



## **BIRMINGHAM BOTANICAL GARDENS**

Westbourne Road

Edgbaston

BIRMINGHAM

B15 3TR

Tel: 0121 454 1860

Fax: 0121 454 7835

Website: [www.birminghambotanicalgardens.org.uk](http://www.birminghambotanicalgardens.org.uk)

Email: [admin@birminghambotanicalgardens.org.uk](mailto:admin@birminghambotanicalgardens.org.uk)

Registered Charity No: 528981

All photographs by the BBG and Gill Mills



# BIRMINGHAM BOTANICAL GARDENS



**FRIENDS OF BIRMINGHAM  
BOTANICAL GARDENS NEWSLETTER**

**SPRING 2014**

## Opening Times 2014

The Gardens are open every day except Christmas Day and Boxing Day from **10.00 am**.

## Closing Times

**1 January to 30 April:** Doors close at **5.00pm**

**1 May to 30 September:** Doors close at **6.00pm** - weekends at **7.00pm**

| Admission Prices    |                                |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| Family *            | £22                            |
| Adult or Two Adults | £7 or £12                      |
| Groups **           | £6 (adult) or £4 (concessions) |
| Concessions         | £4.75                          |
| Children under 5    | FREE                           |
| SHOP                | FREE                           |

\*Family ticket = 2 adults and up to 3 concessions.

\*\* Pricing valid for groups of 10 or more. School visits are priced separately.

**Please Note:** all prices include a 10% donation as part of the Gift Aid scheme.

*giftaid it*

## Membership Options

Family Membership £65 – allows entry for up to 5 people from the same family

Annual Membership £40 – allows entry for 2 people from the same family

Single Membership £35

Guest Ticket £13 – may be purchased by Annual, Family or Single Members only and allows entry for one other person

## SPONSORS OF THE 2014 NEWSLETTERS



- Wills & Powers of Attorney
- Probate
- Trusts & Charities
- Residential Property
- Commercial Property
- Property Disputes
- Employment
- Dispute Resolution



are pleased to sponsor the Botanical Gardens Newsletter and feel lucky to be so close to these wonderful Gardens.

We and our clients can look out on our own gardens as we discuss legal matters.

**If you have any queries please contact us on 0121 693 2222**

[www.tyndallwoods.co.uk](http://www.tyndallwoods.co.uk)
[facebook.com/tyndallwoodssolicitors](https://www.facebook.com/tyndallwoodssolicitors)
[@Tyndallwoods](https://twitter.com/Tyndallwoods)

29 Woodbourne Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B17 8BY



Perfectly timed business and tax advice from local accountants with local knowledge will be music to your ears.

Finely tuning our own business to meet our clients needs has helped us to be proactive and advise thousands of businesses throughout the UK. Our network of local offices provide all the essential aspects of business support to your company.

Visit [www.hwca.com](http://www.hwca.com) today and enjoy the performance.

Sterling House, 71 Francis Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B16 8SP.  
Telephone: 0121 456 1613 E-Mail: [birmingham@hwca.com](mailto:birmingham@hwca.com)



NPS Wealth Management Ltd

Investment Planning

Retirement Planning | Inheritance Tax Planning

Tel: 0121 4544818 | Web: [www.sjpp.co.uk/Nickshioleftou](http://www.sjpp.co.uk/Nickshioleftou)

description of the tree. A fellow missionary sent seed back to France where one eventually sprouted in 1899 and flowered seven years later. Henry read David's description and found the tree deep in the countryside a few miles from his base at Ichang on the Yangtze River. He gathered seeds and sent them to Kew but they were not cultivated. In 1899 the Veitch nursery sent Wilson to China specifically to find and bring back the seed of this reputedly wonderful tree.



Wilson sought out Henry, now stationed at Szemao in Yunnan province, for his advice on plant hunting in the region before he ventured into the Chinese interior, collecting as he went. It was not until the end of May 1900, eight months after meeting Henry, that he found first one and then a colony of Davidias in full bloom, which he described as 'most beautiful'. He brought back a vast quantity of seed for Veitch from which about 13,000 seedlings were grown on. The first one flowered at the Veitch nursery in 1911, by which time Wilson had completed his plant collecting trips and was living in the U.S.A.

