

Wales Society of Botanical Illustrators

July
2024

It has been a very busy year for the WSBI and our members have been creating some impressive artworks, of which more later.

We have undertaken an Artists in Residence project and have also been preparing for the Florilegium Exhibition which we have undertaken for Llanfrehfa Grange Walled Garden group. This represents the first Phase of the Florilegium and is based on the medicinal plants grown by the Garden Volunteers. The Exhibition is set to open in June and will last until mid August.

We also took part in a day at LGWG Open Day. This free event offered anyone interested in gardens and botany the opportunity to come to see what the volunteers at the Walled Garden have achieved. There was a very successful plant-and-produce sale, as well as numerous other stalls to visit. The WSBI members were delighted to talk to so many visitors and to let them know a little about us.

WSBI continues to attract attention and we have had a number of new members over the last year and a great deal of interest in the Society. We would like to have a branch of the WSBI in North Wales and we already have two members working in the area. If you would like to join the Society please use the website link www.wsbi.org to contact us via email.

You may remember that next year The World Botanical Day will be celebrated in May 2025 with societies and organisations throughout the world presenting their paintings and drawings of a variety of Heritage Crops. WSBI has plans in the pipeline for this and we will let you know more details later.

A number of workshops are planned through until the end of September although we may add to this as the year progresses. Details can be seen on the website at wsbi.org.uk.

As always, our members have been contributing to this newsletter and their experiences and efforts are greatly appreciated.



The Wales Society of Botanical Illustrators at Dyrham Park

Our Botanical Artists in Residence have been helping celebrate 'Tulipmania'. This beautiful National Trust House & Garden have a breathtaking display of Tulips and they have recently introduced their own Dyrham Tulip.



Dyrham Park experiences of Rhian Kendall

I was very pleased to be taking part in the Dyrham House Tulip Mania, Artist in Residence. In preparation I scoured the internet, determined to find a picture of the Durham Tulip to work from. I found a very blurry picture and embarked on a sketch and then started a watercolour of said tulip, experimenting with white gouache and coloured watercolours on grey paper.

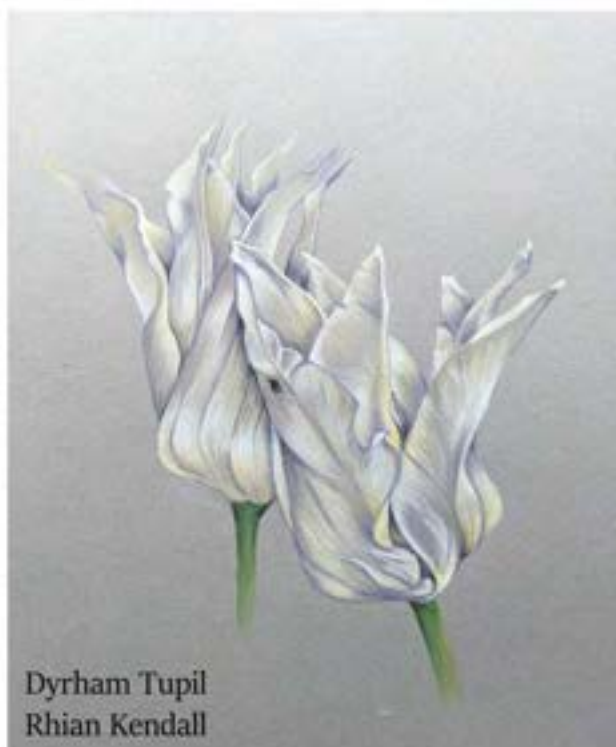
When I saw the Dyrham Tulip in the flesh I was dismayed to find that in contrast to the photographs, they are actually pale cream colour, which fades with age! Just goes to show how important it is to examine plants in real life rather than relying entirely on photos!

During my days at the event, I persuaded my other half (it didn't much arm twisting to be honest!) to treat ourselves to a couple of nights at a local holiday cottage at Hinton together with supper at an excellent local pub called The Bull.

What an absolute treat to spend a couple of days painting in a stunning setting and Linda was great company (including for dinner one evening at the Bull!). It was also great to meet and chat to people who were interested in hearing about our Society.

On my last day, the group was joined by Sian and Louise and I took the opportunity for a tour of the house and gardens and admired the Society's art, mounted around the grand rooms, they looked stunning. We headed home that afternoon, a bit sad to leave the ladies painting

Thank you everyone one who helped organise this event . I thoroughly enjoyed myself and am looking forward to the next botanical adventure!



