

THE SPADE

THE GARDEN TREASURES
OF OXFORD

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE
AT HATFIELD HOUSE

THE PHOENIX RISES
IN GUILDHALL YARD

FLOWERS IN THE CITY
SUMMER WINNERS



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

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THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF GARDENERS



Welcome to the Autumn Spade. Written contributions, ideas for articles and help in gathering material and preparing it for publication are always very welcome.

Most of the items in this issue are available at greater length on the Company website. Using your password, go to the Members' Area and click on the Noticeboard.

The public or first page of the website also features a steady stream of news stories about the Company, events in the City and other items of interest in the horticulture and gardening worlds. Click on the News button. Next to it is the link to our Twitter account. To visit our Instagram account go to:

<https://www.instagram.com/gardenliveryco/>

Please send photographs for posting there to Liveryman Barbara Segall.

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DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

New dates will be added during the year such as Masterclasses and the Golf Day. The Clerk's circulars will provide further details.
The Master may vary eligibility to events. Liverymen and partners will take precedence where numbers are limited.
Closing date for bookings will be at least two weeks before the event.

DATE	EVENT AND DRESS	VENUE AND INFORMATION	ELIGIBILITY
Fri 12th November 2021	COMPANY CATCH-UP Virtual	The Master will bring us up to date with Company activities, with members' contributions and an opportunity for your feedback too.	The Company, Partners & Guests
Thurs 9th December 2021	DICKENSIAN CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL Virtual	In conjunction with The Dickens Fellowship.	The Company, Partners & Guests
Fri 17th December 2021	TRADESCANT COURT AND LUNCH Lounge suits	Ironmongers' Hall, Shaftesbury Place, Barbican, London, EC2Y 8AA	Court only
Fri 17th December 2021	CHRISTMAS CAROL SERVICE Lounge suits	St Stephen Walbrook, 39 Walbrook, London, EC4N 8BN Join us for our annual Carol Service. Light refreshments after the service. Children very welcome.	The Company, Partners & Guests
Fri 14th January 2022	COMPANY CATCH-UP Virtual	The Master will bring us up to date with Company activities, with members' contributions and an opportunity for your feedback too.	The Company, Partners & Guests
Friday 11th February 2022	MANSION HOUSE BANQUET Evening dress preferred	The Mansion House, Walbrook, London EC4N 8BH Principal guest: Mark Hedges, Editor, Country Life The highlight of The Company's year. A privilege to entertain family and guests in the splendour of The Lord Mayor's home.	The Company, Partners & Guests
Fri 4th March 2022	A DAY OF HORTICULTURAL BOOK LEAVES Lounge suits	Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London, SW7 5BD Access to the historical herbaria at the museum, with virtual links to the Royal Collection of George III horticultural books at Windsor and the floral book collection at Milton's Cottage.	The Company, Partners & Guests
Fri 18th March 2022	COMPANY CATCH-UP Virtual	The Master will bring us up to date with Company activities, with members' contributions and an opportunity for your feedback too.	The Company, Partners & Guests
Wed 30th March 2022	SPRING COURT DINNER Dinner Jacket	Butchers' Hall, 87 Bartholomew Close, London, EC1A 7EB Principal Guest: Stanley Johnson. The Prince Edward Award for horticultural excellence will be presented at this dinner.	The Company, Partners & Guests
Tues 5th April 2022	TOUR OF HIGHGATE CEMETERY Comfortable attire	Highgate Cemetery, Swain's Lane, London N6 6PJ Walking tour of the cemetery with a talk on conserving the tombs and creating a wildlife habitat.	The Company, Partners & Guests
Thurs 21st April 2022	THENFORD ARBORETUM AND GARDENS Comfortable attire	Banbury OX17 2BX A tour of Lord Heseltine's famous garden and arboretum.	The Company, Partners & Guests
Wed 4th – Sun 8th May 2022	GARDENS OF ROME Comfortable attire	A 5-day tour of glorious Italian gardens in and around Rome.	The Company, Partners & Guests
Tues 7th June 2022	THE FAIRCHILD LECTURE Lounge suit	St. Giles' Cripplegate Church, Fore Street, London, EC2Y 8DA Lecture to be given by Robert Peel. Supper to follow at The Brewery, 52 Chiswell Street, London EC1Y 4SD	The Company, Partners & Guests
Fri 10th June 2022	COMPANY CATCH-UP Virtual	The Master will bring us up to date with Company activities, with members' contributions and an opportunity for your feedback too.	The Company, Partners & Guests
June 2022 TBA	HIGHGROVE & THE NATIONAL ARBORETUM Comfortable attire	Highgrove House, Tetbury, GL8 0AY A day trip to Highgrove and The National Arboretum	The Company, Partners & Guests
Tues 21st – Wed 22nd June 2022	KENT VISIT Comfortable attire	Overnight trip visiting Sissinghurst Castle, with short horticultural workshop, Hole Park Gardens and Hever Castle and gardens. Stay at Hever Castle (optional).	The Company, Partners & Guests
Thursday 7th July 2022	INSTALLATION COURT DINNER Dinner jacket	Stationers' Hall The start of The Gardeners' year with the installation of the new Master.	The Company, Partners & Guests

