



BSBA Newsletter, April 2026



Foxglove tree by Lila Streether

Welcome to our first Newsletter of 2026 and my last as your Chairman. It has been an honour to have this role for the past three years but now it's time for someone else to take the helm.

By the time you read this our exhibition at Bowood will be open to the general public. We hope you will be able to go and see the work produced by members over the past year, if you haven't already done so. It was a treat for those taking part to have access to Bowood House and Gardens all last year and artists plus guests were treated to a Private View with afternoon tea in glorious sunshine on 19th March. Now we need to start painting for our next exhibition which has the theme of 'Edible Plants'.

Very sadly our long-standing member Lila Streether died earlier this year. She was an excellent artist and a valuable contributor to BSBA. She was very keen for the two paintings she had produced for the Bowood exhibition to still be on display there. We miss her and send our sympathy to her family.

Did you know that there is now evidence that spending time looking at art can significantly reduce stress? In particular, what is known as 'slow looking' encourages one to pause and spend time looking at a particular artwork, taking in the detail. Apparently, on average, gallery visitors spend only eight seconds looking at a piece of art. So, think about slow looking next time you visit an exhibition. We are told it can make you feel more alive!

I hope to see you at our AGM on 23rd April which is always an enjoyable event and an opportunity to catch up with other members socially over a lovely lunch. With very best wishes to all, especially those who have been unwell recently.

Jan

Some pictures from the Bowood exhibition:





From Jen Sheppard : Bowood

We hope that you will be visiting Bowood this season and enjoying all it has to offer, especially our lovely exhibition. If you do go, it would be great if you could let myself or another member of the committee know if you think the picture glass needs a polish, or there are any wonky labels etc., email me at: 1jenshep@gmail.com or put a message on the BSBA group app. Thanks,

Jen

For those of you who have been following Julia Trickey's Botanical Art webinars you will know that she has been asking audience members to submit artworks to be shown alongside the closing credits. This would be an ideal opportunity to feature images from the Bowood exhibition serving to promote not only the exhibition, but also BSBA and individual artists. So, if you would like your work to be featured submit your images to Julia using the following form: <https://www.wixforms.com/f/7421547407147533315>

More news from Julia: she has been selected to be Botanical Artist in Residence at the Oak Springs Garden Foundation, Virginia, USA for three weeks from mid-August. Congratulations and we look forwards to hearing how this went later in the year Julia!

On 12 March BSBA members were invited by the sons of Barbara Phillips to attend an afternoon tea at Bailbrook House. This was a very enjoyable event where her friends came together to celebrate her life. Barbara moved in many different circles so those there included ex colleagues from her

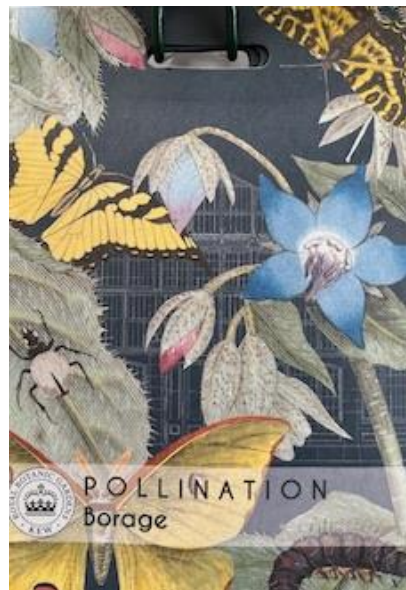
medical career, ladies from her Mah Jong group, BSBA members and of course her family. Some of Barbara's paintings were on display and a 'slide show' of her life was played. There was also a very beautiful portrait of Barbara in her younger days:



(Thank you Lyn for this image)

New design for Kew Flower Seed Packets:

Some of you may have seen these new seed packets from Thompson and Morgan in association with Kew Gardens. They are so beautifully designed and make one want to buy the whole range of seeds. Below, just two examples.



Janet

From Annabel:

On 12 March Julia Trickey's Botanical Art Talks featured botanical artist Christine Battle. Julia asked Christine to tell us how she came start her career of painting plants. Christine discovered Botanical art when she was given a present for her birthday of a two day course about botanical art. She loved it and since then she has gone on to

become one of the top botanical painters I know. Christine told us about her work for the Curtis magazine, published by the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, which to this day remains an important forum for botanical illustration and plant taxonomy. Christine is very interested in trees, she happened to be at a meeting of oak enthusiasts where she met Martin Ricks the editor of the Curtis magazine!

She took us through the whole process undertaken to achieve the plates for Curtis and showed us her first painting for the magazine. This was one of the golden oaks, *Quercus Guyavifolia*. Curtis's requirements are very strict and stipulate that Bristol Board is used for the drawings. Christine explained how she was expected to show all the important parts of the plant in a plate no bigger than 135 mm. by 210 mm. and to fit details such as attachments of the leaf, underside of the leaf, seeds and plant habit all into this small area and fill the plate.

