

OPERCULUM SEPTEMBER 2013

Wednesday 11 September: Second Planting

The second stage of the tree planting will take place on Wednesday 11 September 2013 at 10am to 12noon. This is very short notice but the arrival of the trees this week has made it imperative that the working bee takes place as soon as possible.

Please contact Chris Webb (chris@cwebb.com.au or 4861 4899) if you would be willing and able to help on that day.

A short site induction course (to comply with the *Work, Health and Safety Act 2011*) will be held at the beginning of the session. It is important that those of you who require this induction course arrive promptly at 10am. Please note that only Friends of the SHBG may join in the planting session, as they are the only ones covered by insurance. Please bring your own garden tools.

Highlands Garden Society donates Birch Grove

The generous donation of \$20,000 from the Highlands Garden Society was presented to Charlotte Webb, Chairman of the Board of Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens Ltd, on Friday 16 August. HGS members raised the money over several years and Margaret Stuart, President of HGS, particularly thanked Lynette Lamb and Sally Gaudry for all their work propagating plants to sell at the Trading Table each month. The previous Presidents of the Society joined in the presentation and Charlotte Webb expressed her deepest thanks for the overwhelming support and generosity of HGS.



L-R: Graeme Whisker, Denis McManus, Margaret Stuart, Malcolm Burrell, Merryleigh Brindley, Charlotte Webb, Claire Daggett and Tony Davis

The donation will provide funds for the purchase, planting and management of the birch collection, and in addition some funds will be set aside for a memorial bench to be located within the collection acknowledging the contribution of HGS to the Botanic Gardens.

The planting of the birch grove will take place on **Wednesday 25 September 2013** at 10am. Fifteen species and cultivars of birch have been ordered, including the following: *Betula albosinensis* var. *septentrionalis* (north Chinese Red-stemmed birch); *B. nigra*; *B. papyifera*; *B. pendula* 'Moss White'; *B. fastigiata*; *B. pendula dalecarlica* (cut leaf birch); *B. pendula* 'Tristis' (weeping birch); *B. platyphylla* 'Japonica' (Japanese white birch); *B. platyphylla* 'Whitespire'; *B. jacquimontii* 'Silver Shadow'; *B. utilis* 'Jermyns'; *B. 'Crimson Frost'*; *B. 'Crimson Parade'*.

Thanks to the Highlands Garden Society the birch collection will be an important and beautiful addition to the Botanic Gardens.

Tony Davis and daffodils

Within the birch grove will be another special collection. Tony Davis (who is known as the Southern Highlands 'Daffodil Man') has offered to plant some of his own daffodils, including named cultivars, within the birch grove. He has been breeding daffodils for the past 29 years—one of only twenty breeders in Australia.



Tony Davis and his daffodils

Tony and his partner, Maureen Purtell, are members of a number of garden related groups: both are life members of the Friends of the Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens and the Highlands Garden Society—Tony is also a life member of the Canberra Horticultural Society and the NSW/ACT Daffodil Association. They have been extraordinarily supportive of the Botanic Gardens from the very beginning and it is especially appropriate that Tony's daffodils will adorn the birch grove.

Life members

In addition to Tony Davis and Maureen Purtell, three other long-standing supporters and Friends have been made Life Members of the Friends of the

SHBG—Ann and Tony Emmett and Margaret Osborne (widow of Jim Osborne who was the first Chairman of the Friends).

Their enthusiasm and dedication from the start of the project and their continuing support has been essential and very much appreciated by the community.

The First Stage of Planting

Forty people turned out on Friday 26 July for our first stage of planting round the Volunteer Support Centre (or the Shed!). The sun shone and although the cold wind blew, the volunteers were soon warmed up by the work.

It was also the start of the planting of a number of botanical collections to be held in the gardens—*Escallonia*, *Crepe Myrtle*, and of course the *Buxus* collection. There are currently sixteen different *Buxus* species and cultivars in our collection, which probably places it as one of the biggest collections in Australia.



Volunteers from the Friends busily engaged in the planting

Stephen Jones checks out his tree

Stephen Jones, ALP Federal Member for Throsby, called in at the site of the SHBG to see the first stage of planting and to check on the growth of the tree which he had planted on 10 November 2010.



Stephen Jones

He also advised Charlotte Webb that the Botanic Gardens had been awarded a Federal grant, which will provide the SHBG with a mower, whipper snipper, First Aid Kit, Fire Extinguisher and Fire Blanket.

Council awards a grant

The Wingecarribee Shire Council awarded the Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens a grant of \$400 to pay for chairs for the the Volunteer Support Centre. The continued support of Council is much appreciated by the Executive and the Friends of the SHBG.