Kate Warren

"Dyrham Park is an amazing location to show our work. The stunning historical house, together with the warm welcome from Christell Hughes ensured I experienced a very special day at Dyrham.

Our work was displayed throughout the house in key locations including the Great Hall."





The Court Yard alongside the Great Kitchen where WSBI painted Rachel Turner “I can understand now why the Dutch had such a passion for Tulip bulbs in the 17th century. When you see the beauty of them and the colours, it becomes like being a child in a sweet shop, what to take a photo of and what to paint. To paint in one lovely setting on a Saturday (Tredegar House) is a treat, but then to be invited to be Artists in Residence at the grand Dyrham Park was a whole other level. To see our work there was fabulous and I was amazed how it stood out in the grand surroundings. This was a huge step up for me, painting in front of people, but I learned so much. Tulips are not straight forward, they are "slippery tinkers" that move like greased lightning. My decision was to sketch on the first day, take photos and then work up a painting for the second day. Due to some Arches paper, not playing ball, things turned out somewhat differently - but I did sketch and paint. It was interesting to hear people's reactions, and their positive comments about our work.

Again, it was lovely to be with Sian and I am so grateful for the company. My plan is to hold on to my sketches in the hope we go back next year and use them as a measure of my learning. So thank you so much for the opportunity and the focus.”



Sian Phillips. "Barbara Taylor and I were the first Artists in Residence at Dyrham Park and the weather was not kind to us! It was cold and wet outside so the glorious display of tulips was put on the back burner when it came to walking the formal and orchard gardens. The Great Kitchen in which we were working was a big room with good lighting and a large table on which to paint. The Staff at Dyrham Park had thoughtfully provided a beautiful vase of tulips and the volunteers had also made some tulips in fabric.

I started to sketch and paint three tulips from the vase and although used to painting plants that want to move as soon as you start to work on them, the speed at which the tulips began to open and change colour was astonishing.



The photograph on the left is what they looked like when I started painting them. By the time I had finished the white had become quite creamy and the pale purple was a deep maroon.

My second attempt was quite different. I had enjoyed looking around the formal garden where the planting was amazing but loved the orchard. Each year after the tulips have gone over the bulbs are lifted and placed in the orchard. It was here I had my inspiration.

This time I had to take photographs as there was no chance of sitting in the orchard with the wind and rain lashing down!



I struggled with the intense pinks and deep shadows. The photograph of my coloured pencil work is not yet finished....



Louise Hodgson

“Having spent time at Dyrham Park during their Tulipmania event I shall never look at a tulip with the same eyes again. Many, many years ago I read “Tulip Fever” by Deborah Moggach and working with Dyrham’s beautiful flowers has made me understand even more the obsession of the 17th Century tulip collectors.

I had never drawn a tulip until the Saturday session before we went to Dyrham and I admit to being a little anxious but, boy-o-boy, what a joy to progress from a simple garden bloom at Tredegar House to a teacup sized ‘Flaming Parrot’ (with its fiery oranges, golds, yellow and reds and with petals shaped like flames) on our final day at Dyrham.

Despite the Great Kitchen being a public area it was comparatively peaceful and all the visitors were respectful and full of interest and awe.

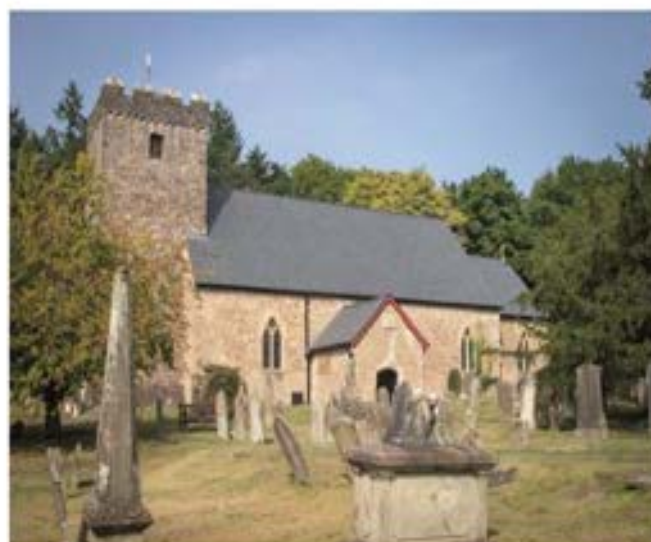
It wonderful that we were able to produce a range of Dyrham’s different tulips. Perhaps we should try and get the paintings together one day!”