**Sources:**

Brickell, C., *The RHS Gardeners' Encyclopedia of Plants and Flowers*, Dorling Kindersley, London, 1989.

Campbell-Culver, M., *The Origin of Plants*, Eden Project, 2001.

Stearn, W.T., *Stearn's Dictionary of Plant names for Gardeners*, Cassell, 1992.

Tyler-Whittle, M., *The Plant Hunters*, Chilton Book Co., Philadelphia, 1970.

- E. H. Wilson was employed at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens 1893-7 and is commemorated in the name of one of the paths, Wilson Walk.
- The Wilson Border has been replanted with plants that he introduced.
- Two other explorers in China, George Forrest (1873-1932), Reginald John Farrer (1880-1920), are commemorated in paths at the Gardens
- There is a fine specimen of *Davidia involucreta* at the Gardens which shows off its beauty in late spring.

As Chairman of the Friends of Birmingham Botanical Gardens I would like to ask all our visitors to support the Gardens and also the events organised by the Friends. The money raised from the events goes towards specific projects within the Gardens. The Children's playground and the Cascade are projects we have supported in the past.



The Friends are a small committee and we would welcome some new members. We have 4-5 meetings including our AGM and as mentioned our events are specifically to raise money for the Gardens. Currently we are only organising the Book Sale in February and the Craft Fair in November. We need new members with new ideas.

I am also a volunteer at the Gardens and talk to members who are interested in a memorial following the loss of a loved one. Over the years the Gardens have acquired many memorial benches and although we aren't discouraging memorial benches we are encouraging tree sponsorship. We have some lovely trees in the Gardens, but they are expensive to maintain and have to be replaced from time to time.

Tree sponsorship can be for a newly planted tree or a mature tree. The cost of sponsorship depends on the type of tree chosen – anything from £350.00 for a small tree up to £2500.00 for a mature tree. You are able to have a dedication hung or nailed on the tree. If you are interested in sponsoring a tree please contact me at the Gardens: [rosemary@birminghambotanicalgardens.org.uk](mailto:rosemary@birminghambotanicalgardens.org.uk)

Rosemary Radford – Chairman of The Friends of BGG



## First World War Graves – a horticultural view by Sally Dickson

From late 1915 the French Government purchased all the plots of ground where British soldiers were buried and presented the 'right of enjoyment' of them as a free gift in perpetuity to the British Nation. Initially, the Army took responsibility for these sites. In order to create worthy memorials to the fallen horticultural and architectural expertise was brought in to design and plant the cemeteries, including Captain A Hill (later to become Director of Kew). He visited and photographed many of the cemeteries in July 1917 and, after the war, published an article about his work in the Journal of the Royal Horticultural Society (vol.45, 1919).



Cemetery sites were chosen for convenience, but many were also beautiful. At Couin burials were in an apple orchard (pictured). Here, annuals were sown near each cross, including *Chrysanthemum* 'Morning Star', mauve and white *Lychnis*, *Alyssum maritimum*, *Godetia*, and blue Larkspur, with the rest of the grave covered with grass.



Soil was a key factor. At Etaples (pictured) the 'topsoil' was blown sand, and wind breaks were planted of Maritime Pine, Poplar and Sycamore under-planted with Willow, Sea Buckthorn and

## E.H. Wilson, China and *Davidia involucrata* by Sally Dickson



Ernest Henry Wilson went on four plant hunting expeditions to China between 1899 and 1911, earning himself the nickname 'Chinese Wilson'. He introduced over 2,000 species of seed to Britain resulting in at least 1,000 new cultivated plants. Some of their botanical names honour him and the small band of European botanists who had ventured as far as China.

