



FRIENDS OF BOTANIC GARDENS FORUM
NEWSLETTER
EDITION 8



Dear Friends,

Today, I was in the Botanic Garden in Edinburgh – for a meeting of the garden guides. And I suddenly became aware that Christmas is looming as the preparations are being made for Christmas at the Botanic. This is the autumn edition of the Newsletter – and apologies for its somewhat delayed appearance – however, Covid-delayed holidays have intervened – and I am at last pulling together all your very welcome submissions. Once again, the articles display the breadth of Friends' involvement with their respective gardens/arboreta.

It was good to see some of you at our zoom meeting in September – now seems ages ago and I was particularly pleased to have our constitution agreed with the first AGM to take place via Zoom next spring. Another small step forward! And thanks again to all who contributed to making such a simple and concise document.

You will now be well into your planned autumn talks, and planning for next year's activities – no doubt facing challenges around increasing costs affecting venue hire, bus hire, etc. And your Botanic Gardens – particularly those with heated glasshouses, will also be looking very closely at how to minimise their energy costs without affecting their precious contents. Fortunately, so far weather has been mild – indeed, as I write this, alarmingly high temperatures for this time of year are forecast over the next few days. I am also aware that many plants are beginning to flower again – they are obviously thoroughly perplexed by the strange weather patterns this year.

I was very pleased to let you know at our last meeting that we do have a new member of the Forum – Swansea Botanical Garden. I hope that in our next newsletter, we will be able to read about their activities – meanwhile do look at their website which is very informative.

While on my travels in October, I was able to fit in visits to 2 Botanic Gardens – Montreal and New York, and 2 Arboreta – Hamilton, Ontario and the Arnold Arboretum in Boston. There were entry charges to Montreal Botanic Garden and New York Botanical Garden – however, free entry to both Arboreta. All had varying Membership/Friends arrangements. These were run 'in house'. The Hamilton Arboretum is part of the Royal Botanic Garden – and whilst the Arboretum is free to enter, the Garden element incurs a charge. As for the contents of these sites – Halloween was obviously being celebrated – as you can see – the most enormous pumpkins that I have ever seen. The autumnal colours were impressive and the two highlight for me was seeing a *Franklinia alatamaha* in bloom amidst its shiny autumnal leaves. This tree is



extinct in the wild – so very special, and its presence in the Arnold Arboretum was an excellent example of one of the key goal of botanic gardens - conservation. The other highlight was the graceful *Metasequoia glyptostroboides* at the entrance to the Arboretum which I discovered was a sister tree to a *Metasequoia* in the RBGE.

I hope you are all enjoying the joys of autumn in your gardens, and that you will all have a very special Christmas this year after our last few Covid restricted Christmases...

Best wishes

Shiona Mackie (Edinburgh Friends RBGE)



Photos: Shiona Mackie

Front and back pages: Treborth Botanic Garden—Entrance to Chinese Garden and Hefina Chamberlain border —Sarah Edgar.

Friends of Belfast Botanic Gardens

The Friends continue to work on alternate Sundays in the Global Medicine Garden (GMG) where we are also able to engage with the public in the garden. Following favourable comments to Belfast City Council (BCC) and requests from the public, the GMG is now also open from 10.00am to 4.00 pm Monday to Friday.

Handmade signage (on slates hung from rebar stakes) now gives a reasonable level of interpretation for visitors and this signage is continually being added to.

We continue to collect seeds from the GMG for sharing with the public.

We have hosted some prestigious groups to the GMG, some in response to requests to the Friends Group and some passed on from BCC, so we are now accepted as an attraction worth visiting. We have had two Gardening Groups visit plus a group of horticulturalists from Vancouver and a group of American scientists on a conference visit to Belfast. Happy visitors and their support make all the hard work so worthwhile.

We held a plant sale at the Belfast Mela Festival in the Botanic Gardens on Sunday 28th August, our first proper plant sale since September 2019. Our 'pop-up' plant and ceramics sales continue on some of the Sundays that we are working in the GMG.



Two members from the Friends group attended a final stakeholder meeting held on 6th September in respect of the UPSURGE – Horizon 2020 proposal to develop the lower Botanic Gardens. The UPSURGE project focuses on nature based solutions (e.g. urban forests, rewilding, ponds, nature reserves) in EU cities, local food production opportunities and educational programmes for schools, community, staff and university students, with the aim of sharing learning and good practice. The draft plan now includes the Friends' proposal for an area dedicated to horticultural education and training, especially with regards to plant trials

and RHS practical qualifications, and for community engagement / outreach projects.

Our member Professor Jonathan Pilcher gave a public talk in August entitled 'Bogs – A Window Into The Past and Hope For The Future' which was enthusiastically received.

