



Operculum

Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens Inc

Newsletter No. 13

February 2013

The Town and Country Gardens Weekend 27 – 28 April

Town & Country
SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS GARDENS

SATURDAY 27 APRIL - SUNDAY 28 APRIL 2013
OPEN 10AM – 4PM

ENTRY: \$25 per person ~ 7 gardens, all weekend
\$5 per person each garden / School children free
PREPAID GROUP TICKETS ARE AVAILABLE
CONTACT TED DUNCAN Ph:4862 3163 Email: wdu51587@bigpond.com

Preparations are well under way for our special weekend in April to raise funds for the Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens. The seven gardens to be opened will delight and inspire all the visitors. And the Plant Stall at Quindalup will be a source of many beautiful plants for all our gardens.

The three Bowral gardens are: **Retford Park** (Old South Road), **Bellagio** (4 Kimberley Drive) and **Quindalup** (180 Sproules Lane).

There are two gardens in Burradoo: **Wildewood** (45b Sunninghill Avenue) and **Windrush** (37 Phillip Street).

The country gardens are: **Birchbeck** (Clearys Lane, off Wildes Meadow Road, Wildes Meadow) and **Prittlewell** (Bodycotts Lane, off Sheepwash Road, Fitzroy Falls).

The brochure for 2013 is in A4 format—a larger size than in previous years—which has enabled us to provide more photos, a more comprehensive map and sponsorship details. It is enclosed with this ‘Operculum’ for your perusal. We will also send the brochure via email to those of you on line, so that you can more easily send it out to your friends and neighbours.

Many of the Friends assist on the weekend and without them we would not be able to organise this weekend. As our major fund-raising activity, we greatly appreciate their help. The generosity of the owners of the gardens is of paramount importance to the whole weekend. We hope that they enjoy the experience of sharing their wonderful gardens and we thank them in advance for all the work they undertake and the support that they give to the Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens.

The Plant Stall

The Plant Stall at Quindalup is one of the highlights for the Town and Country Gardens Weekend—there are many plants propagated and growing beautifully despite the vagaries of the summer weather. Charlotte and Chris Webb held a very successful potting morning on Tuesday 22 January; the Webbs, with Tony Davis, Maureen Purtell and Les Musgrave, demonstrated their techniques for producing the best results—from propagating to plant care. Another propagating morning will be held in August prior to spring growth—watch out for further details.

For those people growing or tending plants for the stall: please deliver your plants to Quindalup on Saturday 20 April.

Don’t forget that this month is the last opportunity for you to dig up any spare bulbs from your garden for the sale.

‘Quindalup’, previously a specialist nursery, is a superb location for the plant stall. Deirdre Hill has most kindly allowed us to use her grounds for the third time this year and it enables us to cope with the expected influx of visitors and the great number of plants on sale, some of which are unusual and rare.

The other important ingredient to the success of the plant stall is the organisation and co-ordination of growers and helpers and we are

grateful to Di Grant for taking on the role of coordinator. On the weekend we rely on the volunteers from the Friends to perform a number of crucial tasks—managing the car parking, selling the plants and answering horticultural questions.

If you would like to join the band of volunteers to help on the day, please contact Di Grant (tel: 0417 494 705 or email: dirollo@optusnet.com.au.)

The First Building on the Site

The Development Application (DA) has finally been approved by Council for the first building on the site. Known by the Committee as ‘The Shed’, the construction will commence in the next fortnight. It will initially house equipment and provide a shelter for volunteers during the first planting period. The shed will be officially opened on Friday 5 April 2013 at 2 pm by the Hon. Pru Goward, Member for Goulburn and Minister for Community Services and Women.

After all the kerfuffle over the birds, it was a relief when the fence finally went up in November 2012. The fence is handsome and unobtrusive and marks out the site clearly. The entrance to the gardens will be from Old South Road and when the shed is erected the overall plan of the gardens will begin to emerge. The fence was originally supposed to be erected in January 2012 but the birds delayed the project by ten months. They say that patience is a virtue, but when establishing a Botanic Garden, patience is definitely a necessity!



Contractor Greg Newman and his son Murray erecting the fence in November 2012

Revised Plan for the Gardens

The designer, Kate Cullity, has redesigned the plan of the gardens to incorporate a habitat for the birds. This revision has now to be finally approved by Council but hopefully this should not take long. The changes affect only part of the design so the fundamental shape still remains true to the initial concept plan.

Site Induction Course

Due to regulations under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*, before the Friends of the SHBG (or anyone who intends helping on the site) are permitted to assist in any activity, they must take part in a Site Induction Course which will be offered by a specialist trainer.

This rule applies to those involved in horticultural activities as well as anyone helping with morning tea or setting up for an event. A number of sessions will be held, at this stage it is conceived as a monthly event, at the East Bowral Community Centre. The first Volunteer project will be to landscape around the new shed, so anyone hoping to participate will need to be inducted in the first session. Further information will be made available about dates and times.

Simon Grant on The Explorers Part 1: The Early Collectors

I was recently hiking through a mountain forest in Japan re-discovering a wonderful range of plants now commonly found in our gardens and thinking what it must be like to find a new plant that can be introduced and appreciated by future generations. Surrounded by varieties of maple, hydrangeas, viburnum, oak, katsura and so on, it felt like being in the Garden of Eden to an amateur botanist, but it is also easy to forget what the reality was for the true collector.

Those of us who were at the recent session at the Camellia Show where George Orel discussed newly discovered camellias from South Vietnam, will have heard about some of the hardships and risks taken such as snakes and other dangers under every leaf. When I explore, I like to have a guide so I don't get lost as well as a many course meal before and after, and a hot bath every day!

