



NEWS FROM THE SHED -APRIL 2021

Well, we have managed to get through a whole year since the first lock down, the weather is improving, new shoots are appearing in the garden, the seed catalogues are well-thumbed, Boris has rolled out his Road Map – we are on the move – so join me on some JOURNEYS by means of The Shed News for April!

In this issue we find links between a C17 Yeovil Pirate and Easter Eggs. There is news as to how Roman gladiators used a certain vegetable to improve their muscle tone. We take a look at gardens in Stratford to celebrate the birthday of Shakespeare. And then there are seeds, Gallery visits and well, I guess all this might leave you twisting and turning and not knowing which way to turn so a look at Mazes in gardens.

We have all been on a journey through uncharted waters this year – but have you heard of the journeys of William Dampier?



William Dampier born in East Coker, Yeovil, baptised 5 September 1651 and died March 1715 was an English explorer, pirate, privateer, navigator, and naturalist who became the first Englishman to explore parts of what is today Australia, and the first person to circumnavigate the world three times.

Dampier influenced several figures better known than he:

- *He made important contributions to navigation, collecting for the first time data on currents, winds and tides across all the world's oceans that was used by James Cook and Horatio Nelson.*
- *Daniel Defoe, author of Robinson Crusoe, was likely inspired by accounts of real-life castaway Alexander Selkirk, a crew member on Dampier's voyages.*
- *Jonathan Swift mentions Dampier in his Gulliver's Travels as a mariner comparable to Lemuel Gulliver.*
- *His notes on the fauna and flora of north-western Australia were studied by naturalist and scientist Joseph Banks, who made further studies during the first voyage with James Cook.*

This helped lead to the naming of and colonisation of Botany Bay and the founding of modern Australia.

- *His reports on breadfruit led to William Bligh's ill-fated voyage in HMS Bounty.*
- *His observations and analysis of natural history helped Alexander von Humboldt and Charles Darwin develop their scientific theories.*
- *His observations (and those of William Funnell) during his expeditions are mentioned several times by Alfred Russel Wallace in his book *The Malay Archipelago*, and compared to his own observations made on his 19th-century voyages.*
- *He is cited over 80 times in the Oxford English Dictionary, notably on words such as "barbecue", "avocado", "chopsticks" and "sub-species". That is not to say he coined the words, but his use of them in his writings is the first known example in English.*
- *He recorded the first English language recipes for guacamole and mango chutney*

The link between Dampier and chocolate? Here is a description from his book published in 1703 about finding the Cacao tree

The Cacao: *the Nuts of the Coast of Caraccos, tho' less than those of Costa Rica, which are large flat Nuts, yet are better and fatter in my opinion, being so very oily that we are forced to use Water in rubbing them up; and the Spaniards that live here, instead of parching them to get off the Shell before they pound or rub them to make Chocolate, do in a manner burn them to dry up the Oil; for else, they say, it would fill them too full of Blood, drinking Chocolate as they do, five or six times a day.*



The Cacao Tree hath a Body about a foot and a half thick (the largest sort) and 7 or 8 foot high to the branches, which are large and spreading like an Oak, with a pretty, thick, smooth dark-green leaf, shaped like that of a Plumb-Tree, but larger. The Nuts are enclosed in Cods as big as both a Man's Fists put together..... There may be ordinarily about 20 or 30 of these Cods upon a well bearing Tree; and they have two Crops of them a year. The Cod itself (or Shell) is almost half an Inch thick; neither spongy nor woody, but of a substance between both, brittle yet harder than the Rind of a Lemmon; like which its surface is grained or knobbed, but more coarse and unequal. The Cods at first are of a dark green, but the side of them next the Sun of a muddy red. As they grow ripe, the Green turns to a fine bright Yellow, and the Muddy to a more lively beautiful Red, very pleasant to the Eye.....The Cods gathered, they lay in several heaps to sweat; and then bursting the Shell with their hands, they pull out the Nuts, which are the only substance they contain, having no stalk or pith among them, and are placed like the grains of Maiz, but sticking together.....



There are generally near 100 Nuts in a Cod, in proportion to the greatness of which, for it varies, the Nuts are bigger or less. When taken out they dry them in the Sun upon Matts spread on the Ground: After which they need no more care, having a thin hard skin of their own, and much Oil, which preserves them. Salt-Water will not hurt them; for we had our Bags rotten, lying in the bottom of the ship, and yet the Nuts are never worse.

