

HARRISIANA



The Newsletter of the Friends of the Harris Garden

No. 40 MONDAY 28 OCTOBER 2002

Welcome to another *Harrisiana*, the Newsletter of the Friends of the Harris Garden. The garden is named after the late Tom Harris, Professor of Botany in the University of Reading, well-known local gardener and plantsman. It is situated behind the School of Plant Sciences in Whiteknights and open to Friends at reasonable hours and to the public on four Sunday afternoon open days in aid of charities.

The School of Plant Sciences, The University of Reading, Whiteknights, Reading, RG6 6AS, U.K.

Winter Events 2002/2003

All talks are in the Conference Room of Plant Sciences at Reading University and start at 7.30pm unless stated otherwise.

Do remember that all our talks are specially for the Friends and not aimed at the academics at Reading University – I am sure you will enjoy them all.

Wednesday **‘Why we garden as we do’** by Richard Bisgrove – this talk will
13 November focus on garden history, looking briefly at historical events and
relating them to current practice.

Monday **Quiz evening** – this is generally a fun event so do come along
9 December and enjoy some Christmas Cheer as well.

Monday **‘Why are weeds’** – by Bob Froud Williams
13 January

Thursday **‘Science and the nurseryman’** by Ross Cameron
13 February

Week beg **AGM** – date to be confirmed when we have a speaker for the
10 April 03 session after the formal business of the AGM.

April 2003 **Fuchsias** – we will confirm the date of this talk later in the year.

We will give you more information on the content of the talks in the new year nearer the time - but you can put the date in your diary now.

NOTICE BOARD

I expect most of you have seen the new notice board at the entrance to the Harris Garden. This was hand made for us by Don Palmer, a member of the Friends - even the various brass fittings were made to measure. The notice board is weather proof and has its own padlocks which so far have prevented any vandalism. We are all very grateful to Don for this valuable addition to the Harris Garden and we would like to express our thanks to him for all his hard work. We have already had some new members after seeing the information placed there.

We hope to add seasonal information to the notice board and if anyone could help with this, we would be very grateful if they would contact Stephen Jury at the above address.

Last year one of the Friends offered to send us a photo of Tom Harris after whom the garden is named. If they or any others of you still have a photo of him, we would welcome a loan of it to make a copy. Please send to Stephen Jury at Plant Sciences (address above)

THE TONY MILLER LEGACY

At the last AGM in April, our Treasurer Dave Collett informed us that the total which we have now received from the Tony Miller estate is £49,000.

Various ideas for expenditure were put forward at the meeting including:

Greenhouse for the walled garden

This would allow Alan Hayes to grow plants for the garden. The cost for the shell for the greenhouse is currently estimated at £26,000 - on top of this are costs for:

- Low wall on 2 sides of the green house
- Staging
- Heating equipment
- Staging

These could cost £20,000 or more.

The running costs of the greenhouse would be met by the University as would the maintenance costs.

The meeting considered such expenditure would be a fitting memorial to Mr Miller

Other ideas included:

- Paths to provide wheelchair access
- Alpine area
- Grasses area
- Order beds
- Labelling

Those of you who did not attend the AGM may have further ideas and we would suggest that you inform Dr Stephen Jury of your ideas.

We believe we have received the total from the legacy and will now consult you our Friends on how you would like to spend the money. At present the pumping system for the stream has to be altered and we may need to spend some of the legacy money on this.

SUBSCRIPTIONS 2002/03

We are still waiting for some subscriptions for the current year - if you have lost the subscription form either email David Hewitt or telephone him on 0118 987 2119.

Many of you are now on Email and it would greatly assist in the sending out of letters, etc., if we could email these to you. When renewing your membership please complete the email section of the form.

