

Patron: HRH the Duchess of Cornwall

Newsletter

Issue 12 May 2011

Physic Garden Plant Sale

Buoyed up by the excitements of the Royal Wedding on the previous day, the gallant Volunteers of the Cowbridge Physic Garden arrived shortly after dawn on Saturday 30 April to erect the gazebo and get organised for the busy day of selling plants on behalf of the Garden. The blustery wind meant that a keen eye had to be kept on the tent to stop it from getting airborne — but all went well and the day was a great success.

Many thanks to all those who donated plants to sell, and to all those who helped out on the day. There was also a raffle and the sale of cards painted and photographed by our talented Volunteers helped to swell the profits of the day. All in all approximately £800 was raised which will be spent wisely and conscientiously on items needed during the following year to keep the Physic Garden looking as wonderful as the community has come to expect.

Your generosity is much appreciated.

Jo Homfray



Volunteers News

December 2011

As I look through my window at the dazzling snowy winter landscape, the best for years, I'm reminded of Rosemary Verey's book 'The Garden in Winter' – "The low slanting winter sun plays new tricks with the light. Have you noticed how it catches the leaves on the evergreen trees?" Certainly in the Physic Garden the *Cornus alba* stems are looking beautiful as is the *Ilex Aquifolium* – the lovely yellow and green variegated holly, long associated with Christmas.



Some ice still clings to the fountain. If you came a couple of weeks ago there was a splendid ice sculpture caused by the frost and ice around the fountain. I also noticed a goldfinch hovering around the teasels in the hope of the last few seeds. Its lovely colours showed up against the browns of the winter garden. And the almond tree has produced much fruit this year which lies scattered beneath it.

Yesterday three of us visited the Christmas tree exhibition in the Church. What a lovely selection of interesting trees, and thank you again to Rebecca for bringing the fir tree which she carefully tends during the year for the Physic Garden's contribution, and for organising the decorations – natural and golden.

January 2011

In the garden small plants are flowering already. Winter Aconite, *Eranthis hyemalis*, is flowering at the back of the Dye Bed and under the Fig tree. Nearby, by the Library entrance clumps of little *Cyclamen* are flowering, and there are snowdrops just showing white buds near the Mess Room.



We have been clearing some of the old seedheads now they have gone over and are no longer of use to the birds, but we have left the Cardoon and Teasel heads which looked stunning, as did the whole garden this Thursday under a heavy frost. We have also left some sticks of *Elecampane* in case small insects want to enjoy the shelter of the tubular stems. We also found quite a few ladybirds as we cleared away debris.

February 2011

Monty Don echoes my feelings about February in the garden. "At 6.45 a.m. the light began to open up, and a robin and a wren sang modestly for fifteen minutes and then were quiet. Not much. Hardly a dawn chorus. But I got the message. Gently, quietly, stepping over rain and ice, springtime is coming in." (8 February 2001 Monty Don The Ivington Diaries).

Indeed a week ago it was almost warm enough to sit out to have our lunch as we cleared the beds in the Physic Garden. Then of course this week it just rained on and off and we were loath to compact the soil by treading on it.

March 2011

I'm writing this as the sun streams through an east-facing window – March, my favourite month! The Volunteers last Thursday had our first lunch outside in the Physic Garden which is looking lovely. The Pasque flowers (*Pulsatilla*) were opening, the Almond tree blossoming, Cowslips, Primroses and *Leucojum* (Snowflake) and stunning white flowered *Helleborus niger*, and possibly my favourite plant at the this time of the year, *Pulmonaria* – Lungwort with it's lovely spotted leaves. I could go on...! (And Brendagh wants to mention her lovely Heartsease in her bed).

Not only are the spring plants looking lovely, but there is passion in the flowerbeds! There are ladybirds everywhere 'mating like billy-o' (to quote Val B!).

April 2011

We have cut off the heads of the Dandelions to try to prevent them reseeding all over the garden. We have removed the poor dead Myrtle bushes along the path as well as the mostly dead Santolina and these will be replaced by more Lavender (added to the new Lavenders already planted) which should look lovely and will add structure to the apple-tree beds.



