



Patron: HRH the Duchess of Cornwall
President: Dan Clayton-Jones OBE, KStJ, TD, DL

Newsletter

Issue 17 February 2013

Jekka McVicar, talking on “The world of herbs”



Jekka McVicar has agreed to be the guest speaker after the CPGT AGM on 20th March 2013 at 7.30 pm in the St Quentin Suite, Bear Hotel, Cowbridge.

Crowned the 'Queen of Herbs' by Jamie Oliver and a Rick Stein's food hero, Jekka McVicar's passion for herbs started in early childhood when her mother taught her to make fresh mint sauce. Jekka first started growing her own organic herbs in a small back garden in Bristol over 25 years ago, and organic herbs have been her life ever since. In 1987 Jekka and her family established Jekka's Herb Farm, producing herbs for mail order, from its present location in South Gloucestershire.

As well as the day-to-day running of the farm, Jekka is also well known for her regular appearances on TV and radio gardening and cookery broadcasts. She is also an enthusiastic writer on herbs, having published five successful books. She has achieved 62 RHS gold medals, including 14 golds at RHS Chelsea. Jekka is an elected member of the RHS Council, the governing body of the RHS responsible for its strategic direction, and sits on a number of RHS committees. Jekka is also President of the West of England Herb Society. See www.jekkasherbfarm.com.

Places are limited so early booking is essential, priority being given to CPGT members. We hope that you will also support the CPGT by attending the AGM at 6.30 pm—entry to that is, of course, free.

Message from the Chair, Jo Homfray



For all those who are involved in outside activities, the last few months have been extremely testing as a result of the extraordinarily persistent rain — and even snow.

Nevertheless our stalwart Garden Volunteers have gallantly visited the Physic Garden every Thursday, even if they can only have a cup of coffee and discuss what needs to be done in the garden once conditions become more favourable! Of course, as you will know, true gardeners seldom let up in the winter months, for tools need to be sharpened and cleaned, seeds ordered, bulbs planted, lists and plans made, sheds sorted! This has all been done, and I salute them for their unflagging energy and enthusiasm.

We have got some great new Volunteers in the Garden, and have also said a sad goodbye to one of our most loyal ones — Val Bertorelli, who worked in the Garden for several years. We thank her, and wish her well in her new life in Gloucestershire.

The Garden is in a good place thanks to our Volunteers in the Garden, on the Maintenance front, on the Marketing front, and with its Board of Trustees. All play an important part to keep this jewel in the Vale thriving.

There is much to look forward to in the coming months. Our AGM on 20th March will be followed by a wonderful talk from Jekka McVicar and is an event not to be missed. Also in the spring we have our Annual Plant Sale on 27th April in Cowbridge Hall Gardens. A justifiably popular event.

Let's hope for drier days and more blue sky! A happy and healthy New Year to you all.

Volunteers News

October 2012

Beth Chatto headlines one of her autumn descriptions in her book 'The Shade Garden' as 'Glowing Berries'. Indeed we might do the same when looking at the Physic Garden. The Spindle Tree by the Plant Sales area is covered with exotic looking pink and orange fruits. Esther tells us that the Dutch refer to the fruits as cardinals' hats which they indeed resemble. The Medlar tree is also looking beautiful as the foliage changes colour against the fruits.



We have now planted clumps of the old Narcissi from Ron Scamp round the garden and in a couple of pots in the container by the office.

Much of the month has been spent trying to dodge the rain but on a sunny day a volunteer saw a Comma butterfly and our Robin (possibly two?) continues to hold sway over his/her territory.

November 2012

The Physic Garden's contribution to the Holy Cross Church Christmas Tree Festival is looking lovely—a huge thank you to Rebecca for organising that again and those who helped to decorate. With Christmas in mind we also decorated the Memorial Crown.



We had a small celebratory party in the garden as we said a fond goodbye to volunteer Val Bertorelli and presented her with a lovely picture of primroses which was commissioned from Gillian.

The garden has been gradually 'put to bed' though we still leave some seed heads for the birds and some of the large stems of plants such as *Elecampane* for insects to live in. Val Caple has harvested the few grapes we had this year – she has about 3lb. of grapes which she hopes to turn into juice for the volunteers.

Timothy Clark in Cambridgeshire has given us some old variety hyacinth bulbs. Mary tells me that some of these hyacinth cultivars had become extinct in the West after World War II, but a botanist, Dr. Rita Raziulyte (now in her nineties), saved some 30 cultivars in her native Lithuania and the hyacinth cultivars made their way to Britain. In gratitude, Gillian painted a picture of a double yellow pre-Victorian cultivar which she has sent to Dr. Raziulyte. Gillian has now received a delightful letter thanking her for the picture of the hyacinth which now resides in her bedroom.