Work continues on the redesign of our website by a leading locally based IT Company that also refreshed our logo which we are now using.

Barbara Pilcher and Adrian Walsh, Friends of Belfast Botanic Gardens
Photographs: Adrian Walsh

Friends of Benmore (RBGE) Botanic Garden

At the end of June 2022 when Shiona Mackie sent out the last Forum newsletter, I reported that the Friends' Committee at Benmore was looking forward to once more hosting events in the Gallery.

We were delighted that the Grazioso String Quartet accepted our invitation to pay a return visit to the Gallery for our re-opening event. The Quartet is formed from retired members of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra who now play for pleasure and indeed for the pleasure of their audience. Over three quarters of an hour we were entertained by a delightful programme. The committee then invited the quartet to join us in a traditional afternoon tea preceded by a glass of prosecco (for those who wished) to celebrate a return to normality after two years of Covid regulations. The enjoyment of our members was worth all the cutting off crusts from smoked salmon sandwiches, the making of delicate bite sized cakes and the retrieval of fine bone china from boxes in the loft. It was a joyous occasion.



Mentioned in my last update, the 'new Puck' was placed on the top of his hut in the walled garden to be unveiled during a day of more celebration in September. The figure at the top of Puck's Hut was in fact that of Pan, god of the wild. The Hut was originally sited in Puck's Glen, a local trail close to the Garden that winds along a Victorian walkway up a dramatic rocky gorge that is said to be the home to mischievous spirits, hence its name. A group walked up to the original site of the Hut in the Glen and then returned to the Gallery for lunch. David Gray, a Senior Horticulturalist at Benmore gave an illustrated talk on his researches into the origins of the Hut, its significance in the history of Benmore, the early days of the Forestry Commission and the vision of Sir Isaac Bayley Balfour (9th Regius Keeper of RBGE). It was Sir Isaac who recognised the need for a satellite garden in the west of Scotland whose climate would allow trees and newly discovered species to thrive. He saw too that trees were a key factor in controlling climate change so should be recognised as one of the very first environmentalists. Sadly, he died in 1922 before a suitable site could be developed. Puck's Hut was completed by the end of 1927 as a memorial to him. It was officially opened on 8th September 1928. Benmore was part of land gifted to the Nation in 1929 by the Younger family, where Sir Isaac's vision was to be realised. The Hut, which was called the 'Isaac Bayley Balfour Memorial Rest House' was moved to the Garden in 1967 into its present position in the formal garden. Nearly a hundred years of weathering had caused much damage to the original figure of Pan atop the hut and a new one was carved in 2021 by Guy Elder, a local craftsman much of whose work can be seen around Benmore. The photograph shows the much aged Pan and his newly carved copy. It is fitting that he should have been unveiled in this, the centenary of Sir Isaac's death.



Awareness of the importance of the history of the Benmore Garden was emphasised during a guided walk in early October led by Andrew Watson who authored 'James Duncan, an enlightened Victorian', published in 2010 by RBGE. Duncan was the owner of estates on Cowal between 1870 and 1889. Since this publication Andrew Watson has done more research about Benmore during the years 1860 to 1890. The walk took members from the steading area around the Gallery to the foot of the Fernery, stopping enroute to discuss various significant historical buildings and areas such as the Redwood Avenue, planted by James Patrick (owner of the estates 1860-1870). It was interesting to hear that the Golden Gates, commissioned by James Duncan from a maker in Berlin and displayed at the Paris Exhibition in 1878, were A listed. The only other A listed item within RBGE is the Palm House.



Meanwhile planting continues at Benmore to create the Garden's new history in the landscape and to further the purposes of conservation, research and education. Recent plantings have been in the Chilean area and either side of the new path from the viewpoint across the top of the Garden. No recent collecting trips have been possible so wild collected material is being bulked up by propagation in new facilities within the Garden.

The committee are meeting regularly to plan events in the Gallery which will take place during the closed season for the Garden. Our members tell us how much they appreciate these talks and social events. As a committee we are relieved that, despite Covid, the loyalty of our local members remains.

Marion Kinns (Secretary, Benmore Members' Group)

Photos: Marion Kinns and Peter Baxter

If you are in Edinburgh over the pre-Christmas period—this is a very popular visitor attraction at the Edinburgh RBGE.



Birmingham Botanical Gardens

This year has been a very busy year for Birmingham Botanical Gardens. Our Chair retired in March and we welcomed our new Chair, Sue Beardsmore, to the Board in April. Sue is a former BBC Midlands today presenter and until recently chair of the Lottery Heritage Fund Committee for England, Midlands and East. An experienced board member, she has held a number of non-executive roles in the region, including chair of governors of Birmingham school, chair of a medical research foundation, with an arts festival and with community organisations concerned with health and young people.



