Occasional Papers from
The RHS Lindley Library

VOLUME FIFTEEN
MAY 2017
RHS gardens in the
nineteenth century
Cover illustration:

View of the Gardens from the International Exhibition. From Andrew Murray, The Book of the Royal Horticultural Society (1863)
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Occasional Papers from the RHS Lindley Library

Editor Vol 15: Dr Brent Elliott. Editor Vol 16: Elizabeth Koper
Production & layout: Richard Sanford

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For further information, or to request an appointment, please contact:

RHS Lindley Library, London 80 Vincent Square
London SW1P 2PE
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E: library.london@rhs.org.uk

RHS Lindley Library, Wisley
RHS Garden Wisley
Woking GU23 6QB
T: 01483 212428
E: library.wisley@rhs.org.uk

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Occasional Papers

from the

RHS Lindley Library

Volume Fifteen

May 2017

RHS gardens in the nineteenth century
This volume of the Lindley Library *Occasional Papers* series is dedicated to Dr Brent Elliott, the first editor of this series, who retires at the end of May this year. Dr Elliott joined the Lindley Library in 1977. He was Head Librarian from 1982 to 2007, charting the Lindley Library through its move to new premises within Vincent Square and overseeing the mammoth task of creating a digital catalogue of the printed collections. In 2007 Dr Elliott was appointed to a post created specifically for him, that of RHS Historian. As an undoubted authority on the history of the Society and British horticulture in general, and as a generous and committed librarian who has supported countless researchers and colleagues, Dr Elliott has made a unique contribution to the Royal Horticultural Society and the Lindley Library in particular.
The Horticultural Society’s eagle

FIONA DAVISON
c/o The RHS Lindley Library, The Royal Horticultural Society, London

The archive of the RHS, housed at the Lindley Library, includes a collection of minute books for the Garden Committee tasked with overseeing the Society’s garden at Chiswick. I have been consulting these minute books to help with a research project looking at the training scheme for gardeners that the Horticultural Society ran from 1822 to 1829. As I was looking through the Garden Committee minute book for 1823, one word in one entry leapt out, sparking one of those detours that are the hallmark of archival research. That word was “eagle”.

Amongst routine references to plants acquired and gardeners hired, the minutes for the Garden Committee meeting of 2 June 1823 state, “Captain Sabine’s offer of the Eagle brought by him from Maraham [sic] be accepted and that a proper place be proposed for the bird, in the Ornamental Experimental Garden”. Further research revealed that the bird was a male Harpy eagle. The Harpy eagle (Harpia harpyja) is the most powerful raptor to be found in the Americas and is one of the largest eagles in the world. It inhabits tropical lowland rainforests in Central and South America. This entry prompted a number of questions, not least what made the Horticultural Society decide to take on the care of a large, and apparently dangerous bird?

The eagle was to be placed in the Society’s garden at Chiswick, which it had taken on in April of the previous year. The garden was on a plot of land between Turnham Green and the grounds belonging to the Duke of Devonshire’s Chiswick House. The primary purpose of the garden was to grow fruit, vegetables, ornamental trees and plants in order to correct nomenclature, test varieties and cultivation techniques. The place that the Council proposed to house the eagle was the Ornamental Experimental garden, the area of the Chiswick Garden where new ornamental plant introductions and cultivation techniques were trialled. Unfortunately none of the garden plans that survive indicate the exact positioning of the eagle’s new home. However, we know that the eagle would have shared that part of the garden with exotic plants from around the world, some sent back by

1 RHS Archive ref: RHS/minutes/VS/Garden Committee/2
the Society’s own plant collectors, others sent by generous Fellows and a network of “Corresponding Members”. There is a long history of affluent British landowners acquiring exotic creatures to add interest and beauty to their gardens and parklands. Just next door to the Society’s Chiswick Garden, the Duke of Devonshire kept a menagerie in the grounds of Chiswick House which included tigers, emus and a kangaroo. The eminent garden writer John Claudius Loudon even seriously suggested that the new glasshouse technology could be used to create miniature exotic worlds where plants, animals and even people should be exhibited together, with natives in costume acting as guides and curators (Loudon, 1817: 49).

However, it is highly unlikely that the members of the Garden Committee had the concept of the eagle as an ornamental or educational addition to the plant display in mind when they accepted this gift. Whilst the Garden was open to Fellows of the Society and their guests, the Garden was most definitely intended as a resource for serious horticultural study. It was not a public pleasure ground and it is highly unlikely that the eagle was acquired as a visitor attraction. Public fêtes and garden shows were not introduced until 1827 and even then with resistance from some quarters. Moreover at the time that the Council decided to take on the care of an eagle, the Garden was still under construction. Fences were still being built, paths laid, glasshouses constructed. The Society was incurring expense at an alarming rate. Already by 1823 there were concerns that subscriptions to the garden were lower than anticipated and that the Society was struggling to cover the ever-escalating costs of creating and running the garden. In this context the decision to accept Captain Sabine’s offer appears eccentric. In fact the acquisition of the eagle was emblematic of a combination of high-minded horticultural ambition, scientific curiosity, social deference and a staggering lack of basic common sense that was to bring the Horticultural Society to the brink of financial ruin.

The answer to why the Horticultural Society of London decided to accept this inconvenient gift can be found in the identity of the person offering it, and his connections. Captain Edward Sabine was the younger brother of Joseph Sabine, the Secretary of the Horticultural Society. In 1823 Joseph Sabine was at the height of his influence in the Society, masterminding and overseeing virtually every aspect of the formation and operation of the Chiswick Garden. He was not paid a salary and had already donated sizeable collections of plants to the garden. Members of an eminent Anglo-Irish family, both brothers were fascinated by science and natural
Fig. 1. “Harpyia destructor”. The harpy eagle as illustrated in the *Penny Cyclopaedia*, 1838.
history and were active collectors of plant, animal and mineral specimens. Edward Sabine was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in April 1818, and would eventually become its President. He served in the military but was given leave of absence to pursue scientific experiments. Edward Sabine was a diligent and careful scientist. By 1821 he had turned his attention to the science of geodesy, the branch of mathematics dealing with the shape and area of the earth. In particular he hoped that by measuring the length of a seconds pendulum in different latitudes, he would be able to calculate the “oblateness” of the Earth – i.e. the degree to which the shape of the earth departs from perfect sphericity. Between 1821 and 1823 he travelled halfway around the world with his pendulums and carried out an enormous number of precise measurements on the coasts of Africa and the Americas. These travels also gave him the opportunity to indulge in his enthusiasm for collecting natural history specimens, alive and dead. On this particular journey, he agreed to bring along a plant collector to collect material for the Horticultural Society. George Don, an ex-foreman of the Chelsea Physic Garden, was engaged in this role and he was given a specific brief to focus on collecting seeds or plants “likely to be useful as fruits on account of their first importance and next to take those plants which will be esteemed in our gardens for their beauty and singularity”\(^1\). On board HMS *Iphigenia* and then HMS *Pheasant*, Captain Sabine and Don made a circuit of the South Atlantic, landing in Portuguese Guinea, Sierra Leone, Dahomey and São Tomé before crossing to Brazil (Challenger, 1973).

It was in Brazil that Sabine came across our eagle. Although most of the day-to-day business correspondence of the Society from this period has been lost, the archive does include a set of letters from Edward Sabine to his brother Joseph, and these letters give a fascinating insight into the way the eagle made its way from Brazil to Chiswick\(^2\).

The eagle, along with a vulture, was presented to Edward Sabine in August/September 1822 by Robert Hesketh, British consul in the town of Muranham (spelt in a variety of different ways in the letters) on the banks of the Amazon in Brazil. It was the custom on reaching port to seek out British expatriates to receive information and support to collect plant and animal specimens to send home. Robert Hesketh appears to have been a particularly useful contact. In a letter dated 3 September 1822 Edward

\(^1\) RHS Archive ref: RHS/PH/Don

\(^2\) RHS Archive ref: RHS/VS/hist/21.6
Sabine wrote, “made a friend for the H.S. [Horticultural Society] in the consul Robert Hesketh Esquire... he is very active, steady and zealous”. The job of a British consul in Brazil was an extremely difficult one with a wide variety of duties ranging from helping penniless British subjects, repatriating shipwreck victims, advising and regulating British mariners, running the British hospital, chapel and burial grounds, and generally keeping the mobile and changing British population out of trouble with the local authorities. The opportunity to socialise with an eminent figure like Edward Sabine was one which an ambitious man would be wise to take up. It appears that Robert Hesketh picked up on Sabine’s ornithological interests because Edward writes, “He has presented me with a Royal Vulture and a splendid Eagle both (chiefly the latter) rare and extremely interesting species. I hope we shall bring them home safely.” The “Royal Vulture” was probably *Sarcoramphus papa*, better known as a King vulture. The eagle was a male Harpy eagle, which was fortunate as apparently the female of the species is twice as large and fierce as the male.

By the end of November 1822 the ship with its strange cargo had moved on to the Gulf of Florida from where Edward wrote, “The birds are quite well as yet. The Eagle not so strong as at first, but in good health. I shall endeavour to land him at New York to stretch his limits”. Unfortunately none of the letters tell us how Edward managed to exercise an eagle in New York, which by 1822 was a sizeable city with a population of around 150,000 people. From a horticultural point of view, the stop-off in New York was a disaster. All of the plants that Don had collected in São Tomé were killed by frost. However it does seem that the stay did the eagle good, and Edward became quite fond of the bird, saying “It has become extremely tame and gentle”. This appears to be over-optimistic as a later account tells us that the eagle killed the vulture at some point on the homeward journey!

The plants that Don returned with were received with great fanfare. Joseph Sabine read a paper on the tropical fruits that he returned with, including guavas and star apples. Of the 31 types of fruit, 17 had never been previously described. Amongst the ornamental plants were *Crinum revolutum*, *Mussaenda elegans*, *Clematis grandiflora* and *Clerodendrum splendens*. The eagle may have been less eagerly received but an offer from the Secretary’s brother, a man to whom they were already beholden for this significant collection of new plants, was probably one that the Committee members did not feel they could politely refuse – even if that offer was of a large, fierce carnivorous bird. It is likely that the bird’s
residence in the garden was arranged for the convenience of Joseph Sabine. In addition to his role as Secretary of the Horticultural Society, he was a founding member of the Zoological Club of the Linnean Society which had been established in November 1822. However, the Club did not have any capacity to keep live animals for study. Sabine’s original family estate, Trewin House in Hertfordshire, had been sold and it is possible that his residence in South Mymms was too small to accommodate an eagle. Anyway Sabine was so frequently in Chiswick that accommodation was built for him in the Garden and he may have felt that it was more convenient to keep the eagle at Chiswick for study. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, science was still largely conducted by amateurs and the hard dividing lines between scientific disciplines were still to be formed. For a man like Joseph Sabine, with interests which spanned botany, horticulture and zoology, it would have seemed sensible to locate his chief objects of study together in the most convenient way.

Upon its arrival in London in June 1823, the eagle was housed in a wooden cage with “a wire circular front” which was designed by Joseph Sabine. After that point there is no further reference to the eagle in the records of the Horticultural Society, so we do not know which member of staff looked after it, how well it fared or even whether it was given a name. It would be fascinating to know what the garden staff made of the bird, but unfortunately their thoughts were never recorded. The Penny Cyclopaedia of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge included a description of the bird (using Cuvier’s name *Harpyia destructor*), emphasising the ferocity of the species and its “strength sufficient to split a man’s skull with a single blow”. Rather alarmingly it recounts that “after arrival a cat was put into its cage and the eagle with one blow of its immense foot, broke its back” (Broderip, 1838: 174–176). In the wild Harpy eagles eat sloths and monkeys. Hopefully the Chiswick gardeners did not persist with the diet of live cats. We do not know the size of the cage and the quality of its care but the eagle lived in the Chiswick Garden for six years. The eagle was in the garden to witness the first fêtes held at Chiswick, the precursors to the Chelsea Flower Show. It is hard to believe that the visitors to these fêtes were so single-minded in their horticultural focus that they did not take the opportunity to view the eagle, but unfortunately I have not been able to find any reference to the bird in accounts of these flower shows.

1 RHS Archive ref: RHS/minutes/VS/Garden Committee/3
The bird was not to spend the rest of its days in Chiswick. In late 1826, thanks to the diligence of one of the office clerks, the Society found that it had been the victim of embezzlement by its Assistant Secretary. This had been completely missed by Joseph Sabine who, despite being Inspector General of Taxes from 1808 to 1835, appears to have had a slightly chaotic approach to administration. To make matters worse, Sabine was also responsible for widespread overspending, including at the Chiswick Garden, which together with the embezzlement and inefficiencies in collecting subscriptions resulted in serious levels of debt. The difficulties became public, causing many Fellows to cancel their membership of the Society, making the funding crisis even worse. In response, wide-ranging cutbacks were made, including cutting the wages of gardeners and eventually even selling off plants. In this context a large, hungry bird was a luxury that had to go. One of the chief critics of the Society at this time of financial crisis was the horticultural journalist, John Claudius Loudon. He singled out the eagle in a stinging article in his *Gardeners’ Magazine* in May 1827 when he wrote of it amongst other “objects of luxury” which were “all very good in their way, but most improper as main objects” for a garden (Loudon, 1827: 359).

There was another factor which was to mean that the eagle’s days at Chiswick were numbered – the emergence of a much more suitable home. The Zoological Society of London was founded in April 1826 with the express aim of creating a collection of live animals for zoological study. Joseph Sabine was a founder member (and in the wake of his departure from the Horticultural Society would become its Secretary), and it will have been at his behest that the eagle was transferred to that Society’s care. On 31 August 1829 the Horticultural Society presented the eagle to the Zoological Society to join its new zoo in Regent’s Park which had opened in April the previous year. This Zoological Garden was open to members of the Zoological Society, and the eagle joined a growing collection which included the now extinct quagga and thylacine. The eagle is included in “A List of Animals in the Garden of the Zoological Society” published in October 1829 (Scherren, 1905: 36–39). There we learn that he resided in a cage at the end of a room in a temporary building near the South Entrance to the Zoo, along with three leopards, a jaguar, a lion cub, a Tibet bear and some doubtless rather nervous guinea pigs. We know that the eagle survived at London Zoo until at least 1837, the date of the entry in the *Penny Cyclopaedia* which describes it as still very much alive and includes an illustration. This is an impressive achievement as we know that many
animals struggled in the rudimentary conditions that applied in the early days of the Zoo in Regent’s Park. For instance there are accounts that in its early years the Zoological Society found it easier and more cost-effective to buy replacement monkeys each year, rather than arrange proper heating to ensure their survival over the winter months (Ito, 2014: 36).

The eagle was certainly more fortunate than another exotic creature which made its way to the Chiswick Garden. The Zoological Journal for 1829–1830 includes a paper by William Beattie Booth, then the Garden Clerk at the Horticultural Society’s Garden. The paper records how a large snail, Bulimus haemastomus Scopoli (now Megalobulimus oblongus var. haemastomus), was brought back to the Chiswick Garden in October 1828 from Rio by one of the Garden staff, William McCulloch, after his secondment as gardener to the Right Hon. Robert Gordon, British Envoy to Brazil. It was kept in one of the hothouses and fed on lettuces and cabbage leaves. It appeared quite happy and healthy but unfortunately met an untimely end when it strayed onto one of the hot bricks that the garden staff heated and watered to create the warm, humid atmosphere required for the plants. As Beattie rather lugubriously recounts, “In the morning it was found fixed to them, and quite dead” (Booth, 1830). The shell was donated by Sabine to the Zoological Society for its museum. Unfortunately we have not been able to locate the shell in the collections today.

Bibliography

A little Chiswick mystery

TRACEY LOGAN & BRENT ELLIOTT
c/o The RHS Lindley Library, The Royal Horticultural Society, London

In 1831 a cartoon was published entitled “An attack of cholera at the Horticultural Gardens”. It shows a crowd assembled, apparently for a flower show; the Horticultural Society held its fête for 1831 at the Chiswick garden on 22 June of that year. It shows a bilious-looking man clutching his side, having apparently collided with a woman who is lying on the ground; surprise from onlookers, though no one is making any move to assist.