*Acer davidii* 'Ernest Wilson' also records the name of French missionary Pere Jean Pierre Armand David (1826-1900) who was sent to China in 1862 and worked there for twelve years. He studied the flora and fauna of the region, making three early explorations of the interiors of China, Tibet and Mongolia.



*Sinowilsonia henryi*, a genus of one species of deciduous tree, is grown for its foliage and catkins. Its discovery was an opportunity to honour Wilson by giving the genus a Latinised version of his nickname, 'Chinese Wilson'. The species name honours Augustine Henry (1857-1930), an Irish physician who joined the Imperial Chinese Maritime Customs Service in 1881. He was also a dendrologist and keen plant collector. During his twenty years in China he repeatedly urged the British authorities to send collectors to explore the botanical riches of the Chinese landscape. Meanwhile, he sent 158,000 herbarium specimens from China to the Botanic Gardens at Kew and Edinburgh.

The Handkerchief Tree, *Davidia involucrata*, links all three men. David, after whom the genus was named, saw and published a

## *Amomum dealbatum*



This relative of ginger is an aromatic medicine, which was often used as an antidote to poisoning. The name means 'without blame' suggesting its use as a cure all. It is a robust herb in the ginger family with stalked leaves to about two metres in height, strange indeed that its flowers barely break the surface of the soil and open fully at the base of the stem.

Pollinated by bees even at this low altitude the flower buds are used to make curries and the dried seed capsules have a similar aroma and taste to cardamom pods. Despite being all the way from the Eastern Himalaya this plant thrives in our sub-tropical house – remember to look down for the flowers not up at the leaves!

- These are some of the plants of the month for the next few months at the Gardens. For other plants that look spectacular in these months see the website

Privet, to ensure that plants other than annuals could eventually be grown. As the ground colour was yellow the annuals grown were blue, mauve and white, including *Linaria*, *Phacelia*, *Aster*, and *Alyssum*.

Individual burials in the Somme battlefield were given a white cross and enclosed with a wire fence. In July 1917 the whole area was transformed by scarlet Poppies interspersed with swathes of white Chamomile and yellow Charlock. To quote Captain Hill "The sight was more beautiful than any words of mine can express."



By the end of 1919 the Imperial War Graves Commission had received its Royal Charter and taken responsibility. Six Army officers, a staff of non-commissioned officers, foremen gardeners and a large body of gardeners were employed on the work. Their aim was to establish the even and unbroken surface of turf that we see in the cemeteries today.



***Primula auricula (x pubescens) 'Scorcher'***  
**Florists' auriculas**



Strictly speaking the Florists' auriculas are a hybrid between two wild *Primula* species, *Primula hirsuta* and *Primula auricula* with the hybrid name *Primula x pubescens*. Typically however they are found listed in catalogues as *Primula auricula* cultivars. Auriculas were brought to the UK by Huguenot weavers (Protestant French refugees of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century). Whilst employed at home on their work they were able to devote time to the care of these delicate plants.

The Show auriculas are typically grown in clay pots in a compost with good drainage in a cool place out of direct sun. Their beauty rests in the contrast of colours on the petals and the fine meal (known as farina) which dusts every part of some varieties like caster sugar. 'Scorcher' is a bright crimson variety which displays this farina well on its grey foliage.

***Magnolia x soulangeana***



Probably the most widely grown Magnolia in domestic gardens, its beauty, although fleeting, keeps it being planted regularly and its presence as a large tree in many places throughout the country is a testament to its hardiness over many years. It is a primary hybrid between two wild species, *M. denudata* and *M. liliiflora* and was made in 1820 in France by Etienne Soulange-Bodin after whom it is named. Introduced into Britain by 1827, this would be one of the first magnolias most English people would have seen.

The floral magnificence comes with a couple of problems however. It flowers early on bare stems and sometimes a hard frost in April can leave the buds scorched brown. The petals fall quickly to make a coating of pink at ground level that soon turns to brown and can smother delicate low growing bulbs and herbaceous plants beneath. Despite all that, those of us lucky enough to have a magnolia in the garden tend to forgive them in return for the floral extravaganza in spring!