

by any other name

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Cover image:

'Mme Ancelot' [Müller, 1901]

Image: Charles Quest-Ritson

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Laura Wells from www.bulletin.co.uk

Editors' note

We kick off this edition with the sad news of the demise of the Fineschi garden in Italy. Charles and Erich Unmuth reflect on the seriousness of the loss.

This edition is later than usual because I was in China for three weeks to attend the WFRS 17th International Heritage Rose Conference, which took place in Nanyang – the centre of Chinese rose production – and Shanghai. But we have three pieces from there – and more to come. I hope that feels sufficient compensation!

While in China, I took the opportunity to visit the site of what was once the Fa Tee gardens in Canton. This is holy ground for gardeners. I would argue that only the Garden of Eden could be more important! The nurseries there were the conduit through which Europeans were to source thousands of Chinese plants in the late 18th and early 19th century. Among these were what are known as the four Chinese stud roses. I tell something of their story in an article on the journey roses took from China to Europe – the subject of my own lecture there. I also share a report on the highlights of the conference,

In a new series on great rosarians, Helga Brichet pays tribute to Zhang Zuoshuang, who has been a major driver in helping preserve heritage roses in China through a lifetime of work.

Di Durston and Jeff Wyckoff tell the stories of two great rosarians of yesteryear – Alister Clark and Horace McFarland. And we hear from South Africa and Uruguay on efforts to preserve our rose heritage in those countries.

Our thanks to all our contributors who make this and every edition such a varied and interesting read, as well as a joy for me and Charles to compile.

You can share this magazine with other rose lovers – view the digital version [here](#) in your web browser. Enjoy!

Martin Stott

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Charles Quest-Ritson is a writer, historian and journalist, with a column in the lifestyle magazine *Country Life*. He is the author of *Climbing Roses of the World* (Timber Press, 2003) and, jointly with his wife Brigid, of an *Encyclopedia of Roses* that was first published in UK by Dorling Kindersley in 2003 and has since been translated into seven languages, including American English.



Martin Stott is a journalist who has made programmes for the BBC World Service and Radio 4 in 21 countries. Passionate about roses and garden history, he has also written for *Gardens Illustrated* and *Hortus* magazine and lectured on rose history internationally. Martin's garden history blog can be found at www.thestorytelligarden.com and his YouTube channel at youtube.com/@thestorytelligarden

Save the Fineschi Roses!

Charles Quest-Ritson

BELGIUM

“Professor Gianfranco Fineschi’s garden in Tuscany is a shining example of rose conservation, a monument to what a committed individual can achieve in one lifetime.”

A group of roses from Belgian breeders in Professor Gianfranco Fineschi’s garden in Cavriglia, Tuscany

Image: Charles Quest-Ritson

Professor Gianfranco Fineschi's garden in Tuscany is a shining example of rose conservation, a monument to what a committed individual can achieve in one lifetime. We have learned with the greatest sorrow that his daughters can no longer hope to maintain the garden, its collection and its genetic heritage in the way they have nobly and respectfully tried to do since their father's death in 2010. Concerned rosarians have repeatedly called on others all over the world to unite to save the collection for future generations. The World Federation of Rose Societies has advanced a little money to help towards the gardener's expenses. But could more have been done to conserve the largest collection of roses ever assembled by an amateur?

Twenty years ago, the Fineschi rosarium could fairly boast only a few hundred roses fewer than the 100-year-old European Rosarium at Sangerhausen. The extraordinary fact is that this garden and its collection of roses were entirely made by Prof. Fineschi from about 1960 onwards. I dedicated my book *Climbing Roses of the World* [Timber Press, 2003] to 'Gianfranco Fineschi, who has done more for the Rose in one lifetime than the Empress Josephine herself'. That dedication holds as good in 2026 – no individual rosarian has achieved so much in the last 100 years as he did. But no WFRS conference has centred on Italian rose-gardens and their unique collections of roses in 30 years. Too few visit the enchanted

1. 'Climbing Virgo' over the gateway
2. 'Augustus Hartman' [Cant, 1914] in the Fineschi garden
3. 'Martin Frobisher' [Svejda, 1961]

Images: Charles Quest-Ritson and Erich Unmuth



Roseto Fineschi, set among vines and olives in the classic heart of Tuscany. There is much to learn and to love about roses that are so rare, often the last of their kind. Visit Cavriglia to see the largest collection of roses from your own country that the world has ever seen.

