

CSGGA Newsletter

December 2020



RHS Affiliated Membership Number: 10570237

We should like to wish you all a safe, happy and healthy Christmas and a new year filled with love, laughter, happiness and hope.

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Tales of the Great Plant Hunters

Matthew Biggs

We are lucky enough to get some very knowledgeable speakers at the Gardens Association talks (well done, Jan) and December's Zoom lecture was no exception. Again more than 40 members joined us virtually with one commenting "the Zoom talks have been great, especially for those of us who are hardly going inside anywhere until we've had a vaccine!"

Matthew Biggs is a gardener, plantsman, writer, television presenter and frequent broadcaster on Radio 4's 'Gardeners' Question Time'. Briony noted that his Twitter handle is @plantsmadman!

His talk was on the subject of "Great Plant Hunters" who travelled the globe in search of new plants and adventure, and sometimes they got more than they bargained for with regard to the latter.



Banksia Aemula

Joseph Banks was born in 1793 in Lincolnshire to a wealthy family and was able to pursue his passion for botany at an early age with expeditions to Newfoundland and Labrador. He collected many species of plants and animals previously unknown to Western science. In 1768 he joined the crew of HMS Endeavour on a journey to South America, Tahiti, New Zealand, Australia and Java. He is credited with introducing the eucalyptus, acacia, and the genus named after him, Banksia, to the Western world. Around 80 species of plants bear his name.

George Forrest was born in Falkirk in 1873 and spent some time in Australia before he returned to Scotland to work at the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh. He was recommended to A. K. Bulley, who was looking to sponsor an expedition to western China. Forrest travelled to the Yunnan province where he took the time to get to know the people and learn their language. His respect for the local people and their culture was notable.

In the summer of 1905 he and his team stayed as a guest of the French missionary Père Dubernard near the border with Tibet. They collected many plants, specimens and seeds. Their journey back, however, was fraught with danger. The local lamas (warrior priests) would torture and kill any foreigners or local people in contact with foreigners and Forrest and his team were hunted down. Forrest managed to evade the lamas, travelling by night and hiding by day until he was helped by the local indigenous people, the Lissu, who

gave him shelter and disguised him as a Tibetan in order to help him escape. He continued his quest for plants with his friend George Litton, travelling to Tengyueh then up to the Salween district.

Forrest brought back hundreds of pounds of seeds, thousands of roots, tubers and plants, and other specimens including *Rhododendron sinogrande*, *Primula bulleyana* and *Primula beesiana*.

He returned to the area on further expeditions, covering parts of Burma, eastern Tibet and Sichuan province. He discovered over 1200 plants species new to science, as well as many birds and mammals. He died in 1932 of massive heart failure near the town of Tengyueh.



Primula Bullyana

Ernest Wilson was born in 1876, in the Cotswolds. In 1897 he began work at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and was subsequently offered work as a plant collector in China. French missionaries, Père Armand David and Père Jean Marie Delavay had for many years been collecting plants in China, a suitable collector was needed to go there to bring specimens back.

The tree *Davidia involucre* was one of the first plants introduced to the west by Wilson. He travelled for days to find the one tree he had come halfway around the world to see, only to find it had been cut down to make way for a new house! He spent some time looking at alternative plants, one of which was *Actinidia deliciosa*, better known to us as the Kiwi Fruit. Wilson did, however, finally find the *Davidia* tree and collected a large quantity of the seed.

He collected tubers, corms, bulbs and rhizomes, and dried herbarium specimens representing hundreds of plant species together with seeds. Some of the plants he brought back include *Acer griseum*, *Berberis julianae*, *Clematis armandii*, *Clematis montana* var. 'Rubens', *Ilex pernyi*, *Jasminum mesnyi* and *Primula pulverulenta*.

Reginald Farrer was born in 1880 in London. In 1902 he embarked on the first of his expeditions to Eastern Asia, visiting China, Korea and Japan. In 1914 Farrer travelled to Qinghai Tibet and the Province of Kansu province of North-west China with William Purdom. They found numerous hardy specimens that fill many English gardens. Several hardy plants and shrubs which Farrer introduced from China and Burma include many varieties of rhododendron, as well as *Lonicera syringantha*, *Rodgersia aesculifolia*, *Viburnum farreri* and *Potentilla fruticosa*. He died in 1920 at the age of 40 while on a plant-hunting expedition in Burma.

Francis Kingdon Ward was born in 1885 in Manchester. He was offered a place on a zoological expedition to search for new species up the Yangtze in western China and sent a small collection of plants back to Cambridge. In 1911 he was commissioned by A. K. Bulley to collect hardy plants from Yunnan and Tibet to grow in English gardens. He brought back about 200 different species including 22 new to science. Kingdon Ward got lost on both these expeditions and contracted malaria which he suffered from for the rest of his life.



Francis Kingdon Ward in Laos

In 1914 he went to Burma and narrowly escaped death when a massive tree fell on his tent in a storm but he was able to crawl from the wreckage unscathed. During another storm his hut was squashed. He seemed to have more lives than a cat as he was close to the epicentre of an earthquake, registering 9.6 on the Richter magnitude scale, in 1950 during an expedition in Assam.