Plant collecting for gardens goes back thousands of years although it gained momentum during the age of exploration and discovery that I hope to cover in a future piece. Firstly though it is interesting to reflect how botanically poor Western Europe and in particular Great Britain were left after the last ice age, and how important even introductions from the Old World were.

Great Britain for example had only one or two species of apple, beech, birch, maple, oak and pine, and no pears, spruce, chestnuts, horse-chestnuts, sycamores or walnuts—all of which are commonly thought of as natives having been introduced centuries ago.



Queen Hatshepsut (1479-1457BCE) Statue in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

The first recorded plant hunt was for Queen Hatshepsut of Egypt who in 1495 BC sent a party to collect the common myrrh from Somalia, a thorny almost leafless plant that will never be sought after as a garden beauty.

In those days probably the greater risk for the plant hunter was not bringing the plant home. No doubt there were other introductions during those ancient times but it was during the empires of Greece and Rome that an increasing number of plants were spread around their colonies to places where they hadn't previously been. Following the conquest of the Persian Empire by Alexander the Great, a number of trees from the East were introduced including the walnut, mulberry and peach. The interest then was predominantly productive plants. They also began the systematic study of plants. The Romans, on the other hand, did not engage in plant hunting to any extent but they did scatter a number of known plants around their colonies, both for produce and for beauty in their beloved flower gardens.

Little changed after them until the Renaissance when the classical systems in a number of sciences were again brought to light including the Greek systematic study of plants. Again it was predominantly functional plants that were of interest, the "medicinals" and the "herbals" but soon scientific studies of other plants were undertaken. By the middle of the 16th century and to further these studies, organised collections were planted in centres of learning

such as the universities. The world's first botanic gardens were begun in Pisa and Padua in 1544 and 1545. Soon others were established such as gardens commenced in Montpellier, France, by Pierre de Belleval and at Leiden, Holland, by Carolus Clusius, both in 1593.



Carolus Clusius (1526-1609)

It wasn't long before plants from afar were being sought; the merchants of Venice collected for the Orto Botanico di Padova, whilst Belleval had plants collected from the surrounding mountains, the Cevennes, the Alps and the Pyrenees. Clusius at Leiden urged the Dutch East India Company to send back specimens and planted tulips originating from Turkey, that he had previously grown in Vienna. He is credited with introducing them to Holland, leading on to Tulip Mania and the commercial bulb industry. A trickle of specimens collected from the ancient world began to appear in Western Europe that included the horse-chestnut (introduced to Europe in 1600) and the cedar of Lebanon soon after. No doubt the collectors at those times took great risks and sometimes perished. Their stories have been obscured by history.

For one father and son however the tales of their risks and privations have been recorded, albeit with debate on some of the details. For those interested the Tradescants have been the subject of novels by Philippa Gregory. The following is a brief summary of their adventures.

John Tradescant the elder was working as a gardener for Robert Cecil, 1st Earl of Salisbury at Hatfield House when first sent in 1610 to the Low Countries to collect fruit trees, a journey which seemed to encourage his enthusiasm for collecting all and sundry. Following the death of his initial employer, he moved to St Augustine's Palace, Canterbury, where he soon brought fame to the garden and so got to know many famous men of the day. Through them he invested in an

expedition to the new colony of Virginia to obtain new plants such as *Rhus typhina* and the spiderwort, *Tradescantia virginiana*.



John Tradescant the elder (1570-1638)

His next great adventure was in 1618 when he was a member of a trade mission to Russia as its naturalist. The trade mission itself was a spectacular and costly failure, and though John the elder's interest in 'local weeds' amused and mystified the Russians, he returned to England with a valuable load of plants, many other specimens and put together the first known list of Russian plants. His next high adventure was in 1620 when he joined as a 'gentleman adventurer' an expedition against the Algerian corsairs. Whilst little harm came to the Barbary pirates, John the elder made several risky trips ashore where he observed acres of a rare gladiolus and brought back a number of specimens including an apricot that was soon propagated in every nobleman's garden. In 1630 he became royal gardener and remained at Lambeth until his death.



John Tradescant the younger (1608-1662)

By then, John the younger had already gone to collect specimens, this time from the new world.

He returned to England to succeed his father as gardener to Charles I. After the death of the King in 1642, he is thought to have made two further trips to Virginia, ultimately spending many years there in harsh conditions collecting plants and other artefacts. His final years were spent in their 'Ark' at Lambeth cultivating the wide range of new acquisitions and cataloguing their collection. That collection was later left to Oxford University by Elias Ashmole and has become the Ashmolean Museum (the world's premier university museum) though alas the garden was neglected and its trees soon disappeared.

Between them, the Tradescants introduced a number of important plants to England. Amongst those they introduced or grew first were the larch, Robinia, swamp cypress, the tulip tree, phlox, Michaelmas daisies, a collection of cistus, *Gladiolus byzantinus*, white lupins, cos lettuce, scarlet runner beans. More importantly they helped establish the role of the plant hunter, stimulating the interest in creating plant collections and introducing unusual species to our gardens.

Simon Grant 2013

References and Further Reading:

Miles Hadfield, *Pioneers in Gardening* (1955, 1996).
Toby Musgrave et al, *The Plant Hunters* (1999).
Hugh Johnson, *Encyclopaedia of Trees* (1984).
Philippa Gregory, *Earthly Joys* (1998) and *Virgin Earth* (1999).

Friends of SHBG Committee

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