

CHS NEWS

NEXT MEETING

Monday, 4 April 2022 at 20:00 at The Athenaeum

BOTANICAL GARDENS OF SOUTHERN CHINA

Morné Faulhamer of Super Plants Tokai will tell us all about a trip he made to China and the gardens he saw there.

RECAP OF FORMAT FOR MEETINGS:

- There is space for only 50 people. To ensure fairness, bookings by email or telephone must be made **between 30 March and 3 April**.
- Chairs will be appropriately spaced.
- Masks must be worn.
- Bring your own sanitizer.
- There will be no entrance fee for members. Visitors will pay R30.
- Please bring plants to sell to other members, as the CHS Nursery will be open. We would appreciate the grower taking home any plants that have not been sold and continue to grow them on for the following meeting or the plant sales.
- The library will also be open and you are welcome to borrow books until the next meeting. Susan Armstrong will be available to assist before and after the meeting, so give yourself some time to browse.
- The Plant Table will remain a Plant Show and Tell, for the moment. Please send in your photos of flowers blooming in your garden at the moment, with the name of the plant and some interesting information about it (please Google it if you're not sure). Photos are needed by **Friday morning, 1 April**, please. If you have difficulty with the technical side of this, please call Glenda.
- Tea will not be served.

NEXT OUTING

Fri, 8 April at 10:00: Visit the Constantia garden of member, David Walsh. He has a Mediterranean garden with a variety of rooms, each with seasonal colour. There is a fynbos section, a succulent section, a big colourful border, and peaceful white garden. Nursery filled with "liquorice all sorts".

Limited to 20 members. RSVP to Glenda by no later than Tues, 5 April.

WELCOME TO ...

... Caroline Bruton and Rosalind and Johnny Spears. We wish them a long and beneficial stay with the CHS.

SUBSCRIPTION RENEWAL

A very big thank you to the 87 members who have already renewed their membership for the coming year. Apologies to you all for not having received acknowledgement of your payment. This will be rectified soon.

If you have not yet found time to do this, a Subscription Renewal Form is attached. Please complete it and return it, together with proof that payment has been made, to info@capehorticulturalsociety.co.za or faxed to 086-514-0998.

MARCH 2022

LOCKDOWN EDITION 22-03

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Marianne Alexander

Acting Chairman

Jenny Scarr

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Henry Diesveld

Secretary

Glenda Thorpe

Committee Members

Melanie Stewart Jenny Scarr
Susan Armstrong Isabella Hayden
Gerald Robertson

Honorary Members

Laurie Powis Marianne Alexander
Mary Smith Anne Bean Adam Harrower
Michael Tuffin Bill Elder Ernst van Jaarsveld

*"In gardening, one's
staunchest ally is the natural
lust for life each plant has,
that strong current which
surges through everything that
grows."*

Jean Hersey



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Instagram – capehortsoc

We hope last year's trend of paying electronically (EFT) will continue this year.

Whether *you* do the EFT or ask a family member or friend to make the payment on your behalf, please ensure that *your* name is used as the Beneficiary's reference and Proof of Payment is sent to either the e-mail address or fax number above.

Bringing cash to a meeting will incur high charges to deposit the cash into the bank. We are trying to keep costs down as much as possible, but we will accommodate you if you have no other way of making payment.

NB!! AUTUMN PLANT SALE

SATURDAY, 21 MAY 2022 is the day!! Please diarise this date.

The last Autumn Plant Sale was held when Melanie and Rod still lived in their Kenilworth house. That was a long time ago, so after many years we are going to hold another Autumn Plant Sale, this time in Pinelands, timed perfectly for planting as the winter rains arrive to help establish the plants really well before our next hot and, quite possibly, dry summer.

May will be the last possible moment in which to plant indigenous spring flowering bulbs. If you have any to donate to the sale, please do so, as these are really special additions to anyone's garden or sunny patio pots. Pop them into packets and label them. It is also the last chance to sow Sweetpeas and Poppies – so if you have seeds of these to share, let's have them bagged and labelled, too.