The cocoa trade is still important in the West Indies to this day and independent chocolate manufacturers produce the most divine products

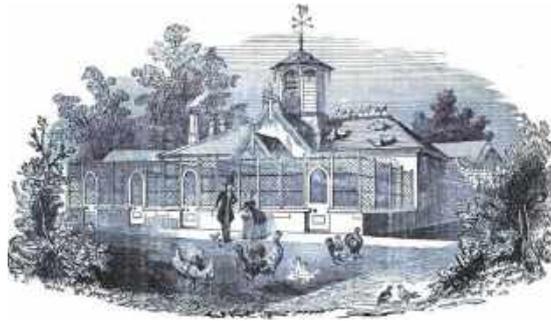


And from chocolate Easter Eggs to real **Eggs and Hen Houses** – I wrote about an eccentric gardener in an earlier Blog and his Hen Coop which was constructed at Tong Castle, in Shropshire in 1842. The owner George Durant built an extraordinary range of outbuildings and follies whilst living a life of domestic chaos and debauchery. He was the one who had built a pulpit in his boundary wall and would preach to all the villagers as they passed by including his children of whom he had upwards of about 40. He loved Pyramids and built a Hen Coop and a Piggery in that design.



Poultry keeping got the royal seal of approval in the 1840s when the Royal Family became exceedingly keen on keeping birds, domestic as well as more exotic hens which came from all round the world. A

large and striking poultry house was built on the royal estate at Windsor as seen in this photograph from the *Illustrated London News* on 23rd December 1843.



There was also a wonderful poultry house built at Frogmore on the royal Estate at Windsor



However, it wasn't just in Royal grounds that these elegant buildings could be found and some of them date back to the 17th century like this triple-decker on a farm in Kent, with the ground floor for pigs who would protect the hens against foxes- the hens on the first floor, who would help keep the pigs warm and then there would be doves on the top floor.





ONIONS

When I discovered that onions were used by Roman gladiators to rub on their skin to improve their muscle tone, I was gripped and set off on a journey to learn more:

1. The onion is a powerful aphrodisiac
2. It has antibacterial qualities
3. The Guinness Book of World Records lists the largest onion ever grown as weighing in at 10 pound, 14 ounces.
4. The onion was worshiped by ancient Egyptians. They believed that its spherical shape and concentric rings symbolized eternity. They used to cover the tombs of their rulers with onion pictures and onions played a vital role in burial rituals. They believed that onions would help the dead succeed in the afterlife.
5. Onions have been around since the Bronze Age. The oldest known onion harvest dates back to around 5000BC
6. Finally, I read about this but I remain a touch sceptical; before it was known as the Big Apple, New York City was called the Big Onion because it was a place where you could peel off layer after layer without ever reaching the core. Ummmm.

SELLING ONIONS IN THE STREETS

From this



to this



and to this



Onion sellers were once well known in London especially around Covent Garden but

WHO WERE THE ROSCOFF JOHNNIES?

The “rosé” onion, which is specific to the region of Roscoff, was brought from Portugal in the 17th century by a Capucine monk who taught the neighbours of the Roscoff convent how to grow this sweet onion, full of flavour and which melted in cooking.



And the links to the UK? The trade may have begun in 1828 when the first successful trip is said to have been made by Henri Ollivier. This was the beginning of a trade which is carried on right up to today. These onion-sellers came to be called “JOHNNIES” ; Johnnies found a more profitable market in Britain than in France, and typically brought their harvest across the English Channel in July to store in rented barns, returning home in December or January. It was a tough life for them away from their families for so long and in their absence the women and children had to plant the crop for the following season. They could have sold their produce in Paris, but the roads and the railways were bad in the 19th century and going there was a long and difficult trip; crossing the channel was shorter and easier.



In the aftermath of World War II, onions in common with other goods were subject to import restrictions, and were obliged to be traded through a single company. By 1973 the number of Johnnies had dropped to 160, trading 1,100 tonnes, and had fallen again to around 20 by the end of the 20th century. The legend of their transporting their produce to Britain inspired farmers in Brittany to set up Brittany Ferries in the 1970s



There is now a museum in Roscoff which tells the history of these onion sellers and their wares. Today just a dozen Onion Johnnies stay in business but the pink Roscoff onion, now given AOC

appellation contrôlée protection and distributed by more conventional means, remains highly prized in kitchens across Europe and are still prized by top chefs, including Raymond Blanc of Le Manoir aux Quat' Saisons, when it comes to making the best onion soup.

