm



The Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens Committee extends an invitation to the Friends to a springtime garden party at one of the most important historic houses in the region. Built in 1828 by James Atkinson, who was born in Oldbury on the Medway River in Kent, the two-storey house constructed of stone with a porticoed entrance resembles an English eighteenth century farmhouse.

The house, with its beautiful Berrima sandstone façade, is rarely open to the public so this is a very special occasion. The writer, botanist and artist Louisa Atkinson was born in the house in 1834 and spent much of her childhood on the property.

The Richard Gawned Duo will entertain us while we enjoy wine and finger food. The printed invitation and reply slip is enclosed with this Operculum. It would be advisable to reply quickly as numbers are strictly limited to 150. The tickets cost \$75 each.

Off to a flying start!

The Federal Minister and Department have assessed the proposed gardens and have determined that we can proceed with the development. The plans will incorporate a designated habitat area for the birds. The work on the site will start on 4 October 2012 with the building of the fence and planting will commence soon afterwards.

The Volunteers' Support Centre has been designed and will be erected in the next few months, subject to the usual approvals. Of course the Latham Snipes, which have caused considerable delay for the Gardens, may decide not to visit us next season but we'll be ready to give them a warm welcome should they fly in.

The Waratopia dinner

Despite a freezing night outside, the dinner at the Annesley Ballroom on 1st September was a delightful occasion. The Ballroom decorated with waratahs and native flora looked elegant and welcoming; the Garden Room was graced by the exhibition of prints and paintings by Elaine Musgrave and Suzannah Blaxill. We were delighted that the Hon. Pru Goward, Member for Goulburn and Minister for Community Services and Women, and her husband, David Barnett, were able to attend.

The guest speaker was Professor David Mabberley, who is the Executive Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust, Sydney. Professor Mabberley was formerly Director of the Herbarium, Library, Art and Archives at the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew (2008-11).



Professor David Mabberley and Mrs Charlotte Webb

"The role of a botanic garden in modern society"

In a far-ranging talk, Professor David Mabberley, who has agreed to substantial extracts from his talk being included in this article, began by reflecting on the emergence of botanic gardens in Europe in the sixteenth century (notably Pisa, Padua, Firenze and Bologna) and reminded us that the oldest in the English-speaking world at the University of Oxford, England, was

founded in 1620. He posed the questions: ‘What does this longevity tell us about their roles in society over 400 or so years – and what does it tell us about society itself?’ He noted the phenomena that

Almost every nation and most principal cities in the developed world have botanic gardens; developing countries are establishing them, and those with surging economies, notably China, are putting literally billions of dollars into enormous new botanic gardens. Why is this? What is it that makes such institutions so important today?

The fact that botanic gardens are not just parks or public gardens, but for education and recreation, he believes, ‘has kept them going for so long’:

Nonetheless, through time the balance between these two functions has changed, has caused tensions, and indeed strife - when in essence it is the melding of these two functions that makes them, just as with other collections-based organizations like art museums and natural history museums, extremely precious to society.

He pointed out that although the origin of modern botanic gardens were ‘entirely utilitarian’ physic gardens such as those at Oxford and the Chelsea Physick Garden, founded in London in 1673 and linked to the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries, the focus changed during the next century through exploration outside Europe.

At the same time ‘cabinets of curiosities’ were being amassed by rich people and this led to what has become in the UK the British Museum, with its Sloane Herbarium eventually to be united with Sir Joseph Banks’s collections finally to become the Botany Department of the Natural History Museum.

In London there were two royal gardens side-by-side at Kew: King George II’s garden and that of his daughter-in-law, Princess Augusta, dowager Princess of Wales. She was an avid collector of plants and determined to acquire examples of all the plants from all over the world.

In 1759, then, Princess Augusta employed, effectively as the first Curator, the Scottish gardener, William Aiton, the year when the British Museum was founded, two material representations of the inquiring Enlightenment in England. By 1768, Kew had over 3400 plant species being grown under glass and in the open. Just 15 years before, Linnaeus had estimated that there were perhaps just 6000 or so plant species in the wild (rather than the 300,000 or so suggested today) . . .

