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“Palm Trees Shivering in a Surrey Shrubbery”—A History of Subtropical Gardening

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From the earliest times, gardeners have been preoccupied with cultivating exotic plants in alien climates (Huxley 1978). Henry VIII's gardener successfully grew fruit such as figs, peaches, and apricots against the warm, south-facing brick walls at royal palaces. Not much later, Sir Francis Carew was growing orange trees outdoors in southern England. Extraordinary measures were needed to keep these delicate trees alive. In winter, wooden huts were erected around them and they were heated with stoves when frosts threatened (Rose 1989). However, despite these early beginnings, the use of hardy palms and other “exotic” plants in the temperate garden really owes its origins to eighteenth and nineteenth century European botanical expeditions and to the Victorian vogue for botany and plant collecting. This article traces that history to the present-day use of such plants in the Pacific North West.

Palm Pioneers and Plant Collectors

Interest in palms and other tropical plants grew as European nations extended their influence in tropical areas of the world. In particular, the Dutch presence in the Far East led to an increase in European knowledge of palms. In the latter part of the 17th century, Rumphius (1627–1702) compiled his books on the flora of Amboina in the Moluccas Islands, describing about 50 species of palms. Alexander von Humboldt added greatly to this knowledge through his voyages of scientific investigation to the Spanish Colonies in South America, adding, among others, the genus *Jubaea*, which is usually considered to be the hardiest of the feather palms. Humboldt's travels and publications stirred up interest over South America, which led, in turn, to the expedition in 1817 to 1820 of Carl von Martius (1794–1868), the “Father of Palms.” One of the results of this expe-

dition was the *Historia Naturalis Palmarum*, which took him from 1823 to 1853 to complete and which is described by Prof. Corner as “the most magnificent treatment of palms that has been produced” (Corner 1966). The half-hardy palms *Brahea* and *Trithrinax* were included. The year 1850 saw the publication of another great palm book, *Palms of British East India* by William Griffith (1810–1845). Other British palm pioneers of the 19th century included Alfred Wallace (1823–1913), Henry Bates (1823–1892), and Richard Spruce (1817–1893). A major contribution was made to the study of palms by the Italian botanist Odoardo Beccari (1843–1920) in the latter part of the 19th century and early 20th century.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, plant collectors went on many exciting and dangerous voyages around the world to bring back specimens for European collectors. One of the most famous was Sir Joseph Banks (1743–1820) who went with Captain Cook on his first voyage around the world. When he became unofficial director of Kew Gardens, he sent out other plant collectors who added many more of the plants with which we are now familiar. From Britain, many of the plants were then sent to other tropical regions. For example, the Malaysian rubber industry owes its origin to seedlings sent to the Singapore Botanical Gardens by Kew Gardens. Kew was also important in spreading the cultivation of bananas around the world. A major breakthrough in plant collecting took place in 1827 when the Wardian case was invented and plants could be more safely transported (Allen 1969). Deenaugh Goold-Adams notes that, “the use of the Wardian case—meant that the more delicate tropical plants and the wonders of China had a chance of surviving the journey. The use of the Wardian case turned the trickle of new introductions into a flood” (Goold-Adams 1987).

One of the earliest plant collectors was Robert Fortune who made successful expeditions into China and Japan (Coats 1969). Although Dr. Von Siebold sent seeds of the Windmill palm (*Trachycarpus fortunei*) from Japan to Holland in 1830, it was Robert Fortune who was responsible for their successful introduction as a staple of subtropical gardening. He first saw the palm on the islands of Chusan off the coast of east China and collected young plants in 1849 on a trip into the interior. China had been off-limits to European collectors until the end of the Opium War in 1842 and in 1849, Europeans were still restricted to 30 miles from a treaty-port. Fortune wanted to collect green tea plants, which were far from the coast so, in order to go undetected, he wore a Chinese costume and had his head shaved in the Chinese style to conceal that he was a foreigner. On the journey by boat to the tea district, he came across the palm that was to be named after him. He arranged to send some young plants via Hong Kong and Calcutta to William Hooker at Kew. He requested "that he would forward one of them to the garden of His Royal Highness Prince Albert at Osborne House, Isle of Wight." It is interesting to note that, in 1871, William Robinson wrote that a Chusan palm in Her Majesty's gardens at Osborne "had stood out for many winters and attained a considerable height" (Robinson 1871). Over a hundred years later in 1989, Roy Lancaster observed that trees from Fortune's introductions are still alive and well outside at Kew, Osborne House, and elsewhere Lancaster (1989).