The State Governor to visit in December

Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO, Governor of New South Wales, will be visiting the Botanic Gardens on Sunday 8 December 2013. She will plant the time capsule for the sesquicentenary under the Pioneer pavers and she will preside at a dedication ceremony of the sponsored trees.

If you would like to have a personalised paver installed in the garden, please note that the final cutoff date for ordering the pavers is Friday 13 September.

Simon Grant on The Explorers Part 4: After Joseph Banks

Carl Linnaeus and Joseph Banks were responsible for the introduction into western cultivation of thousands of plants, though they themselves collected mainly dried samples of plant material for study and categorisation. They also despatched collectors: Linnaeus sent his “apostles” out into the world collecting and, as we shall now see, Banks encouraged scientific groups to support a range of journeys for plant hunters.

Banks returned to London after James Cook’s first voyage to a hero’s welcome, gaining influence in all areas of society, including the patronage of King George III. He became the unofficial advisor to the King on the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew (later ratified officially in 1797) and here collected plants from around the world, a project that continues to this day. Of course not all went to plan. He had intended to go on Captain Cook’s second voyage to the Pacific aboard HMS *Resolution* in 1772, but after disagreements with the Admiralty his equipment was off-loaded and dumped quayside. The disagreements included the need for modifications to the *Resolution* to accommodate Banks and his party that included a pack of greyhounds and Bank’s own personal orchestra! In the end he was able to arrange for his place to be taken by Kew’s first official plant hunter Francis Masson.

Quietly spoken and modest, Masson had every reason to be known as the “dour Scotsman” by the time he died. He was born in Aberdeen, and until the age of 31 had been employed in a secure if undistinguished position as an under-gardener at Kew when he boarded the *Resolution* and headed to Cape Town, South Africa. After a short time familiarising himself with the potential dangers, he was soon out collecting on Table Mountain. He then completed a 600kms covered-wagon trip eastward, crossing treacherous rivers. He was rewarded by a wonderful display of the veldt landscape. On this trip he collected the seeds of many species of *Erica* (the Cape heaths) that would do so well in the Royal Gardens Kew. Returning to Cape Town, he spent several months planning a larger expedition.

The planned journey came to the attention of one of Linnaeus’ apostles en route to Asia, Carl Peter Thunberg,

who persuaded Masson to travel with him in Africa. Opposite in personality (Thunberg an incorrigible braggart and show-off), they worked well together, as can be seen from the number of species collected on their joint trips into southern Africa. Together they completed two major journeys, the first leaving in September 1773 and lasting over four months, heading predominantly to the east some 800kms and the second went north to north westerly over 560kms from Cape Town lasting three months. On both trips, the hardships experienced by two northern Europeans must have been extreme. Flooded rivers needed to be crossed, intense heat and thirst on the dry dusty plains, cold on the mountainous peaks, lions and other wild animals, poisonous snakes and threats from local natives all contributed to eventful times.



Francis Masson (1741-1805)

Their contrasting personalities are shown in their respective diary entries of one near disaster when Thunberg riding his horse across a flooded river, floundered for some minutes in a deep hippopotamus pit. According to Thunberg it was because "he was the most courageous of any of the company and obliged to go ahead", but in Masson's view, "the Doctor imprudently took the ford without the least inquiry" and implied that it was the horse's strength that saved the puffed-up little Swede.

Nevertheless the botanic riches they returned with have changed our gardens. Amongst the plants introduced were: *Ixia viridis*, *Amaryllis belladonna*, *Protea cynaroides*, *Erica* species, *Geranium* species and the Bird of Paradise, *Strelitzia reginae*. By the time Masson returned to Britain in 1775, he had collected some 500 new species many of which were growing in the Cape hothouse at Kew within twelve months. But Masson could not settle down into the routine there. He finally convinced Banks to send him on another expedition and in 1778 he headed to Madeira, Tenerife and the Azores with plans to go to the West Indies. Some 180 plants were dispatched back from Madeira and the Canary Islands, including *Echiums* and *Senecio cineraria*, the parent of the popular cinerarias. Masson's luck ran out on reaching Grenada. By then the British and French were in dispute (relating to the American War of Independence), and the French took the island.

Masson was taken captive and imprisoned in mid-1779. He was released only after high-level negotiations from Banks, but by the time he returned to England in early

1781, his entire collection had been lost. Haunted by the traumatic experience, over the next few years he spent some time at Kew and two years in Portugal and Algeria (trying garden design). But plant hunting was his passion and he decided again to return to his favourite hunting ground, South Africa. He arrived in Cape Town on 10 January 1786. For those of you who are still reading and hoping that Masson's fortunes would improve, the news is not good. This time, Britain and Holland were at war. The Dutch restricted travel inland to a three-hour walk from Cape Town. Despite that, over the next eight years Masson travelled widely (at personal risk) before returning to London. Nevertheless the political unrest had an impact and considerably fewer new species were collected. There was however the arum lily (*Zantedeschia aethiopia*).