LEARNING HOW TO DANCE IN THE RAIN

Immediate Past Master Heather Barrett-Mold looks back over her two extraordinary years in the Chair

A lot of preparation went into my first year as Master and it was launched with some trepidation. I was so pleased when each event filled up, although sad that we couldn't accommodate all those who wanted to attend. However from April to June, we lost our two holidays and other events. This was heart-breaking, but the Company immediately made use of online opportunities to continue its committee work.

Once it was decided that I should continue for a second term a very different approach was needed. I felt we should be keeping members in touch with each other and entertained through this very difficult time. None of us knew how long this would go on for. We didn't have a two-year planning period, we just had to do what we could. Events were very hand-to-mouth, often with a three-week turnaround from idea to delivery.

The Clerk and I were having daily telephone conversations as we put events together. We learned quickly

what the technology could do for us and how to use it. At that time my broadband was very poor and uploading videos for viewing by others proved impossible; fortunately PM Paul Rochford had good capacity at his nursery and he kindly allowed us to deliver some of the events.

So many in the Company supported this virtual programme through photography competitions, masterclasses, gardeners' question times, walks, wine tasting and garden visits. The Carol Service at St Stephen Wallbrook was filmed about six weeks ahead in a short window when we were allowed to travel.

In the same window we managed to plant a disease-resistant Elm at RBG Kew. At that time I still hoped we might do the "Decorating Your Home for Christmas" event live at Rochford's but this wasn't possible, so we filmed it with Stephen Crisp and Paul and Katy Rochford.

By this time Barry and I had bought some sound recording equipment that helped the quality and Barry has become expert at editing. From 21st June we were able to have more face-to-face events such as

Buckingham Palace, Hatfield House and the Royal College of Physicians.

The Company Catch-ups were a delight. We got feedback, ideas and offers of events and at the same time we were able to provide a real time update of how the Company business was progressing and of course some time to chat.

As more people became acquainted with online platforms the Company was suddenly able to do things we had not been able to do before and we opened many events to other companies. The bigger audiences were another challenge for our Clerk which he certainly rose to meet.

For some time we had wanted to have a Green Cities Conference but now we were able to work with the Association of International Producers of Horticulture (AIPH) to hold eight monthly Green City Briefings, with experts from cities worldwide. At the time of writing we have an audience of around 500 with about a third from outside the UK.

Throughout the year the Company has also remained heavily involved in the pan livery groups of Pollinating London Together and Livery Climate Action Group. Another Master has found a quote from Vivian Greene which he thinks really sums up what we have done:

"Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass. It's about learning how to dance in the rain".

Heather and her Consort Barry at July's Installation Court at Ironmongers' Hall just before stepping down.



A MESSAGE FROM THE MASTER

Despite some restrictions still being in place, we had a wonderful gathering at Ironmongers' Hall, our new London abode, for the Installation Court and Lunch. We were made very welcome.

Within days we had a visit to my home town of Welwyn Garden City which has recently celebrated its centenary and is regarded as the most complete manifestation of the concept of a garden city in the world, a marriage of town and country.

The visit was oversubscribed and fellow gardeners were impressed by the mile-long boulevard with its Coronation Fountain, Henry Moore statue and the recently unveiled statue to its founder, Sir Ebenezer Howard. We were given a taste of the urban arboretum, designated a UN City of Trees with its 19,000 specimens, and of the 200-acre woodland reaching to within 150 yards of the John Lewis department store, via a newly planted woodland garden.

Next we visited the Oxford Botanical Gardens, the country's oldest and one of the oldest in Europe, in addition to the incomparable gardens of Worcester College.