The Victorian Passion for Plants

The many exotic plants found by the plant collectors were eagerly welcomed by the European middle classes, especially in Britain. The Victorians had a passion for plants:

Plants—especially fecund, exotic plants, found on heroic adventures in the far corners of the globe—were one of the symbols of the Victorian Age. As Britain's industrial base grew more prosperous and her Empire spread, so the British public became more obsessed with nature in all its varieties. It was not such a paradoxical fascination as it might seem at first sight. Partly it was a reaction against the accelerated drift of the population towards the industrial cities, partly a sheer revelling in "The Wonders of Creation". Nothing was more encouraging to an aggressively expansive and optimistic people than the ceaseless parade of new resources and natural marvels that its explorers and entrepreneurs were bringing home from the colonies. It seemed like a divine blessing on the nation.

Mabey (1989)

Exotic plants such as palms provided a link, however weak, to wondrous lands:

Only in purple light of dreams may dwellers in temperate climates conjure up, perhaps, for themselves pictures of indescribable magnificence of the vegetation that springs up beneath the glowing sun of the tropics. The individual plants themselves that languish imprisoned in our hot-houses can but faintly suggest ideas of their full and majestic development in their native lands.

S. Moody (1864)

The association of palms with religion was part of their fascination for some Victorians. In 1864, *The Palm Tree* by S. Moody was published. In it, she notes the many scriptural references to palms, writing that "it has been the writer's earnest aim throughout to endeavour, by unfolding the countless lovely analogies suggested by her subject, to interest the reader in *The Palm Tree - Servant of God and friend of man.*" Sometimes this association seems to have gone too far. One 19th century enthusiast wrote:

This distinguished form of the palm, superior to all other plants, the noble bearing, the stem striving to reach the skies—its nourishing fruits, the materials for clothing and shelter - all these combined to create the sense of a higher being inherent in it, if not a godhead then surely the dwelling of the same.

Minter (1990)

In Europe, many of the newly introduced plants were housed in greenhouses ranging from the great Palm House at Kew built between 1844 and 1848 to more modest suburban home conservatories built for the expanding middle class created by the Industrial Revolution (Minter 1990, Warren 1991). The development of those glasshouses was the result of the repeal of Britain's Glass Tax in 1845 and the growth of new industries producing cheaper glass. Heat was provided by stoves and so these conservatories were often called stove houses or stoves. One author notes that

the Victorians liked to heat their conservatories. It was a matter of ambition and pride to be able to grow and display the most exotic, rare, and tender plants and then to be able to take tea amongst them.

Marston (1992)

The design of many of these conservatories was very elaborate and the survivors bear witness to the skills of Victorian craftsmen.

Although the passion for palms never surpassed the craze for ferns, palms had a special fascination for the Victorians as reflected in the growth of the Kew collection. Six palm species were grown at Kew in 1768, ten by 1787, 20 in 1813, 40 in 1830, and 420 in 1882 (Minter 1990). This public

collection was eclipsed by that of Loddiges' Nursery in Hackney between 1820 and 1845, which in the latter year had upwards of 200 types of palms. The customers for such a nursery required considerable wealth. A writer commented in 1838, "The culture of palms—is less a matter of nicety than expense. They require a powerful moist heat, a large mass of rich earth in the pot, tub or bed and ample space for the leaves—it would require to have the roof elevated by degrees to sixty, eighty or a hundred feet" (Minter 1990). The development of subtropical gardening, which reduced the need for large conservatories may have been, in part, due to a desire to enjoy palms and other exotic plants without this great expense.