SEEDS



The seed heads of aliums and other plants make wonderful sculptural additions to the winter garden



(photographs taken at East Lambrook garden this spring)

The Garden Museum has a most interesting feature and a range of activities about seeds . There is an outline of a plan to make a folded seed packet – go to the Garden Museum web site to learn more <https://dyvdnmp0itmzz.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/19112215/Garden-Museum-Seed-Packet-Activity.pdf>

Download, print and customise your own seed packet

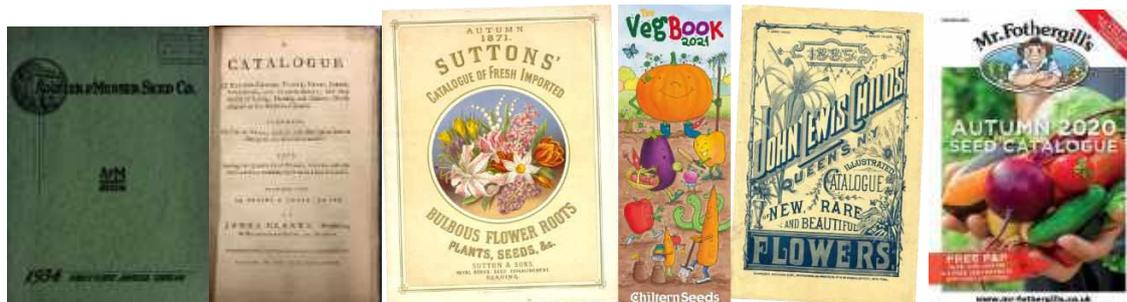


Also in the Garden museum is this display cabinet from around 1900

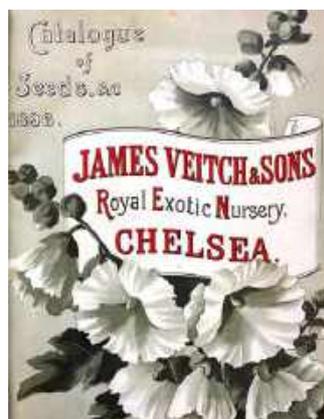


These cabinets were supplied to ironmongers and department stores by the seed company Yates, a company specialising in seeds and founded in Manchester in 1880s. Seeds which were kept in drawers at the back of the cabinet were sold over the counter.

Gardening became a popular pursuit in the 18th century. The plants to cultivate rose sharply with new varieties flooding in from abroad, mostly sold as seeds. In the 17th and early 18th century, seeds were sold by greengrocers and street tradesmen but gardening's increasing popularity meant dedicated seed shops were soon springing up. By the late 18th century most provincial towns had at least one seed shop and many had nurseries too. Seeds were advertised in innovative ways. As well as the usual trade-cards, seed catalogues were printed with sale prices and descriptions of each plant. These catalogues were where most gardeners encountered new plants on offer. All of this is evident in the sole surviving copy of a seed catalogue printed in Houghton-le-Spring, a provincial town near Durham, in 1779: *A Catalogue of ...Seeds...with their Season of Sowing, Planting and Culture: Chiefly Adapted to the Northern Climates* by seeds-man James Clarke.



One of the most famous seed merchants was James Veitch and Sons:



The firm of Veitch had by the 1914/18 war been responsible for introducing an astonishing 1281 plants which were either previously unknown or newly bred varieties. These included 498 greenhouse plants,

232 orchids, 153 deciduous trees, shrubs and climbing plants, 122 herbaceous plants, 118 exotic ferns, 72 evergreen and climbing plants, 49 conifers and 37 bulbous plants. In the years to come, more plants followed.

In 1899, Harry who was now operating the Chelsea branch of the business, sent Ernest Wilson to China in search of plants suitable for British gardens and in particular for seed of the Davidia, or **Pocket-handkerchief Tree**. He was told firmly by Harry Veitch, 'Stick to the one thing you are after and don't spend time and money wandering about. Probably every worthwhile plant in China has now been introduced to Europe.' Wilson describes the journey to find the Dove Tree:



'After 10 months of travel and hardship I came to the location that Dr. Henry had marked on the map. This was the locality of the Dove Tree. This solitary tree was my sole objective! I asked the natives to show it to me..... Imagine my consternation when they pointed to a stump and a newly built cabin. Needless to say, I didn't sleep well that night.' The story has a happy ending as in his search he discovered many plants and finally found a group of Davidia producing seed, which he duly sent back to Veitch's nursery at Coombe Wood from which, he found on his return to England, they had successfully raised thousands of seedlings.



