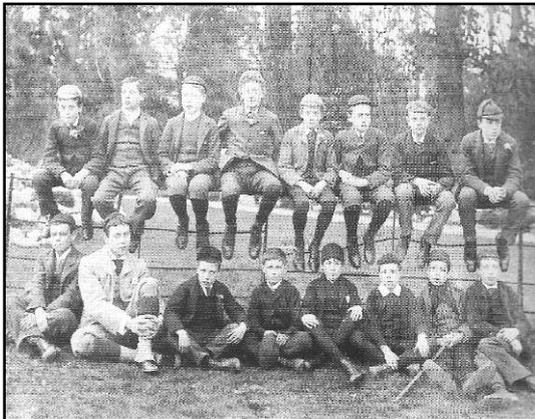


NEWSLETTER 68 JUNE 2013

Dear Member:

“You can start teaching the little hooligans of Brace’s Alley for a start” said his father. “They can’t even read a word of the Bible.” * So said Henry Carrington Bowles to his youngest son, after Gussie decided not to return to work in London following the untimely death of his siblings, John and Medora.



The year was 1888. Henry Carrington Bowles purchased a house in nearby Turkey Street to be a Night School and very soon seventy boys were learning their 3Rs, drawing, and of course, bible studies. So began E A Bowles’ lifelong interest in education and sharing of knowledge. When the E A Bowles of Myddelton House Society was formed, education was a prominent objective and has remained a priority.

We have the E A Bowles Memorial Award, the Myddelton House Trainee’s grant and we helped Lee Valley Education department fund the ‘Ossie’s Garden Adventure Challenge’.

We hold an extensive archive of Bowles’ papers at Myddelton House and now, after lying dormant for sixty years, his notes and scrapbooks held at the RHS Lindley Library are to be catalogued and archived in a joint venture with our Society. Ultimately, they will be available for reference. Access to these papers and photographs will be invaluable in the continuing restoration of Myddelton House garden. Already, the Head Gardener has spotted a number of paving stones currently “in the wrong place”. They will be restored to their rightful home in the garden and add greater credence to this heritage site.



Of course, it can’t be all work and no play, so I am delighted to look forward to an evening with members at our hog roast on 6th July; our end of term party.

* *E.A.Bowles and his Garden at Myddelton House* by Mea Allen, Faber & Faber 1973.

Photographs: E A Bowles and boys. From the Society archive. Steps to the Kitchen Garden. RHS Lindley Library / R Holland.

Stop Press: Roger Holland has written an excellent ‘plantsman biography’ article on E A Bowles in this month’s Royal Horticultural Society periodical *The Plantsman*. It is very informative and includes excellent photographs. Highly recommended.

Jackie Kingdom, Chairman

MEMBERSHIP NEWS The Society welcomes new members John Willcocks, Miss K Hudson, Stephen Rolfe, Ann & Richard Turvey, Mrs J Mixer, Mrs Carolyne Smith.

THE NEW RIVER We know anecdotally that Mr Bowles took much pleasure from this unique feature in his garden but his writings show that it did pose some horticultural problems:

“Of water there seems to be plenty, for the New River runs right through the very centre of the garden; but though it may carry many millions of gallons through it, clever Sir Hugh Myddelton made its clay banks so strong that even after 300 years they let no water soak away, and I smile quietly when people say, “Of course your Irises do so well all along by the river, as they get moisture from it,” for I know those beds under the old Yews are about the driest in Europe. The water is there in the river bed, but as a gardener once said to me, “Yes, sir, there’s plenty of water but it’s very low down.” I often think of his plaint when I too have been dragging it up in fat, lumpy water-cans, and wish I had standpipes and hose and sprinklers and the many luxuries of people lucky enough to have water high up, on the top of their own hill, like good old Tom Smith’s ideal nursery at Newry, or in the water-tower of the neighbouring town.