Twenty two intrepid gardeners visited 12 gardens over five busy days in Wales. These included: a medieval cloistered garden at Aberglasney where the head gardener proudly reminded us that he had received an award from the Gardeners' Company in 2009; a recreated 88-acre garden at Dyffryn, originally designed by the Edwardian garden designer Thomas Mawson, himself a Liveryman, and a new creation by the eminent garden designer Arne

Maynard, which surrounded Allt-y-bela, one of the oldest houses in Wales.

There was much in between, including the gardens at heavenly Gwydir Castle, lost in time but being methodically saved, both garden and castle, and where trees were planted to commemorate the engagement of the future Charles 11 over 350 years ago. We visited old favourites such as Powis and Bodnant whilst absorbing the delights of all three horticultural creations by H. Avray Tipping, the great Arts and Craft architectural editor of Country Life of a century ago and a physic garden planted solely with apothecary plants found in Britain before 1800.

Our first virtual lecture was on ancient trees; Britain is home to more than any other country yet most are not afforded protection, surely a travesty. Our Harvest Festival at All Hallows by the Tower followed by lunch at Watermen's Hall and

a lecture on the role plants play in major religions, was both fascinating and well received.

Meanwhile, via the Livery Schools Link, pupils from City of London School visited a number of venues including the Chelsea Physic Garden which helped bring together horticulture, medicine, chemistry, history and other disciplines. Apprentices and trainees meanwhile gathered for a Discovery Day at the Olympic Stadium to be regaled with the myriad of opportunities available in horticulture.

We are planning two events additional to those published in the Year Book, both in 2022: a visit on 21st April to Thenford, the renowned gardens created by Lord and Lady Heseltine and a dinner to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee (date and venue to be confirmed) with monies from the latter going to support Future Gardeners.

Peter Waine



PHOTOGRAPH RYAN PRINCE

PHOTOGRAPH RYAN PRINCE

HISTORIC HATFIELD HOUSE IS ALWAYS LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

We had the most glorious afternoon at Hatfield House on Tuesday 8th June. We were greeted by Lady Salisbury at the North Front by the magnificent Renaissance sculpture. (Beautiful as it was, it was apparently not working properly - we were advised to watch on YouTube which shows the lovely golden orb rising up from the deep.) Andrew, the head gardener, then took us round the gardens. Andrew is a former Gardeners' Company award winner having studied at Wisley.

Hatfield prides itself on always being forward thinking. They have 16 robot mowers, including 4-wheel drive ones, which bumbled quietly and unobtrusively about the lawns as we went round. They also have electric secateurs for pruning the five miles of lime avenues. Prime Minister Salisbury was one of the first to use tarmacadam on the drive, very early after its invention and it was only the second place to install electricity. They are now considering the treescape 400 years hence!

Having admired Renaissance, we went into the West Garden at the entrance of which are two giant cloud pruned Phillyrea. It contains the Old Palace Garden, one side of which is bordered by the remaining wing of the Old Palace, where Elizabeth I was imprisoned.

The original 1611 garden was swept away by the landscape movement and it was redesigned in Victorian times. The late Dowager created the Knot Garden in it and planted wild flowers on the surrounding banks creating a lovely juxtaposition with the formal structure. The central fountain has been converted into a large planter, still with a bugler on top whose bugle is supposed to be

sounded by the wind.

We left through the lime pergola which has been there since 1780, and admired the stone frieze of Elizabeth I surrounded by courtiers which was originally in the Corn Exchange, and proceeded to the 400 year old Sundial Garden taking in the paeony border and the blue and white border on our way. The current sundial is American and in the stone compass terrace surrounding it are marked the directions and distances to places as diverse as Baghdad, Brussels and Riyadh.

Next came the Woodland Garden, lovely and shady and full of wild flowers. We emerged to two more formal gardens, the first of which was the Fountain Garden, also known as Lady Gwendolyn's Garden. Passing two enormous topiary elephants, we then strolled at our leisure down the hill and round the lake, through wild meadows with

pockets of shrub roses along the way, through woods and round to the kitchen garden with immaculate raised beds and greenhouses.

Andrew told us they are creating an orchard in the old walled garden which will contain a collection of Hertfordshire apples as well as pears and cherries. They are discovering new local apple varieties, which, when approved by the RHS, are being named for family members.