What is going on here? The minutes of the Society’s Council report no incidents of cholera in the garden at Chiswick, in 1831 or subsequently; the report of the fête in The Times mentioned no incident; there is no such report in the Chiswick Vestry minutes; and in any case there was no reported case of cholera anywhere in the country until September of that year. One of the authors (TL) discovered this cartoon in the course of research for her Master’s degree into the mid-nineteenth century history of Chiswick under its Improvement Commissioners. She wished to know how badly Chiswick was affected by cholera, and a search in the Wellcome Library’s catalogue threw up this cartoon. She contacted the RHS Lindley Library to see whether there was an actual incident that provoked the cartoon. “Why is it funny?” she asked. No final answer has yet been determined, but this paper will present the evidence and the arguments so far.

The cartoon and its publication
The cartoon is signed “HH”. That identifies the artist as Henry Heath (fl.1822–1851), the brother of the better-known William Heath, who used the sobriquet “Paul Pry”. (Paul Pry, it may be remembered, had published a print entitled “The Horticultural Fate”, depicting the raining-out of the Chiswick fête of 1829.) Henry Heath was active from the mid-1820s until 1850. “In 1831 he switched from etching to lithography, and, using the pseudonym ‘HH’, drew political prints in open imitation of HB [John Doyle]. His most individual works are the comic vignettes – usually pictorial puns – which were published in sets like the Cruikshanks’ Scraps and Sketches” (Bryant, 1994: 105). This cartoon is an etching rather than a lithograph,
but it bears the HH signature, so the break was not as clear-cut as Bryant’s summary implies.

The cartoon is inscribed “Publ. 1831 by S. Gans, Southampton Street, London”. Gans is not well documented, and is not listed in the British Book Trade Index. “Judging from the material we hold that was published by him, I would suggest that his prints were published as separate sheets, and not in magazines. This was usual for graphic satire of the period and of this nature” (Esther Chadwick, personal communication to TL).

**A cartoon in the time of cholera?**

The cartoon is dated 1831; the month is not stated. It would seem likely that the print would have been published not long after 22 June, the date of the Horticultural Society’s fête, for the allusion to the fête to remain topical. The cholera, however, had not yet arrived in England at that time. Even so, it had been advancing through Europe, and was already causing alarm. On 18 June (p. 4d, reprinting a statement from the *London Medical Gazette*), *The Times* reported that Britain was in a “complete panic” about the threat of cholera: “This subject divides attention with the Reform Bill”. The Central Board of Health, which had been founded in 1805 to deal with the problem of yellow fever, was reconstituted in June. Quarantine measures were imposed on foreign ships, but the first reported cholera victim died in Sunderland on 26 October, and the disease spread to Newcastle and Scotland, eventually arriving in London in January or February 1832 (Higgins, 1979). So cholera was a highly topical news story several months before it actually arrived.

In November, a comic farce about cholera was staged at the Coburg Theatre in London, entitled *Cholera morbus; or Love and fright*. The author is not named, but Samuel Gedge, selling the original manuscript of the play in a recent sale catalogue, identified him as Benjamin Webster (Gedge, 2016: 52, entry 68). It is not a well-known play; Allardyce Nicoll listed it in his comprehensive list of nineteenth-century plays (Nicoll, 1930: 2: 432), but the British Library catalogue does not list it. The play was denounced in a letter to *The Times* (Laicus, 1831), and one clergyman attacked it in a published sermon: “some of the panderers to the depraved feelings of the public were – infidel like – treating this awful visitation of the MOST HIGH, with absolute mockery and contempt, as a mere fiction, under the hollow pretence of quieting alarm, lest the poor should be thrown out of employ” (Vernon, 1831: 3).
Fig. 1. Henry Heath, 'An attack of cholera at the Horticultural Gardens', 1831.
This involves a crowd scene, analogous to the one depicted in the print. Here is a summary of the plot from a contemporary magazine:

Coburg. – Mr. Davidge, out of pure benevolence, has brought out a squib under the inviting title of *Cholera Morbus, or Love and Fright*, intended, as he says, to laugh people out of their fears of that alarming malady. A young lady (Miss Watson) escapes from a miserly old guardian (Mortimer), who pursues her, exclaiming, “Collar her! Collar her!” This is taken by the affrighted neighbours as a proof of his being affected by the disease; he is chased into, and nailed up in, his own house, where he is visited by the village apothecary (Webster), in a cholera-proof dress; his papers are burnt, agreeably to the directions of the “Board,” and among these is the Power by which he is invested with the control over the young lady, who is of course thus left at liberty to marry her lover (Harrison), and the mistake as to the collar-her being explained, all ends in the usual happy manner. After all, there is not much to laugh at in this; but Webster, with his good-humoured face, can always please an audience; and Mortimer looked and acted the wretched miser to perfection (Anon., 1831: 2: 309).

The author defended his play in a letter to *The Times*: “the whole piece turns on a story published in the public prints of the day, of a man, completely exhausted, calling out “Collar her!” and the by-standers being weak enough to suppose he meant he had the cholera, instead of rendering him any assistance, leaving him to his fate, thereby allowing the girl who had stolen his watch to escape unmolested” ([Webster] 1831). Note that phrase: “published in the public prints of the day”. The author went on to say that “the piece was prepared, and its performance sanctioned, before this malady was reported to have visited our shores”. Could the idea for the play have been suggested by the print? But the scene depicted does not involve a pursuit. BE has checked such references to cholera as are cited in the index to *The Times* for the summer of 1831, without finding any such incident reported.

**Colour or politics?**
Both authors have tentatively suggested explanations for the cartoon. First, BE:

Considering the number of fashions depicted (yellow and blue hats; red,
green, brown, blue, and yellow dresses, the yellow dress of the fallen woman bearing a floral pattern; blue and brown coats; white striped trousers), it occurs to me that the word “cholera” might be a pun on colour – meaning that the variety of colours shown in people’s clothing is enough to cause nausea. There was much debate in the gardening press about contrast of colour, especially in the 1830s to 1850s, so admittedly a trifle late for this particular print. J. C. Loudon in particular campaigned for colours in the flower garden to be presented in large masses of unmixed colour, as opposed to mixtures of flowers of different colours within the same bed (see the references discussed in Elliott, 1986: 48–51). From that point of view, it is possible that the fallen woman represents mixture of colours (yellow and red), whereas most of the other women have dresses of a single colour. Unless of course the whole group can be taken as a mixture of colours, and therefore reprehensible from the Loudon point of view. By analogy, one might think of the people who complain today about the bright colours of anoraks and high-vis jackets on garden visitors (Tradescant, 1993).

TL demurs, and offers the following suggestion:

The Horticultural Society fêtes were held in grounds leased by the 6th Duke of Devonshire, leader of the “Grand Whig” dynasty (who stayed in the adjacent Chiswick House). In November 1830 the Tory government collapsed, and a Whig government under Earl Grey was appointed. Earl Grey was committed to parliamentary reform. A general election in June 1831 returned the first Whig government in 25 years and it was, essentially, a referendum on parliamentary reform. The bilious man’s grey clothing, contrasting with the colourful attire worn by everyone else, may be a visual pun on Earl Grey’s name, supporting the idea that this cartoon is really about politics.

I believe this is nothing to do with cholera or the cholera play, put on in November 1831. I think it is a political satire and that it has something to do with the Whigs’ Reform Bill, one of the two biggest issues in public life in June 1831. If, as Esther Chadwick (British Museum) says, this cartoon was published as a poster – not accompanying an article in a satirical magazine – the story must have been obvious to the public at the time.

An important clue would appear to be the black rope-like object the gentleman is holding under his right arm. If we knew what that was – as no doubt every contemporary viewer would have known – then I think we could solve the puzzle.

I am stumped, but surely some reader will have a clue?
Acknowledgements
Thanks are due to Esther Chadwick (Picture Curator, Monuments Trust), Stewart Gillies (British Library), and William Schupbach (Wellcome Library).

Tracey Logan’s MRes dissertation, Improving Chiswick 1858–1883, is available for download at: http://sas-space.sas.ac.uk/6442/#undefined. She is now studying for a PhD at the University of Leicester’s Centre for Urban History.

Bibliography


In 1903, the Royal Horticultural Society was given a great new experimental garden at Wisley, and over the ensuing months everything that was required from the existing garden at Chiswick was moved there; that included the library. The Chiswick garden library was used by the staff and students, and it was not sold in the 1859 auction that dispersed the Society’s main book collection; so the Wisley staff library today is the Society’s oldest library. In 1866, after the death of John Lindley, the former Assistant Secretary, Vice-Secretary, and eventually Secretary of the Horticultural Society, Lindley’s private library was purchased using the profits from the International Horticultural Exhibition of 1866, and two years later the Lindley Library Trust was created to administer it (Elliott, 1999). But the library at Chiswick was an independent entity, not directly supervised by the Lindley Library Trust nor by its successor, the RHS Library Committee, until the 1920s, when the decision was taken that all books owned by the Society were deemed to belong to the Lindley Library.

The creation of the library at Chiswick

In 1821, the Horticultural Society of London acquired the site for a garden in Chiswick: 33 acres of land leased from the Duke of Devonshire, immediately north of Chiswick Park. The Society was now able to undertake one of its long-contemplated projects, the creation of a school for horticulture. Up to 36 young men would be trained for a two-year period, working successively in every department of the garden, fruit, vegetable, ornamental, arboricultural, and glass. But practical training was not enough: there was much theoretical knowledge about plants and cultivation that the students needed to learn, and that required a library.

So it is somewhat surprising that no attempt at creating a library for the students was made at first. There is no indication that they were expected to go to London to make use of the Society’s library in its offices at Regent Street. But we have to wait until 5 April 1824, when the minutes of the Garden Committee record that:
The Secretary stated that the Council has ordered all the duplicate books in the Society’s possession be sent to the Garden, and a purchase to be made of a certain number of elementary works, towards forming a small library for the use of the Garden.

Nothing was said in those early years about which particular books the new Garden library contained. And indeed there is some evidence that the project of making the library sagged, and had to be reinvigorated at the initiative of the staff and students themselves, for on 21 August 1828 the minutes of Council reported that

[T]he Under-Gardeners and men in the Garden had formed an association in the Garden with regulations which had received his previous sanction for the purpose of improving themselves in the business of their profession and other useful knowledge – and that it had in consequence become particularly desirable to increase the Stock of Books in the Garden Library to which the young men had access. It was ordered that the sum of £50 be allowed to be expended for this purpose.

Fifty pounds in 1828 would be worth upwards of £3,000 today, so this was a generous undertaking, particularly at a meeting where planning the Society’s first flower show took up pages of minutes. But still there is no record of what books were added.

There matters rest, as far as documentation is concerned, for nearly two decades, during which the Society’s main library in London occasionally received the attention of Council, but the library at Chiswick never did. In the 1840s, there was a flurry of interest. The report of Council for 1847 listed the means that were being employed to improve the educational facilities at Chiswick (in order to keep pace with “the advancing intelligence of all the educated classes of society”). A reading room had been created, not in a newly constructed building but by the conversion of an empty room, and the shelves were stocked by three expedients. “Some duplicate and other books were selected from the Society’s library; various persons interested in the promotion of the object presented others; a few were purchased at the expense of the Society”. A set of rules for the use of the reading room was printed in full:
RULES for the MANAGEMENT of the READING ROOM, passed by the Garden Committees of Dec. 7, 1846, and Jan. 4, 1847.

Of the Reading Room
The Reading Room is to be accessible, at the hours mentioned below, to the persons employed as garden-labourers upon the recommendation of Fellows, and to the superior officers of the Garden, including Mr. Sibthorpe, or to persons recommended by them.

It is to be cleaned, the fire in the winter to be lighted, the candles or lamps cleaned, and otherwise kept in order by the stoker; he is to look to it every morning before breakfast, and light the fire one hour before the room is opened during that part of the season when fires are required.

It is to be open every evening, except Sunday, till ten o’clock; from dark in winter, and from half-past six in summer.

Of the Books, &c.
The Books, &c., are to remain as now, under the care of the Garden-clerk, who is responsible for their safe custody and good condition.

He is—
1. To receive all books when they first come to the Garden.
2. To cut them.
3. To enter them in the catalogues, and place them on the shelves.
4. To see that they are kept in proper order, as to binding, &c.
5. To report if any accident or injury happens to them.

No books are to be removed from the Reading Room except by the written order of the Vice-Secretary.

No printed book of newspaper is to be admitted, unless by the permission of the Garden Committee or Vice-Secretary, application having been first made in the recommendation book, and signed by the person making the proposal.

Of the Evening Meetings.
A person, to be called the reading-room clerk, shall have charge of the room. His business will be to light the candles, deliver out books and replace them, see that all the rules below mentioned in this chapter are observed, and report in writing immediately any infraction of them. He is also to be the first and last man in the room, putting out
the candles, leaving all right, locking the door, and taking the key with him.

The frequenters of the Reading Room are to act in succession as the reading-room clerk, each one week at a time; the Garden-clerk taking the first turn and being succeeded by the oldest man in the Garden, and so on according to seniority.

All persons using the Reading Room, except Mr. Sibthorpe and the officers of the Garden, will upon entrance sign their names in a book provided for the purpose.

No one can be permitted to frequent the room unless his hands and face are washed clean.

No conversation is allowed, except on lecture evenings after the lecture is concluded.

When a book is wanted, its name is to be written on a slip of paper and handed to the reading-room clerk, who will furnish the book if not previously engaged.

The Society furnishes all articles of stationery in moderate quantity, except pens and cedar-pencils.

Of Supervision.

It is expected that the gardener and superintendents will look to the due observance of these Rules, and to the general management of the Reading Room, each taking one week at a time, Mr. Munro commencing, to be followed by the superintendents according to their seniority. It is not, however, meant that they should stay in the room; it is only wished that they should consider the room under their charge, each for his week, and give it occasional supervision (Hort.Soc., 1847: 172–173).

The report further detailed some of the incentives which had been started in order to promote the use of the library:

For the encouragement of the men in the pursuit of knowledge, an annual examination will be held by the Vice-Secretary, or other office appointed in his room. This examination will be held in the reading room in the second week in the month of August. It will be conducted by means of printed or written papers, to which written answers must be returned; and will include,
(1) Arithmetic.
(2) The Definitions and first twenty Propositions in the first book of Euclid.
(3) Physical Geography.
(4) Systematical and Structural Botany.
(5) Vegetable Physiology, in its relation to Horticulture.

On these occasions two book-prizes will be offered; the highest of the value of £3, and the second of £2. Besides which, certificates of merit may be awarded, with or without such prizes (ibid: 176).

And Council happily reported that “Notwithstanding the unfitness of the present room for its purpose, and especially for lectures, for which there is no accommodation whatever, the Garden Committee report that the measure has proved of great value to the men, that they attend regularly and diligently, and that not a single instance of misconduct has been reported. The Council, therefore, propose to furnish better accommodation as soon as the funds of the Society will permit them” (ibid.: 171–172).

Another twenty years, another cycle of decline: the Society’s financial disaster of the 1850s would have allowed little expenditure for the Chiswick library, and in a printed report of the Gardens Committee (pasted in the Council minutes for 3 October 1865) we find, as though it was a novel idea, the proposal that:

A library and reading-room containing a selection of Horticultural works, and of books on the above sciences, the Horticultural periodicals, and such other books and educational appliances as may be attainable, should be provided at Chiswick and South Kensington, probably by donations from the Fellows.

The books in the Chiswick library
In the course of compiling the digital catalogue of the RHS Library, we have been trying to identify as far as possible which volumes had previously been part of the library at Chiswick. It has proven surprisingly difficult, with but a small number of titles that can be confidently asserted to have been on the Chiswick shelves.

The reasons for the difficulty are several. (1) No systematic record appears to have been made of the Chiswick library at the time of its
transfer to Wisley, so there is no clear-cut list of what was moved. (2) The old Wisley card catalogue was compiled in the twentieth century, and the entries were minimal, not generally recording provenance. (3) There were very few statements in the Society’s publications or minutes that listed titles at Chiswick, and those all in the first half of the nineteenth century. The 1927 printed catalogue of the Lindley Library did not include books then held at Wisley. (4) When the condition of books deteriorated through overuse, they were either replaced by other copies or rebound in a cheap and sturdy manner, which could have the result of effacing inscriptions or provenance notes written on endpapers. (5) Volumes have been moved from Wisley to London, and from London to Wisley, in the twentieth century, and there is no reason to suppose that similar movement did not take place in the nineteenth.