In June we appointed a new chief executive Sara Blair-Manning who joins the grade II* listed Gardens in Edgbaston with 27 years' experience in the cultural and charitable sectors. Sara has significant experience of leading the development of beautiful gardens, heritage sites and environmental projects at two National Trust properties, Tattershall Castle and Gunby Estate, Hall and Gardens. While CEO with The John Clare Trust, she worked with Gardeners' World presenter Adam Frost and sponsors Lands' End to create The Rural Muse garden, which won gold at RHS Chelsea in 2012.

In September our horticulturalists reflected on the incredible time they had at the PoliNations festival in the city centre. Wayne Williams, head gardener, and Chris Howell, worked with community organisations to plant a variety of plants for the garden festival in Victoria Square, which took place between September 2 and 18, and then gave free daily guided tours to visitors. Commissioned by UNBOXED: Creativity in the UK, PoliNations was part of the Birmingham 2022 Festival and took place as the city celebrated hosting the hugely successful Commonwealth Games. It was presented with the support of Birmingham City Council. Featuring huge architectural trees and thousands of plants, it comprised five tree installations up to 40ft high and sculptures inspired by iconic plants – such as daisies, pansies, apple trees, and roses – that are staples of British gardens but are not native to Britain.



However, our most significant and exciting piece of news is that Birmingham Botanical Gardens has been awarded £590,814 from The National Lottery Heritage Fund – with the potential to secure a further £4.4 million – to restore its four historic, listed glasshouses. The Gardens has received the development grant so that it can develop plans for the £13 million 'Growing our Green Heritage' project, which aims to restore its historic glasshouse estate, as well as additional visitor and community resources, to create a place of horticultural excellence and outstanding green space.

As the project progresses, the Gardens will have the chance to secure an additional funding amount of £4,409,186 to deliver the project. Funding for the project has been made possible thanks to National Lottery players.

Sue Beardsmore, Chair of Trustees at Birmingham Botanical Gardens said: "The historic glasshouse estate is at risk. It needs urgent extensive repairs to continue to provide the right environment for our important living plant collection. Support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund will mean that we can preserve this historic estate and iconic glasshouses for future generations. A place of sanctuary, learning and inspiration, bringing people and plants together for another 200 years.

"We know that a meaningful relationship with nature has significant benefits for health and well-being and we are immensely grateful to the Fund for this unique opportunity to restore an important part of Birmingham's heritage, champion biodiversity and the environment, and reconnect people with nature."

The glasshouses have always been a major attraction: the Tropical House was built in 1852 to house the famous tropical water lily, *Victoria amazonica*; the Subtropical House in 1871 and the present range of Terrace Glasshouses replaced the original conservatory and lean-to houses in 1884. The Tropical House was rebuilt during 1990/91 and the other houses improved and replanted during the major redevelopments carried out in 1986/87.

The total project is expected to take about five years to complete.



Caroline Clutton-Brock, Friends of Birmingham Botanic Garden

Photos: Birmingham Botanic Garden

Friends of the University of Leicester Botanic Garden

Our annual Plant Exchange was held on 19th June, and was most enjoyable. Many donated plants were swapped and given good homes. There was also an exchange of ideas and tips over coffee from the LOROS charity van. Surplus plants were sold later from the Friends stall during our Plant Sale & Family Day on 26th June.

More than 1100 adults plus enthusiastic children visited our garden for the Friends Plant Sale & Family Day. The day was a great success, initially indicated by visitors arriving even before opening time in order to purchase the best plants from the specialist nurseries, and products from craft and art stalls. The Friends sold out their refreshments stock just before the end – perfect! A popular place to take tea was near the slow-paced and relaxed classics jazz band on the sunny terrace under the scented giant *Magnolia grandiflora*. The children were well occupied some distance down the garden by the free supervised activities and entertainments which included plaster moulding, willow weaving, the Lion Learners educational animal experience (think petting zoo), and the ever popular and always busy bouncy castle. The specialist plant nurseries attending all ended up with many empty stock trollies, and declared the day a good one for sales. The Friends stall did a very brisk trade selling surplus plants from the garden and from the Friends, and all the while dispensing information on plant care and Friends membership. Total number of Friends needed to volunteer on the day was 85.

For the first time, and in response to the fall in demand for organised tours during and after COVID 'Turn up and go' guided tours of the garden have been offered starting in June. The tours are short and informal, lasting not more than 30 minutes, and focus on one aspect of the garden. Numbers have been small, but the guides having the opportunity to continue delivering parts of tours to a small group, sometimes including young children. To begin with all participants were recruited as they arrived at the garden, but by September it was interesting to note that 8 of the 13 participants had come to the garden in order to participate in the short tour. We will have a final short tour on the second Sunday in October and after that we will decide about our offer for next year.

