

Ardleigh Horticultural Society - June 2025 Meeting

“The Plant Hunters: The Adventurers who brought us garden colour” - Maggie Piper

For anyone with an interest in where some of our favourite garden plants originated, our June talk from Maggie Piper was a fascinating insight into this aspect of our botanical history. John Tradescant the Elder, often referred to as “the father of English gardening”, and his son, John Tradescant the Younger, were active plant hunters during the 17th century and brought back many species from their travels, including larch, lilac, apricot and runner beans. Sir Joseph Banks was active during the second half of the 18th century and early 19th century. He was a naturalist, botanist and a patron of the natural sciences. He took part in Captain James Cook’s first great voyage, visiting Brazil, Tahiti, Australia and New Zealand. He was President of the Royal Society for 41 years and, as adviser to King George III on the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, sent botanists all round the world, turning Kew into the world’s leading botanical garden. He was responsible for the introduction of bougainvillea, mimosa, eucalyptus and more than 80 varieties of plants with the name Banksii.

The plant hunting tradition was maintained through the 19th century by David Douglas, famous for the introduction of the Douglas fir from the USA, Joseph Hooker, who collected 7000 plant species from India, including 25 species of rhododendron, and Ernest Henry Wilson, who explored China and sent back the handkerchief tree and lily regale. The tradition continues today, with Tom Hart Dyke at Lullingstone Castle in Kent, and Sue and Bleddyn Wynn-Jones at Crug Farm near Caernarfon. Sue and Bleddyn started their plant hunting with a trip to Jordan in 1991, and they are still going strong today. Tetrapanax is one of their best-known introductions.