The original proposal for the Chiswick library had been to rely on the transfer of duplicate copies from London as much as possible, to keep expenditure low, and this process no doubt continued. There is evidence that books received by gift and bequest could be sent from one location to the other if they were duplicates, or more specifically, could be sent from London to Chiswick if London acquired a superior copy. John Lindley had edited the final volumes of Sibthorp’s *Flora Graeca*, but had never been able to afford a set of his own; his personal copy consisted solely of the letterpress for the portion he edited, all bound in one volume. This would have initially been housed in London. Once the extent of Lindley’s library had been determined, the Society advertised in the *Gardeners’ Chronicle* of 5 December 1868 (pp. 1258–1259) for people to donate portions of works to complete the Lindley copies; one of these was the *Flora Graeca*, but it does not appear that anyone provided a copy – not surprisingly in view of the work’s rarity. Eventually, in 1911, a set was purchased for £200 (Council minutes do not name the source); this had been the Duke of Sutherland’s copy. We may presume that Lindley’s copy was sent to Chiswick as soon as London had the full set.

Some works now held in London bear inscriptions identifying them as gifts for the Chiswick library. Others have presentation notices from donors that predate the library sale of 1859. There are two possible explanations for these cases: (1) Lindley bought them at the 1859 sale, and they returned to the RHS with the purchase of Lindley’s library; (2) they were assigned to the Chiswick library before 1859, and therefore unaffected by the sale. Among these are some titles presented by Sir George MacKenzie
in 1817, before Chiswick was acquired by the RHS; could these have been moved to Chiswick before the 1859 sale specifically to preserve them?

There are a couple of cases of books which have both Chiswick library annotations, and RHS Kensington stamps. These were probably cases of books which were received at Kensington, and then assigned to Chiswick either directly or at a subsequent date when duplicate copies were acquired.

Some apparent indications of Chiswick provenance can be disregarded. Luigi Colla’s *Hortus Ripulensis* is held in London; Colla inscribed it “Claro. John Lindley, Autor, Garden of the Horticultural Society Chiswick”, but this is merely a postal address, not an indication that it was intended for Chiswick; Lindley took it home, and it formed part of his library when that was bought in 1866. The same is the case with F. E. L. Fischer’s *Synopsis Astragalorum*, which Fischer inscribed to “Professor J. Lindley / Chiswick / London / Respectfully from the author”. More ambiguous is the case of Sir James Edward Smith’s *English Flora*, which contains a binding receipt addressed to Lindley, marked with the statement that the binding had been “Paid with Garden fines”.

The principal piece of documentation for the actual contents of the Chiswick library is a list given in the Report of Council for 1847:

> The Council are strongly impressed with the value of the exertions made by the Vice-Secretary to promote this highly important object, as evinced by the very interesting lectures delivered by him at the Garden, and by his valuable donations to the Garden Library, and they have much satisfaction in stating that this undertaking has been promoted by presents from several other parties (Hort.Soc., 1847: 173–174).

Six titles were listed as having been donated by Mrs Loudon. The first was Vincenz Köllar’s *Treatise on Insects Injurious to Gardeners, Foresters, & Farmers* (1840). The Society now possesses two copies of this, one held in London and the other by the Entomology Department at Wisley; neither copy shows any evidence of provenance, but the London copy retains its original binding while the latter has been rebound, so it may well be the copy Mrs Loudon donated. She also provided a copy of Waterton’s *Essays on Natural History*, no longer in the collection; Loudon’s *Suburban Gardener and Villa Companion* (not in the collection unless it is the London copy, rebound and showing no indication of provenance);
and three magazines edited by Loudon: the last nine volumes of the *Gardener’s Magazine*, the complete run of the *Architectural Magazine*, and the *Illustrations of Landscape Gardening*. The Wisley library has a complete run of the *Gardener’s Magazine*, but volumes XI–XIX are bound differently from the first ten, and the boards incorporate advertisements for other publications by Loudon; so these are almost certainly the copy donated by Mrs Loudon. These latter works are no longer held by the library; the loss of the *Illustrations*, which is a very rare publication, is particularly galling and hard to account for, other than by theft.

Other periodicals: Donald Munro, the curator of the ornamental garden at Chiswick, donated “21 volumes, including a complete set of the Gardeners’ Chronicle”, which might form part of the Wisley set today. Thomas Clarke (unidentified), in addition to a set of Burnett’s *Outlines of Botany* (probably the current Wisley copy), donated the first ten volumes of the *Floricultural Cabinet* – again, Wisley has a complete set, but Clarke’s copy may form the first ten volumes of it.

Robert Glendinning, the landscape gardener who had redesigned the Chiswick arboretum, donated a copy of his *Practical Hints on the Culture of the Pine Apple* (1839), which might be the copy now in London; no provenance information is shown in it. (Lindley also had a copy, bound in one volume of his “Botanical Tracts”.)

William Haseldine Pepys, the Secretary of the Royal Institution, who was a Council member, donated five works, one of which survives unambiguously. George Don’s *General History of the Dichlamydeous Plants* still carries Pepys’ ink inscription. He also donated the second edition of Aiton’s *Hortus Kewensis* (five volumes, 1810–1813); the current Wisley set has been rebound, but may be Pepys’ copy. The other works he donated – Rapin’s *History of England*, Gleditsch’s polyglot dictionary, and Curtis’ *Hortus Siccus Gramineus*, are no longer held.

Some other works of miscellaneous knowledge, not horticultural but relevant to general education, were presented by named donors, and none of these works is now held:

- An 1811 map of South America, donated by the Society’s Treasurer, Thomas Edgar;
- Black’s general atlas (1846), donated by W.W. Salmon of Devizes Castle, one of the original subscribers for the creation of the Chiswick garden;
F. E. Thompson’s *Solutions of the More Difficult Equations* (1837),
donated by the author;
Four cedar triangle rules, donated and probably made by Joseph
Sibthorpe [or Sibthorp], the Society’s carpenter;
Abraham Booth – not the 18th-century Baptist, but Abraham Booth
of the British Association, the author of *The Stranger’s Intellectual
Guide to London*, which was advertised in Loudon’s *Gardener’s
Magazine* in 1839 [vol. 15 p. 471] – donated six copies of his
“Sanatory Tracts, no. 1”. This might have been his *Treatise on the
Natural and Chemical Properties of Water*, but I am not sure.

It is apparent that many works listed in those few reports have long
been lost from the library, so that apart from the published record there
is no trace that the works in question were ever held. Reasons for the
total loss of works could include: (1) the discarding of works that were
deemed, decades later, to be out of date – not such a likely fate, to judge
from what has survived; (2) the discarding of works damaged beyond
repair, and subsequent failure to find replacement copies; (3) confusion
and misappropriation during the move from Chiswick to Wisley; (4) theft,
which must always remain a possibility despite the claims for probity in
the published praise for the management of the library.

We can assume that the Chiswick library would have contained
the important works of the Society’s own employees: Lindley, Robert
Thompson (*The Gardener’s Assistant*), George Gordon (*The Pinetum*),
Archibald Barron (*Vines and Vine-culture*); but while the RHS has copies of
all of these, none of them can confidently be identified as Chiswick copies.
This may, of course, be the consequence of rebinding and replacement of
worn copies.

Subject, therefore, to this range of caveats, ambiguities, and
uncertainties, the list appended here (Table 1) can be taken as a minimum
list of works that were formerly held in the Chiswick library.

**Hints at the later contents of the Chiswick library**
At their meeting on 31 January 1899, the Society’s Council “resolved that a
proper Library for the use of the Students should be formed at Chiswick &
that any books at present at Chiswick but not in the Library at Westminster
should be moved up to Westminster”. On 14 February “The Secty was
instructed to consult with Dr. Masters on the formation of a proper Students
Library at Chiswick’. Nothing had been said in Council minutes about the Chiswick library for nearly two decades: had it fallen into disuse, was it being badly managed, or was it simply getting too big for its premises, with books housed in various cupboards and odd locations?

Did this transfer of books take place? If it did, this would explain the number of former Chiswick titles now in London, but what of the 1758 edition of Hitt’s Treatise of Fruit-Trees, donated by Sir George MacKenzie in 1817, and apparently uninterrupted in its sojourn on the shelves of the Garden library, despite the fact that London has never had a copy? If the transfer of non-duplicate books from Chiswick to London was not carried out, or not carried out fully, then there are a number of titles that might have been Chiswick copies:

- Daniell, J. Frederic. Meteorological Essays & Observations (1823)
- Peyritsch, Johann Joseph. Aroideae Maximilianae (1879)
- Rennie, Robert. Essays on Natural History and Origin of Peat Moss (1810)
- Tull, Jethro. Horse-hoeing Husbandry (4th ed., 1762)

If the transfer did take place, these must have been acquired after the move to Wisley, but the acquisition and provenance never recorded. Whatever happened, the library at Chiswick lasted only four years more, for in 1903 the Society acquired Wisley as its new experimental garden, and everything was moved there.

Can we make any reasonable inferences about what had been added to the Chiswick library in its later years? There is one source that is at least suggestive. Frederick William Burbidge, the Curator of Trinity College Garden in Dublin, gave a lecture on garden libraries in 1896, which was published in the Society’s Journal. Back in 1868, Burbidge had received the highest marks on the new gardeners’ examinations that the RHS and the Royal Society of Arts had set up, and in 1896 he was a member of the RHS Scientific Committee, and of the Daffodil Committee; it is reasonable to think that he was aware of the Chiswick library and to some degree of its contents. In this
talk, which was geared towards institutions both private and public, he gave a list of “good and useful gardening books” which he recommended, along with the weekly gardening journals, as the basis for a garden library. (In this list I will silently correct several misprints in names and truncations of titles that would make searching for them difficult today.)

**Elementary**

2. *Paxton’s Cottage Gardeners’ Calendar* – i.e. *The Cottager’s Calendar of Garden Operations* (many editions from 1862 on)
3. RHS, *Best Fruit Trees for Cottagers* [a pamphlet first published in 1891; the 1893 revised version was published in the Journal, vol. 15 (1893), pp. 61-70]
4. T. W. Sanders’ *Encyclopaedia of Gardening* – many editions from 1895

**First principles**

6. William Fream, *Elements of Agriculture* (many editions; today the RHS holds nothing earlier than the 10th edition, 1918)
8. Sorauer, *Popular Treatise on the Physiology of Plants* (1895)

**General works of reference**

10. G. W. Johnson, *The Cottage Gardener’s Dictionary* (many editions, the most recent at the time of Burbidge’s lecture being Wright and Dewar’s revision of 1894)
Special works of reference
18. B. S. Williams, *Stove and Greenhouse Plants* (two parts, one on flowering and one on foliage plants – 1883 and 1876 the most recent editions at the time of Burbidge’s lecture)
19. B. S. Williams, *Select Ferns and Lycopods* (2nd ed., 1873)
24. Charles W. Quin, *Garden Receipts* (several editions from 1877)
25. Vilmorin, *The Vegetable Garden* (1885 – two more editions would follow Burbidge’s lecture)

Nomenclature
27. T. A. Durand, Index to *Genera Plantarum*, i.e. *Index Generum Phanerogamorum* (1888)
28. *Index Kewensis* (1895; from 1901 a supplement was published every five years)
29. Kew handbooks – i.e. the *Hand-lists* of various departments (Trees and shrubs, Herbaceous plants, Orchids, Tender monocotyledons, etc. published by Kew from the 1890s)

Interesting
30. Grant Allen, *The Story of the Plants* (1895)
32. Samuel Reynolds Hole, *The Six of Spades* (1892)
33. Alphonse Karr, *A Tour round my Garden* (1855 and later editions)
34. E. V. Boyle, *Days and Hours in a Garden* (1883 and later editions)
36. Alfred Austin, *The Garden that I Love* (1894)
37. Alfred Austin, *In Veronica’s Garden* (1895) – there were three further sequels after the date of the lecture
38. Frances Jane Hope, *Notes and Thoughts on Gardens and Woodlands* (1881)

One’s first response to this list might be a sigh of nostalgia for the days when bookshops did not try to clear their unsold stock so rapidly. Even forty years ago it was not so uncommon to find twenty-year old volumes on the shelves of large bookshops; but even so, to expect to find a copy of Kemp’s *How to Lay Out a Garden* thirty years after publication might have been pushing it. Note that Burbidge did not suggest H. E. Milner’s much more recent *Art and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (1890) – testimony to the value of Kemp’s work as a practical manual. At any rate, there are copies of nearly all these works in the RHS libraries, in one or more locations. The only exception is Ville’s *Reluctant Farmer* (though there are other works of his in the collections). And – a significant note – the 1927 catalogue records that the 1902 edition of Fream’s *Elements of Agriculture* was held in the Library (perhaps acquired in the light of Burbidge’s recommendation?), though today the earliest edition extant there is 1918.

Which of the works on Burbidge’s list would still be thought worthy of incorporating in a basic garden library today? The only work that I suspect most educators would consider would be Robinson’s *English Flower Garden*. Agricultural works would have been deemed relevant in the age when the country house garden was part of a working estate, but are of limited relevance today. Lindley’s *Theory of Horticulture* was, *faute de mieux*, still being used in training at the end of the Second World War (Elliott, 2004: 322), but there have been several theoretically-based treatises since then, and while *Science and The Garden* (2002) is available, no one is going to recommend a work which devotes a chapter to bottom-heat for greenhouses. Nicholson’s *Illustrated Dictionary of Gardening* was used sixty years later as the template for the *RHS Dictionary of Gardening*. The works of Graham Thomas and W. J. Bean (with possible supplements in the form of Dallimore and Jackson, Krüssmann, and Aljos Farjon) would replace Burbidge’s major practical manuals; there would now be less emphasis on glasshouse plants, and far more on garden design and construction; would Farrer’s *English Rock Garden* still qualify for inclusion today, or would the Alpine Garden Society’s *Encyclopaedia of Alpines* replace it? In the “interesting” category, Christopher Lloyd would now loom large, and the category of “nomenclature” would consist purely of online sources. But stop: it is not the purpose of this paper to decide on a
curriculum. Readers can spend some happy hours deciding for themselves what a garden library should consist of, and some unhappy ones debating the subject with other people.