Our Garden Director of 40 years retired at the end of July and the University is now developing its plans for a revitalised Botanic Garden in the future. This is likely to take some time and, in the meantime, we are seeking to second a professional to oversee the activities in the garden for the next year. If any of you have access to Job Descriptions which describe the responsibilities of someone 'In charge of' the garden our Board would appreciate receiving them. You can send them to :
mary.campbell703@gmail.com

Mary Campbell, Friend of Leicester Botanic Garden

Autumn Visit to Inverness Botanic Garden

At the beginning of November, I headed north to Nairn, Morayshire for the AGM of the Scottish Gardeners' Forum (www.scottishgardenersforum.org.uk). I took the opportunity to visit Inverness Botanic Garden, one of our members, and met up with Pamela Sutherland, the Head Gardener. It was a beautiful, autumnal day and I spent several hours wandering around the garden, initially in the company of Pamela, and later on my own, savouring the many different areas in the garden, including the very impressive glasshouses, of which, at the moment, there are two – a Tropical Glasshouse and a Cactus and Succulent House. The Botanic Garden is approximately 3 acres, located in the middle of a series of sports complexes in what used to be the estate of Bught House. The house and land were taken over by Inverness Council, and the house was demolished in the 1960's to make way for an ice rink. The Botanic Garden is located in the original walled garden. The equivalent of three full time staff tend the garden and glasshouses, with six volunteers. It is a very tranquil haven away from the bustle of the surrounding car parks and sports arenas/playing fields.



There were plenty of plants to interest the keen gardener – one of which greatly excited me – to be found in the sensory garden - the Australian mint bush, *Prostanthera rotundifolia*. This is a plant from the antipodes and yet here it was – flowering in November in Inverness! Another indication of the relative mildness of the garden's microclimate, was a tree fern in what I called the dinosaur bed! It is living with a Gingko and a Wollemi pine. Another impressive part of the garden is where the Grow project is based – it occupies over half of the garden and offers the experience of practical horticulture for clients with learning disabilities. Pamela contributed an article on this project in a previous newsletter.




As yet, the garden does not have a Friends' group. Entry to the garden is free. The garden is managed through HighLife Highland – a charity set up by the Highland Council in 2011 to run all the leisure and library facilities in the Highland region. Membership of this charity brings discounts to the leisure centres and other related organisations, and also commercial services. However, the Garden does welcome donations and are always looking for volunteers to help out in the glasshouses, the gardens and the Grow Project.



The garden is well worth a visit – parking is easy and there is a café which was doing a roaring trade when I was there. So, if you are heading to the north of Scotland, a side trip to the Inverness Botanic Garden is definitely a possibility. Just head for the sports grounds on the south side of the Ness River and that is where you will find it.


Shiona Mackie

Photos: Shiona Mackie



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(From an article by Paul Smith for the Friends of Treborth Botanic Garden newsletter, May 2022)

Keeping accurate records of the plant collection is an important aspect of any botanic garden and records have been kept at Treborth Botanic Garden (TBG) for many years. In 2017, Paul Smith, a member of the Friends of Treborth Botanic Garden, became involved in sorting out the plant records at Treborth. At that time, there were several versions of an Excel spreadsheet that were circulating and being updated by different people so that it was quite confusing to determine which was the most up-to-date version. After identifying the Excel file that was most recent, it was uploaded to Google Drive so that it could be converted to a Google Sheet. This way, there was only one version that could be edited and updated by authorised people - singing from the same hymn sheet.

Secondly, for over 300 accessions, the species name is either not known or the entered species name has been questioned. In a few instances, even the genus is uncertain. Identification takes time and specialist knowledge. Shortage of staff doesn't help. Thirdly, there is incomplete information about such aspects as provenance and the name of the donor. Fourthly, we are constantly having to deal with the whims of taxonomists who are frequently changing the names of plants, often well-known ones. We have tried to keep up with this, but it is a Sisyphean task.

Although much work remains to be done on the plant records database – and indeed such a database is never static – we are now sufficiently confident to be able to use it to do some analysis of our collection. The following table summarises what we have in the collection, excluding those accessions that we are uncertain about and those that we know (!) have died or have been removed. We retain records of all dead or removed plants, especially if the reason for death is known as this information may help in future management decisions.