Among his collections were *Meconopsis betonicifolia*, a Himalayan blue poppy, first discovered by Pére Delavy, *Primula florindae*, and *Rhododendron wardii*, a yellow flowered species.

Frank Kingdon Ward died in 1958 and was buried in the churchyard at Grantchester. Matthew explained how he had visited the grave and was concerned to see the gravestone covered in green lichen. He was able to organise its cleaning and met with members of Kingdon Ward's family.

Matthew's talk was illustrated with numerous photos of the plants and the plant hunters themselves. It was noted that so many of the plants brought back by these intrepid explorers are ubiquitous throughout the gardens of Britain. **Eleanor O'Connor**

An additional note from Anne Lines "Matthew Biggs mentioned that the plant hunter Ernest Wilson was born in Chipping Camden but I don't remember him saying that visitors to the village should go down to the end of the Main Street where there is a little 'hidden gem' - a memorial garden dedicated to Wilson and containing some of the species he discovered in his travels."

Next Month's Talk 14th January 2021 via Zoom 7.45 for 8.00

Medicinal Plants of the Hedgerows – Frances Watkins

Frances Watkins is a medical herbalist. She will tell us about the array of the plants found in the hedgerow, probably considered to be weeds today that can be made into herbal remedies for better health. <https://www.franceswatkins.co.uk/>

This talk will again be via Zoom. Details of how to log in will be sent to you a few days beforehand. The talk will start at 8.00 pm but zoom will be open 15 minutes beforehand and we will stay open after the talk for members to have a chat.

M's Action Diary for December

- Continue to remove spent flowers for pansies and violas to encourage longer flowering
- If your roses suffered for blackspot this year, clear fallen leaves away from the base of the plant to reduce risk of reinfection
- Pinch out tips of wall flowers to promote bushy growth.
- Prune spireas hard to ensure a compact size, shape and colour
- Remove hellebore leaves so that the flowers are seen more easily and to prevent leaf spot disease infecting new foliage.
- Prune standard roses to prevent wind rock.
- Place Poinsettias in a bright location, out of draughts and away from radiators. They are sensitive to fluctuating temperatures which can cause them to shed their leaves. Water carefully but do not over water.
- Get mowers serviced.



Merida wishes all members to compliments of the season, and happy gardening in 2021

Green Gardening Tip



Most pests will be inactive in cold spells, but it's still worth checking in sheltered places, such as the cold frame or greenhouse. During winter the brown garden snail retreats into hibernation to prevent frost damage to its water-abundant body. So now is the season for finding gangs of snails gathered in disused plant pots, in crevices in walls, holes in trees and other protected spots.

Gardening Events and Courses

Chalfont St Giles Open Gardens Day organised by the Memorial Hall Fundraisers will be held on Sunday 6th June from 11.00 to 17.00. More information will be provided nearer the time.

Gardening for Wildlife, Watford & District National Trust Association Thursday, 7 January 2021 20:00 – 21:30
Rob Hopkins will be delivering a talk, via zoom, on 'Wild Life Gardening', described as an informative and

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inspiring lecture. Rob worked for the Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and he is very keen on creating gardens which are great for wildlife and look beautiful too. [Click here](#) to register.

A Yorkshire Spade in a Tuscan Garden Thursday, 14 Jan 2021 15:00 A Yorkshireman compares and contrasts his experience of gardening in Tuscany with the way we relate to our gardens in England. Born and brought up in Yorkshire, as were his parents and grandparents, Nick Dakin-Eliot started gardening early and saw no better place to forge a horticultural career than.....Yorkshire.

This talk compares and contrasts that formative experience with that gained as a result of two decades of gardening in Tuscany, Italy. The gardening traditions and ways of doing things are very different, as are the things folk hope to get from their gardens but, Nick argues, the wholeness of such diverse gardening experience is much greater than the sum of the two halves. Click [here](#) for details

No dig gardening: Why and how? Monday, 18 January 2021 18:00 – 19:00 Cost £3 Market gardener and author Charles Dowding will introduce the concepts of 'no-dig' gardening and its benefits. In this talk Charles will explain the theory behind 'no-dig' gardening and will explore how the different methods can be deployed in various soil types and climates. Always looking to improve on the 'no-dig' method, Charles will be revealing the results of various trials he has been conducting over the past 10 years. Charles will also be revealing his method of producing the all-important compost used in the 'no dig' system and will focus on how he uses this compost to grow salad crops with great success. Click [here](#) for details

Membership Cards for 2021 are in the post!

Thank you for those of you who have paid your subscriptions and returned your membership forms. If you have paid by bank transfer or standing order then we still need your completed forms, please. If you have not renewed your subscription then this is the last newsletter you will be receiving.

Please let Briony know if your membership card does not arrive by the end of December. Please remember that your current card runs until the end of the year for discounts at the relevant garden centres.



Briony's Poinsettia

Those who joined December's zoom meeting will have heard me boast about my poinsettia that was colouring up just in time for Christmas in its second year. Here is photographic evidence - go on, admit you're impressed!

Your CSGGA Committee

Chairman and Membership Secretary:

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Committee Members:

Caroline Jackson	01494 876685
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Sam Patel	01494 875319

New Committee members are always welcome. We are a friendly bunch! Please contact a committee member to find out more if you're interested in joining us.