It was Sir Joseph Banks who played a major role in the changing mission of Kew into that of economic botany, and, as Professor Mabberly pointed out, by combining the two gardens into ‘Kew Gardens’, Banks created the ‘ever-confusing use of an unnecessary plural in many another botanic garden’. Immensely influential on King George III in all matters relating to exploration and science, Banks was President of the Royal Society for forty years. Not only a competent botanist, Banks had a

great talent for ‘picking the right people for the job, delegating and networking internationally’.

*He had a vision of a great network for the expanding British sphere of influence, eventually to become the British Empire, with the royal garden at Kew as the centre for the discovery of plants – in particular those of economic use, his own experience in the Pacific leading to his promotion of the introduction to the Caribbean of the breadfruit, *Artocarpus altilis* (Moraceae).*

The eighteenth century was the great era of European, and particularly British, imperialism. The home botanic gardens collected and propagated a huge range of plants transported from far-flung colonies and subsequently sent them off to other regions to assist in the developing economies.

From the Jardin du Roi, later the Jardin des Plantes in Paris, to the Hortus in Amsterdam, but perhaps supremely to Kew, what have become the major plantation crops of much of the tropical world were introduced and propagated to be sent on to an increasing network of dependent new gardens in the colonies – to Mauritius, to Calcutta, to Singapore, to Java, to Sydney, the Caribbean. And so cork trees from the Mediterranean reached South Australia via Kew as did the better-known quinine from South America to India and rubber trees from the Amazon reached what is now Singapore and Malaysia via Kew; coffee from Ethiopia was introduced to South America via Amsterdam, vanilla from Mexico to Madagascar via Paris.

The year 1820 saw the deaths of both Sir Joseph Banks and King George III. Despite the excellence of the scientific work of Robert Brown (the successor to Banks), funds were reduced and over the years public criticism of the management of the Gardens became vociferous. Following an enquiry the ‘private royal garden’ was eventually transformed into a ‘national botanic garden’ and William Hooker, Professor in the University of Glasgow, was appointed as its Director in 1841. As no herbarium or library existed at Kew, Hooker allowed visiting scientists the use of his own personal collection, which eventually was purchased by the nation.

The conflict between the roles of public recreation and science continued over the years—at one time the Commissioner of Works and Public Buildings, now responsible for the Gardens, insisted on more ornamental flower beds, and chastised Hooker for his scientific bias—‘*Display seemed to be tipping out science.*’

Notwithstanding all the disputes, the gardens at Kew flourished:

*The economic-scientific endeavour at Kew led to an enormous influx of material leading to the first expansion of the herbarium (there have been four more since), and the beginning of a catalogue of all plant-names, *Index Kewensis* which was nearly named *Index**

Darwinianus, after Darwin whose legacy funded it to begin with.

Today Kew has the largest plant and fungal herbarium in the world, two botanical art galleries and the Millennium Seedbank set up twelve years ago at Wakehurst Place (the second site in Sussex).

He ended his talk by reflecting that “The role of botanic gardens has moved from medical training to collections for collections’ sake to economic hubs of imperial ambition to pleasure gardens and then to conservation repositories, but now to the wellbeing of all society. They have never been more important.”

The “Deciduous” Camellia relatives

The sight of a camellia losing all its leaves in winter is sign of a plant needing to be removed, but a few of its cousins, not only lose them, they do it with style. Camellias are members of the ‘Tea Family’ or more correctly *Theaceae* the name they get from their most famous member in history as well as economically. And whilst only a few of the over 250 species of camellia produce the catechins, gallic acid and theobromines we need in our tea, the cultivation of other species of camellia has dominated our gardens. They originate from the far east especially Japan, China and Vietnam, are evergreen with thick, glossy leaves and apart from the tea plant itself (*Camellia sinensis*), are grown for their showy white, red and pink flowers. In recent times even a few yellow flowering species have also been added to their armoury.