Bibliography


Table 1. List of books in RHS Library, formerly in the Chiswick garden library.
Most of the volumes listed are now in the Wisley collection. Titles that are now in London are indicated by an asterisk.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pub Year</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Backhouse, James</td>
<td><em>Index Kewensis</em> <em>(2 vols.)</em></td>
<td>1895</td>
<td>Fascicles I-IV are stamped: RHS Gardens Chiswick.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown, James</td>
<td><em>A Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies</em></td>
<td>1843</td>
<td>Inscription on front free endpaper: “June 26/45 / For the Garden Library / John Lindley”.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Burnett, Gilbert T.</td>
<td><em>Outlines of Botany</em></td>
<td>1835</td>
<td>Report of Council for 1846 (JHS, vol. 2, p. 173) reports that Thomas Clarke presented a copy of this work to the Chiswick garden library; the current Wisley copy may be this copy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darwin, Charles</td>
<td><em>Variation of Animals &amp; Plants under Domestication</em> <em>(2 vols.)</em></td>
<td>2nd ed., 1893</td>
<td>Title page of both volumes bears inked stamp of R.H.S Gardens Chiswick.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darwin, Charles</td>
<td><em>The Movements and Habits of Climbing Plants</em></td>
<td>1891</td>
<td>Title page bears printed stamp of R.H.S. Gardens Chiswick.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darwin, Charles</td>
<td><em>On the Various Contrivances by which Orchids are Fertilised by Insects</em></td>
<td>2nd ed., 1877</td>
<td>Title page bears printed stamp of R.H.S. Gardens Chiswick.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Pub Year</td>
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<tr>
<td>Du Breuil, Alphonse</td>
<td><em>Cours Élémentaire Théorique et Pratique d'Arboriculture</em></td>
<td>1846</td>
<td>Inscription in black ink on p. 1: Chiswick Garden Library.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ellis, William</td>
<td><em>Madagascar Revisited</em></td>
<td>1867</td>
<td>Page 1 bears inscription: Chiswick Garden Library. Title page bears embossed stamp: Presented by Mr Murray.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Gerard, John</td>
<td><em>The Herball, rev. by Thomas Johnson</em></td>
<td>1633</td>
<td>Wisley copy: ink inscription on ¶5v: “Joseph Brigstock / Given by Major Haughton”, i.e. William Haughton (d.1890), the Society’s Treasurer.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hitt, Thomas</td>
<td><em>A Treatise of Fruit-Trees</em></td>
<td>1758</td>
<td>The title-page bears the signature of Sir G. MacKenzie, and the facing leaf is inscribed: “Presented by Sir George Stuart Mackenzie September 2d. 1817”.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kollar, Vincenz</td>
<td><em>A Treatise on Insects Injurious to Gardeners, Foresters, &amp; Farmers, translated by J. and M. Loudon</em></td>
<td>1840</td>
<td>The report of Council for the year 1846 (JHS, vol. 2, p. 173) reports that a copy of this work had been donated to the library at Chiswick Garden by Mrs Loudon. It cannot now be determined which copy this was.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lawson, Peter, &amp; Son, Edinburgh</td>
<td><em>Lists of Seeds and Plants [composite volume]</em></td>
<td>1854-55</td>
<td>Probably a Chiswick library copy.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lindley, John</td>
<td><em>A Key to Structural, Physiological, and Systematic Botany, for the Use of Classes</em></td>
<td>1835</td>
<td>The Wisley copy was the original Horticultural Society (Chiswick) library copy.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lindley, John</td>
<td><em>The Genera and Species of Orchidaceous Plants</em></td>
<td>1830-40</td>
<td>Wisley Copy 2 was the original Chiswick library copy.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lindley, John</td>
<td><em>Pomological Magazine</em></td>
<td>1828-30</td>
<td>Ex Chiswick Garden Library.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lindley, John</td>
<td><em>Pomologia Britannica [a republication of the <em>Pomological Magazine</em>]</em></td>
<td>1841</td>
<td>Ex Chiswick Garden Library.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lindley, John, and Moore, Thomas</td>
<td><em>Treasury of Botany (2 vols.)</em></td>
<td>1866</td>
<td>The first volume has an ink inscription on its title-page: “Chiswick Garden Library”. The second volume bears on its front pastedown a donation label recording the gift of T. Sergeant of Mayford, Woking, July 1969.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Title</td>
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<tr>
<td>Linnaeus, Carl</td>
<td>A Generic and Specific Description of British Plants, translated from the Genera et Species Plantarum of the celebrated Linnaeus by R. H. Jenkinson*</td>
<td>1775</td>
<td>Lindley Library purchase, 1866. Front free endpaper inscribed in ink: “Garden”; this copy was presumably in the Society’s garden library at Chiswick, and acquired by Lindley on de-accessioning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubbock, John, 1st Baron Avebury</td>
<td>Contribution to our Knowledge of Seedlings (2 vols.)</td>
<td>1892</td>
<td>Volumes I and II: Each volume bears inked stamps: R.H.S. Gardens, Chiswick.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maddock, James</td>
<td>The Florist’s Directory*</td>
<td>1822</td>
<td>Fly-leaf bears ink inscription: “Presented to the Horticultural Society with his Respects by the Publisher”. Title-page bears ink inscription: “Presented by Mr John Harding – April 2d. 1822.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mawe, Thomas</td>
<td>Every Man His Own Gardener*</td>
<td>22nd ed., 1822</td>
<td>Copy 1: ink inscription on B1r: “Chiswick Garden Library”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Noisette, Louis Claude</td>
<td>Le Jardin Fruiter</td>
<td>1821</td>
<td>Each volume carries an ink inscription in Joseph Sabine’s handwriting: “Presented in numbers at different times by the Author”.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rivers, Thomas</td>
<td>The Orchard House, or the Cultivation of Fruit Trees in Pots under Glass*</td>
<td>6th ed., 1859</td>
<td>Page iv bears inked inscription: Chiswick Garden Library. Front free endpaper bears inked inscription: Dr. Lindley, From the Author. Oct 1857!</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rivers, Thomas</td>
<td>The Orchard House, or the Cultivation of Fruit Trees in Pots under Glass*</td>
<td>9th ed., 1861</td>
<td>Page ix bears inked inscription: Chiswick Garden Library.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scott, John</td>
<td>Scott’s Orchardist, or Catalogue of Fruits, Cultivated at Merriott, Somerset</td>
<td>2nd ed., 1873</td>
<td>Handwritten note in ink at the top of the title page: Chiswick Garden Library. Also at top of the title page is the blue circular stamp of the ‘Royal Horticultural Society South Kensington’. Inscripton in ink at top of page 1: For the use of the Hort. Socty / With the Authors Complements.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Pub Year</td>
<td>Comments</td>
<td></td>
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<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibthorp, John</td>
<td><em>Flora Graeca</em> Bound in one volume. Not illustrated.</td>
<td>1832-40</td>
<td>Lindley’s own copy: presumably transferred to Chiswick after London set acquired</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith, James Edward</td>
<td><em>The English Flora</em>, vols. 1-4</td>
<td>1824-28</td>
<td>Pasted on the front pastedown of vol. II is a receipt from Messrs Ridgway to John Lindley for volumes 1-3 and their binding, “Paid with Garden Fines”.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith, John (attrib.)</td>
<td><em>Records of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew</em></td>
<td>c.1880</td>
<td>Reverse of front free endpaper bears inscription: The Library of the Royal Horticultural Society’s Garden; and title page bears inscription: Presented by the Author. Title page also bears inked stamp: Trustees of the Lindley Library.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge</td>
<td><em>The Penny Cyclopaedia</em> (24 vols.)*</td>
<td>1833-44</td>
<td>Formerly the copy in the Horticultural Society’s staff library at Chiswick, and the volumes still bear Wisley Library shelf labels.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veitch, James, &amp; Sons</td>
<td><em>A Manual of the Coniferae</em></td>
<td>1881</td>
<td>Ink inscription on title-page of Wisley copy 1: For the Library of the Royal Horticultural Society’s Gardens at Chiswick / From James Veitch &amp; Sons*.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. List of some books in Wisley Library, lacking provenance information but likely to have been Chiswick copies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pub Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baskerville, Thomas</td>
<td><em>Affinities of Plants</em></td>
<td>1839</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beatson, Alexander</td>
<td><em>New System of Cultivation</em> [bound with: Supplement to a New System of Cultivation]</td>
<td>1821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bentham, George, &amp; Hooker, Joseph Dalton</td>
<td><em>Genera Plantarum</em></td>
<td>1862-83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hooker, Joseph Dalton</td>
<td><em>Niger Flora</em></td>
<td>1845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hooker, Joseph Dalton</td>
<td><em>Rhododendrons of Sikkim-Himalaya</em></td>
<td>1849-51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hooker, Joseph Dalton</td>
<td><em>Illustrations of Himalayan Plants</em></td>
<td>1855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loudon, John Claudius</td>
<td><em>Encyclopaedia of Gardening</em></td>
<td>1850 ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loudon, John Claudius</td>
<td><em>The Landscape Gardening and Landscape Architecture of the Late Humphry Repton</em></td>
<td>1840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M’Ewen, George</td>
<td><em>Culture of the Peach and Nectarine</em>, ed. by John Cox</td>
<td>1859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M’Phail, James</td>
<td><em>Treatise on the Culture of the Cucumber</em></td>
<td>2nd ed., 1795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marshall, Charles</td>
<td><em>A Plain and Easy Introduction to Gardening</em></td>
<td>5th ed., 1813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phillips, Henry</td>
<td><em>Flora Historica</em> (2 vols.)</td>
<td>1824</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweet, Robert</td>
<td><em>The British Flower Garden</em> (7 vols.)</td>
<td>1823-38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Urban landscape photography: documenting the RHS Kensington Gardens, 1859–1862

SARAH MC DONALD

c/o The RHS Lindley Library, The Royal Horticultural Society, London

Although plants and landscapes were popular picturesque subjects for early photographers, garden photography only really blossomed in the mid-twentieth century with the introduction of viable colour processes. Victorian gardens provided the backdrop to country house croquet groups or featured in tourist views, but rarely took centre stage. However, in 1863, only 24 years after the medium’s invention, the RHS published Andrew Murray’s *The Book of the Royal Horticultural Society, 1862–63* (Murray, 1863). With the distance of 150 years it appears a shameless piece of vanity publishing – but with a rather startling and modern innovation: twelve real photographs of the Society’s new flagship garden at Kensington Gore. This set of photographs was the culmination of a wider project recording the construction of the grounds, and these together represent one of the earliest and most complete photographic records of the development of an urban landscape garden.

Albertopolis and photography

Murray’s book was both a celebration of the restoration of the Society’s fortunes and a memorial to the man who had steered it back to prosperity. Only five years earlier the Horticultural Society of London had stood on the brink of collapse. Ticket receipts and visitor numbers to flower shows and the Society’s garden at Chiswick were suffering from a run of wet summers and competition from central London venues such as Regent’s Park and Crystal Palace (Fletcher, 1968: 186). In 1858 the sixth Duke of Devonshire, president for over twenty years, died. By the following year the Society felt desperate enough to auction off their “Valuable Library” and “Magnificent Botanical Drawings” in a sale lasting four days (Sotheby’s sale catalogue, 1859). Salvation came in the form of HRH Prince Albert, consort to Queen Victoria, who had succeeded the sixth Duke as President, and in May 1861 the Society was empowered to call itself Royal. Prince Albert was also President of the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851, which had been established in 1850 to manage the first world’s trade fair – the Great Exhibition of 1851. The fair’s astonishing popular and
financial success, under the astute management of Commissioner Henry Cole, funded the purchase of 87 acres at South Kensington, including land occupied by the Brompton Park Nursery since the seventeenth century. Nicknamed “Albertopolis”, the site was developing a complex of cultural and museum buildings, fulfilling Prince Albert’s ambition to combine the arts, science and design with education.

Here lay the much-needed opportunity to create an “innovative and fashionable garden, once again a key locus for the London season, centrally located... integrated into a cultural program of Music and Fine Arts Committees” (Elliott, 2004: 26) which would revive the Society’s fortunes. Twenty-two and a half acres were leased from the Commission on the main quadrangle, land now occupied by the Science Museum and Imperial College. The Commissioners were to spend £50,000, raised by mortgage, on the basic earthworks and surrounding arcades. The Society, for its part, would match-fund with monies raised mainly from debentures, for the garden layout and a winter garden (Fletcher, 1969: 186).

From the very first photography was employed as both reference and inspiration for the design of the new gardens. In a letter to Council, Henry
Cole, now Director of the South Kensington Museum (later the Victoria and Albert Museum), proposed that photographs of the “most successful” English gardens be commissioned “for hints for laying out the gardens”. The publisher and photographer Joseph Cundall was to undertake the work if subscribers could be guaranteed to meet the costs of five to seven guineas per volume. Four members of Council agreed to take copies and the volume was published “under the sanction of the Horticultural Society of London” (Council Minutes, 19 August 1859). In the event *English Flower Gardens and their Decorations*, a part work of “photographs of the most celebrated ornamental gardens in the kingdom showing how such places are formed elsewhere” (*Gardeners’ Chronicle*, 1859: 708), ran to little more than 16 prints of four gardens. However the choice of subjects is revealing: the parterre at Windsor; the terraces and formal gardens at the Prince’s royal retreat at Osborne House; the terraces, statuary and twin bandstands of the Crystal Palace grounds at Sydenham; and box and gravel embroidery beds at Somerleyton Hall, designed by William Andrews Nesfield. Nesfield had been appointed by Cole and the Prince in preference to Sir Joseph Paxton, because of his taste for formal, geometric designs (Shepherd, 1975: 124–132). His initial layout for the gardens was already approved by Albert by the time Cundall’s works were published, but the photographs show that the final garden layout incorporated the geometric designs, statuary and Italianate terraces favoured by the Prince.

Photography was also employed by Prince Albert to guide the design of the arcades, by the Commissioners’ chief architect, Captain Francis Fowke of the Royal Engineers. During a visit to Italy in the winter of 1858–1859 Henry Cole collected, with the Prince’s backing and funds, prints of Italian arcaded architecture, including the cloisters of St John Lateran and the crescent arcades in the gardens of the Villa Albani, Rome (Shepherd, 1975: 124–132). These prints (still preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum collections) were displayed at the first planning meeting (*Gardeners’ Chronicle*, 1859: 619) to illustrate the proposed design for the southern and northern arcades, and subsequently “suspended on the walls of the arcades” (Murray, 1863: 136).

The laying out of the site had begun late in 1859 and by May 1861 over 1,000 men were at work on the garden (Shepherd, 1975: 124–132). From the preliminary excavations to its inauguration, though unfinished, on 5th June 1861, progress was recorded photographically, including an image of tree-moving equipment used to transport and install trees from
the Society’s garden at Chiswick. Many were taken by Lance-Corporal Benjamin L. Spackman of the Royal Engineers.

Sappers of the Royal Engineers had been involved in the construction and documentation of the Crystal Palace in 1851, and a small detachment was now garrisoned at the South Kensington Museum as acting firemen. The War Department paid for their instruction in documentary photography, skills successfully employed on overseas surveys and topographical expeditions (Hannavy, 2008: 1216). Corporal Spackman was one of the first pupils, working initially in the waxed paper negatives process and later wet plate. In 1862 Spackman exhibited his photographs of the progress of the building works and the RHS gardens at the London International Exhibition of 1862 (Schaaf, 2007). The gardens adjoined the exhibition buildings, situated on the present site of the Natural History Museum, and acted as an additional draw for visitors. Captain Fowke also used photography to record his construction projects and almost certainly encouraged photography on site (Hannavy, 2008: 543), presenting several photographs of the gardens to the Kensington Museum.

Fig. 4. Removal of a large tree from Chiswick to the new gardens at South Kensington. Engraved from a photograph. Illustrated London News, 9 December, 1860.
On 26 April 1860, Council dictated that “photographs of the new garden be furnished to all newspapers of importance in London, and also to each Fellow of the Society” (Council Minutes, 26 April 1860: 85). These probably included a photograph of the conservatory which appeared in woodcut form on the cover of the *Illustrated London News* on 8 July 1861. The opening of the gardens by Prince Albert a month earlier was a brilliant occasion. “Such a gathering of the higher classes has been rarely seen in London, and the expressions of surprise and delight in the gardens were universal”, reported *The Athenaeum*. The Prince pronounced the garden “a valuable attempt, at least, to reunite the science and art of Gardening to the sister Arts of Architecture, Sculpture and Painting”, and foresaw a future for it as “the inner court of a vast quadrangle of public buildings... where science and art may find space for development, with that air and light which are elsewhere well-nigh banished from this overgrown metropolis”. (*Proceedings*, 1861: 604–605). Sadly he did not live to see this vision fulfilled. The opening was his last official engagement before his death from typhoid in December.

The noted photographer William Lake Price applied to Council for permission to “photograph from his carriage” the Royal opening. This was
Fig. 6. State ceremonials for awarding of medals for the Exhibition of 1862. London Stereoscopic Company, 1862.

granted provided he “puts them to no expense” (Council Minutes, 28 May 1861: 295) and a set of mounted prints was subsequently accepted on the same terms (Council Minutes, 2 July 1861: 347). These are now lost but an impression of the scene can be gained from a stereoview of the State Ceremonials for Awarding of Medals for the Exhibition of 1862. The London Stereoscopic Company had exclusive photographic rights to the Exhibition and during the six months of the show’s run they published over 265 stereoscopic (3D) photographs of the event (Hannavy, 2008: 488). Towards the end, and possibly running out of subjects and inspiration, their photographer William England and his team ventured into the gardens and shot half a dozen (now rare) views.¹

¹ With thanks to Graham Woods, by email.
The Book of the Royal Horticultural Society

So far photography had been initiated independently of the RHS, but in 1862 the Society itself commissioned a set of photographs of the new garden. They were to illustrate a publication authored by Andrew Murray, the new Assistant Secretary. Publication of The Book of the Royal Horticultural Society, 1862–63 was timed to coincide with the inauguration, in July 1863, of the Memorial of the Great Exhibition of 1851, erected in the gardens above the Great Cascade. Dedicated “by permission of The Queen” to its recently deceased royal patron, the Book is a strange hybrid: sonnet and tributes to Prince Albert; a history of the Society (and its rickety finances); flamboyant descriptions of the gardens; and relations to the International Exhibition of 1862. This lavish production boasted decorative pink and green cloth case binding, gilt-edged pages, decorations throughout of coloured borders, wood engravings, two colour plates of illustrated Royal Signatures; and twelve real photographs.

