



BSBA Newsletter, August 2025

A few words from our chair, Jan:

Welcome to our August Newsletter. As I write this, it is raining which is quite a relief for those of us with gardens and I can almost hear the plants sighing with relief! But I hope you have been able to enjoy the long spell of hot, dry, sunny weather we have had this year.

I have just been to the Victoria Art Gallery in Bath to see 'The Lost Spells' exhibition. If you live in the Bath area, do go and see the lovely wildlife paintings by Jackie Morris alongside poems by Robert Macfarlane from their best-selling book celebrating nature. It is on till 5th October and is free if you have a B&NES Discovery Card. This exhibition will be followed by the Bath Society of Artists 120th Open Exhibition. If you can, make the most of what we have going on locally.

Our Bowood paintings have to be completed by 1st December so we will then need to decide 'what next?' We will be asking for your suggestions so get thinking!

Meanwhile I hope you enjoy the rest of the summer.

Jan

A word about Bowood paintings: Please remember to let me know when you choose a plant to paint or indeed change your chosen plant so that I can keep an up to date list on the BSBA website at www.bsba.co.uk

(Janet)

BSBA Exhibition:

BSBA members took part in the Frome Festival in August exhibiting paintings as part of an exhibition at Holy Trinity Church as a tribute, by the church, in memory of Dennis and Daphne Neate. 24 paintings were displayed, 12 from current BSBA members and 12 painted by Dennis and Daphne, see photos below:



From Penny Fleming with a photograph supplied by Barbara:

Rare Tree to flower for 6th time

Glancing through a BBC News email I received recently, I spotted a headline that read: 'Rare Tree to flower for 6th time'. With curiosity duly aroused, I clicked on the link to discover this 'rare tree' was in fact *Emmenopterys henryi* at Borde Hill, near Haywards Heath, West Sussex.

As I'm sure you will recall, *Emmenopterys henryi* was first discovered by Barbara Phillip's great uncle, Augustine Henry, (the Irish Doctor, Botanist and Sinologist). Both he and the botanist Ernest Wilson described this tree as being 'one of the most strikingly beautiful trees of the Chinese forest'.

The Director and Trustee of the Borde Hill Garden Charity is Andrewjohn Clarke and it was his great grandfather Col. Stephenson R Clarke who bought Borde Hill in 1893 with the express intention of collecting trees from around the world in order to create an Arboretum.

At that time, Stephenson Clarke sponsored many botanists to travel the world to collect plant specimens and it was George Forest, (a botanist he sponsored), who collected these seeds from a remote forest in southern China and sent them to him in 1928.

Sadly, neither Stephenson Clarke, Andrewjohn's grandfather or father ever saw the tree flower, all three having died prior to its first flowering in 2011. Now at the age of 97 years, this tree is flowering for the 6th time only and 'this rare and spectacular botanical event is due to early heatwaves', according to a Borde Hill spokesman.

So important is *Emmenopterys henryi* to Borde Hill's garden botanical heritage, that in 2023 it inspired its new logo.

This photograph from Barbara shows Caroline Frances-King painting the said plant in 2012:

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CAPTURING A RARITY: Caroline Frances-King with her painting

PICTURE: Kevin Bates

Painter finds subject closer to home

Artist Caroline Frances-King spent eight weeks in China trying to find a rare plant in flower – only for one to appear less than 200 miles away in Britain.

The painter from Oldfield Park was awarded a Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship in 2009 to fund the stint in China, searching for a tree called *emmenopterys henryi*, which is noted for its rare flowering.

She travelled in the footsteps of the late 19th-century botanical explorer Augustine Henry, armed with paper, paintbrushes and a camera.

Caroline hired a guide and travelled deep into forest only to find that due to unseasonably hot weather the tree had flowered early, and she had missed her chance.

After she returned to England, Caroline put all thoughts of being able to realise her ambition aside.

That all changed when, last month, she heard that it was now flowering in England after 30 years in Cambridge.

“Suddenly I heard that the tree I’d gone all the way to China to paint was flowering for the first time at Cambridge University Botanic Gardens,” she said.

“I dropped everything and went straight over there. The 30-year old tree was in full bloom. It was wonderful. To hold these delicate star-shaped flowers in my hand, and smell their heady perfume is a dream come true.”

Since its introduction, it has been recorded as flowering outside China less than a dozen times.