Similarly most other genera of *Theaceae* are evergreen extending the origins of *Theaceae* to the Americas with a couple from Africa, the Canary Islands and one from New Guinea. For many, the typical flower is quite large with showy white petals and multiple central yellow stamen reminiscent of the *Gordonia* another relative.



Stewartia rostrata

Within the genera are two with deciduous forms, handsome garden plants in their own right. They are the *Stewartia* with most species from East Asia and two from the USA, and *Franklinia* with only one species (also from eastern USA) that is now extinct in the wild.

Stewartia

When Carolus Linnaeus named something it stays even with incorrect spelling, and so it is with the *Stewartias*. They were named in honour of John Stuart the 3rd Earl of Bute but due to a transcription error, it was written incorrectly. Not that John Stuart had anything to do with the genus either. It pays to have friends in high places.

The species identified was one of two from eastern United States, the others all coming from the far east, from Myanmar through to China and Japan. In total there are some 8-20 species, the American ones 3-5 metres tall with the Asiatic species up to 20 metres. There are a couple that are evergreen but they are botanically different and not worth growing. *Stewartias* like similar growing conditions to the camellias though they can cope with colder weather better but will not tolerate drying out. Indeed the largest species that grows to a large tree does so in the rainforests of southern Japan.



Stewartia sinensis



The author dwarfed by a large *Stewartia monadelphina* on Yakushima

In cooler climates they can tolerate full sun but moist woodlands are ideal especially in hotter areas. Their attractions include the large flowers throughout summer (after camellias have finished) described by Stirling Macoboy as amongst the most beautiful in the world, and a rich autumn colour leaving exposed a most

spectacular patterned bark after the leaves have fallen. Alas only a few are available in the nursery trade and then only rarely. Look out for *Stewartia malacodendron* from the USA or *Stewartia pseudocamellia* from Japan both of which remain manageable in size.

Franklinia

This monotypic genus may have only one species but that species is as spectacular as its history. First observed growing along the Altamaha River in Georgia, USA by John and William Bartram in 1765. They collected seed that germinated and grew in their Philadelphia garden. Later William named it in honour of his father's great friend, Benjamin Franklin. Always extremely limited in its native distribution, by 1803 it seems to have completely disappeared from the wild.



Franklinia alatamaha

The cause of its extinction in the wild is uncertain but fire, flood or disease introduced by cotton cultivation has been suggested. Thankfully William Bartram had collected the seed when he did as today all the world's *Franklinia alatamaha* plants originate from his garden.



Franklinia autumn

It requires well drained, non-compacted slightly acidic soil but can not tolerate drought. It is long-lived, a century or more, growing eventually to ten metres. Once established you are rewarded with showy white flowers towards the end of summer and autumn followed by a good orange-red autumn leaf colour. The flowers can be

very late and may coincide with its autumn colour. The *Franklinia* is well worth growing and shows the benefits of our gardens and arboreta in preserving cultivars that are no longer in fashion and even on occasion an unusual species.

Profile – Simon Grant.

Simon Grant and his wife Mariese have lived in the Southern Highlands for 27 years. During this time they have established Coombe Wood, a 3.4 hectare garden with roses, bulbs, conifers, azaleas, rhododendrons and especially maples with many rare and unusual species. Medical practitioners, they are self-taught gardeners and now propagate most of their plants.

They are both members of the Highlands Garden Society and the Heritage Rose Society as well as the International Maple Society.

Plant Stall

Sandy Alsop has kindly offered to co-ordinate the plant stall this year. A morning tea will be held at Les and Elaine Musgrave's home at 10.00am (ending at 12 noon) on Tuesday 23 October 2012 (41 Clearys Lane, Avoca). If you are an existing plant grower or interested in growing plants for the stall for the first time, we would be delighted to see you there. Please give Sandy a ring on 4861 5018 or email her (sbalsop@westnet.com.au).

Bulbs

If you have bulbs in your garden that you would willing to donate, please mark (with a name tag) where they are in your beds and then dig up just before the Plant Stall.

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