Iolo's visit to Lower Machen Church

On the 3rd of May naturalist and T.V. presenter Iolo Williams visited Lower Machen Church to launch their 'Faith in Nature' project which aims to enhance and protect the ancient burial grounds of this historical church.

Lower Machen Church is in a large village a few miles east of Caerphilly, South Wales. It is over 900 years old and includes the 'Morgan Chapel' where many of the Morgan family of Machen, Ruperra and Tredegar are buried. The church is open every Sunday afternoon during the summer for those interested in visiting and viewing the Morgan family monuments and the largest collection of hatchments in a Welsh church.



Children from 3 local schools and other guests spent a fun day learning about the project, which was partly funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Activities included making bug hotels and undertaking wildlife surveys to spot the many wildflowers, mosses, lichens, birds and other creatures in the graveyard. In addition to spending the week making cakes for the event, I was also asked to provide a small display of my wildflower paintings and embroideries.



Exciting News from Linda Joseph

Botanical Art World Wide (BAWW) 2025 Exhibition

I am really pleased to announce that The Senedd has approved our application to hold a WSBI Exhibition at the PIERHEAD BUILDING, in Cardiff Bay.

Lynn Neagle (Minister of Education and Torfaen MS) has kindly consented to be our 'Welsh Government Sponsor'.

The historic Pierhead building is a prestigious venue in the heart of Cardiff Bay, offering a fully equipped gallery space. Sian, Barbara and I had a first visit to the venue which is impressive and should attract a lot of attention.

We will have the full support of the Senedd Exhibition team who have extensive experience of running exhibitions. They will publicise the event through their channels and provide translation services for any publicity or materials that will need to be bilingual. They will also help with the installation and removal of exhibits, signage, etc.

Briefly we have suggested a live exhibition of the WSBI work with digital displays of the UK and International exhibitions running alongside. We will have mobile screen, plenty of hanging space and systems with natural light sources and adjustable artificial lighting.

I'll share all the key dates for producing your illustrations and pictures very soon. In the meantime, I would advise that you start doing some research about your chosen subjects, if you haven't already done so. We have produced excellent work for the Walled Garden Florilegium, and it will be good to have another focus for our talents.

This is a fantastic opportunity for the WSBI and I hope that you will support this important project.



Novice Notes. Rachel Turner

I joined the Society about a year ago, I only know as it was a Bluebell that I attempted, which was the hardest of colours to match, but I digress. I remember being apprehensive about the first meeting however that disappeared within minutes of arriving. There were four of us, not at Tredegar but at Linda's workplace. I have my first painting of Bluebells that I tried to do there. Linda, Sian and Louise were so supportive and generous. I was introduced to Daniel Smith dots - a total revelation - and what struck me was the calm and kindness, I came away relaxed and motivated. I had been to other art societies, one of which I had to be interviewed for and I lasted one meeting, where everything was a competition and you came away drained.

Unfortunately, I hurt my arm and so driving became difficult and that coupled with trips to support my mum and sister in Cornwall meant I needed to step away. I can't believe it but it was I think November when I finally got to Tredegar house. What struck me was my absence didn't matter, not in a negative way of not caring, but in a supportive do what you need to do way. I was again warmly welcomed and settled into the lovely rhythm of laughter, giggles, and quiet concentration. I took the plunge and said I would try to paint one of the subjects for the Florilegium project - a Pulmonaria - Lung wort. Little did I know at the time how important this little plant would be to me in the months to come.

My mum became unwell over new year and we were given the news that she had a limited time left. I spent early January in hospital with her in Cornwall. My sister and I had a routine; visit mum then she would go to choir I would crack on with the Lungwort. Mum was a fabulous illustrator who sadly didn't complete art school and our last conversation was that I must keep painting. It feels now like a lovely legacy.

The Lungwort became the focus, time would disappear as I painted - it was re worked three times, once due to a coffee incident and once due to a puppy and mud shake, lessons learned. To see all the work of our members together on the Saturday painting session at Tredegar House was so magical. I was just so pleased to have contributed in a small way - but above all to feel the support, positivity and excitement from the group.