Number of accessions:	3,273
Number of unique species/cultivars/greges:	2,141
Number of genera:	896
Number of families:	185



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We have recently started recording the conservation status of accessions. Treborth has several species that are of concern. Notable among these is the St Helena redwood (*Trochetiopsis erythroxylon*) which is extinct in the wild and one, the white-flowered aloe (*Aloe albiflora*) is critically endangered, possibly extinct in the wild. Our St Helena ebony (*Trochetiopsis ebenus*) is also of critical concern as there are only two plants left in their native habitat. One species, the starved wood-sedge (*Carex depauperata*) is critically endangered in Great Britain and extinct in Wales. The meadow clary (*Salvia pratensis*) is critically endangered and has been grown at Treborth for re-introduction to its single native site in Wales (Rectory Meadow SSSI in Monmouthshire) to re-build the near extinct population. Also in our collection is the Welsh rarity, *Hedlundia leyana* (previously thought to be a species in the genus *Sorbus*) which has been described as Britain's rarest tree. There are only 20 specimens remaining in the wild on limestone cliffs. These figures underline the important international role that Treborth Botanic Garden plays in conservation of endangered species.

We have developed our own categories for plant types which take into consideration the specialist collections such as carnivorous plants, orchids, ferns, cacti, and succulents. Thus "herbaceous" refers to herbaceous plants that do not fall into any of the other categories (though it does include bananas!). In the database, the various categories are subdivided into sub-categories, for example deciduous trees and epiphytic orchids. Graminoids are herbaceous plants with a grass-like morphology so include not only Poaceae but also Cyperaceae and Bambusa, though the latter form their own sub-category. Not surprisingly, herbaceous plants make up the largest part of the collection - almost entirely perennials. Trees are accessions that are tree species and not necessarily those that are fully grown.

The future

Whilst storing records on Google Sheets was a great improvement over Microsoft Excel there are several disadvantages over specially designed botanic garden plant collection recording software. In particular it is not easy on Google Sheets to link records to one or more photographs of a plant *in situ*. Also it not easy to show the location of an accession on a map.

After much deliberation comparing ease of use, cost and other factors, it has recently been decided to migrate the collection records to a fairly new software package called Hortis produced by Botanical Software Ltd., at least on a trial basis. As a failsafe, for the first 12 months, we will continue to record accessions on both Google Sheets and on Hortis.

In order to be able to link to plant records with maps using the new software, it was realised that our maps needed updating to reflect changes in border names and boundaries and to ensure that they were accurately georeferenced. As a result of a recent meeting between various actors, it was decided to do this using a combination of satellite imagery, georeferenced drone photography, hand-held GPS devices and laser distance measuring or possibly old fashioned measuring tapes!

Paul Smith, Friends of Treborth Botanic Garden

Ness Botanic Garden

Plant and book collections at Ness

Plant Records Volunteers at Ness Botanic Gardens

Whilst waiting in the wings for their work recording the identity and origin of the plant specimens collected by Dr Hugh McAllister to start once again, two of the Plant Records Volunteers at Ness Botanic Gardens have been working through the library collection. This article, written by a member of the Plant Records volunteer team, is an interesting account of the work these invaluable volunteers carry out and the way they have adapted to carrying out other tasks!

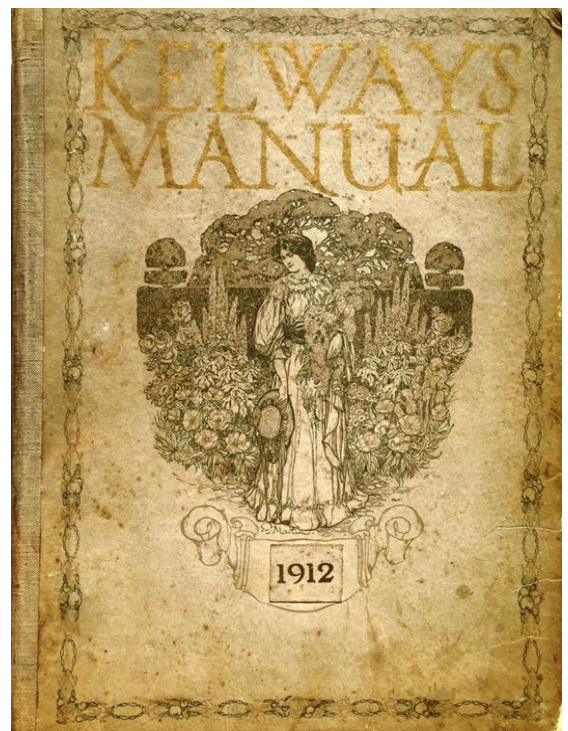
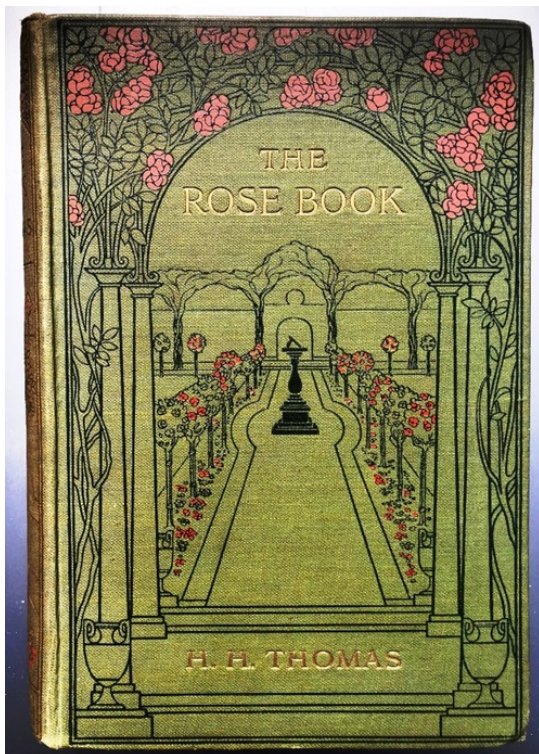
Botanical gardens maintain a huge collection of living plants to be enjoyed throughout the year. They also accept a responsibility to record the identity and origin of what they collect. Since the middle ages, gardens kept by European universities have preserved notable plants for study in herbaria. Ness has played a full part in this, preparing mounted specimens for expert storage in the World Museum Liverpool, where along with material from other botanical gardens and private collections they are available for study and exchange with botanists round the world.

