

REVIEWS

Toby Musgrave, *The Multifarious Mr Banks: From Botany Bay to Kew, The Natural Historian Who Shaped the World* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2020), 368 pp., 44 colour plates, £25.00 (hbk), ISBN 978-0-300-22383-5

This is the latest in several biographies of this intellectual genius. Toby Musgrave has several horticultural and plant-hunting titles to his name, which led me to hope that the focus might be on Banks's role in garden history. And, indeed, it gives a fairly full account of his role in promoting the exploration of distant territories by collectors. Many of them worked for the Royal Gardens at Kew, where Banks acted as scientific advisor, organizer and royal confidante. His own discoveries with Daniel Solander during James Cook's first voyage to Australia and the South Pacific were of huge significance. There is, however, little further detail about Banks in relation to garden history, and references to his own horticultural activities at his country residence of Spring Grove are disappointingly sketchy.

The first part of the book is organized chronologically and deals with Banks's early life up to the conclusion of his expedition to Iceland, which took place just after his attempt to travel with Cook on the second voyage of exploration to the South Seas had been stymied. The second part contains chapters on Kew, Australia, the Royal Society and other organizations with which he was involved. The final chapter, 'The last two decades', summarizes Banks's further achievements despite being crippled with gout. One remarkable aspect of Banks's life is his success in staying out of formal politics while being a supreme political operator.

The book contains many passages quoted verbatim from Banks's correspondence, with its idiosyncratic spelling and unorthodox grammar. Given the publisher's high-quality reputation, it was, however, somewhat surprising to encounter quite a number of spelling mistakes attributable to the author, some perhaps caused by a spell-check gremlin, such as *Rhododendron arboretum* (*sic*), others homophones (yews, for 'ewes'), principle, for 'principal' (p. 198), simple inconsistencies (binomial in the early parts becomes binomial, the more usual form, later on), and the citation of Masson's monograph as '*Stapelia nova*' (for *Stapeliae Novae*). The

translation of 'Nullius in verba' in the caption to Figure 42 is uninformative; the motto actually refers to the need to verify facts for oneself rather than take other's word for them.

Given the amount of original research that has gone into this book, I would have expected a few more answers to some of the questions raised in this context. What happened, for example, to the chunks of lava brought from Iceland as ships' ballast, some of which now surround Sir Hans Sloane's statue at Chelsea Physic Garden. We are told that the rest went to Kew, but can they be seen there today? Why are Banks's publicly owned collections still divided between the British Library and the Natural History Museum? Despite these niggles, I can thoroughly recommend this book for those seeking an insight into Sir Joseph Banks's multifarious influences over Georgian science and horticulture. It is fluently written and engaging, and while it has been aimed at a general readership rather than those of a botanical/ horticultural persuasion, it is well referenced by means of endnotes and a good bibliography.

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Janet Waymark, *Cedric Morris: A Life in Art and Plants* (London: Whitefox, 2019), 208 pp., illus. in colour and black-and-white, £25.00 (hbk), ISBN-10:1912892200, ISBN-13: 978-1912892204

Hugh St Clair, *A Lesson in Art and Life: The Colourful World of Cedric Morris and Arthur Lett-Haines* (London: Pimpernel, 2019), 272 pp., illus. in colour and black-and-white, £30.00 (hbk). ISBN-10: 1910258369, ISBN-13: 978-1910258361

In the 1950s and 1960s, when the art world's principal focus was abstract painting, Cedric Morris's work, in common with many of his contemporaries, became unfashionable. While this affected his income, for Morris completing a picture to his own satisfaction was of prime importance. However, during these years, he achieved fame for his 'Benton' bred tall bearded irises, and on open days gardeners flocked to

see the garden at Benton End at Hadleigh in Suffolk. Not long before his death in 1982, the Tate Gallery recognized Morris's contribution to British art and purchased two of his paintings: a portrait of *David & Barbara Carr* and *Iris Seedlings* 1943. Then, in 1984, the Tate's major retrospective exhibition enhanced his reputation. Since that time, interest in Morris's painting has increased steadily with the result that in October 2019 *Foxgloves*, a previously unknown work painted in 1932, was sold at auction for two hundred and forty thousand pounds.

Morris's reputation as a plantsman has been acknowledged by two of his friends, the former garden columnist for *Country Life*, Tony Venison, and Beth Chatto, whose plant nursery continues to sell many of his plant introductions. More recently, Sarah Cook, Sissinghurst Castle's former head gardener, has been collecting his 'Benton' irises, which were shown at the 2016 Chelsea Flower Show. Benton End, Morris's home for the last forty years of his life, has now been purchased by a trust, which intends to re-create the house as a teaching and exhibition centre and to restore the garden, thus complementing Morris's and his lifelong partner, Arthur Lett-Haines's School of East Anglian Painting and Drawing.