The Beginnings of Subtropical Gardening

The use of palms and other exotics in the temperate garden started in Germany and France. According to one source, the first attempt to use *Canna* as subtropical bedding plants in temperate latitudes was made in 1846 by M. Année, a former French consular agent in Chile (Perry 1979). Reports of the use of *Canna* and *Maranta* in outdoor flower beds came from Germany in the 1850s (Carter 1984, Elliott 1986, Stuart 1988). These tender plants displayed outside only during the summer and autumn were supplemented by the hardier pampas grasses and bamboos. This style was then developed in the public parks of Paris and began to influence British gardeners. One such gardener was John Gibson who was the superintendent of Battersea Park in London. He had been a plant hunter in India and had introduced many new plants to England. By 1864, he had established at Battersea Park a subtropical garden containing palms, tree ferns, and foliage plants, such as *Solanum* and *Canna*. In her history of London's parks, Mireille Galinou (1990) records that Gibson's experiments were soon followed in other parks and the Dell in Hyde Park came to rival Battersea for its display of large and ornamental leaves. Encouraged by such examples, there were gardeners bold enough to carry out and succeed with subtropical gardening as far north as Scotland (Davies 1991). Nurseries and seed purveyors took the opportunity to supply this new interest in subtropical gardening. The firm of Barr and Sugden came to be associated with subtropical plants (Galinou 1990). One of the earliest writers to recognize the growing influence of subtrop-

ical gardening was a leading horticultural writer of the period, Shirley Hibberd. He had previously written on the merits of foliage plants in *The Fern Garden* (1869) and *New and Rare Beautiful-Leaved Plants* (1870). In 1871, the first addition of *The Amateur's Flower Garden* was published. This contained a chapter on "The Subtropical Garden" in which Hibberd explained some of the difficulties involved as well as the attractions of this type of gardening. He notes that the subtropical garden as then understood, was "an importation from Paris of limited and indeed almost questionable value. The nearer we go to the tropics for material, the nearer do we verge towards the impossible in the endeavour to adapt them to the average conditions of a British summer." However, subtropical gardening was not to be condemned on account of such difficulties. It was new and mistakes were to be expected. The solution was to include hardy plants, "when we have made some progress in the artistic disposition of palms, ferns and musas in the open ground, we shall not be slow to discover that many hardy plants may be associated with them to the advantage of artistic effect. Thus subtropical gardening always tends to subarctic gardening."

The Influence of William Robinson

The subtropical garden was popularized in England by the writings of William Robinson who is sometimes known as the Father of English gardening (although he was Irish!) (Hadfield 1980, Allan 1982). In 1867, at the age of 29, he went to Paris to cover the Paris Exhibition for *The Times*. In *Gleanings from French Gardens* (1868) and *The Parks, Promenades and Gardens of Paris* (1869) he gave his support to the growing trend. However, like Hibberd, he was very critical of using the more tender plants, which failed to make much growth in the relatively cool English summer.

In 1871, Robinson's book *The Subtropical Garden* was published. In the Preface, he states that the book was written with a view to assist the newly awakened taste for something more than mere color in the flower-garden, by enumerating, describing, indicating the best positions for, and giving the culture of, all our materials for what is called "subtropical gardening." This was not a very happy or descriptive name and was adopted from its popularity only. Fortunately, a number of plants not from subtropical climes could be

employed with great advantage. Subtropical gardening was defined as "the culture of plants with large and graceful or remarkable foliage or habit, and the association of them with the usually low-growing and brilliant flowering-plants now so common in our gardens." He claimed to have put together the most complete selection of such plants that was possible from plants then in cultivation and that most of the subjects were described from personal knowledge of them, both in London and Paris gardens.

Part I of the book consists of an introduction and some general considerations. He strongly criticizes the love for 'rude colour' which had led to the adoption of a few varieties of plants for culture on a vast scale, to the exclusion of interest and variety, and of beauty or taste. Subtropical gardening had taught the beauty of form. However, the example set by Gibson at Battersea Park was not to be completely adopted. "The radical fault of the 'Subtropical Garden', as hitherto seen, is its lumpish monotony and the almost total neglect of graceful combinations. --The subjects are not used to contrast with or relieve others of less attractive part and brilliant colour, but are generally set down in large masses." The key was to combine foliage plants and flowers: "The fact is, we do not want purely 'subtropical gardens' or 'leaf gardens' or 'colour gardens' but such gardens as, by happy combinations of the material at our disposal, shall go far to satisfy those in whom true taste has been awakened - and, indeed, all classes."