FROM HOSPITAL BEDS TO FLOWER BEDS



'WHISPERING FLOWERBEDS' is the name of the art installation by Toym Imao, renowned sculptor, who, at Philippine General Hospital, has turned 12 discarded beds into large flower pots, a metaphor for survival and springing of life amid a health crisis. The installation commemorates the health care workers who have died of Covid 19.

GARDENING IN GALLERIES



The internet has turned out to be our transportation system of (compulsory) choice during Lock Down. We can journey all over the world to see marvellous paintings – such as this Van Gogh, *Tree Roots* in the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam. This painting then inspires one to go on a personal journey to look back on other trees we have seen on our exercise walks.



And then another journey on the internet beckons and one arrives in Paris and the memory of the horrific fire at Notre Dame



BUT there is hope



The first 100-year-old oak trees that are set to be used to reconstruct the fallen spire of the fire-damaged Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris have been chosen. More than 1,000 oaks from all over France will eventually be used to complete the spire in total. The first oaks came from the forest of Bercé, in Sarthe. They were chosen due to what forest authorities said was their “specific structure”, with a specific curve, and a diameter of at least one metre. These are considered perfect for the “stool”, or base, of the spire. Half of the trees used for the structure will come from public forests, the other half will come from private forests, whose owners have donated their trees to the rebuilding works. This variety is partly due to the government aiming to symbolically include trees from across the country in the rebuilding effort, as a way of showing the importance and symbolism of Notre-Dame to the whole of France. Once cut down, the trees must be dried for 12-18 months, to achieve 30% humidity, before being transported to the carpenters at the beginning of 2023.

TO CELEBRATE THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE BARD’S BIRTHDAY IN APRIL WE JOURNEY BACK IN TIME:

SHAKESPEARE GARDENS STRATFORD - BANCROFT GARDENS



The planting in the Bancroft Gardens is inspired by Shakespeare’s plays and incorporates flowers popular in Elizabethan England, such as rosemary, roses, lilies, irises, lavender, columbine, marjoram and honeysuckle. Shakespeare famously used flowers in his plays as symbols. In *Hamlet* Ophelia uses flowers to express the grief at the death of her father. In *A Midsummers Night’s Dream* flowers are used by the fairy characters to weave magic spells.

The formal planting of yew hedging along the theatre Promenade draws on the influence of the original 1932 minimalist garden design of the Broad Walk. The style of these hedges reflects the influence on the gardens of the Art Deco period of art and architecture.

Ellen Willmott was asked to advise on the planting of the Shakespeare gardens



Ellen Willmott



Anne Hathaway's cottage

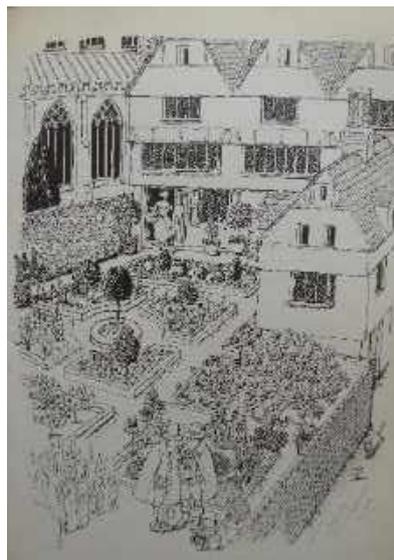


a letter from Willmott to the Head gardener

In the early 1920s, Miss Willmott advised Ernest Law and the trustees at Shakespeare's Garden, New Place on the planting of the wilderness bank in the Great Garden there and in 1924-5 on the improvement of the orchard hedges in Anne Hathaway's Cottage garden

The duties of women, such as Anne Hathaway and her daughter Susanna were first outlined in 1613 by Gervase Markham in his book *The English House-Wife*. This was the first publication aimed at women that described the household tasks, including how to care for a garden. This included how to sow seeds of fruits, vegetables, flowers and herbs.

A final note about Ellen Willmott, remembered often as being the sprinkler of seeds of Miss Willmott's Ghost. She was a remarkable gardener. Awarded the first Victoria Medal in 1897, the same year as Gertrude Jekyll, she ran 3 gardens, in England, France and Italy. Her publication of *The Genus Rosa* book brought her close to bankruptcy. She was considered by many to be an eccentric and is reputed to have made the head of the gardens at Warley Place fix trip wires around the daffodils in the fields, which would set off air guns to frighten anyone hoping to secretly pick some.