THE FRIENDS OF THE HARRIS GARDEN COMMITTEE

As many of you know Ann Lee resigned as our Secretary at the last AGM, a post she held for 15 years. We thank her most profusely for all the hard work that she has put in on the Friends' behalf over this long period. At the 2002 AGM, a number of Friends offered to help with the various tasks she had taken on as below:

Treasurer	Dave Collett - <u>agreed for one more year</u>
Membership secretary	David Hewitt
Open Day Sub-committee	Derek and Keyna Press Richard Bisgrove Ruth Palmer
Harrisiana Sub-committee	Stephen Jury Ian and Elizabeth Finch Ted Bell Ruth Palmer
Botanika	Student to be asked to sit on the Friends Committee to assist co-ordination of events that the two Societies arrange. (Botanika is the name the students give to their Departmental Society.)
Events Planning	Ann Lee agreed to take on this role.

You will see that our Treasurer, Dave Collett, has agreed to fill the post for one more year only - if anyone would be interested in taking on this role next year please get in touch with Stephen Jury or David Hewitt.

News from the Harris Garden from Alan Hayes, Head Gardener at the Harris Garden

After the addition of the stream and small ponds and the new conifer circle we are now going to have a period of consolidation before moving on to any more major projects. All we are doing at the moment is making a small bed as an addition to the Gold Garden. I think most of you know that I retire in April 03 and it is only fair that any new projects are started by Julia Wesley, who is taking over from me.

The Stream

We have recently added a gate valve to the flow pipe from the pump in the new stream which has stopped that tidal wave we had before and which has slowed down the amount of debris

that was washed down. We are hoping that we won't now get the blockages in the pipe under the drive that we were getting before. We have had lots of complimentary comments about the stream and it is nice to have some running water in the garden. I just wish we had some natural water in the garden. Perhaps some time in the future the little ponds can be concreted instead of the liner, it will make water proofing the joint between the rocks and the pond base so much easier.

The Conifer Circle

There are a few more conifers to go into the new conifer circle, this should be done in the next few weeks. A plaque will be put there with all the names of the members who kindly contributed money for the plants.

The Greenhouse

The proposal to put up a lean-to glasshouse in the walled garden has come up against some problems at the estimate stage and we are trying to get them ironed out but it is taking time and we seem to be going round in circles and not getting the answers to the questions we've asked.

Global warming

Now to global warming--- has it made any difference to what we grow in the garden and how we grow it? No! At least not yet. Anything that is the least suspect for hardiness we still lift or propagate from and over winter under glass. It still is too large a risk to leave them out. The Jungle Garden has an excellent micro climate and it is always warmer in there than anywhere else in the garden, especially in the winter and when the sun is out on a cold winters day it can almost be 'shirts off' weather. You will have noticed how well the palms are growing in there and I am sure that that is due to the micro climate rather than the warmer winters. The wetter springs have done the garden the world of good, several years ago a lot of the major trees were suffering from lack of rain and they were looking very thin in the top of the canopy, now they look much better.

New staff

Finally, we have two new members of staff, Robin Frew, who has been with us for several months and came from a landscape company, and Yuko Ono, who has been at Writtle College and has a lot of experience as a florist in Japan.

FERNS AND CONVULVULUSES OF MOROCCO

Recently, Dr Stephen Jury and Mr Ronald Rutherford went on a short plant-hunting trip to Morocco with former Reading graduates Dr Fred Rumsey and Dr Mark Carine, now both working at the Natural History Museum, London. Mark is now studying the genus *Convolvulus* in Morocco and the Canary Islands and Fred the ferns of the western Mediterranean in conjunction with comparative studies on the same and related British species. Plants were also collected to grow in the new botanical garden being developed at the Institut Agronomique et Vétérinaire Hassan II, Rabat. They were also joined by Ms Rosminah Brown, one of our MSc students in Plant Diversity who undertook research on the garden for her project. The Institut provided a Mitsubishi Pajero with driver and their herbarium technician, Mr Mohamed Ait Lafkih to accompany them in the field.