Thence to tea on the East Front with Lord and Lady Salisbury and the Bernese mountain dogs (who had an alarming interest in the cream scones) The sun shone, the gardens were spectacular, tea was delicious – what a lovely day!

Melissa Ashcombe

Lady Salisbury is delighted to receive the Company plaque from then Master Heather Barrett-Mold



THE MASTER IS ON HOME GROUND IN LEAFY WELWYN GARDEN CITY

Master Peter Waine welcomed some 30 members to Welwyn Garden City (WGC), where he has lived for many years. The day started with a lecture on its history. The concept of the Garden City, a marriage of Town and Country was developed by Ebenezer Howard.

In 1919, aged 70, he bought 3,300 acres of farmland for £5,000. His concept was to design a city with a fixed size, surrounded by green belt, to avoid urban sprawl. Industry and commerce with good quality housing was all to be set in a sustainable green environment.

A company was formed and building began in 1920. The company that year bought up the stock of a bankrupt nursery to start growing their own hedges, trees and plants for the city.

We then walked to Parkway, a mile-long, tree-lined boulevard, planted with Lombardy poplars, plane trees, horse chestnuts and flower beds. In the centre of the boulevard is the 1953 coronation fountain. The Master has recently retired as Chairman of the WGC 2020 Centenary Foundation.

Further up the boulevard, we crossed over to the new Centenary woodland garden. The planner of the garden, Past Master Nicholas Evans, took us to the oak tree planted by the Master, who unveiled a plaque to commemorate his Chairmanship of the Centenary project, to the well deserved applause of us all.

We then walked to the new bronze statue of Ebenezer Howard by the sculptor Ben Twiston-Davies. He talked us through his thinking in creating this remarkable depiction of

the man who originated the concept of the garden city. Ebenezer was shown standing with a spade in one hand and a bowler hat in the other referencing "the marriage of Town and Country".

After lunch we were divided into two groups. I chose the city tour. The city has curving roads with houses, of many different designs, in cul-de-sacs. Along the roads and in the public spaces there are now over 19,000 well-established trees.

The other group were taken to Sherrard's Park Wood, 200 acres

of ancient semi-natural woodland, dating back to 1080.

Sue Milward

Elizabeth Rollinson gathered several leaves during the visit and used them to create a nature monoprint, done using etching ink and a printing press. They are, from top to bottom: Acer fruit and Catalpa pod, Liquidambar (sweetgum), Catalpa (Indian bean tree) Tilia (lime) and Acer (maple) more or less together and Quercus (oak) at the bottom.



FLOWERS IN THE CITY SUMMER 2021 COMPETITION WINNERS

The following trophies will be presented at a special ceremony in Ironmongers' Hall on 5th November. A Winter Competition will not be held this year while Flowers in the City undertakes a review of areas, judging criteria, trophy categories etc.

Best Large Display Trophy

The Liberty Bounds
15 Temple Square EC3N 4AA

Best Small Display Trophy

St Bride's Tavern
1 Bridewell Place, EC4V 6AL

Best Enclosed Courtyard Trophy

Dunster Court
EC3R 7AH

Howard Trophy Best Large Garden

Inner Temple Garden
Temple EC4Y 7AL

James Miller Trophy

New Fetter Place
8-10 New Fetter Lane EC4A 1AZ

Skyline Trophy

Green Wall at 120 Fenchurch Street
EC3M 3BY

Livery Hall Trophy

Drapers' Hall
Throgmorton Avenue EC2N 2DQ

Dick Balfour Trophy

Apothecaries' Hall
Blackfriars Lane EC4V 6EJ

Reception Area Trophy

Not awarded

Edward Wright Trophy for Best Floral Street

Not awarded

Best Indoor Garden

Not awarded



Master's Special Award
The Living Wall
New Street Square,
EC4A 3AS



Luder Trophy
Postman's Park
King Edwards Street,
EC1A 7BT



Best Medium Display Trophy
The Bishop's Finger
9-10 West Smithfield, EC2A 9JR



Best Small Garden Trophy
Nic's Secret Garden
Byward Street, EC3R 5BJ

PHOTOGRAPHS BY NICK EVANS

EXPLORING THE TREASURES OF TWO OXFORD GARDENS

On 10th August Gardeners descended on Oxford Botanic Garden which is celebrating its 400th Anniversary this year.