Robinson stressed that subtropical gardening was by no means limited to tender plants or the warmer parts of the country. Some plants such as dracaenas, aloes, and some of the palms could be used for winter decoration in the conservatory and planted out in the summer. But people without a conservatory or hot house could still enjoy the beauty afforded by plants of fine form such as pampas grass, yuccas, the arundos, acanthus, and the "hardy palm" (presumably *Trachycarpus fortunei* [Fig. 1] then described as *Chamaerops fortunei*) that "has preserved its health and greenness in sheltered positions, where its leaves could not be torn to shreds by storms, through all our recent hard winters."

Part II consisting of about 170 pages forms the bulk of the book and is an alphabetical listing of both hardy and tender plants. It describes each plant and gives advice on how they may be best arranged and on their culture. Included are nearly

all of the "subtropical" plants still grown today, although the names may have changed in some cases. Many palms are listed: e.g., *Chamaedorea*, *Chamaerops exelsa* (*C. humilis*), *Chamaerops fortunei* (*Trachycarpus fortunei*), *Chamaerops palmetto* (*Sabal palmetto*) and *Jubaea spectabilis* (*J. chilensis*).

In 1879, Robinson founded his magazine *Gardening Illustrated* in which he advertized *The Subtropical Garden* and continued to write on subtropical gardening. In the January 7, 1882 issue, he published an engraving (subsequently reproduced in *The English Flower Garden*) of a *Trachycarpus fortunei* with a very fine crown of fronds (Fig. 1). The engraving was taken from a photograph taken two or three years before in the grounds of Lamoran Rectory, Probus, Cornwall. It was planted in the spring of 1853 (i.e., only a few years after Robert Fortune introduced the species from China) and, 19 years later, had attained a height of 16 feet 6 inches, the stem 6 feet from the ground, measuring 3 feet 6 inches in circumference. It was a female plant and had several times flowered and produced well-developed fruits. In another part of the ground was a male plant of the same species, about 10 feet high and equally well furnished.

In 1883, Robinson's most important book was published. *The English Flower Garden* became a classic and has continued to influence gardening to the present day. A chapter entitled "Beauty of Form in the Flower Garden" was a summary of Part I of *The Subtropical Garden*. Included in the detailed descriptions of plants were several of the subtropical plants more fully described in his earlier book.

Robinson had a strong influence on the gardens of the late-Victorian and Edwardian period. According to David Otterwill, nowhere were his ideas put to more dramatic effect than in his native Ireland (Otterwill 1989). Subtropical gardening had already been practiced in that country, for instance at Fota Gardens. "But in places like the southern coast of County Kerry off the Kenmore estuary, 'Robinsonian' gardens flourished beyond his wildest dreams." They included Lord Lansdowne's at Derreen, and the island garden created by Samuel Heard at Rossdohan with its tree ferns and bamboos. Both gardens were begun in the 1870s. From about 1900, the Earl of Dunraven transformed Garinish Island at Parknasilla into another subtropical garden. In *Yesterday's Gardens* published by the Royal Commission on Historical



1. The "Hardy Palm," a figure from Robinson, *Gardening Illustrated*, January 7, 1882.

Monuments in England, some of the photographs illustrate subtropical gardening at the turn of the century. For example, there is a photograph of a group of tree ferns at Clandon Park in Surrey (Forsyth 1983).

Subtropical Gardening Enthusiasts

The fashion for subtropical gardening continued until the First World War. One enthusiast was Henry Cooke who wrote *A Gloucestershire Wild*

Garden describing his garden (Challis 1988). Cooke had been Surgeon General in the Indian Army and had been influenced by the vegetation in India. On his retirement in England, he developed a large garden with a view over the Cotswolds and the River Severn. He planted *Trachycarpus*, yuccas, bamboos, agapanthus, cannas, gingers, phormiums, datura, and *Musa ensete* as well as hardier foliage plants such as arum lilies, ligularias, hostas, and polygonums.

Another enthusiast who also lived in Gloucestershire was Canon Ellacombe who created a garden at Britton Vicarage near Bristol during the second half of the 19th century and contributed a series of articles to the *Guardian* newspaper during the years 1890–1893 (Ellacombe 1895). These articles were published in 1895 in a delightful book called *In A Gloucestershire Garden*. He devotes a chapter to hardy palms and bamboos, which he describes as “beautiful objects in any garden, they are easily obtained, and when once established are most easy of cultivation; yet it is a most unusual thing to see a good collection of them.” He notes that it was only in recent years that either palms or bamboos had a place in English gardens. The following passage illustrates the status of palm cultivation in England at that time:

I said that there were 1200 different species of palms; but of this large number only three or four can be at all considered hardy in England. The hardest is without doubt the Chusan palm, Trachycarpus fortunei, introduced a little over forty years ago by Fortune. It was not at first tried as a hardy plant, but the experiment was soon made (I believe first at Osborne), and it was found to be perfectly hardy; and when it has been established eight or ten years it will commence flowering, and will generally flower every year. It is a very beautiful and graceful plant. All it asks for is protection from wind, and it should be planted where it can have some screen from the prevailing winds, but it does not mind frost or snow. In my own garden it grows about ten feet high, and forms splendid leaves. The only other species that can be considered hardy is Chamærops humilis, but it will not compare with C. fortunei and is not so hardy. Jubæa spectabilis, from Chili, will grow in Cornwall, and Pritchardia filifera has survived some winters in very favoured places. Brahea nitida is said to be the hardest palm in the Riviera, and Cocos australis at Genoa, but I have not heard of their being grown out of doors in England, and Erythæa armata (Brahea roezelii), from the Rocky Mountains, may perhaps prove hardy. The cultivation of the hardy palms is perfectly easy. The Arabs say that they require to have their feet in cold water and their head in a furnace. This combination we cannot give them, nor is it necessary; they only require to be planted in good soil, to be protected from wind, and not disturbed, and when once established they give no further trouble, and they give a continual delight to the grower.

The Revisionist Robinson

The Subtropical Garden was published when Robinson was 33 and the first edition of *The English Flower Garden* when he was 45. In 1926 when the 14th edition of the latter book was published, Robinson was 88 years old, an invalid confined to a wheelchair and considerably more conservative in his views on subtropical gardening and the use of palms. In the Preface to that edition, he wrote:

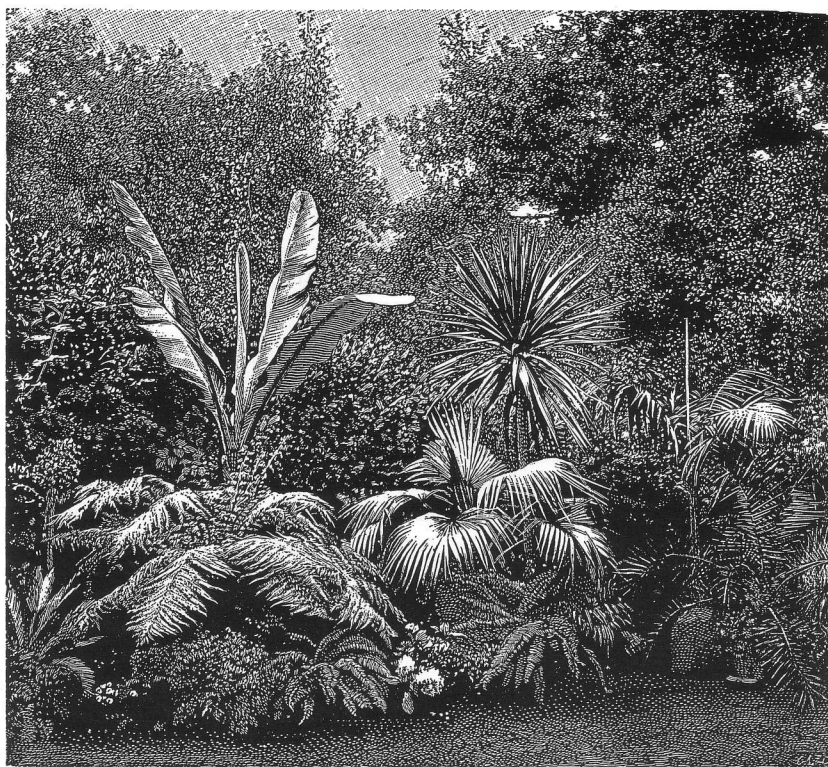
The first editions of this book were burdened with much about the ways of flower-gardening current at the time—Experience has taught me to throw overboard all tender plants and devote the book to hardy things only, that may be planted in the open air on every fine day in the fall or winter. —Tropical weeds that give a little showy colour for a few months and plants that do not flower in cold districts if at all; —palms never at home in look in our clime. This is not a theory but a record of what took place in my garden for many years past.