Caroline’s painting will form part of an exhibition on botanical illustrations from China planned for 2014 in Bath.

To find out more about fellowships, go to www.wcmt.org.uk.

Following on from Penny’s article Caroline Frances-King has the following information to share about the Churchill Fellowship Scheme:

I hadn't heard about the Churchill Fellowship until a friend asked me to endorse her application, and I realised what an extraordinary opportunity this Fellowship provides for those with a passion for discovery. When I applied some 15 years ago to go to China to find and paint *Emmenopterys henryi* in flower, it seemed simple enough to me. It was anything but! I found myself in a foreign country on my own, without the language, and little support on the ground - but I persevered, and stayed in, and travelled around China for the next year.

The Churchill Fellowship developed out of a desire to create a legacy in Churchill's memory, and enable others to have the opportunity to explore their interests and passions and share their experiences with the world. Some fifteen years on from when I applied, the Fellowship has matured, and application criteria are more exacting with the Fellowship offering *'British citizens the opportunity to discover the latest innovations and best practice in any practical issue they care passionately about, anywhere in the world.'*

If you have a passion to change society, in any way, the Churchill Fellowship might just enable you to do so. Applications for next year's awards open on 2 September:

<https://www.churchillfellowship.org/become-a-fellow/>

Lyn alerts us to the RHS's new Royal Signature to celebrate His Majesty King Charles 111's patronage. This is a botanical painting presented to the King at Sandringham on 23 July 2025. The painting is by Gillian Barlow and it continues the enduring relationship between the Royal family and the RHS. Further details, an indepth examination of the painting and also a link to the presentation via YouTube can be found by following the link:

www.rhs.org

National Trust cuts:

The tallest tree at a National Trust garden has been felled recently. The 98ft Monterey pine at the Saltram Estate in Devon was believed to be about 150 years old. It had two large cracks and fungal infection and was unsavable, deemed a safety hazard it had to come down. Even worse in the eyes of some National Trust members is the cutting of homemade scones for NT cream teas in its cafes! (Janet)

The Manx Wildlife Trust is helping to restore hundreds of acres of rainforest on the Isle of Man. Temperate rainforest, also known as Atlantic or Celtic rainforests, cover just 1% of the country and are found in places exposed to the sea with high rainfall and humidity. Conservationists will use seeds from patches of rainforest that remain in the island's steep gorges to reestablish native areas. They hope that saplings of oak, hazel, birch and holly will grow into a lush habitat profuse with lichens and ferns, home to hen harriers and wood warblers. (Janet)

For more information visit: www.mwt.im

Day Workshops and Mini-workshops:

A report and photos from Lyn:

Members enjoyed a day making their own beautiful sketchbooks with Megan Stallworthy, see examples below in the photographs from the workshop. We each made two little sketch books, the one illustrated is a Japanese Accordion Sketchbook which was made using glue. We covered the end pieces in printed paper and stuck single cards to each other to make a double sided zigzag. This can be made with watercolour paper and painted on both sides.

The other was a book made up of six booklets sewn at the spine in such a way that when opened the pages lay flat. Very nifty!

We all enjoyed the day very much and came away with a pair of professional looking books.



Theresa has been working very hard to put together a program of workshops for your enjoyment:

We are holding another day workshop on Friday 19th September, run by Sally Pond. Sally was instrumental in founding the Salisbury Cathedral Close Florilegium in 2016, and, more recently, was one of the SWSBA artists selected to exhibit at the Botanical Art Worldwide 2025 Exhibition. (See her two paintings, titled Traditional Hay Meadow Grasses I and II, in the latest Summer edition of 'Palette and Petal') She has three RHS Silver Gilt medals.

The subject for the workshop in September will be 'Autumn Fruits' focusing particularly on light, reflected light and the large range of colours found in even the smallest of fruits. The cost for the day workshop is £40 each.

The signing up list is on our BSBA notice board at St Andrews Hall or email Theresa at theresasmith2351@gmail.com to put your name down.

Finally, we are always looking for new ideas for mini and day workshops – just let Theresa know if there is a tutor or subject that you would like.

From Lyn:

Curzon gave a very interesting talk about Carl Linnaeus for the mini workshop on 3rd July. She had done lots of research and there was much chat and questions afterwards followed by a really enjoyable lunch!



From Julia Trickey:

A few words about one of the leading botanical artists who has very sadly recently died.