A key figure in this work has been Dr Hugh McAllister. Herbarium specimens are awkward to store and until recently DNA has been difficult to extract from them. But even photographs and digital records can deteriorate or get lost over time. In a world where biodiversity is threatened, at least a piece of the real thing remains. After a prolonged gap due to the Covid emergency the plan is for the plant collection volunteer team to return in the coming months. One group will start by processing a number of Hugh's specimens patiently waiting between yellowing pages of tissue and newsprint. Other volunteers will return next year. The plant collection volunteers as a group will then be supporting plant

record management in a wider sense, led by Nick Lightfoot (Garden & Collections Manager) and the new Plant Record Officer when they are in post.

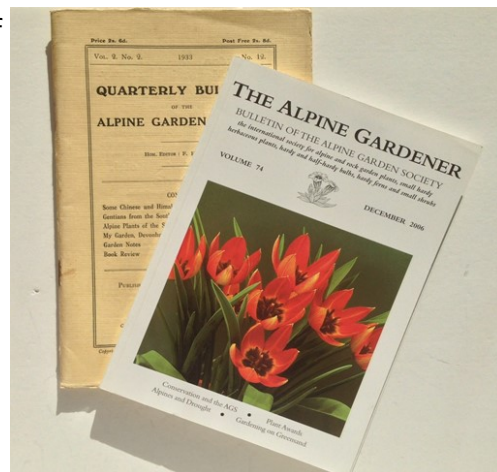
Meantime two members of the team have been busy sorting through boxes of library books displaced by alterations and changing use of space in Mickwell Brow. Some are already catalogued and retrievable through the University library system but most are not.

What to do with books donated in past years, such as Kelway's Manual (1912), a beautifully illustrated volume, part commerce, part work of art? AK Bulley must surely have admired a copy, though not this one, which was the kind gift of a lady in North Wales.



Or a very early 20thC edition of Gaston Bonnier's Complete Flora of France, Belgium and Switzerland originally published in instalments but here bound in eleven fine leather volumes inherited from the Hartley Botanical Laboratories in Liverpool? These are all back on the shelves again, as are numerous plant monographs and rows of journals including the Alpine Garden Society's Bulletin from 1933 onwards.

A more recent gift is a book by Professor Sir Cyril Clarke, FRS. On the fly leaf, in neat but slightly spidery writing, the author expressed his debt to Ness and its director, Ken Hulme for regular supplies of fresh leaves needed to feed breeding colonies of swallowtail butterflies in Liverpool. Genetic studies on these had in the 1960s led to his team at Liverpool University finding the first effective means of preventing rhesus haemolytic disease of the newborn. Since then, the technique has saved the lives of many thousands of unborn and newly born infants. A reminder perhaps of the part that 'physic' or botanical gardens have played in scientific advances over the years."



Plant Record Volunteer/ Andrea Harman

Photos: Plant Record Volunteers

Friends of Oxford Botanic Garden

On Sunday 17th July, I was lucky enough to be present at the opening ceremony for the Garden's 400th anniversary celebrations in the University Church of St Mary the Virgin. We heard an uplifting mixture of poetry, music and garden musings past and present before proceeding along the High Street, led by the Chancellor and Vice Chancellor and other University dignitaries in their colourful gowns – wholly unsuitable for a glorious summer's day. We were told about the fascinating history of the memorial to the medieval Jews of Oxford in the rose garden outside the Botanic Garden, saw the Vice Chancellor, Professor Dame Louise Richardson, plant an historic oak, and then sat down for a delicious lunch. One of the great joys of the day was knowing that the Oxford Botanic Garden and Arboretum has been fully embraced by the University as an important place, both physically, historically and in terms of its potential contribution to science and the environment. This has not always been the case and the Garden has long struggled for recognition and funds and has run on a shoestring: one of the main reasons for the creation of the Friends' charity some thirty years ago. It is a delight to see the Garden thriving under its current team, looking stunning, taking part in many international joint ventures of huge conservation importance, producing ground-breaking research, collaborating with other University departments of physics, engineering, plant sciences, ecology, zoology and psychology, to name but a few. They have also worked with City and County organisations in the musical, theatre and civic world. Hugely exciting plans are afoot to build new glasshouses for the Garden incorporating not just a tropical rainforest but also a café and teaching space.