When I joined the group, I wanted to improve my painting and drawing to be as good as I could be. I believe through the support of the group that I am improving and having the goals to work towards is so helpful. However, above all it has given me so much fun, it's been a solace when needed and I love the Saturdays when I can come. My list for Christmas is rapidly increasing with every new product I now "need". Having a positive focus when life is throwing a lot of curve balls has been such a help to my wellbeing, I am sure. My diary where I would have gone to support to look after mum has been gently replaced with workshops- uncanny but true.

To anyone new, just come along, you will be welcomed no matter at what level you are and that is the key. You can relax and be you - which supports you in learning more, you can ask for help, you can ask questions and you can laugh - something often missing in this busy world.

So this really is a thank you note, to all of the group for your kindness and positivity in addition to Linda, Sian and Barbara's hard work, dedication and determination. Here's to the next project and lots of learning for me and a clean paint palette- but I may just have to try pencils...or ink.....or.....

LLanfrechfa Grange Walled Garden Florilegium

WSBI members have submitted over 20 paintings and drawing for the first part of the Florilegium it has undertaken to help celebrate the work of volunteers and contributors to the Walled Garden. Located within the grounds of the newly built Grange University Hospital in Cwmbran the garden is an ongoing project which sees the reinstating of an original Victorian Walled Garden which had been allowed to deteriorate into a bramble covered tangle.

On the 1st of June we helped celebrate the achievements of all those involved in this very worthy cause.



These are some of the Medicinal plants that form the first section of our Florilegium. Kate, Rachel, Louise, Rhian and Linda have produced these beautiful paintings and drawings. Evening Primrose, Lungwort, Rosemary, Ginkgo, and Quince are depicted. Amy has been working hard on the descriptions and booklet layout that will accompany the Florilegium. These and many more art works will feature in the exhibition in the Grange University Hospital. The exhibition is free to view and a launch date will be issued shortly. It will run through until mid August.

Billy Showell Workshop

Our members enjoyed a great day with the inspirational Billy Showell on the 25th of May. It was also a great opportunity to use our new toy!



These are a few of the comments we received after the Workshop

"Please convey a big thank you for getting Billy to Newport. I thoroughly enjoyed the session and meeting Billy in person as she is one of my favourite artists."

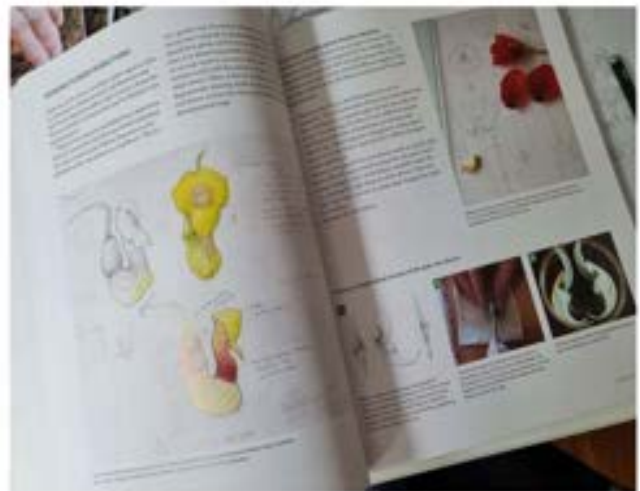
"I thoroughly enjoyed it.... Billy is such a kind tutor with a sense of humour. All was positive and everybody was happy. We had individual petals and finally an iris bud to paint using various techniques. We puddled, we swept, we hopped and we tip toed! We wet-on- wetted, dry brushed, did little washes etc. All very good stuff."

"Thank you for arranging yet another great workshop. The overhead projection of Billy working was a triumph once Rhian and Amy had sorted it out. I'm looking forward to our next workshop event."

Recommendations

Jackie Isard

*I highly recommend this book, **Botanical Sketchbooks**, to anyone starting their journey in botanical illustration! It is the best I've seen so far which shows the whole process in clearly explained chapters. Thank you Lucy T Smith, Botanical Artist, for taking the time to write this wonderful book. I'm taking it to my workshops and regular group sessions from now on! They will benefit so much*



This inspirational guide explains how a botanical sketchbook can take many forms and hold different meanings. It shows how a sketchbook can be used as a workbook to study plants through drawing and painting in a variety of media. It includes examples of preliminary work or finished pieces, experiments in colour and exploration of plant anatomy, and shows

how these studies can be made away from the pressure of creating the perfect, polished piece of final botanical artwork. It goes on to feature sketchbooks created for their own sake as a curated space for an artist to draw and record plants over a period of time, or a particular place.