With such prominent royal connections it could be met with no other than critical acclaim. The Gardeners’ Chronicle (22 August, 1863: 799) described it as “a superb drawing room book” but reserved their highest praise for the photographic illustrations, stating they “doubt equals of its admirable photographs of scenery in the gardens can be found in any printed volume whatever” and “cannot but regret our inability to give the name of the skilled artists by whom these photographs have been executed”.

In fact the photographer is credited prominently, alongside the artists John Leighton and Thomas Scott, and the Society had not looked far to find him. Charles Thurston Thompson had assisted Henry Cole with photography at the Great Exhibition and in 1856 Cole appointed him photography studio head of the Kensington Museum to record collection objects – the world’s first such post (Physick, 1975: 1). Thompson also trained the sappers, including Spackman, in photography for the War Department. He called upon Captain Fowke to assist in moving larger objects, such as the Raphael Cartoons, outside to be photographed. Fowke even built a large camera capable of taking 3ft square glass negatives for the project (Physick, 1975: 18). Fortunately for Murray, Thompson was not limited to his paid employments and the photographs were commissioned independently.

Photographically illustrated books were prohibitively expensive to produce – only 100 had been published in the entire previous decade (Hannavy, 2008: 189). Until the introduction of half-tone printing in the 1880s the
illustrated press reproduced photographs in the form of wood engravings. Using actual photographs required contact printing by daylight, trimming to size, pasting onto heavy card stock and individually placing within the text block prior to binding—all this done by hand. Bradbury & Evans’ ledgers give the total cost of the “sundry charges per day for Thompson’s photography” as £50—over £5,000 today. If this sounds excessive consider that 500 case bindings were ordered, plus six sample copies and four large-page format volumes (in elegant brown and pink silk lining) for presentation to the Queen. Over 6,000 individual photographs would need to be printed and prepared for binding to complete the order. Add on the electrotypes and printing of the colour plates, decorative borders and designs by Leighton and illustrations by Scott and the entire publication cost £1,345. However, the market was there: in the first 12 months 319 copies had been sold, 23 given as presentation copies and 66 taken as stock.

There are some errors in the placing of illustrated pages and, of the 10 copies examined for this essay, only two have exactly the same set of photographs. Only four plates are reproduced in all volumes (see Table 1). One of these is the interior of the Council-Room, which is a photograph of a drawing as indoor photography would have been all but impossible because of low light levels. Each volume therefore, by virtue of its construction and content, is unique.

In addition to the illustrations for Murray’s Book, Thompson also independently shot at least seven other images of the gardens (Fontanella, 1996: 28). These additional images are taken from similar viewpoints and those found in the Royal Collection archives are listed in the final column of Table 1. This brings the tally for known works of the garden attributed to Thompson to 27 plates.

The finest of these are carefully staged with a cast of genteel middle class ladies and gentlemen, in tranquil contemplation of Nesfield’s pools and planting. The same figures appear repeatedly, suggesting that Thompson photographed them around the gardens on the same day. The inclusion of figures brings the scenes to life, represents the respectable garden visitors, and also adds scale for the viewer. The variant of Pl. 117 shows what must be the earliest photograph of an RHS gardener at work. Images of workers and servants are not unknown from that time, but they were not common subjects. However, the lack of blurring or movement suggests he was intentionally included. The only other direct reference to the act of gardening is the inclusion of two watering cans in Pl. 147.
Although the variants are generally photographed from the same vantage points, it is evident from planting or progress of works that some were taken weeks if not months apart. It’s possible that in these cases the original glass plate negative was damaged or broken during printing and the image needed to be reshot. The images are generally dated in 1862 and the dismantling of the Moreau Fountain in Pl. 109 supports this. It was reportedly a wet summer, which would have made photography difficult as exposures relied on sunny days for both the taking and printing of negatives (Physick, 1975: 5).

Pl. 1 Variant 1 clearly shows a photographic studio just outside the Council Room. This is likely that of the Hungarian Louis Birnstingl, photographer to the Commissioners, and referred to many times in Council Minutes, not least because of the Society’s ongoing attempts to evict him. Photography was still beyond the pocket and capabilities of the public, and Birnstingl provided a portrait studio for visitors to the Exhibition and gardens. (Lady Clementine Hawarden briefly set up a portrait booth in the gardens photographing partygoers in fancy dress, and may have borrowed Birstingl’s studio for the
purpose). Birnstingl did photograph the gardens, however – at least one stereo view of the interior of the conservatory is credited to him and he also applied to Council to photograph the fountains (RHS Kensington Garden Committee Minutes, Vol. II, p. 145).

Conclusion
Although the Book now offers a privileged glimpse into the its first urban garden, the Society can take little credit for the production of the photographs. Murray no doubt intended to gain favour and status with Queen Victoria via Albert’s passion for photography, easily achieved by the appointment of the photographer through its partners at the Royal Commission. The appearance in the Royal Collection of additional images by Thompson, “acquired by Queen Victoria”, supports this line of thought. Council’s dealings with Birnstingl and Lake Price seem more symptomatic of their relationship with photography – reluctant, dismissive and occasionally acrimonious. Given the Society’s interest in science and research, it is a great curiosity that the opportunities offered by the new medium to record RHS activities, Fellows or gardens went virtually unrecognised. Of the great number of images taken of the Kensington Gardens under construction, only eleven survive in the RHS archives, and until recent conservation, were in a poor state. None of the prints by Cundall or Lake Price, nor other images, such as the Chiswick tree planting machinery or prints distributed to press and Fellows, were retained.

Similarly it’s unclear if photography of the construction site was officially sanctioned. Certainly no single body of work has survived in the V&A or the 1851 Commission’s archives. Prints are scattered through Cole’s private albums or presented as donations. Spackman exhibited under his own name, suggesting the sappers’ endeavours were privately pursued. In attempting to consider them as a single continuous body of work it appears this unique documentary record of the gardens is accidental rather than intentional, arising from a peculiar coincidence of personalities linked to the Great Exhibition of 1851. What we clearly see is that early photography was already variously employed as reference, design and educational tool, documentary record, publicity vehicle and status symbol.

The Kensington Gardens were the “culmination of a growing movement in garden design, and unprecedented experiment in urban horticulture” (Elliott, 2004: 66). Sadly they were not the panacea the Society had hoped and they were finally evicted in the 1880s. The V&A holds a series of photographs of
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Primary plate</th>
<th>Variant plate</th>
<th>Additional photographs in Royal Archives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Portico of Council room, with Entrance into the Garden.</td>
<td>Man on steps</td>
<td>No people. Photographic Studio</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>Sculpture in the Conservatory</td>
<td>No people</td>
<td>Boy sitting on chair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89</td>
<td>The Garden and Exhibition Building, looking South-East</td>
<td>Bandsmen in bandstand</td>
<td>Bandstand empty, group of men in foreground</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>109</td>
<td>General View of the Garden, from the Exhibition Building</td>
<td>View of fountains, from left. No people</td>
<td>View of fountains, from centre, man on ladder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>117</td>
<td>View of the Garden, looking North-West</td>
<td>Gentleman reading by canal. Ladies in background</td>
<td>Gardener. Ladies in background</td>
<td>The conservatory, no people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>121</td>
<td>The Council-Room (from a Drawing)</td>
<td>Interior photographed from a painting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>136</td>
<td>Albani Arcades, South-East Corner</td>
<td>Gentleman on steps, no planting or awnings</td>
<td>Lady on steps, planting, urns and awnings</td>
<td></td>
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<td>147</td>
<td>The Alcove in the Conservatory</td>
<td>Foley’s ‘Youth at the Stream’ and watering cans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>153</td>
<td>Upper Terrace and Conservatory, looking North-East</td>
<td>Ladies on steps an gentleman man sitting</td>
<td>Woman and boy, planting in foreground</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>156</td>
<td>The Great Cascade</td>
<td>No people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>166</td>
<td>The Canal, and Small Cascade</td>
<td>Small trees, some unfinished gravelling</td>
<td>Mature trees, gravel completed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>172</td>
<td>View of Upper Arcades, showing Ribbon Beds, &amp;c.</td>
<td>Ladies just visible in background</td>
<td>Ladies centre, admiring beds</td>
<td>The Arcades (no people)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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the disused arcades taken in 1908 before they were demolished. Forty years after Thompson, for technical reasons, photographed it from a drawing. We finally see the interior of the Council Room, though long since abandoned, still sporting ventilation grills featuring the RHS logo.

**Bibliography**


Photographs of Garden by Thompson in Royal Archives (www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/search#/page/1). Item numbers: RCIN 2932800, RCIN 2932801, RCIN 2932802, RCIN 2932803.

Rediscovering the British Institution busts

RACHEL FEELY

c/o The RHS Lindley Library, The Royal Horticultural Society, London

In a storeroom of the RHS Lindley Library, in Vincent Square, sit two marble busts. I first saw them when I joined the RHS in June 2014. My job was primarily to catalogue a collection of orchid paintings; however, as I had previously spent ten years at the Royal Academy of Arts, the busts caught my attention. I discovered that they were a mystery to all at the RHS as so very little was known about them. There seemed to be no paperwork relating to them, and the only piece of historical evidence was a photograph of them, dating from 1897, showing them in the rooms of the Lindley Library, which at the time doubled as the Council Room of the RHS. The two busts continued to sit in the Library reading room, flanking a portrait of John Lindley (Fig. 1), until 1999 when they were put into storage during the refurbishment of the RHS offices on Vincent Square and the making of the new library on the ground floor. They did not then return to public view, but were placed in the storeroom where I first saw them.

One bust was signed by the distinguished sculptor Joseph Nollekens RA, but the sitter was unidentified. Neither the sitter nor the artist of the second bust was known.

After much studying of the busts, I began to think that they looked like the eighteenth century painters Sir Joshua Reynolds PRA and Benjamin West PRA: the first two Presidents of the Royal Academy of Arts. Often associated with each other, it would not be odd for the busts of these two painters to be together. If they were indeed the busts of Reynolds and West, it was baffling to think how they had found themselves in the RHS collection. Reynolds and West seemingly had nothing to do with the Society. These busts are two of only four marble busts in the Lindley Library collection; the other two, both from the nineteenth century, are of the gardener Joseph Paxton by Edward Wyon, and of the 1st Duke of Sutherland (earlier known as the Marquess of Stafford) by Sir Francis Chantrey.

There are a small number of references to a bust of Benjamin West by Joseph Nollekens. One is found in a biography of Joseph Nollekens from 1829: Nollekens and his Times (Smith, 1829: II, 80). It contains a complete list of works, and the entry for 1812 includes a bust of Benjamin West. The biography also contains the text from the Will of Nollekens, which
Fig. 1. The RHS Council Room, 1897. Gardeners’ Chronicle, 1897.
Rediscovering the British Institution busts

includes the entry: “I give to my old friend, Benjamin West, Esquire, one hundred pounds, with the model of his bust” (Smith, 1829: II, 20).

A thorough search for busts of Joshua Reynolds revealed very little, but it did unearth a reference in the book *Recollections of the British Institution* (1860) to a bust of Reynolds which was unknown to me. I knew from my time at the Royal Academy that there were hardly any known busts of Joshua Reynolds (the exception being the wonderful bust by Giuseppe Ceracchi, from c.1778, in the Royal Academy Collection), and the bust in the RHS was certainly one I had not known of. The reference was found in a description of the interior of the British Institution, and was described as follows:

A Bust of Sir Joshua Reynolds, P.R.A. Sculpted by Bacon in 1813 at a cost of 120 guineas, subscribed by the Directors and Governors. The following inscription appears on the plinth:

JOSHUA REYNOLDS
PICTORI SUI SAECULI FACILE PRINCIPI,
ET SPLENDORE ET COMMISSURIS COLORUM,
ALTERNIS VICIBUS LUMINIS ET UMBRAE,
SESE MUTUO EXCITANTIUM,
VIX ULLI VETERUM SECUNDO
QUI, CUM SUMMA ARTIS GLORIA MODESTE UTERETUR,
ET MORUM SUAVITATE, ET VITAE ELEGANTIA,
PERINDE COMMENDARETUR;
ARTEM ETIAM IPSAM, PER ORBEM TERRARUM,
LANGUENTEM ET PROPE INTERMORTUAM,
EXEMPLIS EREGIE VENUSTIS SUSCITAVIT,
PRAECEPTIS EXQUISE CONSCRIPTIS ILLUSTRAVIT,
ATQUE EMENDATIOREM ET EXPOLITIOREM,
POSTERIS EXERCENDAM TRADIDIT,
LAUDUM EJUS FAUTES ET AMICI
HANC EFFIGIEM POSUERUNT.
1813.¹

Here is also a bust of Benjamin West, Esq. by Joseph Nollekens, Esq. R.A. 1822. This was paid for by a subscription of 120 guineas (Smith, 1810: 18).

¹ See p. 64 for translation, reading “bust” for “statue”.

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The unidentified bust at the RHS does not have a plinth or an inscription, unlike the one described above. However, the plinth could easily have been separated from the bust at some time. Most interestingly though, the entry above links the bust of Benjamin West by Joseph Nollekens with a bust of Joshua Reynolds. Could they be the same two busts at the RHS?

Would images of the British Institution shed any more light? There are two of interest. Firstly, ‘Interior of the British Institution (Old Master Exhibition, Summer 1832)’ of 1833 by Alfred Joseph Woolmer (Fig. 2). In the background of the painting is a bust, but it is neither the bust of West or Reynolds. It does however appear to me to be one of the other two busts held by the RHS: ‘The Duke of Sutherland’ by Sir Francis Chantrey.

The second painting is ‘The Interior of the British Institution Gallery, 1829’ by John Scarlett Davis (Fig. 3). The painting appears to be a depiction of the 1829 exhibition, but on closer inspection, it is not accurate at all. Rather, it is an illustration of works by the leading artists of the early nineteenth century. Some of the artists represented, by inclusion of their paintings, are Sir Joshua Reynolds, Thomas Gainsborough and Sir Thomas Lawrence. The figures on the left are Benjamin West and Reynolds’s student James Northcote, who are admiring a self-portrait by Reynolds. This self-portrait was not in this 1829 exhibition, and certainly Benjamin West was not there either, having died nine years earlier.

The bust on the left of the painting has previously been identified as the bust of the Duke of Sutherland by Sir Francis Chantrey (Yale Center, 2010). However, I also think it bears a passing resemblance to the bust of West by Nollekens at the RHS. The bust in the painting is looking in the opposite direction to the actual bust, but the face bears a strong resemblance to Benjamin West (and as we know, the painting is not solely based on historical accuracy).

These paintings suggest that three, and not two, of the RHS busts appeared to have been displayed in the British Institution. Establishing whether the unknown bust was Reynolds, and discovering why these three busts were now at the Royal Horticultural Society, was the priority.

In the Conway Library at the Courtauld Institute of Art is one of the only photographs of the RHS’s Nollekens bust. Identified as by Nollekens, it is described as “possibly” of Benjamin West. I wondered if the Conway Library, which houses over a million images, primarily of sculpture and architecture, also had images of the busts of the Duke of Sutherland, and particularly Reynolds. If there was an image, how would it be described?
Figs 2 & 3. ‘Interior of the British Institution Gallery’ by Alfred Joseph Woolmer (top); ‘The Interior of the British Institution Gallery, 1829’ by John Scarlett Davis.
The collection of sculpture photographs in the Conway Library is ordered by century, school and artist, so I was able to find both the Nollekens and the Chantrey busts fairly easily. The third bust was rather more difficult, as unfortunately, the bust was not filed under the artist name of Bacon, or under the sitter name of Reynolds. The search for both an unidentified artist and unidentified sitter took much longer. But after much sifting, I found a photograph of the bust. It was identified as being with the “Royal Horticultural Society, Library”, but there was still no reference to who it was or who it was by.