In 1621, Henry Danvers chose the site in Oxford, originally a medieval cemetery and belonging to Magdalen College, to create a physic garden in which to grow plants for medicinal research. They raised the 1.8 ha (4.5 acres) land above the floodplain using 4,000 carts of "mucke and dunge". In 1834 it was renamed the Botanic Garden to reflect its role in experimental botany.

Our party was welcomed by Professor Simon Hiscock, Director, before splitting into two groups for the morning. Gardeners were given an insight into the research being carried out and the global conservation programmes taking place.

The new Mediterranean Garden is one such example. Plants have been grown from seeds obtained from Cyprus, Greece, Crete, Turkey, Tresco, Israel and Berlin (the Garden has a seeds sharing system). Gardeners were told that in Cyprus 10-20% of the plants are not found anywhere else. The results of this new rock garden are encouraging.

On a trip to Japan in 2018, Dr Chris Thorogood, our enthusiastic guide, collected rare *Orbanche* parasitic plant seeds and has successfully germinated these in Oxford.

Chris emphasised the importance of engaging, enthusing and working with young people in the study of plants. We were told the garden is used by Biology undergraduates for research purposes. We had time for

a sprint through the glass houses to see the water lilies and tropical plants before departing to our next venue.

In the afternoon we visited Worcester College (founded in 1714). In 1785 the Provost of the college, William Sheffield, declared, 'No Man Shall Walk on the Grass'. The rule remains to this day and applies to the manicured main lawn at the centre of the three sided quadrangle of the college. Punishment for trespass is community service in the form of gardening. Gardeners were told that the stunning lawn was cut three times a week.

With 26 acres, only Christ Church and Magdalen Colleges have more land than Worcester. Head gardener, Simon Bagnall,

leads an enthusiastic team of eight to care for and improve the grounds. These include lawns for undergraduate relaxation, an ornamental lake (with bream) and a century-old orchard which provides apples for juice and plums and pears for the kitchens.

Worcester is the only Oxford college to have a sports ground on site where students play cricket, football, rugby, hockey and tennis. Gardeners were again impressed by the immaculate grass.

Susan Jeffery

Melissa Ashcombe pays close attention while Worcester's Head Gardener Simon Bagnall explains the planting philosophy



PHOTOGRAPH BY SUSAN JEFFERY

FASCINATING TOUR OF BUCKINGHAM PALACE GARDENS

The long-awaited day dawned clear and bright for the Gardeners – long delayed from last year by the Covid pandemic - and finally saw some 30 members and guests assemble outside Buckingham Palace to be security checked before being led through the front gates and into the gardens by Liveryman and Queen's Gardener Mark Lane LVO.

Those of you who have attended Royal Garden Parties will have some idea of what the gardens contain – and indeed may well have done a little exploring where you could (given the usual 5,000 people at each event!). We were led down the splendid herbaceous border which lies to the north side of the Palace and meanders its way through some splendid planes and other trees. Much envy was expressed for the sheer scale and variety of the planting (the bed is more than 100 yards long) and Mark kept up a very informative commentary the whole way.

We emerged from there to be confronted by a magnificent bed of hostas the like of which few if any of us had seen before. A truly impressive sight and completely untroubled by snails or slugs (of course they wouldn't dare).

From there we moved across a superbly scented camomile lawn and up to the rose garden and the magnificent urn that dominates that part of the garden and which Mark assured us he had actually been inside! It is a commemorative urn to celebrate victory at Waterloo and after being placed elsewhere in London eventually ended up here in the Palace Gardens.

For once the gardeners kept in a reasonably tight formation, if only to hang on to Mark's every word as we toured through magnificent trees and other interesting planting and landscaping (almost all the soil in the gardens has been imported at one time or another). At times it was hard to remember that we were in the middle of a great metropolis and even the traffic noise was largely subdued. Only the sight of some high-rise buildings nearby intruded and these are slowly but surely being blocked out by planting.

Mark pointed out a number of areas of work in progress planting and that the gardens were constantly evolving (Her Majesty takes a keen interest in all aspects of the grounds).

Eventually, after about two and a half hours' fascinating perambulation, we rounded the lake and emerged onto the main lawns behind the Palace.

Our grateful thanks go to Mark and his staff who spared most of the afternoon to escort us so knowledgeably and interestingly around the gardens, answering questions and pointing out plants and other items of interest all the way.

Jeremy Herrtage

Father of the Company David Longman and Lois Warren enthroned in the Palace gardens.



