

Palms in Southern England

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The British climate is notorious throughout the world for its rainy cloudy days and winter mists and fog. This weather pattern, caused by the prevailing westerly winds blowing off the open Atlantic Ocean, may limit continuous high temperatures and endless sunny days in summer, but similarly the influence of the Gulf Stream allows much milder winters than lands lying between 50°N and 60°N have a right to expect normally.

This maritime influence is naturally more marked on the western seaboard than in the east, where winters are cooler, summers hotter, and the weather tends to be sunnier and dryer. However, even here, because of the size and shape of the islands, this variance is merely a matter of degree, for on the sunny southeast coast the annual average of bright sunshine is only 1,830 hours.

My home at Worthing in Sussex is on this southeast Channel coast, being some 57 miles southwest of London. As happens with many coastal resorts throughout the world, local residents and park authorities in this region like to create a subtropical effect by planting trees and shrubs not normally featured in the area. Here, this effect is attempted by growing *Yucca* varieties, *Cordyline australis*, bamboos, and the palm species *Trachycarpus fortunei* and *Chamaerops humilis*. To my knowledge, however, no pinnate-leaved palms are growing in southeast England.

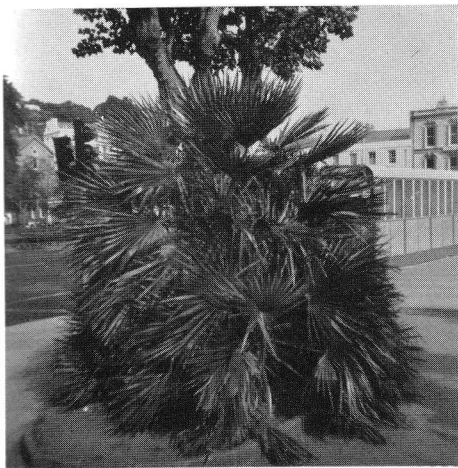
I recently had the opportunity of spending a short holiday in Devon and Cornwall, the two most southwestern counties of England, and naturally de-

cidated to keep an eye open for plants flourishing in these mild areas but not normally seen further east. I planned to visit Torquay, a popular holiday resort on the southeast Devon coast, before proceeding to Penzance in the southwest of Cornwall, where I was to stay. Whilst in Penzance I also hoped to visit the Scilly Isles lying some 30 miles off Lands End, which contain the famous Tresco Abbey Gardens.

The climatic data for these areas with London and my home town for comparison are: London, coldest mean monthly average temperature 39½°F and hottest month 64°F; Worthing, 40½°F and 63°F; Torquay, 43°F and 61½°F; Penzance, 44½°F and 61°F; and Scilly Isles, 46°F and 61°F.

Whilst in Torquay, besides the popular *Trachycarpus* and *Chamaerops*, which can be seen practically everywhere, I noted a fine 30-foot *Phoenix canariensis* growing in a public garden beside the main promenade. This tree, I believe, was planted out about 12 years ago, having presumably previously outgrown some greenhouse. It survived the severe winters of 1961/2 and 1962/3 (the latter being the coldest winter for a hundred years in many areas here) and is growing quite healthily.

Also in this resort, Mr. G. R. Muir kindly allowed me to photograph *Jubaea chilensis* (25 feet) and *Butia capitata* (18 feet) growing in his garden. He informed me that some of the palms in the garden were planted before the turn of the century. These palms, growing as they do at approximately 50°25'N must be some of, if not the most north-



1. *Chamaerops humilis* growing as a street tree, Torquay, Devon.



3. *Jubaea chilensis* in the garden of Mr. G. R. Muir, Torquay, Devon.

erly pinnate-leaved palms growing in the world!

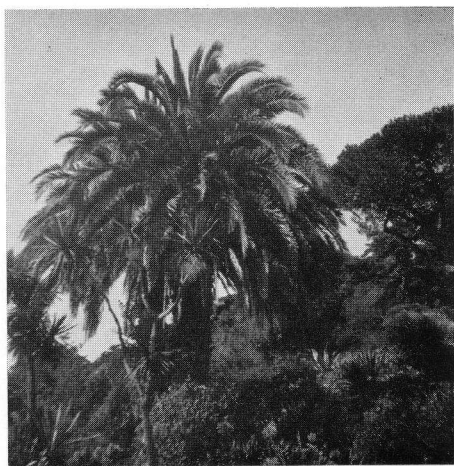
Moving further southwest, I noticed fine eucalyptus trees, *Dicksonia* tree ferns, massive *Cordyline australis*, and Japanese bananas flourishing in the parks of Penzance.