December 2012

Philip Miller, 'Gardener to the Worshipful Company of Apothecaries at their Botanic Garden at Chelsea', first published his much-read volume in 1732; the seventeenth, and final, edition came out in 1792. It is a Kalendar (sic) of the works necessary to be done in the kitchen, fruit and flower gardens. December, he writes, is the darkest month of the whole year, and "is subject to different sorts of weather: sometimes the ground is frozen up, so that little can be done in the garden: and at other times there are hard rains and thick fogs, which render it very uncomfortable stirring abroad, but especially to persons of tender constitutions: and this weather is very injurious to tender plants". At this time of year,

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he recommends you pick snails out of the holes of old walls or from under pales, hedges, broken pots or other rubbish. (Taken from 'The Garden in Winter' Rosemary Verey).

Well, that certainly describes our experiences this December in the Physic Garden though I don't think we have been picking snails out of holes. The sparrows are using the fountain as a bath while our robin flits around the garden, helping us tidy up!

Despite the heavy rain and frosts we have managed to plant the old variety tulips. We have also had a gift of small species tulips – *Tulipa clusiana* – from Rob Evans at Pheasant Acre Nursery in Llangan.

I walked round the garden yesterday and standing out in the gloom by the Old Hall entrance are the lovely green Hellebores – *Helleborus foetidus* – standing proud against the red stems of the Cornus and as you turn back towards the shrubbery near the office the Honesty catches your eye.

January 2013

"Gardening is hard work, as a Victorian apprentice up before dawn in January to sweep the gravel paths of the great could certainly tell you. And it can bring fears as well as pleasure, frets as well as promise: in the middle of the eighteenth century a stout doctor, Erasmus Darwin, was stomping around his garden in his boots and greatcoat, writing the name of every plant in a scuffed brown notebook and mapping his small kingdom 'near the sundial', 'behind the shed', 'between the house and the river' and writing anxious notes like 'lost', or even more poignant, 'lost?'" (A Little History of British Gardening, Jenny Uglow).

Well, we're not necessarily up before dawn, but we have certainly mapped the garden and made little notes with question marks. We've been checking labels, noting missing plants, considering what needs to be ordered and so on. Glen has cleared the ground and walls behind the Magnolia and we have planted snowdrops (*Galanthus nivalis*). The combination is lovely. Rebecca tells me that snowdrops were used in Queen Victoria's wedding bouquet!

Walking round the garden the signs of early spring are appearing. The winter aconites have been flowering for weeks and now the primroses along the Pergola wall are really blooming well. The two *Cornus mas* (Cornelian Cherry) have just broken into flower.

Val Thomas, Gardening Group.

Excerpts from the monthly Newsletter for the regular volunteers.

The latest issue of the Volunteers Newsletter is available on the website at www.cowbridgephysicgarden.org.uk.



Introducing the Volunteers

Esther Boots

In July of last year for the first time I wandered around the Physic Garden in Cowbridge. I immediately got struck by the beauty of the garden and I was hoping they could use another volunteer. I was really happy to hear they did, so I joined.



I'm Esther Boots 34 years old and Dutch from origin. I have been living in Wales now since August 2011. We've moved to Wales because my partner Taco (also Dutch) was asked to join a project at Tata Steel in Port Talbot. We didn't hesitate for a moment and went for the adventure. I quit my job at de GGD, an organization for prevention in public health, where I worked as a quality manager. Our first year in Wales we lived in Tonmawr but we had to move. We've found a nice home in Llanblethian where we moved to in July 2012. And it was the best thing that could happen to us because otherwise I wouldn't have found the Physic Garden.

Since Taco's contract is only for 19 months we decided I could make the most of my time in Wales and enjoy life (and support Taco of course). Besides practicing my hobbies like photography, walking, horse riding, cooking and baking, I wanted to do some volunteer work as well. In Tonmawr I did some volunteering for Pelenna Communities First like helping out with cooking at a primary school and organizing nature activities for children in the village.



Esther (left) was handed the 'key' to the 'Skin, Nails and Hair' bed by Val Bertorelli when she left

Nature is one of my biggest interests in life. In my spare time in the Netherlands, I followed a course to become a nature guide. After that, I became a volunteer at an organization for nature education. Plants and herbs are two of the subjects I liked most. Therefore the Physic Garden really caught my attention. I'm not a really experienced gardener but I love to learn and the other volunteers can teach me a lot.

Taco and I have really fallen in love with Wales because of its beauty and diverse nature and really friendly people. So we are now hoping Taco's contract will be extended and that we can stay longer. I really hope I can continue to be a volunteer at the Physic Garden, because I love being part of such an inspirational group of people.

More of Esther's photos can be found on the website.