Since the Tate Gallery's retrospective, several books and articles about Morris have been published and, rather like the Bloomsbury Group, there appears to be a continuing fascination in him and his circle of friends. In the wake of exhibitions in 2018 at the Garden Museum and the Philip Mould Gallery, both of which had informative catalogues, two further books have been published. Bearing this in mind, a question that has been considered is what new information these books provide.

In *A Lesson in Art and Life: The Colourful World of Cedric Morris and Arthur Lett-Haines*, the art journalist Hugh St Clair considers Morris's complex relationship with Arthur Lett-Haines, which endured for over fifty years despite infidelities on both sides. One of the book's strengths is its consideration and depiction of Haines's life, and not just as someone who was an appendage in Morris's life. Although Haines chose to manage many aspects of their life together, as he ran the household and organized the school, leaving Morris free to paint and garden, he continued to paint, and his teaching was appreciated by the school's pupils. In later years, he found great comfort and pride when his 'natural' son, Michael Hampden-Turner, came into his life.

As the book is intended for a general readership, St Clair describes how Morris and Haines lived their lives 'in colour' in a 'black and white world'. It describes their other relationships, Morris with other men and Haines often with women. What is disappointing is that St Clair often does not attribute his sources and some of the inferences he draws are questionable. He suggests, but does not substantiate, that in the 1920s when Morris and Haines spent weekends

with Rupert and Stella Gwynne at Wooton Manor in Sussex, they met Lawrence Johnston. This is possible as Stella was sister-in-law of the harpsichordist Violet Gordon Woodhouse, who lived in a *ménage à trois* with her husband and Johnston's friend, William (Bill), 11th Viscount Barrington. What is undisputable is that Stella's daughter, the cookery writer, knew Johnston and Haines, with whom she shared her love of cooking.

In contrast, the garden historian Janet Waymark's *Cedric Morris: A Life in Art and Plants* has been researched meticulously. This book provides a comprehensive background to Morris's family, his early life and his development as an artist and renowned plantsman. Where the book is less successful for a general readership is that, apart from the artists Christopher Wood and Frances Hodgkin, there is little discussion of Morris's friendships. Unlike St Clair, Waymark refers only to his plant-hunting trips with the botanist Nigel Scott, but fails to acknowledge that this was an important relationship that lasted for several years until Scott's death in 1957. Without the knowledge that for a short time in 1925 Paul Odo Cross was Morris's lover, it is difficult to understand why he would buy Benton End for them. Neither St Clair nor Waymark make it clear that Odo Cross's partner, Angus Wilson, was a writer and iris breeder, born in New Zealand and who came to Britain after the First World War. He lived with Odo Cross at Tidcombe Manor in Wiltshire, and after the end of the Second World War in Jamaica. At least two reviews have confused him with Sir Angus Wilson, the novelist.

Both books portray Morris as self-determined and single-minded and some may say selfish, as he followed his own path regardless of others. Waymark describes in detail the time he spent painting in Wales in 1934 and 1935, leaving Haines to manage their affairs. As Morris disliked cold winters, he painted and searched for plants in Southern Europe with Scott and the plantsman Basil Leng. Haines, who had little interest in plants, was left to make his own arrangements. Yet, despite this, Morris and Haines's relationship survived although the link that continued to bind them together remains elusive.

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Kathryn Bradley-Hole, *English Gardens: From the Archives of Country Life* (New York: Rizzoli, 2019), 492 pp., 450 illus. in colour and black-and-white, £55.00 (hbk), ISBN-10: 0847865797, ISBN-13: 978-0847865796

When it was founded in 1897, *Country Life* quickly became a renowned pictorial weekly devoted to all aspects of upper-class country

living, from sports and game-hunting to country estates and their gardens. Edward Hudson, the magazine's astute founder and editor, devised the large format to showcase high-quality black-and-white photographs. Rather than using standard stock photographs, he hired staff photographers such as Charles Latham, whose images of country houses and interiors are legend. Latham also specialized in country house gardens, which were immortalized in Country Life's three volumes of *Gardens Old and New* (1901–08). Country Life's outstanding publishing record of illustrated books on country houses and gardens continues to this day. In the 1950s, the series was revitalized with large format illustrated books by John Cornforth and other country house historians. And in more recent years Country Life has published dozens of new titles, expanding the palette from England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland to Italy, France and beyond. Roy Strong's commemorative volume, *Country Life 1897–1997: The English Arcadia* (1999), recounts the history of this important publishing venture. Kathryn Bradley-Hole's new volume, *English Gardens: From the Archives of Country Life*, is the latest addition to the series. Weighing in at almost seven pounds and nearly five hundred pages in length, the book is the most visually appealing volume in the entire series.