The Fineschi sisters – Cristina, Antonella and Silvia – are now in their seventies and have devoted all their energy and resources to keeping their father’s legacy open to interested rosarians. But time is not on their side and they do not have the resources to sustain the garden as it has been in the past. They have therefore anticipated the future by launching what amounts to an appeal to save not the garden and not the collection

as a whole, but its all-important roses. They realise – and readers also need to know this – that thousands of the roses at Cavriglia are the only surviving specimens of cultivars that are extinct everywhere else in the world. The most they can do is to appeal to rose-lovers and conservationists worldwide, to ensure that from now on every one of those roses is propagated and safely maintained in other gardens with a more certain future. ‘We would like to ensure,’ they say, ‘a real future for at least the rarest and most important species and varieties.’ And they appeal for ‘guardians’ who will help to make this possible.

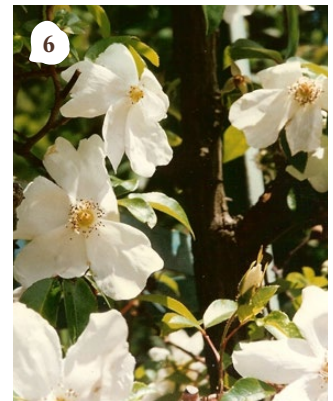
The Fineschis’ hope is that these guardians will accept budwood

“The extraordinary fact is that this garden and its collection of roses was entirely made by Prof. Fineschi from about 1960 onwards.”

The roses are grown in an ancient olive grove at Cavriglia

Image: Charles Quest-Ritson





1. 'Edmée et Roger' [Ketten, 1902] in the Fineschi garden
2. 'Dr. Hurta' [Geschwind, 1867]
3. 'Albéric Barbier' [Barbier, 1990]
4. 'Bessie Johnson' [Curtis & Sandford, 1872] in the Fineschi garden
5. 'May Wettern' [Dickson, 1928] in the Fineschi garden

6. 'Cooper's Burmese' in the Fineschi garden
7. Some ramblers are grown on old farm buildings
8. 'Forstmeisters Heim' [Geschwind, 1885]

Images: Charles Quest-Ritson and Erich Unmuth



“The Fineschis’ hope is that these guardians will accept budwood from Cavriglia to propagate rare cultivars.”

‘Mühle Hermsdorf’ [Dechant, 1928] in foreground. Austin Roses behind.

Image: Erich Unmuth



from Cavriglia to propagate rare cultivars. They add that ‘there are no restrictions on numbers or types that may be requested – everything that grows in the garden is available for you to conserve.’ Interested parties are invited to look at the list on the Fineschi website and submit their requests, which will be forwarded to them freely at the first available opportunity. The sisters sent out their invitation in March to as many rosarians,

gardens and nurseries as possible, but the uptake is small and some have not yet even replied.

The Austrian rosarian Erich Unmuth, who has written a heartfelt appreciation of Professor Fineschi and his roses to accompany this piece, tells me that Sangerhausen would like to do whatever is possible but the number they can accept is very few because they have a serious shortage of rootstocks this year. I understand that the botanic rose collection at Lyon – the wonderful Parc de la Tête d’Or – would also like to take what they can, but I know of no others.

This is the most urgent of all problems that confront the lovers of old roses today. It is probably the most significant threat to our inheritance in the entire history of garden roses. So we appeal to every heritage rose society, garden and nursery to contact the Fineschi sisters through their website to ask what they can do to preserve this unique collection of roses – still some 6000 cultivars – for future generations. Please do not put it off until next year. The need for action is immediate. The opportunity for positive action may not be available for much longer.