Christine has painted many plants since then and has travelled all over the country and abroad to see and collect specimens. Initially she makes her sketches and colour matches in her sketch book and takes many photos but she also keeps some plant specimen and finds the best way is in vodka in the freezer!! Christine told us that one of the things she loved about working for Curtis was working with the incredibly knowledgeable botanists. Botanists write the articles and the artist draws the enlarged details in pen and ink and paints the plant. The Curtis magazine has very high standards for all their botanical painters and it is an accolade to Christine that she works for them.

There was so much more but it really was a fascinating conversation between two Gold medal painters who are both Friends of the BSB.

From Celia:

In January I visited the Garden Museum in Lambeth, primarily to see the Rory McEwen 'Nature's Song' exhibition, but also learned about the life of another influential botanical artist.

Nelly Roberts (1872 – 1959) was a largely self-taught botanical artist who became the first official RHS orchid artist at a time of 'orchid mania' due to the introduction of new species and hybrids. She lived and worked in a modest flat above a shop in Brixton and supported her family by producing about 100 scientifically correct paintings a year.

For 56 years Nelly painted every orchid that received an award by the RHS Orchid Committee and the collection of over 4,500, held in the Lindley Library, is still used today for comparison purposes. (see illustration below). She also undertook commissions for private orchid collectors. Two orchids were named after Nelly and she was awarded an RHS Gold medal in 1900.

I was also interested to find some information the Museum provided about the Finnis Scott Foundation. Our 'Amazing World of Trees' exhibition in 2017 and 'Plants for Wildlife' in 2022 received financial support from the Foundation. This charitable trust

was created by Valerie Finnis, the second wife of Sir David Scott, a distinguished diplomat. The couple had been expert and popular horticulturists in the 20th century and also had a shared interest in Fine Art. Incorporated in 2008 the Foundation supports and encourages horticulture and plant sciences together with fine art.



From Rachel:

A few weeks ago, I was invited round to meet a neighbour's new puppy, and he, knowing I was a keen gardener, told me that in researching his family tree, he had found that he had a distant cousin as an ancestor who had been a notable botanical artist. He had gone to the British Library to see one of the original published copies of her book, and then he bought a facsimile, which he showed me. Her name was Elizabeth Blackwell and she had a rather colourful life (excuse the pun.)

She was among the first women to achieve fame as a botanical illustrator. Born Elizabeth Simpson in a house in Poultry, in the parish of St Mary Woolnoth in the City of London, on 23 April 1699. She trained as an artist (her father was artist Leonard Simpson) and married her second cousin Alexander Blackwell when she was 27. He seemed to have had a talent for being involved in dodgy business practices. He practised as a physician - but had no medical training. When he was caught out, they fled to London, where he set up as a publisher - neglecting to undertake the four years of training required. Hence, he received hefty trade fines which he was unable to pay - and ended up in a debtors' prison

Elizabeth Blackwell undertook an ambitious project to raise money to pay her husband's debts and release him from debtors' prison: her project was a book entitled ***A Curious Herbal***. She learned that physicians required a reference book documenting the medicinal qualities of plants and herbs and including illustrations so it could be used to identify the plants. Prior to her herbal no such herbal existed in England. In order to develop the illustrations for the Herbal she examined and drew

specimens of plants available in the Chelsea Physic Garden. She also produced the botanical engravings and hand coloured them. She lived in Swan Walk, near the Physic Garden while doing this work. Her husband's role was to provide the scientific nomenclature and common names of the plants in various languages and also what they could be used for.

She had two children who both tragically died soon after she commenced work. Sir Hans Sloane, the architect, provided financial support to publish 'A Curious Herbal'. In total, the enterprise took Blackwell six full years to complete but did enable her to release her husband from prison. He then emigrated to Sweden where he continued his 'career' by becoming involved in a conspiracy to alter the Swedish succession and, as a result, was beheaded on 29 July 1747. After her husband's death Elizabeth Blackwell lived her life in obscurity until her death in 1758. Later however, as a result of the publication of a larger and expanded version in both German and Latin (*Herbarium Blackwellianum Emendatum et Auctum*), she came to the attention of her contemporary Carl Linnaeus who referred to her as *Botanica Blackwellia*.

Her grave is in the churchyard at Chelsea Old Church and she is one of the four names on a plaque in the church dedicated to the memory of Chelsea women distinguished by their learning and piety. Her book apparently remained in print for decades after her death.

News Snippets:

A British biotech firm has created a sustainable alternative to natural rubber with latex harvested from dandelions. QuberTech hopes to ease reliance on the rubber tree, which is threatened by climate change and disease. The latest gene-editing techniques will be used to grow larger dandelion roots for a greater yield.

Now scientists can hear when plants are saying 'ouch'. Biologists have worked out how to listen to plants' distress calls:

1. Electrodes are fitted to the plant.
2. The bug infestation begins.
3. Plant signals it is in pain.
4. Farmer can intervene up to a week earlier than normal to treat the crop.
5. Healthy crop continues to grow.