Bradley-Hole, who served as Gardens Editor of *Country Life* from 2000 to 2018, wrote or edited hundreds of weekly articles on gardens both new and historic. An excellent writer and seasoned historian, Bradley-Hole is eminently qualified to write this volume as a tribute to her knowledge and years with *Country Life*. Her earlier book, *Lost Gardens of England: From the Archives of Country Life* (2004), was also part of this series. Her new book is primarily visual with an engaging text. Arranged thematically, rather than by styles or timelines, the book flows easily from one topic to another with an informed selection of seventy gardens ranging from historic to contemporary. The thematic arrangement of chapters certainly makes it easier for the layman to enjoy the book, while the text is detailed enough to satisfy a more knowledgeable reader. *English Gardens* is certainly one of the best books of the year, although its weight and price might deter some readers.

As the Duke of Devonshire states in the Foreword, 'This celebration of English gardens is a reminder that the cultivated space around people's homes is as important now as it ever has been. There are more people gardening and to a higher standard than ever before.' In her Introduction, Bradley-Hole writes, 'This book is therefore a timely celebration of English country gardening as it is now, in the twenty-first century, illustrated via the unique archive of *Country Life*.' As she states, she had to select from 'more than 6,000 gardens across 120-plus years [which] amounts to an enormous and diverse pictorial and textual record'. The thematic organization, with chapters devoted to topiary, formal gardens, parks, water gardens, cottage gardens, kitchen gardens, cutting gardens, rose gardens, exotic

gardens and more, works well for casual readers whose interest might fade in a rigorous timeline arrangement. Yet the text is informative and detailed enough to satisfy the expert. And for those who yearn for more, there is a good bibliography and list of gardens to visit.

One of the major attractions of the book is the diversity of gardens featured, from well-known examples, such as Hidcote, Barnsley House and Hasley Court, to lesser known ones, such as Euridge Manor Farm, Warnell Hall and Ousden House. In most large-format picture books usually the text or the photographs stand out and do not necessarily complement one another, but in this volume the exemplar photographs and text elucidate one another. In 'Water's Many Moods', for example, the author skilfully blends examples from the grandiose water gardens at Blenheim Palace and the more modest Heale House to the new extravaganza, The Alnwick Garden, each with its own clear identity and message. In 'Cottage Gardens', we journey from traditional Cottage Row in rural Dorset (inspired by Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, 1911) to Arne Maynard's South Wood Farm in Devon. The chapter on Arts & Crafts Gardens includes Gertrude Jekyll's Munstead Wood, Charles Voysey's Perrycroft, and Edwin Lutyens's Great Dixter, as well as Jinny Blom's contemporary garden at Temple Guiting that shows the influence of the movement. Bryan's Ground, another important Arts & Crafts-era garden, only makes a guest appearance in other chapters. 'The Kitchen Gardens' includes the recently rehabilitated oval one at William Robinson's Gravetye Manor to George Carter's masterfully restrained garden at Friston Place.

There is a wealth of knowledge and pleasure in *English Gardens*, a book to be savoured and scrutinized over time. While other experts might gently quibble about which gardens to include in what categories, this presentation works remarkably well. Over the years there have been many books bearing this title, but this one is the best in terms of text and illustrations.

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Liz Bellamy, *The Language of Fruit: Literature and Horticulture in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 249 pp., 24 black-and-white illus., £60.00 (hbk), ISBN 978-0-8122-5083-1

Published in the series 'Penn Studies in Landscape Architecture', under the serial editorship of Professor John Dixon Hunt, one might conclude that this book is what it is not. The 'literature' of the title embraces poetry, fiction and *belles lettres*, but only one chapter explores the horticultural

literature. Other topics covered include seventeenth-century verse, restoration drama, eighteenth-century Georgic and a whole chapter on the pineapple in the romantic period novel. Every conceivable kind of fruit is referenced, usually by way of apt quotations, though three form the focus: the apple, the orange and the pineapple. The Biblical myth of the Garden of Eden is a recurring theme, and (without labouring the point) it has to be said that Liz Bellamy's exploration of the sexual connotations of fruit are not confined to this particular story. She has made a very thorough search of the relevant

literature and the book is supplied with copious endnotes grouped by chapters, and a voluminous bibliography divided into primary sources (the books studied) and secondary sources (articles and books addressing the themes explored in this book). To me, the bibliography was one of the most useful parts of the work; the text is heavy going and at times repetitive. Printed by Lightning Source UK (a form of print-on-demand) the UK version lacks the attractive jacket shown on the Penn Press website.

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