Sarah Taylor ,Chair of the Friends of Oxford Botanic Garden and Arboretum

Photo: Oxford Botanic Garden

Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum

At the start of August FoWA welcomed our new CEO, Emma Griffiths. Emma was formally CEO of Gloucestershire Counselling Services and has a wealth of experience in the community and volunteering sector. She joins us just as FoWA and Forestry England (FE) are starting the process of developing a Master Plan to guide the arboretum through the next 10 years. This master plan will ensure that the arboretum achieves its vision of:

- Conservation – protecting our trees for the future
- Education – sharing knowledge to create change
- Participation – connecting people with nature

A great deal of background work has already been undertaken, prioritising projects and understanding the needs of our visitors, staff and volunteers. These various studies are now being pulled together to create an outline project plan and business case to be submitted to FE for approval. To this end, monthly meetings between FoWA and FE are helping to shape the plan and identify our respective roles and responsibilities. It is evident that FoWA will be pivotal in both shaping the plan and raising funds for what will be a multi-million pound programme.

Membership.

The great majority of FoWA's income is in the form of membership subscriptions. During lockdown and the early stages of the pandemic, we saw a surge in membership as people joined to have access to nature and open spaces. Membership peaked at 38,700 in December 2021 but declined during the early part of 2022 as the requirement for pre booking inhibited some visitors. However, membership has now stabilised at 37,200, very much in line with 2021.

Shop

FoWA took over the running of the shop only a few weeks before the first lock down. (What perfect timing!!). This clearly led to some difficult trading conditions but we took the opportunity to refurbish the shop and change the layout. Since then, our Retail Manager, Tracey, has done a brilliant job reviewing the product range with a strong emphasis on locally sourced and sustainable products. Product ranges include books, textiles, garden items, gifts, food items and toys. Recently we have expanded the range of products aimed at our four-legged furry friends, much to the delight of the many dogs and their owners that enjoy our 600 acres of Grade 1 listed landscape. As a result, the income from the shop is an important part of visitors 'secondary spend' and makes a significant contribution to FoWA's income.

The shop has recently started stocking a new edition of *'The Little Book of Disappearing Trees'*, a guide to some of the 100 threatened tree species that we have on site.

Individual Giving Manager

Our Individual Giving Manager, Ellie, has nearly been in post for a full year. Ellie brings vast experience of fundraising with a focus on environmental and heritage causes from her previous roles at Earthwatch Europe and National Trust.

Next year, we will be embarking on the delivery of a 3-year Individual Giving strategy that focuses on developing income from the Friends' supporters. This forms a crucial next step in the Friends' supporter journey development, engaging supporters to advocate for our cause. Initially this has focussed on creating a donor-centric case for support to provide the foundation of our fundraising messaging. We look forward to building and improving our current fundraising offers over the next 3 years.

Other projects

Community shelter.

Our new community shelter (see our previous newsletter contribution) has been nominated for an architectural award.

Coppicing.

We have now closed the tenders for the building of the new Coppice Shelter. We hope to start construction early in the new year. We are also looking to recruit an apprentice coppicer that will be partially financed by FoWA

Ash Die back programme

FE is currently developing a Community Woodland re-planting programme to regenerate areas of ancient woodland in Silk Wood following the felling of hundreds of infected Ash trees. The planting will be future focussed, featuring trees that will be resilient in the face of climate change and rising pests and disease pressure. The Friends have agreed to fund a project manager role for this programme and FE are currently recruiting for this role. The Friends look forward to implementing further fundraising efforts next year as plans progress.

Pre-Booking

Compulsory pre-booking for visitors stopped on 3rd May but will be reintroduced at peak periods including Bank Holidays, the autumn period and over Christmas. It ran successfully over the Jubilee Bank Holiday weekend and the August Bank Holidays. However, the real test will be during the October / November peak when Westonbirt receives 1/3 of its annual visitors. Pre-booking is advised for guaranteed entry from the 1st of October to the 13th of November. On peak days this can cause significant traffic problems on the local roads and requires overflow parking on our protected landscape. Pre-booking enables us to reduce the impact of high visitor numbers in the arboretum itself but also for our local community and environment.