***Massonia pustulata*, the genus named by Thunberg in honour of his fellow traveller, are described as plants for the collector**

Again unable to settle, Masson set off on what would be his final journey in 1797, this time to North America. En route, his boat was boarded twice by French pirates who kept Masson and his fellow passengers in atrocious conditions under threat of execution. Finally off-loaded onto a German boat, he reached New York before heading north to Canada. Over seven years' further consignments were sent back, including *Trillium grandiflorum*, but in total only 24 new species were dispatched. Masson's health began to deteriorate in the harsh climate, and during the particularly severe winter of 1805 he died in Montreal. There is no doubt our gardens would be the poorer without the plants he discovered, some 1700 species. They include *Kniphofia*, *Pelargonium*, *Sparaxias*, *Watsonias* and *Gladioli*. A *Cycad* in a pot at Kew collected in 1775 is perhaps the world's oldest pot-plant. He should be better known and appreciated.

The next Scottish botanical explorer (there are several more to come) was Archibald Menzies (1754-1842). In common with Masson he was to collect specimens for Banks and Kew Gardens, but the number he collected was small in comparison. What he did, however, was to draw the Pacific North-west to the attention of another Scotsman of the next century whom we shall learn about in the future. Menzies was born at Styx, Perthshire in Scotland. He worked in the garden at Castle Menzies before moving to the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, where his brother was already employed. Whilst there his work came to the attention of Dr John Hope who encouraged him to study botany and medicine at the University of Edinburgh. He graduated in 1781 and

entered the navy as an assistant surgeon. He spent four years on the east coast of America becoming familiar with its local flora.



The Pacific Madrone (*Arbutus menziesii*), an Irish Strawberry relative is considered one of the most beautiful Canadian trees

In 1786 Hope recommended Menzies to Joseph Banks and this led to Menzies' appointment as surgeon on board the *Prince of Wales* on a three-year round the world trip via Cape Horn. This voyage included the Pacific coast of America where he first saw *Cupressus nootkatensis* (one of the parents of the infamous Leyland cypress) as well as many other new species. He spent a month collecting before returning to England with some specimens and a ship's company in good health. Menzies' reputation as a botanist was enhanced. He was appointed in 1790 as naturalist on HMS *Discovery* with Captain Vancouver on another round the world trip, this time via the Cape of Good Hope, Australia, New Zealand, Hawaii and again to the North American Pacific coast. On the way, however, the ship's surgeon became sick and was sent home. Menzies was appointed in his place.

Unfortunately for Menzies, the belligerent Vancouver objected to his crew helping him collect plants. Menzies was confined to his cabin for the final three months of the voyage so in the end although he saw and described many new species, several that bear his name, this time he returned with only a few plants for Kew. Of the plants he described on his two visits to the region are many of the conifer giants: the Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), the *Sequoia* (coast redwood), the Western Red Cedar, the Monterey and Lawson Cypresses and the Monterey Pine (*Pinus radiata*). Amongst his other finds were the California poppy, *Mahonia aquifolium*, the flowering current, dogwoods, and *Rhododendron occidentale* an early contributor to breeding of the cultivated deciduous azaleas. Many of Menzies' sightings however were not confirmed until nearly forty years later when another Scotsman, David Douglas, inspired by his journals, returned.

Perhaps Menzies' finest introduction to Kew was a tree he didn't even see. On their way back to England, and

stopping in Chile, they were served some nuts when he dined with the Viceroy. Menzies took some of the nuts back to the ship and planted them in pots. A few germinated and he was able to present Kew with the first introduction of the Monkey Puzzle Pine (*Araucaria araucana*). On the way back his relationship with Vancouver deteriorated and he was nearly court-martialled. After the voyage Menzies returned to the West Indies until he retired from the navy in 1802 from ill health, then practised medicine in London, dying in 1842.

Simon Grant

References and Further Reading:

Toby Musgrave et al, *The Plant Hunters* (Ward Lock, 1998).

Wikipedia articles on Francis Masson, Archibald Menzies, etc.

Webpage: *Explorers: The Scottish Plant Hunters Garden*

Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Article by William T. Stearn

Renewal of Membership

If you haven't already paid your Friends' membership for June 2013 to June 2014, please complete the form that was sent to you in June or complete the form on the website and return it to:

SHBG, PO Box 707, Moss Vale, 2577

Please note that if you joined after 1 April 2013 your membership is paid until June 2014.

(Don't forget to include your email address to help us reduce mailing costs.)

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