If every member donated 5 or 6 plants, we would have a wonderful variety to sell to the public because we tend to grow things that are more unusual. Of course, the "usual" will not be turned away as the public love to buy what they are familiar with at very reasonable prices.

In fact, we will take anything you have to donate as long as it is well established already. If it's too little, we'll let you keep it for now and nurture it until stronger for the Spring Plant Sale.

Recap of last month's notes:

- 🌱 Well-grown plants can be brought from **Wednesday, 18 May**, as well as the Thursday and Friday.
- 🌱 Sorting and pricing will take place on **Thursday, 19 and Friday, 20 May from 09:00**.
- 🌱 The sale will **open at 09:30 on the 21st** and run until about 13:00.
- 🌱 Any member who has a product to sell (garden-related – bird feeders, compost, 'ornaments', plant hangers etc) would be welcome to have a stall on the day. Please inform Glenda if you are interested.
- 🌱 We will also be selling some of the excess books from our CHS library.

We would be very grateful for help with:

- Pricing and sorting the plants on the 19th and 20th between 09:00 and 13:00;
- Moving plants to the sales area between 08:00 and 09:00 on the 21st;
- Selling the plants and giving advice to buyers, especially novice gardeners;
- Taking the buyers' money when they get to the cash point with, we hope, loads of purchases;
- Manning the "book stall";
- Selling raffle tickets should we decide to have one.

Please let Glenda know what you would be prepared to do and the amount of time you can give to helping out.

All hands on deck to help bring in some much needed cash!



JANE'S GARDEN AT THE ATHENAEUM

On the 6th of March, those family, friends and CHS members who had made donations to the restoration and maintenance of the Athenaeum garden, were invited to a tea party and to witness the unveiling of a bench placed in the garden in memory of Jane Robertson.



JANE'S GARDEN

The garden was created by
Jane Robertson
between 2018 and 2020

Hortum fecit. Floram capensem dilexit.

Clockwise from left:
The group gathered for the
unveiling; the bench; Gerald
Robertson and his family; CHS
Committee.



FOREST GLADE OUTING

Our first garden visit for this year was a pure delight.

Peppy Dau's garden, although small, was packed with so much variety – all doing well.

A small group spent the morning looking at all the garden and the outside communal space had to offer. Peppy works hard to keep the gardens interesting and flourishing.



THE LIQUORICE STORY

From RHS's *The Garden*, July 2005

[Ed: I have no idea if some of these facts still apply, but it is interesting.]

It takes all sorts

Like it or loathe it, liquorice was once a popular treat, and an important crop in parts of Yorkshire. Jo Whittingham visits the annual Pontefract Liquorice Festival and discovers something sweetly idiosyncratic.

Yorkshire has a rich horticultural heritage, and local delicacies, such as ruby-stemmed forced rhubarb, which spent years in decline, are once again the height of culinary fashion. Unfortunately, the UK population's fickle taste has long since moved away from the country's sweetest crop in favour of chocolate: the last commercial liquorice field was harvested in 1960 in Pontefract, West Yorkshire. However, local people are proud of their roots and the annual Pontefract Liquorice Festival proves to be a vibrant celebration of the town's confectionery heritage – not to mention a great chance to indulge your sweet tooth.

Richard Van Riel is Curator of Pontefract Museum, which has an exhibition devoted to liquorice production in the area. 'I love the idea of having a liquorice-themed festival in the town,' he says. 'It's nostalgic and quirky, and people come from all over the country to celebrate liquorice.' Indeed, on a sunny Sunday in the middle of last July, crowds flocked to the Market Place and surrounding streets to watch the vibrant, raucous procession that snaked through the town centre to kick off the festival. Specially made costumes colourfully illustrated the town's historical links with liquorice, with people of all ages dressed as anything from monks to varieties of sweets that have been manufactured locally.

Once the parade had passed, there was a chance to visit the scattering of stalls crowded into the Market Place alongside a funfair and music stage. These gave an insight into the diverse and sometimes unexpected uses that have been found for the liquorice root.