... one of my troubles is the well-known hardness of New River water. Derived mainly from chalk wells, it is so hard that one feels it would be scarcely a miracle to walk on it, and when the well nearest to us is in full work there is a distinct bluish-green colour in the river, rather attractive to look at, but as I have found by experience, rendering it an absolute poison for certain calcifuge plants. A liberal dose of New River water given in a spirit of kindness to a collection of dwarf Rhododendrons during a time of drought killed all but one in about a fortnight. The survivor is with me still, being evidently a lime lover ...” (My Garden in Spring, chapter II).



“The northern bank of the New River provides us with a long grass path and one of the most sheltered walks in the garden. ... Three of these borders are very much overhung by the old Yews, and of course the roots fill and drain them very effectually, and though they lie so close to the river, not one drop of its water soaks through to them, for to begin with Sir Hugh Myddelton saw to the proper construction of its clay banks three hundred years ago, and vigilant officials, first of the New River Company and now of the Metropolitan Water Board, have ever since been on the watch for weak spots and ready to apply fresh clay when needed. So that in spite of the nearness of so much water, these beds are about as dry and starved as any in the world, and very few plants will grow in them so happily as the Flag Irises.” (My Garden in Spring, chapter XIV).

“So many people say, “What splendid opportunities you must have for Water Lilies and aquatic plants with the New River running through the garden!” – so many, in fact, that some day I shall push one of them into it instead of explaining that, if I did plant a water Lily in the River, the Water Board’s officials would soon rake it out again, and, even if they did not, it would catch its death of cold, as people used to say when I was young, ... The New River water comes chiefly from chalk wells of great depth, and therefore is hard enough to look blue, and cold enough in Summer to make you look blue if you were in it for long.



Besides, its banks are made of clay, pommelled and puddled and slapped and banged with wooden slappers to a degree of watertightness, solidity, and neat level appearance that admits of nothing but turf margins. So the River is banned, taboo, *verboden* for planting, but above all, unsuitable.” (My Garden in Summer, chapter IX).

[Editor’s note: The upper picture shows gardener Sam Howard (1876-1971) bending to fill a watering can on the day of the Forty Hill fête, June 28th 1950. The colour photograph is a recent addition to the archive. It was taken circa 1950 by Mrs Kathleen Hayes (née Hobbs) and given by an unnamed donor.]

Enfield Museum's exhibition "Water, Water, Everywhere: 400 Years of the New River" runs until 5 January 2014 at the Dugdale Centre, Thomas Hardy House, 39 London Road, Enfield EN2 6DS. Admission is free from 9 am to 5 pm Monday to Saturday and 10 am to 1 pm on Sunday.

The second part to volume one of local author Michael F Kensey's *London's New River in Maps* is now available from the visitor centre sales area.

ARCHIVE We are grateful for two donations made at the annual general meeting on Saturday 27 April.

Thank you to Hazel Langley for giving us, via Society member Helen Loveland, a 1966 print by Libereso Guglielmi. 'Li Williams' was a key figure in the modern history of the garden. He worked at Myddelton for the School of Pharmacy from the early 1960s and was head gardener from 1966 until he returned to San Remo in 1970.



Thanks also to Frank Bayford for a field guide to orchids of Britain and Europe.

HISTORICAL NOTE Summertime is when we can perhaps best appreciate the plant family Apiaceae whose signature characteristic is to produce umbels – usually flat-topped or rounded flower clusters in which the individual flower stalks arise from a central point. It is one of the best known groups of flowering plants not only to horticulture and agriculture but also because of its important chemical constituents reflected in the odour, flavour and toxicity of many of its members. By the end of the 16th century early botanists had recognised these characteristics as representing a plant family even though only temperate Old World species were then known. It was probably the first grouping to be systematically examined in a study *Plantarum umbelliferarum distributio nova* by Robert Morison (1620-1683) published in Oxford in 1672. This is unsurprising given how useful umbellifers are for quite apart from a wide range of medicinal uses they provide vegetables such as carrot and parsnip; stems and leaves in angelica, celery and lovage; herbs like fennel and parsley; spices including anise, caraway, coriander, cumin, dill; gums and resins from asafoetida and poisons such as hemlock.