A birthday also remembered in **April** is **Anne Scott-James** who describes an Elizabethan garden in her utterly delightful book 'The Pleasure Garden' (1977) with illustrations by Osbert Lancaster.

No longer concentrating on leeks and onions for the pot or on herbal mixtures for their aches and pains, gardeners were beginning to love flowers for their interest and beauty.

In Henry IV Part 1, Shakespeare writes,

‘Thou mayst not wander in that labyrinth,
there Minotaurs and ugly treasons lurk.....’

Labyrinths and Mazes - A FEW A-MAZING FACTS

Confused by all the Government pronouncements? Feel you have got lost in rules and regulations? Don't know which way to turn? Think you are in a fiendish maze? A situation beautifully captured by a cartoon in last month's Private Eye:



Come on a journey to the Queen's Gallery and [THE WORLD OF MAZES](#)



This is the wonderful painting by Lodewijk Toeput – *Pleasure Garden with a Maze* c.1579 – 1584

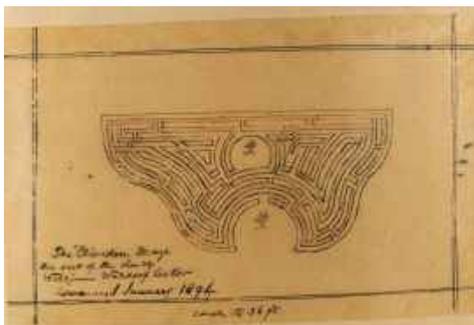
It formed part of the exhibition *Painting Paradise*, at the Queen's Gallery. It is a water labyrinth which was a C16 elaboration on the theme. The mythological origins of the maze had been converted to Christian use as a symbol of the one true path to God, used on the floors of French cathedrals in C11 and C12 before being used in a more ornamental form in the garden.

Mazes became a 'must have' in Victorian gardens. Sir Morton Peto (Harold Peto's father) desired a suitable country house to reflect his title and fortune so at Somerleyton in Norfolk he got W.H. Nesfield to lay out a maze (along with elaborate bedding schemes)

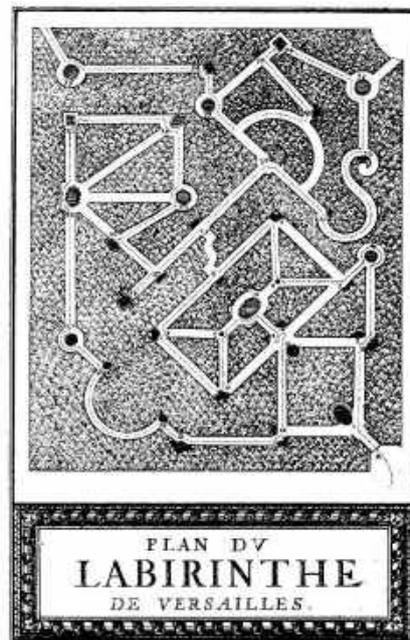


The Victorians loved 'Tea-Garden' Mazes when ladies of leisure gathered to take tea and go for a gentle stroll through the maze. Nesfield designed the maze that opened in the RHS gardens in Kensington in 1861 – sadly this was destroyed in the building of the Science Museum in 1913.

A maze was installed at Clivedon in about 1894 - what a superb acquisition for a garden where intrigue abounded.



What is interesting is that some mazes were made which the owners believed would help in the education of their children.



In 1665, André Le Nôtre planned a hedge maze of unadorned paths in an area south of the Latona Fountain near the *Orangerie*. In 1668 Jean de La Fontaine published his first collection *Fables Choisies*, dedicated to "Monseigneur" Louis, *le Grand Dauphin*, the six-year-old son of Louis XIV. and because of

this Louis XIV in 1669 was advised to remodel the labyrinth in such a way as to serve the Dauphin's education. Between 1672 and 1677 Le Nôtre redesigned the labyrinth to feature thirty-nine hydraulic structures that depicted stories from Aesop's Fables. Each fountain was accompanied by a plaque on which the fable was printed and it was from these plaques, that Louis XIV's son learned to read.

At Glendurgan, the challenge of how to keep their children entertained was solved by Alfred and Sarah Fox over 180 years ago. The maze they planted gave endless amusement to their twelve children together with their many cousins.



I end this very brief look at Mazes with a photograph of a modern take on Mazes:



The end of the journey – this will be the last Shed News, so thank you for letting me join you on this journey through an exceedingly strange year – enjoy the Spring and your gardens.

CJS April 2021