SUSANNAH BLAXILL 1954 - 2025

It was with great sadness that I heard that the Australian artist Susannah Blaxill had died. Considered to be one of the all-time greatest botanical artists with many paintings in the Shirley Sherwood Collection, I was privileged to host her talking about her work last summer. This hour-long presentation can be viewed on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rivjcfh4Hfo&t=2387s>

She will be much missed, especially by her devoted students.

Below is an article that I wrote originally for the American SBA journal last December, about Susannah's iconic Beetroot painting - one of my all-time favourite artworks.

LASTING IMPRESSIONS

When I first discovered botanical art in the late 1990s, there were few books on the subject and certainly no social media posts to take inspiration from. So, when I got a copy of *Contemporary Botanical Artists*, cataloguing the artwork in the Shirley Sherwood Collection, I pored over each entry, studying the paintings carefully and reading up about each artist. This is where I first encountered Susannah Blaxill's work and her Beetroot painting in particular, demonstrating that the mundane and less-than-perfect specimen could be centre stage.

Susannah actively described herself as a botanical artist rather than illustrator for her choice of subject, capturing a moment in time and for her use of colour. In a recent online talk with Susannah, she said "I play with colours all the time, because I think it makes it (*the subject*) more real. " And "It is incredibly important to change my colours over the surface of a painting."

I had become aware of Susannah as a colourist when seeing the Beetroot painting in real life for the first time at the Shirley Sherwood Gallery, Kew Gardens. As I looked at the painting through a magnifying glass, I was amazed to see the range of colours, especially on the leaves, including greens, gold and purples, all applied in tiny dry strokes, which I had not been aware of in the book reproductions.

The form on the beet itself is a perfect example of a subject lit from the top left, with beautifully subtle reflected light on the shadow side, which enhances its three-dimensional shape. I often direct students seeking to understand the value of reflected light to this painting. I also love the movement that the angled placement of the vegetable creates and the inclusion of cut and broken leaf stems.

I will never paint like Susannah as I am a much 'wetter' painter, and I don't have her meticulous patience or use of colour (though since speaking to her recently, I have tried to be a little more adventurous!). Neither will I paint a beetroot myself, as I couldn't do so without comparing it to this gold-standard portrait. That aside, this painting continues to feed my soul and to be a source of inspiration and fascination.





Also from Julia: (see Julia's South African photographs above)

In early July, I found myself standing in the private Grootbos Nature Reserve at the southern tip of South Africa. The Grootbos Foundation is a non-profit organisation, established in 2003 with the vision of conserving the Cape Floral Kingdom and uplifting the communities therein. I was there as part of a second phase Florilegium project, the first having spanned the last five years. The aim is to celebrate and highlight the beauty of the unique plants growing on the reserve.

The outcome of the initial project includes a truly beautiful book in two sizes, making it affordable and accessible to a wide audience. A dedicated gallery has been built on the Reserve housing the original paintings, with many of the images adorning the accommodation, restaurant and Foundation office walls as prints and wallpaper. Unlike other florilegia that I have been involved with, artists are encouraged to depict associated pollinators and other details, giving a more complete story of the plants depicted and their importance to the wider natural world. These illustrations truly bring added interest to the book too, dotted as they are amongst the text.

My week was spent with four other (South African) artists on plant safaris, collecting specimens, learning about the Foundation, visiting the gallery, drawing and collecting reference material (as well as a fancy meal with the enthusiastic and encouraging Reserve owner). We also worked with the entomologists to understand the associated animals, birds and insects.

I arrived home with lots of notes, drawings and reference photographs. Given one of my assigned plants has tiny flowers with eleven bumpy, shiny and spiky leaves, it will take me some time to complete. Memories of the wonderful people, place and project is keeping me going!

To keep up with all Julia's latest news and information about her Botanical Talks visit:

www.juliatrickey.co.uk

A new garden at Kew:

The Carbon Garden aims to reveal the invisible, bringing to life the critical role carbon plays in sustaining life on Earth, communicating the scale of the climate crisis, and sharing the extraordinary potential of the natural world to combat it.