Rachel Turner Recommends...

“If you have never been to Kew my suggestion is just go. It is the most impressive and fascinating of places. I went not long after I joined the Society last year.

My mission was to see Sue Wickeson’s Plants of the Koran Exhibition in the Sherwood Gallery. This was incredible to see, large watercolours of date palms in intricate detail, her sketchbooks and paint charts for these huge pieces of work. In my novice status who knew one would even consider painting to that scale. Her collaboration with Kew and one of the curators enabled the work to take place and she is an incredible artist. She had visited parts of the Middle East where I lived for a short while and so it was even more fascinating. There is a book as the exhibition has now ended and she recently gave a Julia Trickey talk. It was fascinating to hear about the years of travelling, gathering specimens at different times of the year and re-working compositions; including scratching out and over painting! There were so many plants that I didn't realise would feature in the Koran or in the Middle East, many of them ancient plants with curative properties.

Kew itself, I loved. So much to see and marvel at. It is really worth going to explore. The huge glass houses and the specimens are all so inspiring. I suggest you give it the whole day. Make sure your camera or phone is charged and you have a note book/sketch book to hand. I loved the Shirley Sherwood and the Marian North galleries. There is a lot to take in but what a remarkable woman North was, with another view point on plant hunting and botanical art.

I often dip into the Julia Trickey talks, which are available online and have learned so much from artists of different backgrounds. I enjoy watching and making notes but always come away feeling inspired and having learned something new. Yes, there is a cost but it's an hour of really interesting content from a wide range of artists and the talks are really well put together.

More recommendations....

This recommendation comes from Louise Hodgeson and Linda Josepj
The Tapestry of Life: A Botanical Artist's Miscellany
(Botanical Art Portfolios series) Susan Christopher-Coulson

About the author: An award-winning botanical artist and tutor, Susan trained at Kingston School of Art as a fashion designer and worked for several years in London as a designer and illustrator, before her interest in the natural world led her to take up botanical art. She has been awarded two Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) gold medals, as well as awards from The Royal Birmingham Society of Artists, the Society of Botanical Artists, and The Society of Floral Painters. She is an elected fellow of the Society of Botanical Artists, where she was vice president for eight years, and a member of The Florilegium Society at Sheffield Botanical Gardens. Her original artworks are in private collections in the UK and abroad, as well as in the Shirley Sherwood Gallery of Botanical Art collection at Kew Gardens, the RHS Lindley Library and the archive of The Florilegium Society at Sheffield Botanical Gardens. An experienced teacher, Susan was the coloured pencil tutor for several years when the Society of Botanical Artists established their distance learning diploma course.

I have known for some time that this book has been on its way and it finally arrived on my doormat this morning.

Published by Two Rivers Press it is part of the Botanical Art Portfolios series.

The title reflects the warp and weft of Susan's journey from childhood to being an award winning botanical artist.

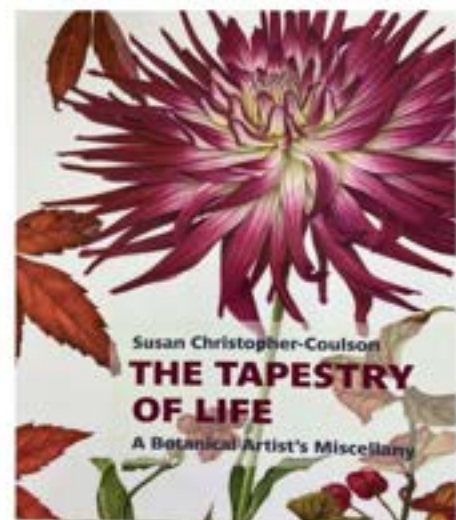
The very readable and personal text is generously accompanied by Susan's own beautiful illustrations.

Her chosen medium is coloured pencil (which she finds more 'immediate' as they do not need to dry and are also very portable) and her end results are exquisite in detail, subtlety and depth.