However, the principal feature of this holiday was a trip to the Scilly Isles. These islands, lying about 300 miles

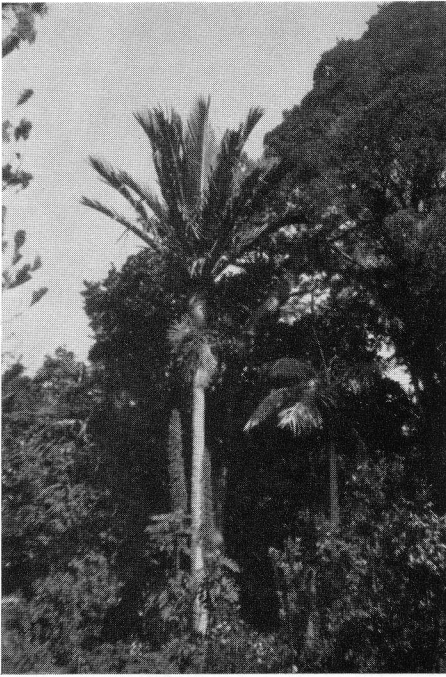
from London, are at this latitude (49° , $56'N$) the last of Europe and of land generally until Newfoundland's shores are washed by the Atlantic. They consist of approximately 100 islands, islets and rocks, of which five are permanently inhabited. They are a veritable world in miniature, as the largest island, St. Mary's, is only $2\frac{3}{4}$ miles long and the resident population of the entire group is about 2,000 people only.



2. *Butia capitata* in the garden of Mr. G. R. Muir, Torquay, Devon.



4. *Phoenix canariensis* at Tresco, Scilly Isles.



5. *Rhopalostylis sapida* (center) and *Ptychosperma elegans* (right) flanked by Norfolk Island pines and *Metrosideros*, Tresco, Scilly Isles.

As can be imagined, the area represents an escape from mainland cares and worries and the islands are accordingly popular holiday spots. The other major industry for the islanders is the growing of early-flowering spring plants, which are sent to the mainland markets from about Christmas time to early April. The area, although enjoying mild temperatures (a temperature below 25°F would be very rare) has an annual mean temperature of only 52½°F, which approximates to a southern California winter and the average afternoon temperature in midsummer is a mere 66°F. Annual rainfall is about 32 inches and the soil is a light sandy loam.

I flew by helicopter service to St.

Mary's and then travelled by boat about a mile and a half across the sound to Tresco, a low-lying island with unspoilt silver sand beaches. The island of Tresco is leased by the Dorrien-Smith family from the Duchy of Cornwall and the Abbey Gardens, which were started in the 1830's by one of their ancestors, are privately owned, but are open to the public on week days. Before the gardens were commenced, the island was a bare wind-swept spot with nothing larger than a gorse bush! Accordingly when Augustus Smith, the garden founder, started his dream of growing exotic trees, he first had to plant a shelter belt of pine and cypress before the advantages of the climate could be enjoyed.

However, the result of this advantageous climate can now be seen in its full glory, for beyond the shelter belt, eucalyptus, acacias, *Metrosideros*, myrtles and bamboos create a dense jungle in which flourish *Trachycarpus fortunei*, *Chamaerops humilis*, *Phoenix canariensis*, *Jubaea chilensis*, *Butia capitata* (as "*Cocos campestris*") *Washingtonia robusta*, *Livistona australis*, *Rhopalostylis sapida* (to 35 ft.), *Ptychosperma elegans*, and *Cyathea* and *Dicksonia* tree ferns.

Also noted, apart from the above mature species, were juvenile plantings of *Sabal minor*, *Livisona chinensis*, *Arecastrum romanzoffianum*, and *Archontophoenix cunninghamiana*. Surprisingly, I did not notice any howeas which, because of their use as house plants, must be the most easily obtained palms in England. The Canary Island dates and the *Rhopalostylis* palms seemed most at home on their new island habitat and appeared as healthy and vigorous (both seeding freely) as I have personally seen palms growing anywhere, including within the tropics.