The boom in machine learning and artificial intelligence capability has transformed scientists' capability to decipher and analyse huge amounts of data. (Janet)

From Jen Sheppard: A report of the workshop on Feb 13th **Tulips in cut paper by Angie Girling**

Angie gave us a full day workshop on how to create the image of a tulip, using paper cut from magazines. It was a surprise to discover that rather than using the traditional collage method of cutting out pieces from magazines, of the appropriate colours and

gluing them on to black paper, we had to cut the petals and leaves a little larger than needed so that the image could be completely glued together before fixing it to the background.

We all enjoyed getting ‘stuck’ in and learnt a lot about this technique and it was good to be pushed out of our comfort zone.

Exhibitions, courses and books:

Tulip Mania at Dyrham Park:

Immerse yourself in the world of tulips at Dyrham Park with magnificent displays around the grounds. In relation the house will highlight the tulip’s historical links to the Netherlands through displays of Delftware and an exhibition of artworks inspired by Dyrham’s tulips by local artists. More information: www.nationaltrust.org.uk

In Bloom – how plants changed our world. A multi sensorial exhibition shows how plants from far and wide have influenced our lives today. It traces how a network of the rich, scientific, artistic and adventurous have transformed how we view plants. Exhibits include sumptuous paintings old and new, flower teaching models and a chance to smell scents from roses through types of tea to the scent a of Chinese opium den. I have seen this exhibition and recommend it! Advisable to pre-book a ticket. (Janet) Ashmolean Museum Oxford. 19 March – 16 August
Below are just three from the 100 artworks on show.

For further details of the exhibition and related events, including a lecture, visit www.ashmolean.org



Garden Museum, London

Benton End: A paradise of pollen and paint, 2 June – 20 Sept 2026

This exhibition will explore Benton End’s impact on a generation of artists.

Spring plant fair 2026, 19 April

Kew Gardens: The Singh Twins, Botanical Tales and Seeds of Empire runs until 12 April 2026. Also showing, **Flora Indica**, botanical illustrations produced by Indian artists in the C18 and C19. Not botanical but worth seeing: **Henry Moore: Monumental Nature**. 30 large sculptures placed throughout the garden with smaller models and sketchbooks on view inside the Shirley Sherwood Gallery. 9 May – 31 January, 2027.

Kettle's Yard, Cambridge: Handpicked: painting flowers from 1900 to today. Showing paintings by over 40 artists including Henri Rousseau, Vanessa Bell, David Bomberg and Louise Bourgeois. 25 April – 6 September www.Kettlesyard.cam.ac.uk

ROSA Botanical Art Fair is taking place at West Dean, Chichester, Sussex – 1-4 May 2026. Open 10am-5pm.

The botanical theme at the Rosa Festival is very broad and open to interpretation so it is not strictly botanical across the whole event. The SBA will have an exhibition in the main grand house at West Dean in the estate boardroom. Some SBA members will be there. SBA subscribers can obtain a 10% discount on tickets using the code: SBA10 All exhibits will be original with the theme encompassing all plant life and the wonderful gardens at West Dean should, by then, be bursting into life.

For more information and to buy tickets: <https://rosamagazine.co.uk/botanical-art-fair/visit/>

JSBA (Japanese Society Botanical Artists) are holding their first exhibition 14 March – 24 May at Kochi Prefectural Makino Botanical Garden. This exhibition includes works by the Indonesian Society of botanical Artists and work by young artists from the Inaugural Young Botanical Artist Competition. For those of us who cannot hope to visit the live exhibition it can be followed through the society's posts on Instagram, just search: Japanese_society_botanical to see images.

Ann Swan will be taking part in Marlborough Open Studios during July. For more details of this and Ann's courses and tuition see: <https://annswan.co.uk>

Books and Talks:

Grasslands by John Wright. One of Britain's best known naturalists will be discussing his latest book *Grasslands* at Topping and Co Booksellers on Thursday 21st May. The book explores the richness and diversity of Britain's grasslands. See: www.toppingbooks.co.uk for further details

RHS Botanical illustration: The Gold Medal Winners by Charlotte Brooks. This is an updated compilation of Gold Medal winning artworks from the RHS Art and Photography shows. This volume contains 29 new works by 14 artists between 2019 and 2024. Published by ACC Art Books ISBN: 9781788843386

RHS Watercolour Botanical Art: A Practical Guide for Artists by Sarah Howard and Rachel Pedder-Smith. This book is an essential guide that bridges botanical knowledge with practical watercolour techniques. Published by Octopus Publishing Group. ISBN: 9781784729844

A Wildflower Year by Frances Tophill who has documented 60 wild flowers throughout the year. Octopus Press.

RHS The Garden Almanac 2026 by Zia Allaway and Guy Barter. A collection of advice, art and photography. Published by Quarto.

In Nature's Slipstream by Carol Bruce. Over 20 years Bruce has created a garden from scratch but in harmony with nature, beauty and sustainability. Published by DK.

BSBA Diary dates:

Mini workshops will be held at St Andrews on the first Thursday of each month for the remainder of 2026 except for August.

9 April: Easter break, no painting at St. Andrews

23 April: BSBA AGM

15 May: Day workshop with Laura Silburn, contact Theresa Smith for further details and to book a place theresasmith235@gmail.com

Many thanks to all those who sent me items for this Newsletter.

Janet