The unusual Tulips in the apple-tree beds are outstanding – in particular, the Herbert Calvert, Philippe de Comice and Columbine have caught my eye. The Pergola bed is at its best as well. The white Narcissi look beautiful and the Cherry trees planted along the wall are flowering for the first time. The Quince, *Cydonia oblonga*, near the office is flowering its heart out, the Lily of the Valley, and the Solomon's Seal with their glorious architectural form are at their best... I could go on...

Val Thomas, Gardening Group

Excerpts from the monthly Newsletter for the regular volunteers.

Visit us at: www.cowbridgephysicgarden.org.uk

Of Mace and Men

Our regular annual fundraiser, Gardeners Question Time, was replaced this year by an illustrated lecture from one of the most famous growers in Wales, the celebrated Ivor Mace from Rhondda Fawr.

Ivor has won gold awards all over Britain and beyond as one of the most skilled plantsmen in Wales for his speciality devotions Chrysanthemums, Carnations, Onions, Leeks and a whole variety of others. With a plethora of coloured slides Ivor described how he has honed his craft over time into consummate and almost unassailable skills, with numerous tips on his know-how. From his small back garden with its rich loamy soil, Ivor has built a reputation for knowledgeable craftsmanship, illustrated in every frame.

Deputy chairman Bob Cope introduced and later thanked Ivor for his meticulous presentation. The lecture was preceded by the annual general meeting which was attended by almost 50 people. Chairman Dan Clayton-Jones remarked, "We appear to draw more people to our AGM than British Petroleum get to theirs."

Treasurer Genevieve Thomas outlined income and expenditure for the year, revealing a healthy bank balance. The meeting was also reminded that the National Eisteddfod comes to Llandow in August 2012 and is likely to draw in excess of 150,000 visitors to the locality, many of whom seem likely to head for the Physic Garden where we'll need well versed guides for conducted tours using the medium of Welsh. *Mike Meredith*



Visitors

As Volunteers working in the Garden, it is always very pleasing to hear the comments of visitors as they walk around, and really helps us to feel that our efforts are appreciated.

On Thursday, 12th.May, Mr and Mrs Watts, from Northwich, Cheshire, were clearly enjoying their visit, and spoke very warmly of the surprise they had felt on finding such a hidden delight.

"We are on holiday in Porthcawl, and chose to come to Cowbridge when we read about the Physic Garden in the Tourist leaflets in the Hotel," said Mr. Watts. "A number of our group had gone to Brecon, but we liked the look of Cowbridge, and particularly wanted to see the Garden. I'm sure it must give hours of pleasure to the visitors who come here. It is a credit to all those who have worked here," said Mrs. Watts. "It is a real pleasure to come here." *Brendagh Richards*



A physic garden by any other name

In the stunningly beautiful Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden in Cape Town, South Africa, there is a small area devoted to what they refer to as “useful plants”. Here, they have planted a variety of indigenous African herbs and plants that have been used in traditional African healing for countless generations.

Each African village or family group would have its venerated “sangoma” or healer who was the fount of all this knowledge and would have an apprentice who would be absorbing skills and knowledge for the future. There was no scientific research to develop these cures and remedies, nothing written down to form medicinal textbooks for future pupils to follow, just an instinctive and historical development that has been passed down through the years.



There is a delightful logic and symmetry in many of their derivations: if a plant has a resemblance to an ear, it is used to ease the pain of an ear infection; plants that have millions of tiny hairs are used to form a primitive gauze that not only helps stop bleeding from wounds, but also has a natural antiseptic; skin care, cleansing and beauty treatments are developed from a variety of plants and tubers. There are even plants renowned for their treatment of insect and snake bites.

While Western Europe has been busy developing its giant pharmaceutical industries, the indigenous African nations were calmly continuing to use their traditional healing methods and, surprise, surprise, many of the commercial drugs that are saving lives today are derived from the same plants that the Bushmen and other tribes of Africa have been using for centuries, just because they know that they work. *Martyn Hurst*



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Dandelion

(*Taraxacum officinale*)

We are hoping to include a small item in each newsletter on a plant or plants in the garden. We are starting with a plant that gives a lot of colour in the countryside in April: the Dandelion! The name comes from *dent de lion*, ('lion's tooth' in French) and is believed to have been named after the jagged shape of the leaves. The Welsh name 'Dant y Llew' has the same meaning. Although unpopular with many gardeners because it spreads easily and shoots up where it isn't wanted, this bright yellow flower is an important addition to a medicinal garden because all parts of the plant can be used and it is safe to use in large quantities.