National Membership Scheme

We have been working closely with FE as they plan to launch a national membership scheme. After intensive negotiations we have reached an agreement in principle and we are now working through the detail.

Upcoming events

As usual, there are a large number of activities taking place, so rather than list them here, all the information can be found on the website.

<https://www.forestryengland.uk/westonbirt/events>.

And finally:

If any members of the forum would like to visit Westonbirt, we are happy to meet you and provide a personal tour of our site. Feel free to contact me, Martin Green, by email at greenteam2@talk21.com. We are also happy to accommodate group visits. These can be organised by contacting

<https://www.forestryengland.uk/westonbirt/groups>

Martin Green, FoWA

Autumn update Friends of Sheffield Botanical Gardens

Autumn sees the start of renovations to the Pavilions, fully restored some 20 years ago but now needing general refurbishment. The original glasshouse opened in 1836, to a design by Yorkshire architect Benjamin Broomhead Taylor. BB Taylor's design consisted of a simple Palladian arrangement of a central pavilion with smaller pavilions on either side connected by ridge-and-furrow glasshouses. During the restoration project in 2002, the glass domes and wrought iron work were painstakingly removed and restored, including new glazing with hand blown cylinder glass made in France by one of the few remaining companies in Europe capable of making glass by traditional methods. Today we see painting and repairs to the full height glazed timber doors on the front façade, with more work to follow in the interior.



In September our new Chair, Carolyn Clark, together with Education Co-ordinator Laura Alston, hosted a 'Big Thank You' event for volunteers and gardeners. As with 'Friends' groups around the country, FOBs volunteers perform so many important tasks in support of the gardens; from plant sales to organising our lecture programme, and, of course, working alongside the staff team to ensure the Gardens always look their best. Carolyn is looking forward to bringing her own experience to her new role. She says she's not a horticulturalist, but she loves gardening and all things outdoors, she has a flourishing allotment and keeps four hives as well as helping with the bees on a local farm. Carolyn hopes to bring new and different groups into the gardens and offer more flexible ways of volunteering.

Our Lottery funded Education Project continues to build. We have put out a call for activities/sessions and resources which are specifically about, or connected to, Sheffield Botanical Gardens, especially with a focus on nature and horticulture. We hope that the request will bring forward a wide range of experts, education providers and creatives who will help us achieve the aim of upholding Sheffield Botanical Gardens as a site of horticultural excellence and learning. If you would like to be sent more details, or if you have any contacts/networks who may be interested, please get in touch with Laura Alston laura.alston@sheffield.gov.uk

Did you know we offer several virtual tours of the Gardens, which you can follow from your phone around the Gardens, or enjoy on your device from the comfort of your armchair? These include a tour exploring the wildlife (both flora and fauna) you might find in the Autumn. Find more details on our wonderful and informative website under Talks and Tours - scroll down to Virtual Tours www.fobssheffield.co.uk

And last but not least, and no doubt aided by the warmer weather, we are celebrating the superb flowers of *Protea eximia*, which have just bloomed in our South Africa bed. This Protea tolerates quite a wide range of soils and conditions, as well as wind and light frost, and so far it's survived outside in free-draining soil with extra grit and sand. To those of us used to Sheffield's harsher winter conditions, it still seems pretty miraculous to see this growing out in the open and blooming so exotically!



Sharon Watson

Friends of Sheffield Botanical Garden

Photos: Roy Egglestone/Sharon Watson

National Botanic Garden of Wales

Stop press news from Margot Greer:

The NBGW has appointed a new director, Dr Lucy Sutherland –this is the link to the press release

<https://botanicgarden.wales/press/new-director-for-the-national-botanic-garden-of-wales/?fbclid=IwAR3qir5-q9F5lhCSbpWlcPT7BTGBYJvR1Gz8vbEMgC7GxsEjRaqt0VCzBPY>

Margot has had the opportunity to discuss her involvement with the FBGF and Dr Sutherland is keen for their membership to continue.

Friends of Thwaite Botanic Garden

The Friends held a very successful Open Day on Sunday May 22nd. This has now returned to its usual springtime spot following the pandemic. With the added attractions of a local community choir, refreshments, tombola and plant stall, combined with fine weather, there were well over 600 visitors and it was so popular we ran out of cake!

We opened the gardens for Cottingham Open Gardens in June in aid of a local hospice and also hosted a visit for members of the Yorkshire Garden Trust. As Hull is a City of Sanctuary and the University is a University of Sanctuary, we held an event in Refugee week in June called 'Sanctuary in Nature' promoting the role of green spaces in supporting our physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Lindsay Atkinson

Secretary, Friends of Thwaite Botanic Garden

Open Day photos courtesy of Phil Lakin





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