Mr Bowles certainly had a favourite which he describes in chapter VII of 'My Garden in Summer': "*Oreocome Candollei* has no longer a right to use that sonorous title, it seems, and has become identified with *Selenium* [sic but correct in index] *tenuifolium* [now *Selinum wallichianum*]; but it is still the queen of umbellifers, with its almost transparent tender greenness and the marvellously lacy pattern of its large leaves. I think it the most beautiful of all fern-leaved plants, and keep a small colony here."

This tap-rooted, clump-forming perennial is essentially an ornamental cow parsley. Native to the Himalaya it grows about 1-2 m high and flowers from midsummer to early autumn. Fully hardy, it is tolerant of a wide range of conditions but is best suited to part shade in damp soil. Picture by Ken Mines, copyright The Hardy Plant Society photo library.

FROM THE ARCHIVE In a short article, 'Iris Memories', E A Bowles writes: "My memory carries me back something like seventy-five years for the earliest vivid recollection it retains of the beauty of an iris. My parents had taken me, a small boy in a sailor-suit, for what in those days of horses and a landau was considered a long drive; we went to Ware's celebrated nursery-garden at Hale Farm, Tottenham, and among the frames and beds of early spring flowers I first met Mr G Reuthe [d. 1942], who in later years became such a good friend and taught me so much. When he saw how charmed I was by my first acquaintance with *Primula denticulate*, *Saxifraga oppositifolia*, both red and white, and, above all, *Iris reticulata*, he picked a flower of the last-named for me, and, pressing down the fall to show the markings in the hollow of the claw, said, "See, it is spotted like the breast of a beautiful thrush". I have often felt grateful to him for that revelation of the hidden beauties to be discovered by looking closely into flowers ...

... It was a memorable day when I found some seedlings of *I. reticulata* flowering for the first time. They were the offspring of the variety we used to grow as var. *Krelagei*, a reddish-purple form which seeded freely but was not long-lived. There were three in flower, a rather dark slaty-purple, too dull to be desirable, a tall red-purple, and, the best of them, the pale blue which I named CANTAB. It has rather a small flower, but carried on a good tall tube, and such a hearty constitution that, whereas many larger forms raised later have died out, CANTAB is still widely grown and loved. I gave some bulbs to that skilful raiser of good plants, Mr Herbert Chapman of Rye, hoping that he would rear one of the same colour but larger. He soon had enough to take to Vincent Square, and they received the AM [Award of Merit] of the RHS.”



This is referred to in a letter from F Herbert Chapman, Guldeford Lodge, Rye dated 23 February 1915:

“Dear Mr Bowles I shall have a nice lot of Iris ‘Cantab’ for next Tuesday’s meeting & had some thoughts of putting it before the Committee for FCC [First Class Certificate]. I was wondering if you thought this too ambitious? My high opinion of the plant continued to be confirmed, both as to its beauty & its fine constitution: not a plant has disappeared here as yet, although *reticulata* is by no means persistent. It (Cantab) seems to me to have a fine future as a rival, or, shall we say – companion, to *reticulata* & I think it is worthy of an FCC: but I should like to be a little guided by you in the matter, if you can spare time to drop me quick a line. I am yours very truly F Herbert Chapman.”

‘Cantab’ was given a Royal Horticultural Society Award of Merit in 1918. It is a tribute to Mr Bowles’ discernment that nearly a century after he first selected it in 1914 it remains a widely available, popular and viable plant. Some bulbs donated by the British Iris Society have been planted at the end of the cold frames in the kitchen garden. Picture by courtesy of the Alpine Garden Society Library.

AROUND THE GARDEN In chapter III of ‘My Garden in Spring’ about early irises Mr Bowles deals extensively with forms of his favourite *Iris unguicularis* but adds:



“I grow one other form, but I do not care much for it. I got it first from Herr Sprenger of Naples as *Iris unguicularis* var. *pontica*, and lately from Holland as *I. lazica*. It has wide leaves, which somewhat resemble those of *Iris foetidissima*, and the flowers are of a rather starchy, poor form, and a washy, pinkish lilac, the falls being mottled with a yellow brown much too freely to look clean and fresh. It has some rather interesting botanical characters, ... , but though I should be sorry to lose the variety I do not want any more plants of it.”