A chapter on “Beauty of Form In the Flower Garden” still appeared but stressed the use of hardy plants only. He claimed that “the sub-tropical as a system of flower gardening has failed throughout our country generally, and can only be carried out well in the south of England and the warmer countries of Europe.” Although the illustration of the *Trachycarpus fortunei* from Lamoran Rectory still appeared as did a descriptive entry on that palm, Robinson discouraged the growing of palms:

In our flower gardens Palms can only be seen in a small state; nor can they in pots and tubs give one any idea of the true beauty of the Palm on the banks of the Nile or the Ganges. But, worse than this, the system leads to the neglect of the many shrubs and trees of the northern world, which are quite as beautiful as any Palm.

Robinson’s dramatic change of mind on the merits of subtropical gardening may have owed as much to his personality as to his experience. One writer states that “in character, Robinson was as contradictory in behaviour as in his gardening” (Hadfield 1980). Another writer describes him as cantankerous, chauvinistic, and belligerent and notes that he “could sometimes run with the hare and hunt with the hounds” (Otterwill 1989). One biographer wrote:

As Robinson grew older he is reported to have become full of inconsistencies. When he rode round his estate the workmen never knew whether they would get a rise or be dismissed. He had been a heavy smoker and enjoyed good wine and suddenly one night took all the drink out into the garden and threw the bottles down a well - and burnt his pipes. It is also said that after this he rather unkindly served wine for his visitors and offered them cigarettes, even provided them with ashtrays, but that if anyone should be foolish enough to accept this part of



2. "Group of house plants out for the summer, Harrow Lodge, Dorking" from *The English Flower Garden* (4th edition, Robinson 1893).

his hospitality they would receive a notice on their breakfast tray the next morning giving them the time of the next convenient train to London

Massingham (1982).

In any event, his change of mind was in tune with the times. The end of the Victorian and Edwardian periods saw the decline of subtropical gardening, much to the pleasure of another biographer:

And so vanished the preposterous Musa ensete, the Abyssinian Banana, and other horrors. The plants that remained were indeed the English flower garden.

Allan (1982)

Other writers have noted the supposed incongruity of subtropical gardening with the English Flower Garden. Anthony Huxley comments that, "it is a little odd that in Robinson's famous book, *The English Flower Garden*, there should be a place for an engraving of subtropical bedding, a very unnatural form of display enjoyed in earlier, less cost conscious decades" (Huxley 1978). In their book on the English garden, Laurence Fleming and Alan Gore refer critically to his ideas on design: "But oddest of all is in *The English Flower*

Garden, where there is an engraving from a photograph of "A group of house plants planted out for summer" at Harrow Lodge, Dorking [Fig. 2]. It represents a banana tree, a *Cordyline australis* and three palm trees shivering in a Surrey shrubbery." (Fleming and Gore 1979)

The Decline of Subtropical Gardening

Conservatories and subtropical gardening fell out of favor after the First World War. The high cost of heating and labor led to the disappearance of many of the private greenhouses and conservatories. Deenagh Goold-Adams notes, "During the first quarter of the twentieth century the conservatory was in a constant state of decline. Thousands were pulled down as the reduced gardening staffs struggled to maintain the large and elaborate gardens of a bygone age" (Goold-Adams 1987). Peter Marston, the designer of many modern conservatories in England, notes "By the Twenties, the conservatory had almost disappeared; few new ones were built and existing ones frequently fell into disrepair and were pulled

down. —For the next fifty years little interest was taken in them. Indeed, when I started the company that is now Marston & Langinger in the early 1970s, the idea of the conservatory had so far retreated from public consciousness that I kept having to explain that we did not build music schools!" (Marston 1992).

In 1970, Christopher Lloyd echoed the aged Robinson's revisionist view on the use of palms in England. In his book, *The Well-Tempered Garden*, he refers to windmill palms as "the dowdily pretentious hardy palms one sees in holiday resorts. —when young and no more than 4 or 5 ft high, they can look pleasing and I should not be against recommending them provided you were strong minded enough to chuck them out as soon as they were past their first youth. Most often you see them as gaunt trees with hideous, thick furry trunks surmounted by bundles of old, unshed leaves and finally a tuft of live ones that is quite out of scale with the obesity that has gone before" (Lloyd 1970).