The Liquorice Trust stand offered my first view of *Glycyrrhiza glabra*, the liquorice plant itself. With fresh-green, feathery leaves, the plant was easily identified as a member of the legume (pea) family, although Yorkshire's slightly chilly climate means that its delicate pea-like flowers are not readily produced, and plants rarely set seed. There were 50 potted examples auctioned to enthusiasts during the day to plant in their own gardens.

Sticks of dried liquorice root were also for sale, which some of the older visitors could remember chewing as a sweet treat when they were children. In fact, liquorice contains glycyrrhizin, which, although sweeter than sugar, is less harmful to teeth, so in today's health – conscious world, this practice may well be due a revival.

The roots of *Glycyrrhiza glabra*, better known as liquorice, have been cultivated for their sweet sticky extract, which is more commonly seen refined and famously used in various sweets. In UK its popularity has waned in favour of chocolate but remains a firm favourite in Pontefract.

The annual Pontefract Liquorice Festival attracts local liquorice enthusiasts, as well as those from around the UK. Local college students have used the versatile extract to fashion innovative (if rather sticky) clothing. During the festival, market stalls sell tempting liquorice-related products.

Why Pontefract?

How *Glycyrrhiza glabra* (liquorice) came to be cultivated in Pontefract at all is the subject of some debate. The perennial herb may have arrived in Britain with the Romans but seems likely to have reached Yorkshire from its native Middle East with returning crusaders or perhaps travelling monks, who may have brought it to local monasteries to grow as a medicinal herb.

Either way, liquorice has probably been grown in and around the town since the Middle Ages and Pontefract's fortune has been linked to the plant ever since. The ruins of Pontefract Castle were a centre for liquorice cultivation as early as 1660 and a single plant still grows at the site today to commemorate that fact.

A sample of the solid, black, shiny 'hard juice' extracted from the root was available for the unwary to try. Its potent liquoricy flavour is normally diluted with flour, sugar and gelatin in sweets. Luckily stalls nearby sold every imaginable form of delicious liquorice confectionery to lessen the impact of its rather vicious taste. Centre-stage

were the famous black, coin-shaped Pontefract cakes, each stamped with their maker's mark, and another highly popular choice was the ubiquitous 'all-sorts', which although invented in Sheffield, were manufactured by the million in Pontefract. There was also liquorice beer (which looks like stout) on sale in the nearby Liquorice Bush pub to help cleanse the palate if all else failed.

Medicinal benefits

Glycyrrhiza glabra has been cultivated as a medicinal herb throughout history. The Assyrians, Chinese, Greeks and Romans all recorded its curative properties, and it is still widely used in medicines today. Commonly included in laxatives, cough mixtures and used to sweeten bitter-tasting medicines, liquorice is also believed to be beneficial to the liver, control hormonal imbalances and boost the immune system. The plant has even been used in research into treatments for colon cancer, AIDS and Alzheimer's disease. Richard Van Riel says, 'What interests me is that here is a plant that has been known for thousands of years and used to treat disease by many civilizations, and we are still looking at its potential use today as a medicine.'

A Japanese pharmaceutical company had made a special visit to Pontefract to show its astounding range of top-selling medicinal cosmetic and edible products containing liquorice extracts. In Japan, these are added to cosmetics to lighten skin pigmentation and are included in medicines and tonics to ease coughs and hangovers; it is also used to sweeten salty foods such as soy sauce.

A rather less conventional, but highly entertaining use was demonstrated during a daring fashion show, featuring garments designed by local college students, cleverly created of the black substance lent themselves surprising well to the production of dresses, waistcoats and kilts, although what would happen if the wearer was caught in the rain is anyone's guess. Such catwalk glamour, however, is a world away from the reality of working in Pontefract's liquorice industry during its heyday in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Displays in the town's museum and special talks given by former workers, brought the experiences of growers and factory workers to life.

Growing liquorice

Liquorice cultivation was first recorded in Pontefract's deep, rich, sandy loam during the 16th century, and it was grown and harvested in much the same labour-intensive way until the last crop in 1960. As it is grown purely for its roots, soil some 1.8 - 2.5m (6-8ft) deep was needed for success and in the often cool Yorkshire climate each crop would take five years to mature – two years longer than in hotter regions. This long wait for harvest meant that growers often inter-planted liquorice with other crops and grew fruit, flowers or rhubarb to make their land more profitable.