An organisation’s minutes can be invaluable when undertaking research of this kind. Sadly, the records at the RHS for the 1860s are fragmentary. However, the turning point of my research was the discovery of surviving minutes from the British Institution, for the entirety of its life. The minutes for the British Institution are held at the National Art Library in the Victoria and Albert Museum, from 1805 to 1870, over seven volumes. It was the last volume – Volume VII (25 April 1860–13 July 1870) – which held vital information on the busts, and finally helped answer some of my questions.

When the British Institution knew that the lease on their building on Pall Mall would not be renewed, and therefore that the Institution would be dissolved, they began to consider what would happen to their activities, and their possessions. The following excerpts are from the British Institution Minutes, and I should mention that the sculpture which is referenced alongside the busts will be detailed later:

23 July 1867
It was resolved that Mr Nicol (secretary) be instructed to apply to the Royal Horticultural Society, in the first instance, and secondly to the South Kensington Museum to know, whether they would accept a loan of the statue and busts belonging to the British Institution for a limited period, and in the event of a refusal to make inquiries as to a suitable place to deposit them and the other property of the Institution.

7 May 1868
The Secretary reported that the loan for a limited period of the cast of Achilles and the marble busts of the Marquis of Stafford, Sir J. Reynolds and Benjamin West, had been offered to the Royal Horticultural Society, and had on the receipt of a written communication from Col. Henry Scott, the secretary, accepting the loan in the name of the Council, been removed to the premises of that Society and there deposited in the presence of Col. Scott, Sept. 19th 1867.

7 July 1868
Minutes of the Directors
The cast of the Statue of Achilles, and the marble busts of the late Marquis of Stafford, Sir Joshua Reynolds and Benjamin West, were offered as a loan for a limited period to the Royal Horticultural Society. The offer having been accepted by the Council the said pieces of sculpture were deposited at the premises of that Society in August last.

Fig. 4. View of the Gardens from the International Exhibition. From Andrew Murray, The Book of the Royal Horticultural Society (1863).
The reason why they were offered, “in the first instance” to the Royal Horticultural Society, rather than one of the arts institutions, remains a mystery. As does the fact the busts and the statue were offered on loan for a “limited period” only, even though the British Institution would soon cease to exist. However, two things happened at the Royal Horticultural Society during the 1860’s which may go some way to explaining the loan of the busts.

In 1861, the Royal Horticultural Society developed a new garden in South Kensington. It was the ambition of Prince Albert, who oversaw the project, and the International Exhibition of 1862 was held in the garden. The garden was 20 acres, and covered the area from behind the Royal Albert Hall, down to where the Science museum now stands (Fig. 4). Prince Albert was keen for architecture and fine art to be a prominent feature of the new garden. A Fine Arts Committee was set up in June 1861, a few weeks before the garden opened. The Prince wanted sculpture to be at the forefront, feeling that it lacked decent exhibition space throughout the country.

In the minutes of the Fine Arts Committee for 13 May 1861 (Murray, 1863: 68), Prince Albert explained:

Viewed in a more extended light and with special reference to the influence which the efforts now making by this Society may have in encouraging artists and fostering a taste for art among the people this Garden also possesses singular advantages – Hitherto there has been no place in the Metropolis or even in Britain where the sculptor or statuary could explore the creations of his genius in model with such accompaniments of place and scenery as would give them fair-play.

Sculpture was indeed at the forefront of art displayed in the gardens, culminating in a display in which over 150 sculptures were displayed, by many well-known artists of the day, such as E. H. Baily and Henry Weekes, a project in which the Prince was fully involved until his death in December 1861. However, the gardens experienced poor finances during the last few years of its existence, and closed in 1888, the Society surrendering its lease to make way for the creation of the Imperial Institute and the Science Museum.

It is possible that the British Institution loaned the three busts to the RHS in 1867, with a view to them being displayed in the South Kensington
garden. We know from the British Institution minutes of 1867, detailed earlier in this essay, that another statue was proposed to be given to the RHS at the same time as the three busts. This was the ‘Mourning Achilles’ (or to give it its full title: ‘Achilles, Enraged for the loss of Briseis, Retires to the Sea-shore and Complains to Thetis, A Model’) by Thomas Banks, from 1784. After Banks’s death in 1805, his wife gave it to the British Institution, where it was prominently displayed inside the entrance hall. In 1862 it was lent to the RHS for display in the International Exhibition. After the British Institution closed, it continued to be on loan to the RHS at South Kensington until the 1870s. It was eventually transferred to the Royal Academy, on the suggestion of Edward Poynter ARA (later PRA), great-grandson of Thomas Banks (Bryant, 1983). Perhaps the British Institution decided in 1867 that as Achilles was already on loan to the South Kensington garden, it would be practical for the three busts to follow.

The second event occurred in the 1850s, when the Horticultural Society faced crippling financial difficulties. A consequence of this was the sale of the library in 1859. Prince Albert, at the time President of the Horticultural Society, implemented several changes to try to improve the situation. These included renaming the Society the Royal Horticultural Society (via a Royal Charter in 1861), and the creation of the garden in South Kensington. Then, in 1865, John Lindley died. Lindley was a botanist, and founder of the Gardener’s Chronicle, who was the Society’s Vice-Secretary from 1841 until 1858, when he became Honorary Secretary for another four years. Lindley had amassed a library of 1,300 books, and in 1866 the RHS was told that Lindley’s collection was up for sale. The library was bought using profits from the International Horticultural Exhibition of 1866, and from a subscription list, and this formed the nucleus of the present Lindley Library. The Lindley Library Trust was set up to administer the collections in 1868.

It could therefore have been that the British Institution, knowing of the recent purchase of Lindley’s Library by the RHS, lent the busts in order to contribute to the furnishing of the new Library. The timing could not be better, in that the Lindley collection was sold to the RHS in 1866, and the British Institution disbanded in 1867. The Society and the British Institution already had a relationship of course, with the loan of the ‘Mourning Achilles’ sculpture to the South Kensington garden. We know that the busts were in the Library in 1897, from the photograph of them in the Council Room, so it is entirely possible that they had been there since the re-forming of the Library in 1868.
The only known reference at the RHS which refers to the busts is in the Horticultural Society’s Council Minutes, dated 26 March 1889: “The Treasurer further reported that he had recently examined the cellars & had found three marble busts which he caused to be cleaned & placed in the Council Room.” The Treasurer was Daniel Morris, one of the team who had masterminded the move of the Society from Kensington, with the closure of the garden there. The minute does not state where the cellar was located; Morris may have been clearing the Society’s property from the Kensington site, recovering things that had been left behind in the haste of removal, or the busts and other lumber may have been moved already to a cellar at the Society’s new (temporary) office on Victoria Street, and then ignored until Morris determined to bring things into order. Or perhaps both.¹

My theory is that the three busts went to the RHS Garden in Kensington following the closure of the British Institution in 1867. At some later date, the busts were placed in a cellar (either in South Kensington, or the Society’s subsequent site in Victoria). They were then found by Daniel Morris in 1889, cleaned and placed in the Council Room. It is possible that the identity of the busts was lost during this sequence of events, and that Daniel Morris did not know who some or all of the busts were of, or by whom.

Since the completion of my research, the busts of Reynolds and West have been conserved. Both busts, particularly the Reynolds bust, were very dirty, and both had evidence of old adhesive tape on them. The Reynolds bust also had some small areas of damage, which were filled in. This has made a big difference in our ability to appreciate their quality (Figs 5 and 6).

What follows is a description of the British Institution, and the three busts. I suspect we will never know for certain how the busts came to be at the RHS, and how the identity of the bust of Reynolds was lost for so long. However, for the first time in many years, we can look at these wonderful marble busts with far more understanding of them and their history than ever before.

¹ This reference was discovered very late on in my research, and, with the exception of the British Institution Minutes, is the only one I have seen which refers to the three busts together, rather than just the busts of Reynolds and West.
The British Institution
The British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts in the United Kingdom (known as the British Institution, but also as the Pall Mall Picture Galleries and the British Gallery) was founded in 1805. Its purpose was to exhibit the work of historical and contemporary artists, through temporary exhibitions of Old Master paintings, and exhibitions of works for sale, by living artists.

In June 1805 the British Institution committee was formed, and purchased the lease of 52 Pall Mall, which had formerly been the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery. Several of the best art institutions chose Pall Mall as their home during the nineteenth century, including the National Gallery and Christie’s auction house. The gallery building was designed by George Dance the Younger, an architect and founder member of the Royal Academy of Arts. When the British Institution took over the building in 1805, 62 years remained on the lease, and the British Institution opened in January 1806.

The founding members of the British Institution included patron of the arts Sir George Beaumont, the Marquess of Stafford (later the 1st Duke of Sutherland) and William Seguier, an art dealer and later Surveyor of the King’s Pictures and Keeper at the National Gallery. The founding members (of whom there were approximately 120) were also responsible for persuading the Government to set up the National Gallery, and many of them donated to the National Gallery in order to help set up a collection. The Prince Regent was a firm supporter of the British Institution, and it borrowed many loans from the Royal Collection throughout its 60 years.

As each member donated a sum of money, the Institution was able to buy paintings, many of which were presented to the National Gallery. They also funded prizes for students who studied at the Institution.

The first Old Masters exhibition was held in 1813, and was solely dedicated to Sir Joshua Reynolds. 143 works by Reynolds were exhibited, and were mainly borrowed from the members, as was the case with most of the Old Master exhibitions.

The following year, work by Hogarth, Gainsborough, Richard Wilson and Zoffany was shown. In 1815 Dutch and Flemish art was shown, and the foreign schools continued to be exhibited until 1825. Following this, two exhibitions were put on every year: one of living artists which took place in the Spring, and the Old Masters exhibition in the Summer.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Queen Victoria was Patroness, and
Figs 5 & 6. John Bacon, bust of Sir Joshua Reynolds PRA, 1812, marble. Before (bottom) and after conservation.
Fig. 7. Bust of Sir Joshua Reynolds after conservation.
the Institution seemed to be flourishing. But the lease on the building expired in 1867 and the decision was taken to dissolve the Institution. Any remaining funds were used to set up scholarships for artists, and the Old Masters loan exhibitions programme was taken over by the Royal Academy. The building on Pall Mall was demolished in 1868–1869.

**Bust of Sir Joshua Reynolds PRA by John Bacon (marble, 1812)**

This bust of Sir Joshua Reynolds was commissioned by the British Institution, for the sum of 126 guineas, paid for by the Directors and Governors. It was commissioned to coincide with the first Old Masters exhibition in 1813, which was dedicated to Reynolds.

On completion of the bust, a Latin inscription for the plinth was commissioned. This was the same inscription as appears on the memorial of Reynolds in St Paul’s Cathedral, by John Flaxman RA, also undertaken in 1813. In the St Paul’s statue, Reynolds wears the gown of a Doctor of Civil Law, is holding a copy of his Discourses, and is standing next to a carved portrait of Michelangelo, Reynolds’s hero. The text was composed by the scholar Richard Payne Knight, who produced the two versions of the same inscription, at the same time. The inscription can be translated as follows (Smyth, 1843: 27):

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To Joshua Reynolds,
Pre-eminently the first painter of his age,
And in the brightness and harmony of his colouring,
Mutually exciting the varieties of light and shade,
Second to none of the ancient masters;
Who, possessing the highest honours of his profession,
Became still further estimable
By the suavity of his manners, and the elegance of his life;
Raised art itself by works of exquisite beauty,
When over all the world it languished and was nearly dead,
Illustrated it by choice rules and precepts,
And bequeathed it to the cultivation of posterity,
Corrected and improved:
This statue was placed,
By the friends and fosterers of his fame,
In the year of Salvation 1813.
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To celebrate the opening of the Reynolds exhibition at the British Institution, a commemorative dinner was held on 8 May 1813. One hundred and thirty-seven of the cream of society attended, including the Prince Regent, who was then President of the British Institution.

The dinner was described in great detail in *The Literary Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds* by Henry William Beechey:

[T]he exhibition was preceded by a grand commemoration dinner, which took place on Saturday, May 8. 1813. The Prince Regent (who was then President of the Institution) had announced his intention of honouring the dinner with his presence. His Royal Highness arrived at the British Gallery at five o’clock to view the exhibition, and he was graciously pleased to express the highest admiration, both of the pictures and their arrangement. A short time before seven, the Regent was conducted from the Gallery by the Marquis of Stafford, through a temporary covered way, to Willis’s Rooms. The Prince Regent sat as president of the British Institution, having a bust of Sir Joshua Reynolds placed behind him. The Marquis of Stafford sat on the left hand of the Prince Regent, and, as Deputy President, he officiated, giving the toasts, &c. (Beechey, 1835: 278).

The bust remained on display in the galleries of the British Institution until the closure in 1867.

**Sir Joshua Reynolds, PRA (16 July 1723–23 February 1792)**

Reynolds was born in Plympton, Devon, on 16 July 1723, the son of a schoolmaster, the Rev. Samuel Reynolds and his wife Theophilia. Reynolds served an apprenticeship under the portrait painter Thomas Hudson, and when the apprenticeship ended in 1743 he divided his time between Plymouth, where he worked as a portrait painter, and London. During this time he travelled to Rome where he is said to have become partially deaf in one ear (which he blamed on a bad cold). He began using an ear trumpet, and was thereafter often depicted with it (Malone, 1798: 88–89).

Reynolds returned to London in 1752, where he remained for the rest of his life. His reputation rapidly grew, and at the height of his success he was receiving as many as five to seven portrait sitters a day (Beechey, 1835: 125). He had become the leading portraitist of the 18th century.

In 1768 Reynolds became a founder member of the Royal Academy of
Arts, and the Academy’s first President. On the opening of the Academy, Reynolds delivered his first Discourse, and for the next twenty years he addressed the Academy’s students with further discourses. In 1780 he produced several paintings for the Royal Academy, including full-length portraits of George III and Queen Charlotte, and a wonderful self-portrait. Reynolds was President of the Royal Academy until he died.

In 1769 Reynolds was knighted by George III, and in 1784 he became the Principal Painter in Ordinary to the King.

In 1789, Reynolds suddenly lost the sight in his left eye, which forced him to give up painting. He suffered much ill health for the last few months of his life, and died at home on 23 February 1792. His body lay in state at the Royal Academy, and he was buried at St Paul’s Cathedral.

John Bacon (13 March 1777–14 July 1859)
John Bacon was born in London on 13 March 1777. He was the second son of the sculptor John Bacon RA. He was an apprentice in his father’s studio, and at the age of 12 entered the Royal Academy Schools, where his elder brother Thomas Bacon had also studied.

He excelled in the RA schools, winning a gold medal in 1794. Following his father’s death in 1799, he inherited his successful studio business. He gained popularity, exhibiting work at the British Institution in the early 1800’s, and regularly at the Royal Academy. He was never elected a Royal Academician, however. Bacon worked very much in his father’s style, and never completely emerged from his father’s shadow.

In 1823 Bacon and his family moved out of London to Bath. Upon his death in 1859, he left a large estate, including several properties and a large art collection.

Bust of Benjamin West, PRA by Joseph Nollekens RA (marble, 1812)
The bust (Fig. 7) was commissioned by the British Institution in 1812, to coincide with the commission of the bust of Sir Joshua Reynolds. It cost 126 guineas, and in addition, Nollekens was asked to supply a plinth which matched the one for the Reynolds bust (Br. Institution minutes, p. 118).

The sculptor Joseph Nollekens was so pleased with the bust that in March 1812 he asked for permission from the British Institution to exhibit it at that year’s Royal Academy Exhibition (Br. Institution minutes, p. 16).

Nollekens and West were close friends, and there is a reference to West sitting for the bust at Nollekens studio, in *The Life and Times of Nollekens*
Fig. 8. Joseph Nollekens RA, bust of Benjamin West PRA. 1812; marble. After conservation.
(Smith, 1829: 373). The fact it was sculpted from life might explain why it is such a fine bust. As previously mentioned, in his will dated 1818, Nollekens left £100 and the model of his bust to Benjamin West (although West died in 1820, three years before Nollekens). West’s sons Raphael and Benjamin both attended the funeral of Nollekens (Smith, 1829: 36).

Benjamin West, PRA (10 October 1738–11 March 1820)

West was born in Pennsylvania in 1738, the tenth child of innkeeper John West and his wife Sarah. He showed promise from a very young age, and by the time he was 22, he became the first American artist to travel to Italy (Barratt, 2004).