Many of the subtropical gardens so carefully planted in the 19th century were neglected or became the victims of vandalism. The garden of Henry Cooke became overgrown. When visited a few years ago by Myles Challis, little remained except some bamboo, two windmill palms, which towered almost into the tree tops, some rhododendrons, and a few other things that had stood the test of time (Challis 1988). Very little now remains of the garden at Britton Vicarage created by Canon Ellacombe. In an article in the December 1989 issue of *The Palm Quarterly*, Colin Macleod describes the fate of the garden of an old estate called "Glenoran" near Glasgow. The garden had been left to run wild. Macleod found four windmill palms. Three palms between 15 and 20 feet in trunk had been burnt by vandals and only charred trunks remained. The fourth was about 20 feet and he was successful in moving it to his new home sixty miles away. It is thought to originate from a Himalayan plant and seed collecting expedition, the acquisitions of which contributed to the planting of the garden in 1865.

The Tradition Continued

Of course, not all the Victorian subtropical gardens were allowed to fall into neglect. In 1932, Eleanour Sinclair Rohde noted that subtropical gardening was "now to be seen in perfection in various parts of Cornwall, Dorset and Hampshire"

(Rohde 1932). Various subtropical gardens can still be seen at Craræ Glen Gardens, Logan Botanical Gardens, and Inverewe in Scotland. The last was begun in 1862 by Osgood MacKenzie. The southwest of England has several subtropical gardens and Tresco Abbey Garden in Cornwall, which dates from 1832 can boast a wide variety of palms such as *Phoenix canariensis*, *P. reclinata*, *Rhopalostylis sapida*, *Jubaea chilensis*, and *Livistona australis*. In her book, *The Milder Garden*, Jane Taylor notes that in a garden in Torquay, on the south Devon coast of England, the Chilean palm, *Jubaea chilensis*, has formed a splendid tall tree (Taylor 1990). Three specimens were planted in about 1900 and one was measured at 23 feet in 1972. In a public park in Torquay grows a good specimen of *Phoenix canariensis*, which also thrives in some Cornish gardens. A specimen of *Phoenix reclinata* once grew to 30 feet at Penzance on the Atlantic tip of Cornwall. Even the date palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*) has been found growing on a rubbish tip in Cornwall, young plants presumably germinated from the discarded seeds of a box of imported dates. One of the features of the garden at Borde Hill, Sussex, began in 1893, was the Round Dell, a steep-sided hollow in which windmill palms were planted. Richard Bisgrove notes that they found such a congenial home that they still survive among self-sown seedlings of various ages (Bisgrove 1990). In the May 1992 issue of the journal of the Pacific North West Chapter of the Palm Society, the *Hardy Palm International*, Irish palm enthusiast Philip McErlean describes some of the exotic plants to be found at Mount Stewart Gardens in County Down, Northern Ireland.

Apart from such gardens, books and individuals have also kept up the tradition of subtropical gardening. The 1951 *Dictionary of Horticulture* published by The Royal Horticultural Society contains a fairly detailed entry under "Sub-Tropical Garden," which is defined as "a flower garden or pleasure ground devoted during the summer to plants with stately foliage, arranged with a view to represent tropical vegetation" (Royal Horticultural Society 1951). It suggests several plants that might be used to create such a garden, including a number of palms, *Ricinus*, *Nicotiana*, *Solanum*, some forms of *Zea mays*, bananas, tree ferns, cycads, bamboos, fatsias, ficus, hostas, phormium, pampas grass, and *Arundo donax*. It may be noted, in passing, that this entry was largely based on George Nicholson's *Illustrated Dictionary of Gardening*

published between 1884 and 1887 and that the 1992 edition of the R.H.S. Dictionary has no entry at all on subtropical gardening. Despite his criticism of tropical bedding noted above, Christopher Lloyd's 1973 book *Foliage Plants* recommended the use of several of these plants because of their aptitude for "making summer seem summery" (Lloyd 1973). In 1988, *The Exotic Garden* by Myles Challis was published. I reviewed this book in the August 1994 issue of the *Hardy Palm International*. Suffice it to say that, in my view, it represents the bible of modern subtropical or exotic gardening. The summary on the dust jacket describes it as "the first book this century to cover what was known in Victorian times as 'sub-tropical' gardening." Myles Challis noted that "so far as I am aware I am the only person in this country (England) indulging in it seriously." However, there were others who were maintaining or reviving the tradition of subtropical gardening. For example, in her book *Architectural Foliage* (1991), Jill Billington noted that "there is great fun to be had in combining exotic-looking foliage plants together under a temperate sky and they can be extremely stylish." She describes many of the plants familiar to William Robinson or Henry Cooke. This is also evidenced by the many contributions made to *The Palm Quarterly*, which was published between September 1983 and June 1990. In addition to growing hardy palms, many contributors were growing other border-line exotic plants such as the Japanese fiber banana (*Musa basjoo*), *Cycas revoluta*, and *Cordyline australis*.