The old *Catalogue des Plantes du Maroc* lists no fewer than 19 species of *Convolvulus*, four endemic to the country and most very garden-worthy, though I suspect difficult to grow. The *RHS Plant Finder* currently lists five of the Moroccan species. It is interesting just how many habitats they occurred in: *Convolvulus arvensis*, *C. humilis* and *C. gharbensis* were field

weeds; *C. althaeoides*, *C. tenuissimus*, *C. trabutianus* (a spiny shrub in the south), *C. cantabricus*, *C. supinus*, *C. siculus*, *C. tricolor* and *C. pitardii*, roadside banks—though the last under cedar trees with *Cytisus battandieri*; *C. lineatus* was a silver-leaved, plantain-like plant in heavily grazed grassland at altitude, somewhat ruderal, while *C. mazicum* is a real alpine! The genus also shows a wide variation in flower colour with blue, white, pink and yellow corollas. We missed the most well-known species of gardens, *C. mauritanicus*. (This is now thought to be the same species as *C. sabatius* from Sicily and is at most only recognised as a subspecies, *C. sabatius* subsp. *mauritanicus*, the Sicilian one being subsp. *sabatius*.) Mark collected leaf samples in plastic bags with silica gel to dry them for DNA analysis back at the Natural History Museum. We hope this work will throw some light on the origins of the species in the Canary Islands.

However, the expedition started off in the north with a successful search for the Marsh Fern, *Thelypteris palustris*, just south of the town of Larache on the Atlantic coast. This species had been recorded before from Bou Charen near Larache with a single specimen known at Kew collected by the Spaniard Font Quer and the Frenchman Maire in the 1920s. This was not fertile and without the characteristic thin, wide-creeping rhizome so characteristic of the species that its identity was not certain. It was in a fen under willows by a small river, so we all got wet feet. It is clearly under threat, as it grows in an area grazed by horses and only yards from habitation and the main road south from Tangiers. Its chances of survival for the next 80 years are not good! Further rare ferns were found on the north-east outskirts of Tangiers itself where a wooded valley with a small stream went down to the sea. The first find was *Asplenium hemionitis*, a relative of our Harts Tongue Fern, *A. scolopendrium* on a moist soil bank under pine trees. Nearby under willows in a marshy patch were some splendid fertile plants of *Osmunda regalis*, Royal Fern and *Athyrium filix-femina*, both very rare in Morocco. However, on trees and rocks facing the sea we found *Davallia canariensis*, known only from this part, a few localities in southern Spain and, of course, the Canary Islands. Whilst in the area, we paid our money and visited the Grottes d’Hercule where to our delight, *Asplenium marinum* was still growing high up on the roof, near the entrance to the sea, one of its six known localities.

WILD LIFE IN THE HARRIS GARDEN

Alan Hayes gave a talk in November on the wild life in the Harris Garden. We were all surprised at the extent and variety of animals and birds which visit the garden. Alan has kindly sent us the following list of wildlife. Can Friends add any records to this? We should compile a catalogue! Any volunteers? Are any of our Friends ornithologists?

Birds

Blackbird	Grey Wagtail	Pied Wagtail
Blackcap	Hedge Sparrow	Red Legged Partridge
Blue Tit	Heron	Redwing
Bullfinch	Jackdaw	Robin
Canada Goose	Jay	Song Thrush
Chaffinch	Kingfisher	Sparrowhawk
Coal Tit	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	Starling
Collard Dove	Little Owl	Tawny Owl
Crow	Long-tailed Tit	Teal
Goldcrest	Magpie	Tree Sparrow
Goldfinch	Mallard	Treecreeper
Goshawk	Mandarin Duck	Willow Warbler

Great Spotted Woodpecker
Great Tit
Green Woodpecker
Greenfinch

Mistle Thrush
Moorhen
Nuthatch
Pheasant

Wood Duck
Wood Pigeon
Wren

Mammals

Field Mice
Field Vole
Fox
Grey Squirrel
Hedgehog
Mole

Mammals contd

Muntjack Deer
Noctule Bat
Pipistrel Bat
Rabbit
Rat
Weasel

Reptiles

Common Newt
Frog
Grass Snake
Toad

PLANTS AND PLACES IN PERSIA

The Friends of Ness Gardens (part of the University of Liverpool, situated in the Wirral) intend to run their second non-profit making trip to Iran, 4th -18th May 2003. They ask if any of our Friends are interested in joining them.