CHELSEA PHYSIC GARDEN BRINGS MASTER'S TERM TO AN END

Inclement weather did not dampen the enthusiasm of the 27 Gardeners who joined the Master in her visit to the Chelsea Physic Garden on 29th June, the last official visit for her before she handed the baton to Peter Waine. We received a very warm welcome from Director Sue Medway, who gave us a potted history of the Garden over a glass of wine which got us off to a good start. We were then free to wander and marvel at this amazing garden and the fabulous collection of plants that it holds.

The Garden was started by the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries in 1673 to grow plants to be used as medicines. The word Physic in this context refers to the science of healing. The Garden is the second oldest Botanical Garden in Britain after the University of Oxford Botanic Garden and its four-acre site, first leased to the Society by Dr Hans Sloane for £5 per year in perpetuity, has remained virtually unchanged for the last 300 years. During those years it has contributed hugely to our understanding of the medicinal properties of plants, work which continues to this day.

Chelsea Physic Garden has attracted many of the great and the good of the plant world over the years as botanists, plant collectors and gardeners: Isaac Rand, Elizabeth Blackwell and Sir Joseph Banks to name a few. The two names that caught my eye were George Bentham and Sir Joseph Hooker; my father gave me a copy of an 1896 edition of the then bible to British Flora by Bentham and Hooker. They were both notable botanists in their day and Sir Joseph Hooker was also a close friend of Charles Darwin.

They worked on the classification and nomenclature of plant species at a time when there was little logic and pattern to the plant world. The reason I mention these two gentlemen is because they were responsible for laying out a large area of the garden planted to illustrate the species they were working on. This can still be seen to this day.

The Garden has a collection of some 5,000 different plants arranged in areas that are designated edible, useful, medicinal, and historical. Plants from all round the world, grown outdoors if possible, otherwise housed in the Garden's extensive Grade I listed range of glasshouses. The Garden received

charitable status in 1983 and has in the last three or four years raised £2.9 million pounds for the restoration of these wonderful glasshouses without which, Sue mentioned, they would not be standing for very much longer.

After meandering around the Garden for an hour or two we wandered back to the marquee that had been erected on the terrace for a further glass of wine, and a good old catch-up with friends.

Martin Panter

Chelsea Physic Garden: virtually unchanged for 300 years





THE GUILDHALL PHOENIX RISES

The Gardeners' pop-up garden in Guildhall Yard this year was a spectacular affair featuring a Phoenix with hatching eggs, designed to represent healing and rebirth after trauma.

The Gardeners are asked to build a garden in the Guildhall Yard each year. Normally it is launched in February to advertise the Lord Mayor's Big Curry Lunch in March/April held in aid of ABF The Soldiers' Charity. This year the event was

virtual and the garden went up in June once access to Guildhall Yard, suspended because of Covid, had been restored.

The project was orchestrated and led by Past Master Paul Rochford and designed by Gianna Utilini MSGD. Paul asked Hal Fowler of Waste Not Want Not, Nurturing Plants and People, to participate. Hal and Paul, with others from Waste Not Want Not, designed and made the eggs and the Phoenix.

A group of members of the Company including the then Master Heather Barrett-Mold, built and planted the garden in June and it was unveiled that month by the Duke of Kent. Always a temporary installation, it has now been dismantled.

The striking garden drew much admiration in Guildhall Yard

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN GILBERT

THE MYSTERIES OF PLANTS

Shortly before lockdown ended, a group of 15 Gardeners under the Master Heather and her Consort Barry descended upon the Royal College of Physicians at Regent's Park on a wonderfully sunny spring day to be instructed in the arcane mysteries of the wonderful array of plants available across the world for medicinal and other uses.

Our two guides, Dr Henry Oakeley, Garden Fellow of the Royal College,

and Tim Cutler, Liveryman Gardener and Past Master Barber Surgeon, welcomed us from behind masked faces and split us into two groups before leading us off in opposite directions for what proved to be an utterly intriguing tour of (relatively) small gardens filled with unutterably fascinating plants.

Fascinating because many were so common to us all from our own gardens and knowledge but when

described with the wit, knowledge and wisdom of these two maestros of the medico/botanical world they were turned into something completely out of the ordinary. Their delivery and teasing manner, often putting individuals on the spot without mercy, entertained and interested us all so much that we went away considerably the wiser – and rather more careful!

Jeremy Herrtage