Whilst in Venice in 1762 he met Richard Dalton, Librarian to George III, who offered West a commission for the painting ‘Cymon and Iphigenia’. On his return from Italy, West went to London in the hope of gaining further work from George III. He arrived in England in 1763, and never returned to America.

He became the leading history painter of the day, but unlike his contemporaries, he often chose to depict his figures in modern dress rather than antique drapery. His most well-known painting was the controversial ‘The Death of General Wolfe’ of 1770, which depicts the figures in contemporary clothes.

West was instrumental in the formation of the Royal Academy, and on the death of Sir Joshua Reynolds in 1792, West was elected the second president. In 1791, he became Surveyor of the King’s Pictures, producing several pictures of the Royal Family, as well as a group of paintings for the Royal Chapel in Windsor Castle.

West died at his house in Newman Street, London on 11 March 1820 and was buried in St Paul’s Cathedral.

Joseph Nollekens RA (11 August 1737–23 April 1823)

Nollekens was born on 11 August 1737 in Soho, the second son of Josef Frans Nollekens, a Flemish painter from Antwerp, who moved to London in 1733. In 1750 at the age of 13, he became an apprentice to another Flemish painter, Peter Scheemakers.

Nollekens went to Rome in 1762, where he gained his first commission, a bust of David Garrick, who was in Rome at the same time. His reputation rapidly grew, and he made a great personal fortune while in Rome, before returning to England in 1770. His reputation continued to grow, and he
gained the support of George III, who commissioned a bust of himself in 1772, the year in which Nollekens also became an RA.

His reputation for producing portrait busts was unequalled. When the banker Thomas Coutts asked the painter Henry Fuseli whom he should approach for a bust, Fuseli told him “Nollekens is superannuated in many particulars, yet in a bust he stands unrivalled. If Mr Coutts had required a group of figures, I should have recommended Flaxman; but for a bust, give me Nollekens” (Smith, 1829: 45).

Despite his great wealth, Nollekens and his wife had a reputation for frugality. He was, however, very supportive of younger sculptors. In 1811, Francis Chantrey, then an unknown, submitted a plaster bust of the politician John Horne Tooke to the Royal Academy Exhibition. Nollekens told the RA Exhibition Hanging Committee, “There’s a fine – a very fine work – let the man who made it be known – remove one of my busts and put this one in its place, for well it deserves it” (Cunningham, 1837: III 165). Following this, Nollekens and Chantrey held the greatest respect for each other and when Nollekens’ own works and his collection of art were sold after his death, Sir Francis Chantrey was one of the buyers, having always remembered Nollekens’ kindness towards him.

After the death of his wife in 1817, Nollekens suffered ill health, forcing him to give up work in 1819. He died at home on 23 April 1823 and was buried at St Mary’s Paddington, leaving behind a huge personal fortune and a large art collection.

Bust of the 1st Duke of Sutherland by Sir Francis Chantrey RA
(marble, 1829)
The Duke of Sutherland (previously the Marquis of Stafford) was a founder member of the British Institution. He became Vice-President in 1810 until 1820, and President from 1820 to 1825. This bust was commissioned in 1828 for the British Institution, for 200 guineas. On completion of the bust, Chantrey displayed it in the Summer Exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1829, before it was given a prominent position in the British Institution, where it remained until its closure (Royal Academy, 1829: 47; fig. 8).

The Marquis’s wife Elizabeth had a replica of the bust made by Chantrey for herself in 1830, which is now in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery1.

The bust at the Royal Horticultural Society, having spent decades in storage in the library basement, was exhibited at the National Portrait Gallery in an exhibition of Chantrey’s work; it then spent a couple of decades on long-term loan to the Graves Art Gallery in Sheffield before returning to the Society’s collection.

George Granville Leveson-Gower, 1st Duke of Sutherland (9 January 1758–19 July 1833)
George Granville Leveson-Gower, born 1758, was the eldest son of the Granville Leveson-Gower, 1st Marquis of Stafford, and his wife Lady Louisa.

In 1785 he married Elizabeth, the Duchess of Sutherland, who came from a family of wealthy landowners. They owned much of the county of Sutherland, and a large area of the northern highlands.

When his father died in 1803, George became the 2nd Marquis of Stafford. With this came control of the family estates, which included much land, art and a huge amount of wealth, so much so that it was estimated he was the wealthiest man in nineteenth-century Britain.

In the 1770’s, Sutherland became an MP, but was much less engaged in politics after 1800. Instead, he became very involved in the arts, building up a large collection of paintings. He was one of the first collectors to allow access to his collection to the public. He was a founder member of the British Institution, was elected Deputy-President for a decade from 1810, and was President from 1820 to 1825. At the Reynolds commemoration dinner in 1813, special thanks was given to him for “the great attention which His Lordship has paid to the Commemoration of Sir Joshua Reynolds, and for the dignified propriety with which everything has been conducted under His Lordship’s direction” (Smith, 1860: 137).

Between 1811 and 1820, the Marquis and his wife gained notoriety for their role in the Highland Clearances. Tenants were moved from their land and replaced by more profitable uses of land, such as sheep and tourism. The Marquis was convinced that the answer to the plight of the farmers was to relocate them to the coast, where they could make a living out of fishing. Many farmers refused to leave, and were forcibly evicted. The Marquis and his wife stood by their decision and claimed it improved the economy of the area, and had saved the farmers from ruin. However, these events were highly controversial at the time, and remain so.

Sutherland suffered ill health in the last few years of his life, following a stroke. In January 1833 he was given a dukedom by William IV, and took
Fig. 9. Bust of the Duke of Sutherland, by Francis Chantrey. Photograph of the RHS version of the bust as exhibited at the National Portrait Gallery in 1981, from Alex Potts, *Sir Francis Chantrey 1781–1841: Sculptor of the Great* (1981).
the title of the Duke of Sutherland. However, he only held the title for six months before he died at Dunrobin Castle in July 1833, aged 75. He was buried at Dornoch Cathedral.

Statues of him were subsequently placed at two of his properties; on Ben Bhraggie, part of the estate of Dunrobin Castle in the highlands, and Trentham Hall in Staffordshire. Both are by Sir Francis Chantrey, sculptor of the RHS’s marble bust.

Sir Francis Chantrey, RA (7 April 1781–25 November 1841)

Chantrey was born in Derbyshire to Francis Chantrey, a farmer, and his wife Sarah. At the age of 12, Chantrey took an apprenticeship with a Sheffield woodcarver and gilder but discovered he preferred painting, after taking lessons with the painter and engraver John Raphael Smith. In 1802 he set up his own studio, and for the next few years he worked as a painter in Sheffield and London, before choosing to work in sculpture in 1807.

In 1809 he married Mary Ann Wale and moved permanently to London. He began exhibiting at the Royal Academy, and in 1811 his bust of John Horne Tooke was placed by Nollekens between two of his own. This event helped Chantrey’s reputation hugely. From then, he received more important commissions, and was able to charge more for his work.

From then on until his death, Chantrey’s reputation as a portrait sculptor was unrivalled, but he was also hugely respected in the field of public sculpture. He was elected an associate of the Royal Academy in 1816, and a Royal Academician in 1818; he was knighted in 1835.

Chantrey died suddenly at his home in Pimlico in 1841, and was buried in his birthplace of Norton, in a tomb which he had designed and made himself. He left a large fortune, and following the death of his wife in 1875, it went to the Royal Academy to set up a fund to purchase British paintings and sculpture. In 1898 the collection was moved to the Tate, where it became the biggest source of funding for the acquisition of new work.¹ The Chantrey Bequest, as it is known, is still funding the purchase of new work for the Tate.

Bibliography


One of the Library’s best kept secrets is the archive relating to Oakwood, the former name of Wisley garden. Oakwood was named by the garden’s original creator, George Fergusson Wilson (1822–1902), who in 1878 purchased Glebe Farm (which stood on the site of the present Laboratory Building) and 60 acres of farmland in Wisley parish. The story of the creation of Wilson’s experimental garden over 24 years has been outlined in Brent Elliott’s *The Royal Horticultural Society: a History, 1804–2004* (2004), and in the Library’s *Occasional Paper, Volume 11* (2014). The Oakwood archive has been drawn together in recent years, with the discovery of a complete series of planting records covering the years 1878 to 1902, previously thought to have related to the RHS gardens at Chiswick. Additionally, research into a series of garden journals kept by Wilson’s head gardener, Alfred Tatnall (1861–1943), spanning the years 1888–1902, has revealed the volumes’ true significance as a record of work and events in Wisley garden in its infancy.

**A picture of Oakwood**

Many accounts of Oakwood in Wilson’s time were published in the horticultural press, penned both by Wilson himself and by visitors to his garden, the latter for the most part writing anonymously. Some articles include photographs and engravings of the garden. Drawing on these first-hand accounts enables us to paint a picture of Wisley garden 130 years ago. Starting from scratch with rough farmland and a small oak wood (now the Wild Garden, where a number of the original oaks still stand), Wilson carved out a garden, focusing his attention on about seven acres around the oak wood and the slope beside it (now the rockery, alpine meadow and beyond). He wrote: “This place gave just what I wanted – a grand new field and plenty of work. The wood had not been disturbed for many hundreds of years, during which time oak leaves and bracken decaying had made a great depth of vegetable soil. This, with the light loam of the hill, gave great capabilities” (Wilson, 1900). A visitor in 1887 wrote, “There was just a bare hillside, the soil of which was too poor to carry a decent farm crop, and a plantation of Oaks mostly half grown,
Fig. 1. G. F. Wilson’s portrait in *The Garden*, 6 January 1900, p. 17.
with a tangled undergrowth that made the place look more neglected than it really was” (Visitor, 1887).

Wilson transformed the oak wood early on with the introduction of lilies. The same visitor in 1887 wrote, “The stems of [the lilies] are as much as 9 feet high [...] they love the flickering shade of this Oak wood, and the moist and rich vegetable mould, which is several feet in depth, the accumulation of centuries” (Visitor, 1887). Another described the wood in 1901 as “a woodland planted with colonies of lilies, and drenched with the perfume of roses and a thousand flowers open in shade and sunlight” (Anon., 1901). “Lilies meet the eye at every turn,” commented a visitor in 1891, “all rejoicing in the shelter, the soil and woodland of this garden of mossy and winding paths” (Visitor, 1891).

Lilies also grew on the sloping ground rising up beside the oak wood, along with other plants, creating a colourful spectacle: “The whole hillside was lit up with the colours of numberless kinds of plants, not represented by merely one or two plants but great masses, and all for the most part growing in great luxuriance” (Visitor, 1887). The Gardeners’ Magazine
describes the hillside with its “banks of hardy flowers, where appears [sic] the bright red flower spikes of the stately Rheum acuminatum, poppies of many kinds swaying gently in the wind, the Viper Buglos [sic], Echium vulgare, a perfect sea of blue, and Morina longifolia, perfectly at home” (Visitor, 1891).

In 1883 Wilson wrote in the Gardeners’ Chronicle that after his initial work on the wood, “the field garden, the subject of the photograph, was next taken in hand”. The photograph in question, reproduced in the article as a woodblock engraving (Fig. 2), depicts Wilson and his son Scott, pausing from their labours in the field garden to show a visitor around (Wilson, 1883; the caption contradicts Wilson, incorrectly identifying the scene as the Wild Garden). Entries in the garden journals kept by head gardener Tatnall, whose grammar is at times somewhat inscrutable, also refer to the field: “Dig up large Veronica traversii that was nearly killed by the frost and plant in the field” (2 December 1891), and “Commence planting Rhod’ns on the banks in the field”. In 1900 Wilson wrote, “Iris kaempferi having succeeded on the banks of our ponds, and now, having a rather
damp six-acre field of good soil, we made a wide winding ditch, planting these Irises in damp soil. These were beautiful, so we have made a larger, wider ditch from which we have great hopes for next year” (Wilson, 1900). In 1893 a visitor reported 4,000 clumps of this iris in one area alone, all raised from seed by Wilson (Visitor, 1893). By 1900 there were lupins and tree lupins growing in the field (Fig. 3): “Most of the tree lupins coming in flower on the banks in the field” (garden journal, 8 June 1900). In 1901 Wilson wrote: “The Lupines grow in a field which we took into Oakwood Garden, in which we made wide ditches […] The soil dug out of the ditches and thrown up on banks was used for herbaceous plants. It is there that the Lupines grow and seed themselves about” (Wilson, 1901). It is not entirely clear where the field garden was; however, the 1897 Ordnance Survey map shows a winding ditch from the River Wey to Glebe Farm (now the site of the Laboratory Building), across the area now known as Seven Acres, making this a strong suspect. Indeed the name Seven Acres was used in Wilson’s day: “Roll the carriage drive. Cart in leaves from seven acres” (garden journal, 22 January 1900).
The entrance to the garden was dramatic. The *Gardeners’ Chronicle* reported in January 1884 that “At the entrance Jasminum nudiflorum gives masses of bloom” (Anon., 1884). In 1901 *Country Life* added that “Almost upon entering Oakwood a field of Japanese irises prepares the visitor for the feast of lilies and hardy flowers in the more shady recesses […] A traveller in Japan told the writer that not even in the land of irises had he seen a picture so satisfying and beautiful as the ditches of flowers at Oakwood” (Anon., 1901). In 1894 in the *Gardeners’ Chronicle* Wilson wrote of creating an avenue of flowering trees: “What induced me to plant was that one side of the approach-road to our garden was very ugly; the other side, having a grown-up hedge and Japanese Roses, was well enough, and served as one side to an avenue. We began planting in 1882” (Wilson, 1894).

A spectacular show of gentians awaited the visitor to Oakwood, some of which were brought to the garden by Scott Wilson, a keen natural historian and plant collector who worked on the garden with his father. An impressed correspondent reported in June 1896 in *The Garden* the impact of *Gentiana acaulis*: “At Oakwood a row of plants, upwards of 100 yards long and carrying between 3000 and 4000 flowers, is worth going miles to see” (Cornhill, 1896). On 18 April 1893 Tatnall recorded “Gentians photographed on the mountain”. A few months later, a visitor reported, “One patch of Gentiana acaulis, which grows like a weed at Wisley, had 510 of its rich blue flowers open at one time. This is the kind of gardening that greets the visitor to Wisley” (Visitor, 1893).

In addition to the oak wood, Wilson also developed a pinetum in the northern part of the garden, and some of his original pines still feature in the garden today. Seldom mentioned in the articles about Oakwood, the area is labelled “Pine plantation and green broom” on the map included in the sale particulars (Fig. 5), following Wilson’s death in 1902. There is a photograph of lilies flowering in Wilson’s pinetum in Gertrude Jekyll’s *Lilies for English Gardens*, with the caption “Lilium japonicum brownii in a fir wood at Mr Wilson’s” (Fig. 4). Trees, whether evergreen or deciduous, provided opportunities at Oakwood for spectacular run-away climbers. *Country Life* reported in 1901, “Oakwood is unconventional. Crimson Rambler roses fling their shoots over tree and bush, and a rambling kind has run through to the highest point of a tree upwards of 30 ft. high, its cascades of white blossom tumbling over the dense green foliage” (Anon., 1901).
Trials, water and buildings

George Wilson’s founding aim was that the garden should be experimental, and he circulated the results of his trials via articles in the garden press. Many experiments took the form of placing plants in different conditions across the garden and seeing how they fared, but there was also a dedicated trial or nursery ground where seeds were raised. The garden journals record the sowing of Russian and Indian seeds. A visitor wrote in the Gardeners’ Chronicle in 1884: “A great feature of this garden, too, is the extensive space of nursery or trial ground on the hill-side, made up of scores of separate cribs hurdled off, and in which the Meconopsis and scores of other reputed delicate plants are doing as well as they could in their native homes”. He went on, “Mr Wilson is doing good work by making bold experiments with impunity by reason of his having to work the matters out on sound principles beforehand” (Anon., 1884). A further description of this area of the garden is provided in 1887: “The seed beds are a great source of interest here on the slopes; they are formed of narrow strips, sheltered on all sides by fences of dried Gorse, and over which Clematis, Roses, and other climbers are making headway. The beds are used exclusively for making seeds that ripen in the garden, each variety being separated by stones the size of an egg placed across the bed, and these also ensure safety from wash after heavy rains” (D., 1887).