The will be visiting the Kerman and Alborz mountains. The trip will be accompanied by Dr Vahideh Nazeri, an English speaking botanist from Kerman University. There will also be visits to some of the principal historic sites.

Iran is a country with spectacular scenery, super plants and friendly people. Its wonderful mountains and sites include the world famous Persepolis and Isfahan.

Detailed arrangements have still to be completed. If you would like them when available, please contact Mr J Irons, 74 Brimstage Road, Heswall, Wirral CH60 1XG Tel 0151 342 1703.

OBITUARIES

A.W.A. [Bill] Baker (1916—2001)

Although Bill died last year and his death was mentioned before in *Harrisiana*, I am reproducing with permission the full obituary of the late Bill Baker by Richard Nutt. It was originally published in the *Newsletter* (36: 2--5, Summer 2001) of the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Group of the National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens (NCCPG). Bill had been one of our prominent Friends who had lectured to us, welcomed us to his garden on several occasions, supported our meeting and plant sales with numerous offerings from his garden.

Bill rang me in mid-February to say he was sorry not to have been at the AGM of the BBO NCCPG Group. Last autumn he said he was not so well, but was not specific; perhaps it should not have been a shock to hear that he had died in his sleep on 17th March after a day's gardening, but it was so. Later I learnt that he had been slowing down, but he still had enormous energy. I was to hear from so many people: "Oh I shall miss him; he was always so helpful in answering my questions". When I started to make a garden at Great Barfield, on what was a virgin meadow, I was asked to come and have some plants. It was only one of a number of plant collection visits; much of my early planting was from Bill.

He was a dentist and after Hitler's war practised in Wells, moving to Wallingford in 1953. He founded Wallingford Gardening Club and organised the programme for a great many years. Joan was the Chairman. I recall him saying what pleasure it gave him and Joan to be appointed joint Presidents of the Club. He had a great ability in persuading people to undertake voluntary work. Philippa Grierson used to recall being persuaded by him to become the Programme Secretary. He knew so many people and so often I would ring him for the name of a lecturer on a particular subject. But on occasion, I was chastised for choosing someone who was not so good!

Bill and Joan were Members of the Horticultural Club, the oldest horticultural dining club in the country. It meets in the winter on RHS Show days. They and Mr and Mrs Harry Hay put up with me joining them for dinner; I learnt much from the conversation, in spite of the appalling acoustics of the restaurant. Harry is one of the greatest gardeners to be found.

In 1957 there was a move to Tidmarsh, to Old Rectory Cottage, to provide more land for gardening and for Joan's Arab horses. For a number of years she was a successful breeder. The garden was totally neglected and pigs were put in to clear it, but while this went well, the pigs brought the underlying chalk to the surface. This is not an ideal medium for gardening, particularly with a high water table from the adjacent River Pang. Most years the Pang would flood much of the back garden, and the adjoining lake only helped to let in the river. But the lake allowed for a greater diversity of plants to be grown and from time to time they used to have the silt removed -- quite an undertaking.

Bill found that if he put tree branches round the sides of a new bed, filled the space with compost, and then planted potatoes he was able to form a good medium for his plants. This was successful, not least for his lilies, but the subsoil was rather wetter than they liked.

He was an inveterate planter and propagator; the plants were planted three deep, as in Devon they were propagated and planted into other parts of the garden or given away. When the garden was open for various charities, his plant sales had a mass of rarities. He never came to a meeting or garden occasion without plants to spread to others.