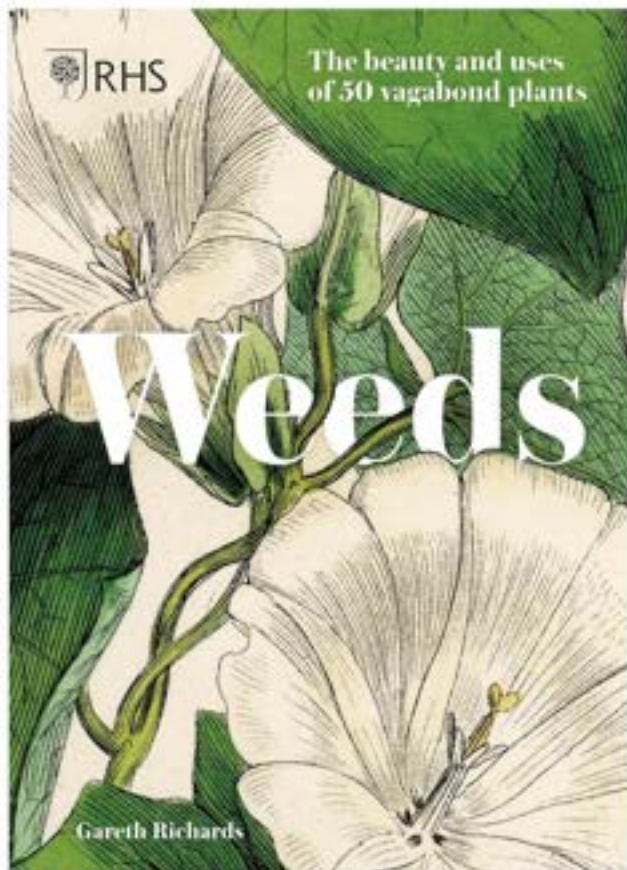
This book is certainly not a text book but is full of information about coloured pencil technique and compositional ideas. There is also step-by-step instruction for drawing a tulip.

Be inspired!!

Louise



Weeds: The beauty and uses of 50 vagabond plants by Gareth Richards
As a young woman I studied Environmental Science so as an ecologist, I don't believe there are such things as weeds. I used to like the definition 'weeds are plants growing in the wrong place'. Of course that could mean any plant in any place according to your preference.



So, when I happened upon the RHS book 'WEEDS: The beauty and uses of 50 vagabond plants' well, it had my name written all over it and it would've been rude not to buy it.

The RHS author Gareth Richards describes weeds wonderfully in his introduction: *'Weeds are nature's first responders, healing the wounds that man inflicts upon the earth. They valiantly bring life back into even the most polluted land, pushing green shoots of ecological power through tarmac and concrete on abandoned sites. Every weed has some redeeming feature'*.

The author describes 50 of the most fascinating, so called vagabond species. Alphabetically from *Acer pseudoplatanus* (Sycamore) to *Vicia*

(Vetch), each description is accompanied by beautiful illustrations mostly harvested from the RHS collections and provides key information about the characteristics, usefulness and cultivation of these unsung heroes of the plant world.

The key message for me is that every plant whether wild or cultivated has an important place in our world. They provide food, textiles, medicines and support all the life forms we humans depend on. They have become even more important in this time of climate change in helping to control flooding, securing nutrients and rebuilding healthy ecosystems.

WEEDS are central to the rebuilding and survival of our world and this book is essential reading, helping us to appreciate weeds as our friends.

Further recommendations and ideas.

Linda has suggested that we have a look at these articles:-

Down the Garden path

Benjamin Franklin ‘Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.’

From the BBC

A rare Amazonian cactus that blooms only once a year before its flower dies in just 12 hours has been put under the microscope for possibly the first time. See more about this fascinating plant at: - Under the Cambridge microscope with the rare moonflower.



<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-68376296>

New Wild Tulip discovered

Plant hunters have discovered a new and unusual species of tulip during an expedition to Kyrgyzstan. This article is from 2022. But as we have been focused on tulips lately this might be of interest. I promise not to mention tulips for a while – honest!



EK Janaki Ammal

The plant scientist

India forgot

In March, the magnolias begin blooming at Wisley.

For the next few weeks, rows of pink flowers dot the small town in Surrey in the UK, beckoning passers-by to stop and smell them.

They were planted by EK Janaki Ammal, a scientist who was born in the southern Indian state of Kerala in the 19th Century.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-63445015>