This new garden will feature multiple different areas that explore the relationship between plants, carbon and the future. A dry garden highlights how we can work together with plants to adapt to a changing climate. A rain garden and bioswale illustrate the ways we can prevent soil erosion, reduce flooding and support moisture-tolerant plants that maintain soil stability and carbon storage. (Janet)

New Books:

Laura Sowerby: *Botanical prints in Linocut*, The Crowood Press, 112p

Dianne Sutherland: *Sketching Nature: The Beginner's Guide to Keeping a Botanical Sketchbook*

Fay-Wei Li and Jacob S. Suissa: *Ferns: Lessons in Survival from Earth's Most Adaptable Plants* (with illustrations by Laura Silburn)

Exhibitions and events:

From Lyn:

Looking ahead to November there is a talk by Illustrator Angela Harding at St Swithin's Church on Friday 7th November at 7pm

You will have seen her natural history illustrations on many book covers (see below) Book through Topping and Co Bookshop

<https://www.toppingbooks.co.uk/events/bath/angela-harding/>



Also from Lyn:

The Painting group who kindly lent us the table easels for the Frome exhibition have an exhibition in early Sept so here are the details in case anyone is interested.

North Wraxall Artists Painting Exhibition at Langridge Hall, Lansdowne
(the building opposite Bath Racecourse entrance)

Saturday 6th Sept 10am-6pm and Sunday 7th Sept 11am-4pm

Until 14th September at The Shirley Sherwood Gallery, Kew Gardens

The Power of Trees: The Shirley Sherwood Collection brings you contemporary botanical artworks that depict resilient trees. From Australian eucalypts and a Madagascan baobab to ancient ginkgos and magnolias, this striking show will explore the various features, colours and forms they've adapted to survive over millions of years.

Also, if you are travelling around the country this summer:

See Rebecca Stevenson's installation 'Inspired by nature: Mary, Maria, Marianne' on display in the Upper Ante at Blickling Estate in Norfolk this summer.

The set of three busts depicts imagined portraits of artists and botanists, Mary Delany (1700-1788), Maria Sibylla Merian (1647-1717), and Marianne North (1830-1890). These three pioneering women made important contributions to the world of science, recording plants and insects before the time of photographic documentation. All three worked at a time when it was difficult for women to receive formal training in either art or science. Constructed from a composite resin material, these three striking portraits reference the women's work through the addition of beautiful wax floral details. The sculptures will be on display along with Blickling's copy of Maria Sibylla Merian's book

'Dissertation sur la generation et les transformations des insectes de Surinam', 1726.
The book came to Blickling as part of an extensive collection inherited from Sir Richard Ellys in the early 1740s. Be an artist and contribute to the growing visitor artwork extending down the length of the Long Gallery, echoing the spirit of these three remarkable women!

The exhibition takes place daily from 19 July to 22 October 2025 daily. House opens at 11am, last entry is at 3.30pm.

Standard admission prices apply, no booking required. Free entry for National Trust members.

Workshops and courses:

Lucy T. Smith is giving a workshop at Kew Gardens entitled: Pencil & Watercolour Botanical Sketchbook, 15 - 16 September www.kew.org

Fresh from the release of her new book Botanical Sketchbooks, renowned freelance illustrator [Lucy T. Smith](#) invites you to a unique botanical sketchbook class at the RBG, Kew. Discover essential techniques in observational drawing and master the art of colour matching using pencil and watercolour - all under the guidance of one of the world's leading botanical artists.

Further details of art courses at Clos Mirabel in the French Pyrenees, including one by award winning botanical artist Ann Swan can be found by visiting :

<https://atelier.clos-mirabel.com>

See: [www/transylvaniaschoolofbotanicalart.com](http://www.transylvaniaschoolofbotanicalart.com)

For a list of botanical course being held there in 2026

To follow Sarah Morrish's botanical activities visit:

<https://www.illustratingnaturesdetails.com/zoom-studio-sessions>

Some BSBA dates for your diary:

September 4th: Mini-workshop 12.15 – 1.15

10th: Bowood visit: 11am meet for coffee

11th: Review of Bowood paintings, bring finished paintings and work in progress to St. Andrew's

19th: Sally Pond day workshop 10am – 4pm

October 2nd: Mini-workshop 12.15-1.15

15th: Bowood visit: 11 am meet for coffee

20th: Committee meeting 10.30

November 4th Mini-workshop 12.15-1.15

Thank you to all those who send items for inclusion in this newsletter. Enjoy the rest of the summer and please sent me items for inclusion in the next BSBA Newsletter!

Janet