Alas, few lilies bred by amateurs in the last half century are still grown; vast sums of money have been successfully spent on breeding for the cut flower trade. Bill preferred the delicate Turk's Cap forms. He registered four: *Lilium* 'Pink Flush', downward hanging, cream with an overlay of pink, 'Bill's Special', sideways facing, coppery but bleached; 'Bountiful', sideways facing, pink, and the grex Wyattwood, one of Oliver Wyatt's *L. parryi* seedlings crossed with Derek Fox's "Bullwood" hybrids. Bill wrote about his lilies in the *RHS Lily Yearbooks*. In the early 1980s, he was the Treasurer of the RHS Lily Group, not that this was his metier, but it was really to keep the Group running through a difficult time.

There is a charming account of the Geraniums he collected in Trevor Bath and Joy Jones' book *The Gardeners' Guide to Growing Hardy Geraniums* (David & Charles, 1994). Without doubt, the white-flowered variant of *Geranium pyrenaicum*, with its grey foliage, was a great introduction; with me it seeds about, never invasive, unlike some of the meadow fodder plants he grew. 'You do not use Roundup' he would say, when I complained about them; I think they were a problem due to the difference in soil between our gardens. In the article he refers to joining the Alpine Garden Society, and the field trips to Europe lead by Gerard Parker. I was fortunate to be on at least one of these, when some of us walked from Macunaga in Italy to Sass Fee in Switzerland. On another occasion I met Bill and Joan on the Alpe di Suisi, above

Val Gardena. I was going to spend the night at the Schlern Houses to see the sunrise over the Rosengarten, so vividly described by Reginald Fairer in *The Dolomites*. Bill and Joan were just wandering along the largest high alp in Europe. I never did see the sunrise, as there were thunderstorms all night, to go with the damp sheets! Bill was a great supporter of the Alpine Garden Society Group at Oxford, where he became President, and also held the same position at Newbury.

The Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust (formerly BBONT) was a cause very dear to Bill. Regularly, he raised considerable sums in its support, as he did in recent years for St. Lawrence's Church in Tidmarsh. For a number of years the church magazine published Bill's nature notes, and it was a popular item.

Climbing roses, the sans style ones, were a feature of his trees, until the tree collapsed. *Rosa* 'Cerise Bouquet' was a very successful climber, much to visitors' surprise. An area of the garden was planted as a Salicetum. He and I visited John White at Westonbirt to see the Lowland Willow Collection. We each returned with cuttings of, to me, new varieties, and were able to send him quite a few species and varieties not in the collection.

Reading Gardeners also benefited from Bill being Programme Secretary for a great many years, always finding the best lecturers. He was Chairman in their centenary year, and it was very memorable. He became President following the death of Mrs Esther Merton of The Old Rectory, Burghfield.

We shall all miss his kindness and friendliness. It was with great pleasure that we learnt in 1995 that the RHS had awarded him a Veitch Memorial Medal, in gold, "for his contribution to horticulture through the National Gardens Scheme and his plant hunting expeditions".

R.D. Nutt

BOOKS

Shrubby Potentillas

By Diana Miller, Royal Horticultural Society, Wisley, 2002. [A4 size booklet. 20pp. £1.50. ISSN 1477—9153]

This booklet has arisen from a recent RHS trial of shrubby potentillas and is principally a catalogue with descriptions and illustrations (smaller than postage stamps – definitive issue size, not larger commemorative ones at that!). It deals with no less than 94 cultivars which it classifies into six main groups based on flower size and colour. It is an essential reference for anybody seeking a special potentilla or to learn which cultivars have been given the 'Award of Garden Merit'.

This information is also available from the RHS website (www.rhs.org.uk) for those with access to the internet. [The RHS website is full of useful horticultural data and is being rapidly developed at present. The contents of *The RHS Plant Finder* are also available here.]

S. L. Jury