Did Mr Bowles’ renowned plant discernment forsake him just for once, or is the plant he described then different from its current form? *Iris lazica* can in fact be an attractive, reliable and floriferous plant and will tolerate more shade and moister soil than other Ungiculares. Its name derives from its origins in Lazistan on the Black Sea coast with a range extending into north Turkey and the south west Caucasus. Picture by Alan Pettitt.

[Editor’s note: Carl Ludwig Sprenger, born 1846, was a German botanist who lived at Naples between 1877 and 1907 and was partner in the horticultural business of Dammann & Co. He collected seeds and propagated plants for botanical gardens but the eruption of Vesuvius on April 4 1906 buried plants under volcanic ash killing many of his best specimens. In 1907 he became garden supervisor of Kaiser Wilhelm II’s palace on Corfu. Although profoundly deaf, Sprenger was briefly imprisoned as a German citizen by Serbs in the middle of World War I. He died in Corfu in 1917].

GARDEN NEWS

For the first time since I have worked at the garden, Myddelton’s historic two hundred year old listed wall was breached by a motorist during the evening of Saturday 11 May. Both courses of brick were knocked through at a point on Bulls Cross often referred to locally as Garnault Hill. The hole was sufficient to allow a

view of the Yew tree that supports the great Wisteria. On 20 June 2011 the nearby northern pillar of the walksman's gate had been damaged, almost ten years to the day since its southern pillar had suffered a similar fate.

Bryan Hewitt, Senior Gardener

The very long, cold and dull spring, with the second coldest March on record, has inevitably delayed senior gardener Nicola Browne's propagation and planting plans in the kitchen garden. However some of the continuing structural improvements here have still been possible including installation of the new fruit arch on a roughly north-south axis along one of the central paths. It will eventually be trained with heritage fruit varieties but for now planting with climbing vegetables such as runner bean varieties will give some immediate interest for the rest of this year.



The sunny, south-facing wall below the tulip terrace has been newly fitted with vine eyes and strung with wires to support the canes for training a selection of fruit trees.



A small area towards the western edge of the kitchen garden has been set aside for six heritage daffodil varieties: 'February Gold' 1923 (a Cyclamineus type), 'Thalia' 1916 (Triandrus), 'King Alfred' c1890 (Trumpet), *Narcissus poeticus* (species), 'Silver Chimes' 1916 (a Triandrus and Tazetta cross) and *Narcissus obvallaris* (species). Mr Bowles would have been familiar with each and wrote about all except 'Thalia' in the 'My Garden' trilogy 1914-15 and 'A Handbook of Narcissus' 1934

(which includes his own black and white sketches of 'Silver Chimes' and *N. obvallaris*).



A collection of sinks and troughs were donated to the garden some years ago by a nearby resident. Two trainee gardeners from Capel Manor College have fully renovated them with a covering of 'hypertufa' mix which gives a simulated stone finish. Now planted up with a wide



selection of alpine plants they make an attractive addition to the path around the hollow lawn area.

The new plantings in the glasshouses continue to surprise and amaze visitors and in May the first enormous heart-shaped flowers appeared on *Aristolochia grandiflora* in the order Piperales and family Aristolochiaceae. This deciduous vine is native to the Caribbean and Central America in tropical forest near streams and gullies. Its flowers are adapted by their colouring and carrion