In medicine the dandelion is known most as a diuretic: something that increases the flow of urine through the kidneys. Dandelions have such good diuretic qualities that an excess consumption of dandelion tea might result in unwanted consequences. Indeed, one of the common names for the plant used to be Johnny-wet-the-bed!



The bitter quality of Dandelions is believed to enhance digestion whilst the plant has also been used medicinally in the treatment of liver complaints and to relieve constipation.

Dandelions can also be used in food and beverages. Young leaves can be torn into small pieces and added to salads or sandwiches or it can be blanched (plunged into boiling water) and eaten as a vegetable. Traditionally the roots were dried, ground and made into a hot drink and were generally considered to have a stimulating effect without the side effects of coffee. The flowers are used to make Dandelion wine and in the production of the 'Dandelion & Burdock' drink.

And there are even more uses for the plant. Dandelions give off ethylene gas which helps to ripen fruit: some fruit farmers encourage a healthy crop of dandelions beneath their fruit trees. A magenta-brown dye is obtained from the root and is used in dyeing. In the Soviet Union during the Second World War the Russian Dandelion (slightly different from the common British one) was used to produce rubber from the latex in the roots.

Those are just some of the reasons why we are growing dandelions in the Physic Garden. However, we'll be trying to control their spread so please discourage any blowing of seeds around the garden!

Jean Reader

Introducing the Trustees

Linda Osborn



I was invited to become a Trustee of the Physic Garden primarily because of my involvement with the garden next door: Old Hall Grounds, for many years a poor relation to almost any garden, let alone its prestigious neighbour. The developing splendour of the Physic Garden spurred Cowbridge Charter Trust to launch a revival of what was once the Georgian garden of Old Hall. Similarly, the evident success of what a bunch of volunteers could achieve

in the Physic Garden predisposed bureaucracy to take the Old Hall project seriously. Old Hall Grounds will be totally different from the Physic Garden – informal (that messy patch of scraped earth will eventually be a wild flower meadow) and with a more upfront commitment to biodiversity in terms of habitat provision.

I grew up in a Welsh speaking home in the Rhondda (my parents had moved from the north). I've had a chequered career (but light on the cheques) symptomatic of many mothers: spent university years in Wales, America and Manchester; trained as a psychiatric social worker; and finally ran a small chain of bookshops in north London before devolving to Wales twelve years ago. After 35 years of city life, Cowbridge seemed from the start a model of civilised existence and I quickly became involved in the life of the town, spending some years as a town councillor. In my retirement, I don't have a moment to spare between working on the garden projects, helping with Big Screen film shows in Cowbridge Town Hall, organising chamber music concerts in Cardiff Museum and being on the board of Seren, an English language literary publisher based in Bridgend.

As a gardener I'm a chorus member not a prima donna, but I believe passionately in the importance of gardens. Cowbridge's gardens are in the heart of our ancient town, and gardens are at the heart of life itself. When so much country is being paved over, threatening not just wildlife but human life by cutting our links with the natural world, the primal need for that vanishing harmony can be nurtured by being in a garden, right here in Cowbridge, and it's a privilege to be involved in keeping the show on the road.

Linda Osborn

Visit us at: www.cowbridgephysicgarden.org.uk

Plant labels

I am sure you have all admired the black engraved plant labels which give the names of the plants in English, Welsh and Latin. We are grateful to Graham Duffield for volunteering to maintain the engraver and produce the labels, and to Geraldine Donovan of Dyffryn Gardens who has loaned it to the Physic Garden. *Val Caple*

Ideal presents

A range of Notelets are always available from The Bay Tree, Cowbridge. Also available are the superb quality Physic Garden umbrellas, plain green with garden logo at £15 which can also be ordered on 01446 774534. These items, plus a range of plants, are available for sale from Volunteers in the Physic Garden on a Thursday. All proceeds are used to support the garden.

Why people need plants

Members might be interested in studying the Open University short course 'Plants and People' written in partnership with Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. More information on the background to the course can be found here www.open.ac.uk

Helen Nelmes, Open University in Wales

Dates for your diary!

Members Garden Party

Our fifth annual Physic Garden Party will take place on Friday June 24 2011. Invitations are included with this issue of the Newsletter.

Please support us – and enjoy a pleasant evening in your garden.

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