As *Glycyrrhiza glabra* rarely produced seed in Yorkshire, it was propagated from cuttings of the horizontal underground stolons or runners that can reach several metres in length. They were cut into 15cm (6in) sections and planted out using dibbers into rows about 1m (3ft) apart. But the hard graft began at harvest time, when all the work had to be carried out by hand to avoid compacting the soil with machines or horses. Because the branching taproots commonly reached 1.2m (4ft) into the soil, trenches had to be dug along each row of plants to expose them. This was traditionally a job for men, who were perhaps grateful for the small mercy that liquorice thrives on light soil, rather than heavy clay. Often women and children were then responsible for gathering up the taproots and stolons that lay on the ground.

Pontefract's liquorice was grown on quite a small scale, mostly by families tending their own fields, but by the end of the 18th century more than 40ha (100 acres) were planted with the crop and four traders were established growing and refining liquorice root in the town. Liquorice extract was produced by reducing the roots to a pulp, which was then boiled in water. This liquid was reduced down to a solid consistency, removed from the heat, shaped and allowed to dry.

Sweet success

Initially, demand for liquorice roots was due to their medicinal properties and the first Pontefract cakes (or pomfrets) were eaten for health benefits, but by the 19th century these sweets had become a popular confection and Pontefract's own industrial revolution began. Factories devoted to the refining of liquorice and to sweet production started to spring up. These provided valuable employment, especially for local women, who were paid to create and pack many millions of liquorice cakes, pipes and boot laces, enjoyed by school children and adults alike, up and down the country.

This huge expansion, however, was not good news for the many small local growers, who despite their expertise, could not meet the demands of the factories, which had their own fields in Spain and Turkey from where they imported cheaper extract. The growing town also needed land for building and market gardens to feed the increasing population, so the fields of slow-maturing liquorice became a victim of their own success and began to disappear.

Richard Van Riel says, 'Liquorice needs to be coaxed to grow in Pontefract, whereas it grows like a weed in the Middle East. Only small areas were planted, so the local supply soon ran out and factories needed to import more of the raw material. A liquorice crop alone was not enough to make a living from. It provided seasonal work at harvest time, but relatively small numbers of people were employed in the fields, compared to much larger numbers in the factories.'

By 1900 there were as many as 17 family-run factories producing about 40 tonnes of liquorice each week, but during the next 40 years demand for liquorice sweets soared. This increase in their popularity led to many of the smaller family-run firms being taken over by new private companies. Factories became increasingly mechanised, so that by 1939 this small town was turning out about 400 tonnes every week and exporting the popular sweets around the globe.

Despite this success, by the 1920s there were only four liquorice growers left in Pontefract and, paradoxically, their produce was taken to other parts of the country for use in the manufacture of medicine, soap and fire-extinguisher foam; none was put to use in the local sweets factories.

Declining trade

This reliance on foreign raw materials back-fired for the liquorice factories when, on the outbreak of the Second World War, imports were only permitted for essential medical purposes. Wartime sweet rationing, which lasted up until 1954, also meant hard times for the industry, and when sweets finally returned, the nation began to develop a taste for chocolate that has only increased since. The popularity of liquorice confectionery never fully recovered and, as a consequence, Pontefract's liquorice industry went into decline. Today only two factories remain, both of which are owned by large multinational companies, although their history can be traced back to local family firms.

Sadly, only a few lonely liquorice plants are now grown in West Yorkshire for their historical interest and Pontefract cakes no longer command the huge popularity they once enjoyed. But they are still made along with other liquorice sweets at the town's Haribo factory – and consumed with gusto each July, when the town remembers the debt it owes to the sweet root of liquorice.

A FEW MEMBERS' PLANTS

Left and centre: Shelley's *Ceropegia sandersonii* which trails all over the place and her *Amaryllis belladonna*

Right: Melanie's Hibiscus she brought back from Knysna last Christmas.