Tamar Myers

In any history of the growth of palms and other exotic plants in temperate areas, a very special mention must be made of *The Palm Quarterly* and Tamar Myers who was its editor for most of its seven-year life. (Peter Purdom was editor for a time.) In the November 1994 issue of the *Hardy Palm International*, she describes herself as "the irascible but lovable woman who grew palm trees in brutal climates while longing for the balmy shores of some tropical island." She contributed many of the articles herself and demonstrated a wide knowledge of palm cultivation in cold climates as well as a very strong and humorous personality and a good writing style which makes it a pleasure to read the *Quarterly*. To give an example, she describes her increasingly conservative approach to palm protection as follows: "Not for

me, any longer, are the perpetually pitiful, partly putrefying, pulp of perennially punished palms." In addition to numerous accounts of growing palms in climates as severe as Ohio and Quebec and tips on palm protection and cultivation, *The Palm Quarterly* contained articles on such diverse topics as making palm jelly; the experiences of a biology professor who specialized in palm trees but was mistaken for a fortune-telling palmist; a haunted palm tree; trips to unlikely palm growing areas; and a palm cross-word puzzle. Contributors wrote from many parts of the United States, Canada, and Europe. One of them was Martin Gibbons who went on to establish The Palm Centre in London, specializing in palms for indoor and outdoor use. As detailed in the November 1994 issue, the *Hardy Palm International* took on a broader role in 1990 when *The Palm Quarterly* stopped publishing. Under editor Nick Parker it has proven to be a worthy successor.

The Pacific North West

The history of palm growing in the Pacific North West was summarized by Nick Parker in the April 1994 issue of *Principes* (Parker 1994). He notes that a windmill palm was planted in Bremerton, Washington in 1939 and is now more than 30 feet high, probably the tallest palm north of California. Palms were planted in Beacon Hill Park in Victoria in the 1950s but have been replaced with new trees. Trees planted in Stanley Park, Manitoba Street in Vancouver and Rumble Street in Burnaby between 1966 and 1968 may still be seen. Interest in palm cultivation in Vancouver has increased due to the efforts of dedicated individuals such as Gerard Pury, Richard Woo, Rudi Pinkowski, and Nick himself. The extent of this increase can be seen in two articles by Richard Woo. In an article in the December 1984 issue of *The Palm Quarterly*, he notes his recent interest in growing palms outdoors on a year-round basis and the limited choice of palms in Vancouver. In his article in the November 1994 issue of the *Hardy Palm International*, he says that "it's wonderful to see how palms and other exotic plants are taking hold in the Pacific Northwest. —Fifteen years ago you couldn't buy a 10 gallon size *Trachycarpus fortunei* in Vancouver. And now they are coming in from California by the truckload, huge palms in wooden crates." In the same issue, Michael Ferguson notes that a local store had recently imported *Jubaea chilensis*, *Butia capitata*,

and *Phoenix* species with trunk diameters of more than a foot. Their more recent imports have added *Brahea armata* and *Sabal minor*.

Conclusion

I hope that the above account will demonstrate that subtropical gardening is not a short-lived fad but a style of gardening that goes back about 130 years. It may have fallen generally out of favor in Europe since the First World War but it appears to have commenced a revival in the Pacific North West. As always, time will tell. One Seattle writer, Arthur Lee Jacobson, is optimistic that the future will see a greater variety of palms in the area:

Local palm enthusiasts (especially members of the Palm Society) have and are planting other kinds of palms in Seattle. But it is too early to write an authoritative account of the kinds expected to be most successful here. Certainly some kinds much more handsome than the common Windmill Palm will feature in our future landscapes”.

Jacobson (1990)

This optimism is shared by members of the local chapter of the International Palm Society.

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