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Three New Features in the Garden

The CPGT frequently acquires new plants but we rarely add new features, which are always donations. Recently the garden has been enhanced by three interesting additions.

A Pestle and Mortar on an elegant Plinth. The cast iron Georgian Mortar was dug up from a garden in a nearby village. It was donated by Colwyn Jones and has been acid cleaned and painted. The CPGT had the Pestle made and the Plinth was donated by Cowbridge Rotary,



The Memorial Bench for Mike Meredith.

Mike was a much loved Trustee, whose fun, generosity of spirit and twinkly sense of humour is greatly missed. He was also an immensely popular figure in Cowbridge and did much for the community. The seat was designed by Robert Cope and funded by Mike's family, 'The Bears' and the CPGT.



The Iolo Morganwg Plaque. The slate plaque contains an ode 'To Laudanum' by Iolo Morganwg and marks the second footstep in the Trail designed by Creative Rural Communities to celebrate this colourful character.

See www.visitthevale.com or booklets are free from Costa and The Bear Hotel in Cowbridge, The Bush Inn in St Hilary, The Blue Anchor in East Aberthaw and St Illtud's Church in Llantwit Major.



Cards and gifts

A range of Notelets and the CPGT tea towel and umbrella are available from The Bay Tree, Cowbridge. These items, plus a range of plants, are available for sale from volunteers in the Physic garden on a Thursday. All proceeds are used to support the garden.

The Opium Poppy

(*Papaver somniferum*, Cwsglys)

The generic name for poppies – *papaver* – according to the *Flora Medica* has links with the Celtic word *papa* or *pap* – the soft baby food in which poppy seeds were mixed to encourage infant slumber – *somniferum* means ‘causing sleep’.

The opium poppy is an annual plant which originated from Asia and has been cultivated on a large scale there and in Europe for many centuries. The oldest reference to it is found in Mesopotamia in the Assyrian Herbal of 2000 BC. The Arabs referred to it as Abou-el-noum – the father of sleep- and in about 800 BC Hippocrates, the Greek Physician, referred to it as ‘poppy-wine’ and noted its effects. According to the ancient Greeks, the poppy was created by the God of Sleep to help Ceres who, in despair as she was unable to recover her daughter who had been abducted by Pluto, was neglecting her duties as the Goddess of Crops. After her refreshing poppy-induced sleep the corn grew to a full harvest.

It is thought that the Roman legionnaires brought seeds to the UK in their clothes, on the hooves of their horses and in the fodder for their animals. The developing road networks, with their newly-turned verges, provided ideal seed beds and the plants quickly spread throughout the country. The plant is mentioned in the early herbals of Gerard and Parkinson who wrote that many forms being found in gardens in Britain.

The foliage is an attractive grey-green and the large flowers vary in colour from white, mauve and red to almost black. There are double and fringed forms, mentioned by Parkinson in the 17th century.

The seed capsules have a latex containing the crude drug – opium – from which laudanum, as well as morphine and codeine, can be produced and used for inducing sleep and as a painkiller. The dried seed heads and seeds are used in floristry and in baking. The plant has a history of hope and despair, being used and abused by man over centuries to this present day.

Further information

Poppies: The Poppy Family in the Wild and in Cultivation. Christopher Grey-Wilson, London: B. T. Batsford Limited, 1993. *Plants from the Past.* David Stuart & James Sutherland, New York: Viking, 1987. *The Origin of Garden Plants.* John Fisher, London: Constable, 1982. *Flora of the British Isles.* A.R. Clapham, T.G. Tutin & F.E. Warburg, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952. Mary Wallis

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Cowbridge Health Centre

When the new Cowbridge and Western Vale Group Practice Building was being planned, the Group Practice Manager, Patricia Hold wanted to find a suitable subject for display as Wall-Art in the Reception area.

Patricia had helped in the early days of the garden and was a regular visitor as it developed, enjoying its relaxing ambiance. When the time came to choose a subject for the Wall-Art, Patricia had the answer – a photograph of the Physic Garden would be visually appealing and highly appropriate in a health context. The photographer Jenny Lilly took a number of photographs but the one finally chosen was perfect – a suitable view of the garden which also matched the décor of the Reception Area. *Robert Moore*

Dates for your diary!

CPGT AGM 20th March 2013 6.30 pm

After the business meeting, at 7.30 pm, Jekka McVicar will talk on “The world of herbs”. Tickets, £7.50, are available from Val Caple using the enclosed booking form.

Annual Plant Fair 27th April 2013

Plants galore will be available both from specialist nurseries and the garden volunteers. Please support us by donating plants in advance and buying plants, raffle tickets etc. on the day.

CPGT Members Garden Party Friday 21st June 2013

This is advance notice of this enjoyable annual event. The invitations will be sent out with the next issue of the Newsletter.

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