odour to encourage pollination by flies. Pictures by Alan Pettitt.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS BY THE SOCIETY Our autumn lecture is at 3pm on Saturday 19 October at Myddelton House when Kate McGeevor, the project manager, will talk about progress on the restoration work at Forty Hall Farm. The cost is £5 per person to include tea, coffee and biscuits and an application form is included with this newsletter. As usual our maximum capacity is 50, and restricted to Society members only - so early application is advisable; cheques will be returned for excess bookings. Tickets will not be issued but please indicate if you wish an email or telephone acknowledgement of your booking.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS BY LVRPA Lee Valley has recently introduced a new guided walk which traces the course of the New River between Myddelton House garden through the Forty Hall Estate and Whitewebbs. Devised and led by garden volunteer Peter Barker it covers about 3½ miles and takes 3 hours starting from and returning to the garden. Andrew Turvey and Peter have very kindly offered a special walk reserved for Society members on Saturday 7th September from 1.30 to 4.30 pm at the reduced price of £2 per person (normally £3.50). The maximum party that can be accommodated is 15; to reserve a place, email Alan or Kathy Pettitt at alanandkathypettitt@btinternet.com or phone 01707 874317. Payment is by cash on

the day in the visitor centre donation box; the proceeds will go to the rock garden restoration fund. Note that most of the walk will be over uneven, rough terrain so suitable robust footwear is advisable.

The main ground floor rooms at Myddelton House will once again be open to visitors free of charge for the Open House London scheme on Saturday 21 September from 10.00 to 16.00. For this and other events see the Lee Valley Regional Park events guide 'What's On', check www.visitleevalley.org.uk or telephone 08456 770 600.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS ELSEWHERE There is a varied display of botanical art throughout the summer at Forty Hall, Forty Hill, Enfield EN2 9HA.

Until 7th July are: 'Bud to Bloom', craft works from the Crafts Council; 'The Beauty of Botany', a selection of drawings from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew; 'Garden Flowers by Pieter van Kouwenhoorn', prints from the Royal Horticultural Society.

'Botanical Paintings by Olga Blandford Lewis (1917-2002)' ends on 1st September.

From 13th July to 1st September: 'Natural Philosophy: Botanical Drawings from the Wellcome Institute Library' and 'Food for Thought: Prints by Arcimboldo'.

Current seasonal opening hours are Tuesday to Friday 11am to 5pm, Saturday and Sunday 12 noon to 5pm, admission free. See website www.fortyhallestate.co.uk for more details.

DIARY DATES 2013

Saturday 06 July: Evening event from 6 pm to 8.30 pm in Myddelton House garden.
Saturday 19 October: Society lecture 3pm at Myddelton House.

CONTACTS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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Secretary: Mrs Helen Reid 18 Winnington Road Enfield EN3 5RH ☎: 020 8804 4873.

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Archives: Mr Geoffrey Nash 31 Tynemouth Drive, Enfield EN1 4LR. ☎ 020 8366 1365.

Charity Commission coordinator: Mrs Jill Holland.

Crocus collection: Dr Roger Holland 45 Gibraltar Lane, Swavesey, Cambridge CB24 4RR.

✉ rogerwk.holland@btinternet.com ☎ 01954 230077.

Garden volunteers: Head Gardener Mr Andrew Turvey ☎ 01992 709849 or 07920 500004. ✉ aturvey@leevalleypark.org.uk

Membership and Gift Aid: Mr Alan Pettitt.

Society event volunteers: Mrs Jackie Kingdom.

Website (www.eabowlessociety.org.uk): Ms Liz Macnicol ✉ info@eabowlessociety.org.uk

Lee Valley Park: ✉ www.visitleevalley.org.uk ☎ 08456 770 600. ✉ info@leevalleypark.org.uk

THE GARDEN

For the latest seasonal news and pictures see www.facebook.com/MyddeltonHouseGardens

THE NEWSLETTER

Members' newsletter contributions, photographs, letters, questions and comments are always welcome and can be sent to Alan Pettitt 2(A) Plough Hill Cuffley Potters Bar Hertfordshire EN6 4DR or email alanandkathypettitt@btinternet.com Deadlines are 15 March, 15 June and 15 November. Please note that items may be edited as necessary. Extracts from E A Bowles' writings are made with the kind permission of the copyright holder, Brigadier A H Parker Bowles OBE. Unless otherwise attributed, illustrations are from the Society archive.