Wilson created a lake at Oakwood, which is the smaller of the two lakes in today’s garden, as well as a series of ponds at the base of the current rockery, over which was a rustic bridge. The ponds remain where Wilson created them, and the style of the current wisteria bridge is modelled on Wilson’s original. An entry in the garden journal dated 3 May 1888 reads “Lowest temperature 39°. Highest in shade 52°. Iris kaempferi sown on bank of large pond at Wisley”. Another dated 2 April 1891 reads “Trout arrive from Mr Andrews”, and on 6 January 1893, “Commence trout fishing. Caught four. Returned two to the pond. Took two to HB [Heatherbank]”. A garden journal entry of 18 January 1894 reports, “Boat arrive from Weybridge”, and a photograph published in 1900 depicts a small boat on a body of water at Wisley (Anon., 1900; Fig. 6). In addition there was a boat house on the River Wey where it runs beside the garden, now the site of the irrigation pump. The boat house was marked on the 1897 Ordnance Survey map, and included in the 1903 sale particulars of Oakwood.

Wilson’s planting in and around water drew considerable attention and acclaim, much of it focused on the iris beds mentioned above situated at
Fig. 5. Plan of Oakwood, forming part of the sale particulars for the auction of the property held on 6 May 1903.
the edges of the lake, ponds and in ditches. But many other water-loving plants flourished at Oakwood. A bog garden was described in 1884: “In the bog garden the Sedums, Andromedas, Vacciniums, Gaultherias, Linnaea borealis (both the American and small-leaved Scotch varieties), Pernettyas, &c, are growing wild, the latter being covered with their variously tinted berries” (Anon., 1884). Wilson wrote in the Gardeners’ Chronicle in 1895 that “the North American Cranberry, Oxycoccus macrocarps [sic] at the side of a pond makes a pretty carpet, and has fruited very freely. The fruit is excellent stewed and in tarts” (Wilson, 1895).

Other edible plants were cultivated at Oakwood. Two kitchen gardens are marked on the map in the 1903 sale particulars (Fig. 5), one on the east side of the oak wood, and a second to the south east of the pinetum. An entry dated 31 January 1890 in the garden journals reads “Faulkner commence putting up wire netting around fruit garden”, and on 30 October 1891, “Faulkner put up iron arches in the kitchen garden”. An article about Oakwood in the Gardeners’ Magazine in 1891 states that “a walk into the fruit and vegetable garden shows that the necessities of life are considered well” (Visitor, 1891). Later entries in Tatnall’s journals include “Cut first dish of asparagus” (19 April 1895) and “Cut a good lot of seakale” (22 January 1900), and there are other references to carrots, onions, potatoes, cabbage, peas, cauliflower, parsley and apples.

Wilson lived at Heatherbank, Weybridge, some six miles from Wisley, and he lost no time in building a pied-à-terre at Oakwood, described by the visiting American nurseryman, C. M. Hovey, as “a handsome summer cottage” (Hovey, 1880). Climbing roses grew up its walls: “On a small hill top is Mr Wilson’s Wisley cottage, wreathed in Rose Reve D’Or, and placed where the surrounding scenery, and the colours of the garden are not lost to view” (Visitor, 1891). Tatnall refers to mowing the grass around the house on 30 April 1897, so we know the cottage had a lawn. Wilson was quite happy to share the house, now known as Weather Hill Cottage, with the local wildlife: “At Oakwood under a gable of the cottage, there is a martin’s and a wasp’s nest side by side and touching each other, but the inhabitants do not seem to interfere with one other” (Wilson, 1891). Cut flowers from the garden were brought indoors, and the longevity of these was reported: “We have had in the drawing-room here for more than two months in a tall green glass vase about 2 feet high a quantity of sprays of the flowers and seeds of Polygonum compactum” (Wilson, 1902). An article in Country Life in 1900 provides an evocative description of the cottage and its garden.
Fig. 6. “Japanese Iris by the water margin” at Oakwood, from Country Life, 8 September 1900, p. 305.

setting: “This is Oakwood, a clearing made in the woodland, and comprising many acres, with the cottage on the hilltop looking towards the blue distance of pine woods. The garden is undulating, and a veritable home of flowers planted in the positions which they love best” (Anon., 1900).

While we know that at his Weybridge residence Wilson maintained a variety of houses, pits and frames for fruit, orchids and tender plants, buildings at Oakwood other than the cottage barely feature in the available sources. Until 1891, Wilson’s emphasis at Oakwood was on growing plants hardy enough to survive out of doors, planting those of a more tender nature in sheltered positions with extra protection provided by hedges formed of a hurdle framework plaited with dried gorse, over which climbers were grown (D., 1887). As Lewis Castle wrote in the Journal of Horticulture in 1888, “There is not a glass house on the place, and even frames are dispensed with, for many thousands of seedlings are raised out of doors in special beds” (Castle, 1888). In 1891 Wilson seems to have relented. An entry in the garden journal dated 1 October 1891 reads “Plant large camellia in the new house”, and between 18 December 1891
and 16 January 1892 the temperature in the camellia house was recorded alongside the routine external readings. Additionally, from 1893 Tatnall records the use of cold frames for iris, cucumber and marrow plants.

High praise
The *Gardeners’ Magazine* in 1883 summarised Oakwood thus: “In the midst of a delightful country, undulating, richly wooded, and with at least a good Surrey climate, about seven acres of pretty woodland have been set apart. […] At Wisley […] gardens are made of all shapes and sizes for groups of herbaceous and alpine plants, the requirements of each group being considered at the outset, the object being, as a matter of course, to attain complete success in their naturalisation. […] In many instances mounds are made for plants that are liable to be smothered out by rank usurpers, and thus, having it all to themselves, they display their beauties fully and enjoy the little world that has been prepared for them” (Anon., 1883).

In 1897 *Country Life* waxed lyrical in praise of Wilson’s service to gardeners at his “birch-fringed garden”: “This Surrey garden has spread a love for hardy flowers far and wide, and taught many lessons in the way to use the hundred beautiful things, gifts from other lands, which here, amidst the shelter from surrounding woodland, are as happy as in their native haunts. To live in the cottage on rising ground overlooking the garden and country near, is to enjoy sweet communion with much that Nature gives us – flowers, birds, and wild woodland. Mr Wilson welcomes all intent on forming beautiful gardens to Wisley, and through the summer months spends much time there amongst the treasured plants he loves and grows so well” (Anon., 1897).

Four years later the same publication championed Wilson for his success in creating a garden for all seasons: “Every inch of soil holds something interesting, and the result is a picture of colour, sweet to look upon and yet mutable, for the most restful garden is ever producing fresh and welcome colour. […] The charm of Oakwood is that it is a garden for the whole year; it has colonies of snowdrops, of gentians, of shortia, of schizocodon, and a thousand things as interesting, and its Japanese irises and lilies, in such profusion as to delight even those who are not unaccustomed to the beauty of English gardening” (Anon., 1901).

The *Journal of Horticulture* concluded in 1888, “It is an extraordinary garden, and with its owner, designer, and superintendent as conductor, it is one of the most interesting a plant lover could visit” (Castle, 1888).
Activities at Oakwood

The visitors’ book, along with Tatnall’s entries in the garden journals, provides a unique insight into what was happening behind the scenes at Oakwood. In 1887, an entry in the visitors’ book reads “At home – lilies – Monday 15 August 1887” followed by 56 signatures and a comment at the end, “many did not sign”. Blackberrying parties took place on 24 September 1888 and 11 September 1893. In 1890 a garden party was held, with 80 guests, and for the following three years two garden parties were held, one in June and a second in July. For this event Tatnall dutifully recorded in the garden journals, “Mr Wiltshire’s tent put up in the evening”, along with the weather which ranged over the years from sunshine to thunderstorms. The final garden party took place in 1900, in Wilson’s 79th year.

Gardens attract artists, and Oakwood was no exception. Wilson’s wife Ellen accompanied her husband on visits to the garden and was herself an artist; her painting of *Lilium kramerii* was reproduced in *The Garden* of 12 August 1876. Wilson’s daughter Alice also regularly visited the garden with her father and brother, and Tatnall’s entries record her artistic excursions. On 7 July 1890 he wrote: “Miss Alice and party over to paint the iris”, and on 19 March 1891 she came to paint her father’s famous blue primula: “Oakwood Blue Primrose returned. Miss Alice and friend over to paint it”. According to the garden journal, the artist H. G. Moon had painted the same primula a fortnight earlier and the painting appeared in *The Garden* of 27 June 1891. Wilson’s lilies were another draw for artists, with an entry by Tatnall on 28 June 1890 recording, “Lilium giganteum in full flower. Artist down to sketch them. 23 spikes in one bed between seven and eight feet high. Most flowers on one spike 13”. Artist Mrs Duffield, whose drawings were published in the horticultural press, visited Oakwood most summers, staying for several weeks at a time, her arrival and departure again recorded by Tatnall. Other artists who signed their names in the visitors’ book include Marianne North, Alfred Parsons, Florence Woolward and Herbert Schmalz, though whether they painted at Oakwood we do not know.

On 24 August 1891 Tatnall records simply, “The Hawaiian Princess visited the Garden”. The Hawaiian chargé d’affaires had visited in June, presumably to inspect the garden for suitability for a royal visit. Princess Victoria Ka’iulani (1875–1899) became known throughout the world for her intelligence, beauty and determination. Her father was British
(Archibald Scott Cleghorn, a Scottish financier), and her mother was a sister of the Hawaiian king. In the knowledge that she would eventually succeed to the throne, Kaʻiulani was sent to England to be educated in 1889, aged 13. In 1891, while she was away in Europe, King Kalākaua died, and his sister Princess Lydia Liliʻuokalani became Queen, appointing her niece as Crown Princess. However Victoria never did assume power, as the following year the Hawaiian monarchy was overthrown. Victoria died of pneumonia seven years later.

**Wildlife at Oakwood**

The garden journals include a record of wildlife, noting the first annual appearances of the woodpecker, wryneck, redstart, cuckoo and nightingale in the garden, along with the first sightings of butterfly species. An entry of 13 April 1888 reads “Peacock butterfly out, and two Brimstones”, and two weeks later another records, “Cuckoo and nightingale at Wisley”. On 16 April 1890 Tatnall recorded, “Cuckoo first heard also the landrail [corncrake] and the swallow first seen”. Occasional entries record the first bird’s nest of the year: “Found the first pheasant’s nest in the garden – 1 egg” (garden journal, 11 April 1890). There are daily tallies of animals trapped, including mice, rats, water rats, moles and hedgehogs, and, from the autumn, of partridges, pheasants and hare hunted. An entry made on 31 December gives the totals for 1890: “Mice 265. Rats 70. Moles 30. Pheasants 58. Partridges 40. [Total] 463”.

**The Oakwood archive**

The fourteen volumes of garden journals (Fig. 7), mostly written in ink and maintained by Tatnall in week-to-view desk diaries, span the years 1888–1902, with no volume for 1889. They form a record of weather, visitors, fauna, plants in flower, planting and other work carried out at Oakwood, such as applying grease bands to fruit trees. Rare entries record events outside the garden, such as “Polling day” (3 May 1892) and “Peace proclaimed” (1 June 1902). The entries are a model of brevity, and only a few were written over the course of any given week. Wilson’s visits to Wisley from his home in Weybridge are recorded regularly, revealing that he visited up to 18 times a month in the summer, and considerably less frequently in winter. They reveal the provenance of some plants, for example received from Wolley-Dod (9 July 1890) and from Canon Ellacombe (11 April 1891), and the exhibition of others: “Take up Oakwood
Fig. 7. Oakwood garden journal entries by head gardener Alfred Tatnall, 25–28 February 1897.
Blue Primrose for the Botanic” (16 March 1891). Plants, flowers and produce are regularly recorded as having been sent to Heatherbank: “Send 3lb raspberries for jam, 2 punnets for dessert, 3 strawberries for jam and 2 cucumbers to HB [Heatherbank]” (garden journal, 15 July 1891). Wilson’s visits elsewhere are noted, including to Ramsgate (flowers from Oakwood were sent to him there), Boscombe and Tenerife.

Wilson himself maintained the Oakwood planting volumes (Fig. 8) which cover the entire 24 years of his development of the garden. The information is recorded mostly in pencil, and is brief but dense, comprising 10–14 entries per page. Entries are grouped by date, the date forming a heading. Each entry is preceded by the word “Bed” (probably referring to the special beds in the trial or seed ground) and a running number, then the name or variety of plant is recorded. There are occasional notes (such as “Smith”) and some later annotations especially “Right” followed by the date. From time to time the consecutive numbers are cross referenced in the garden journals to indicate when a plant had come into flower, e.g. “Crocus 14974 & 15042 in flower” (14 October 1890). These cross-references provided confirmation that the planting volumes relate to Oakwood, a fact not otherwise indicated.

The Oakwood visitors’ book dates from 1884–1902. At the top of the first page, a note is written in manuscript and signed George F. Wilson: “Heatherbank, Weybridge Heath, 1 March 1884. I shall be obliged by all visitors to Oakwood signing their names and addresses in this book”. There follow in the region of 6,000 names, including naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace, William Robinson, Gertrude Jekyll, Edwin Lutyens, businessman and philanthropist Sir Thomas Hanbury, and suffragette Constance Lytton. Enclosed is a chit from Alex H. Turner and Co, auctioneers and valuers of Weybridge, made out to the head gardener at Oakwood, requesting him to admit the bearer to view the garden, June 1902, presumably for the purposes of the impending auction following Wilson’s death.

Almost all the archive material relating to Oakwood is in need of conservation, principally due to weakened 130-year-old bindings, many of which were not of a quality intended for permanent preservation. Additionally, in the planting volumes and visitors’ book there is a risk of loss of text as much of the content is in pencil. The archive is therefore not open for consultation; however the Library’s ultimate intention is to digitise the volumes and make them available online when resources permit. In line with best practice, the archive is to be catalogued and
Fig. 8. Planting at Oakwood, recorded by G. F. Wilson, 14–15 September 1887.
conserved before digitisation takes place, and while surrogate copies will eventually be made available to readers in order to protect the originals, it is hoped that the volumes and papers in their original form will be displayed in periodic exhibitions illustrating the history of the garden.

**A happy ending**

There is a fitting end to the story of Mr Wilson’s Oakwood garden, carved out of farmland. On 1 April 1902 an entry in the garden journal reads “G.F.W. buried”. His wish for his older son Scott to take over from him was not to be fulfilled, and following Wilson’s death, the garden was put up for sale. Sale particulars were produced for the auction which was held on 6 May 1903, in which the property is described thus: “Oakwood and Glebe Farm, situate a short distance from the main Portsmouth Rd, bounded on one side by the lovely Wisley Common and sloping to the River Wey, with boat-house thereon. Comprising a gentleman’s small residence, farm house and buildings, charming gardens and grounds in an oak wood, and far famed alpine, rock, wood, and water gardens, probably the finest in this country, also well timbered grass and arable land, in all about 60 acres”. The property was purchased by Sir Thomas Hanbury, creator of the renowned garden at La Mortola, on the Italian Riviera. Hanbury offered Oakwood as a gift to the RHS, a gesture of which Wilson, who had served as treasurer to the RHS and on numerous committees, would almost certainly have approved. The Society at the time was desperately in need of a larger garden away from the pollution of Chiswick, where it had maintained its gardens for some 80 years. In 1904, its centenary year, the RHS moved its superintendent, S. T. Wright, and some of its staff to Wisley, and opened its doors to fellows of the Society and paying members of the public. Alfred Tatnall did not join the staff; however another of Wilson’s gardeners, George Hilderley, went on to work for the Society, and his granddaughter Janet’s memories of her grandfather’s work at Wisley form part of the Library’s oral history collection.

The foresight and dedication of Wilson in creating his Wisley garden provided the foundations for the garden enjoyed today by over a million visitors each year. The *Gardeners’ Magazine* in 1891 wrote, “It is a garden in the truest sense, a garden to roam in and dream” (Visitor, 1891). 125 years later, while much has changed in the garden, many would still agree.
Fig. 9. First page of a letter from G. F. Wilson to William Robinson, arranging a visit to Oakwood with Gertrude Jekyll and Captain Nelson, 23 August 1884. Lindley Library archives, reference WRO/2/212.
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