For more information about the conservation of the Fineschi garden or to enquire or submit a request to aid the conservation efforts visit:

info@rosetofineschi.it

My special bond with Roseto Botanico Gianfranco e Carla Fineschi

Erich Unmuth



In March 1991, thirty-five years ago, I wrote to Prof. Fineschi to ask whether any of the roses bred by Rudolf Geschwind were in his “Roseto Botanico di Caviglia” collection. His reply, which arrived a few days later, contained a list of fifteen varieties, including some that were thought to be extinct. These included ‘Dr. Hurta’ (Hybrid Perpetual, 1867), ‘Forstmeisters Heim’ (Hybrid Setigera, 1885), ‘Antonie Schürz’ (Hybrid Perpetual, 1889), ‘Tartarus’ (Hybrid Perpetual, 1887) and ‘Wodan’ (Hybrid Multiflora, 1889). The letter ended with the following sentence: “The roses will be in bloom in a few weeks. I invite you to come.”

During my first visit to Caviglia in May 1991, I experienced Prof. Fineschi’s open and appreciative manner in his treatment of every visitor, and his legendary hospitality.

Although I had seen a number of rose collections before, the Roseto was a revelation and remains an inspiration to this day. I still remember:

- The long rows of Barbier ramblers set against Walsh’s ramblers.

Left: Gianfranco Fineschi in his rose garden

Image: Erich Unmuth

- The beds of roses from individual breeders illustrating the evolution of their breeding work over the years.
- The comparative planting of sports alongside the original varieties – particularly noteworthy was the large number of climbing sports – at the entrance.
- The incomparable, white-flowered, strongly scented ‘Climbing Virgo’ (Climbing Hybrid Tea, ‘Hendrickx’, 1961; bush form ‘Mallerin’, 1947).
- Frost-sensitive roses, such as ‘Cooper’s Burmese’ (Hybrid Gigantea, raised from seed collected in Burma).
- Some of the Giganteas bred by Alister Clark, just a few steps away from ‘Martin Frobisher’ (Hybrid Rugosa, 1961) – one of the extremely hardy so-called Explorer Roses bred by Canadian breeder Felicitas Svejda.

- Well-known ramblers such as ‘Mühle Hermsdorf’ (Hybrid Multiflora, Dechant, 1928) with a profusion of fragrant blossoms never before seen on this rose, alongside the then-unknown to me ‘Purezza’ (Hybrid Banksia, Mansuino, 1960).

Prof. Fineschi, and – after his death – his daughters, were extremely helpful. It was always possible to obtain cuttings and plants, which was of great value for the conservation and wider dissemination of varieties. Varieties such as the aforementioned ‘Purezza’ can now also be found in gardens north of the Alps.

I do not in any way wish to belittle the efforts to preserve the genetic diversity of often ornamental plants. The fascination of the rose, the wonder of its diversity, the sensory impressions it evokes in us – all of this carries greater weight for me.

And even that does not adequately describe the magnitude of the loss. Thousands of roses, bred by people across every continent, cultivated and preserved over decades, in some cases centuries, gathered in a garden open to the public – that is a cultural asset. Something like this must not be allowed to disappear.

Every effort must be supported to safeguard varieties and parts of the collection and integrate them into other rose collections. It should be clear, however, that Cavriglia is more than the sum of the roses collected there.

It’s about the loss of a “magical” place where one could experience the incredible variety of roses.

Below left: ‘Purezza’ [Mansuino, 1961].

Below right: *Rosa foetida* ‘Bicolor’ in the Fineschi garden in 1996.

Images: Erich Unmuth



Erich Unmuth has been a rose collector for nearly 50 years. He lives in Vienna, Austria, and his collection, called ‘Rosenkultivarium Baden’, is located in Baden bei Wien. It focuses mainly on shrub roses, climbers and ramblers. He is a member of the Deutsche Genbank Rose, which is coordinated by the Europarosarium Sangerhausen. He is seen here together with *R. moschata* Herrm., one of his favourite roses.

The names behind the stud roses

Martin Stott

'A Florist' – watercolour and ink on paper, Guangzhou, China ca. 1790

Image: V&A Collection



It is nearly a century ago that a Cambridge scientist, Dr Charles Chamberlain Hurst, published pioneering morphological research that identified four roses from China that he said had had a “definite and permanent influence on the evolution of our garden roses”. He called them the “stud Chinas”.

Their names carry little hint of the adventure and hardship undergone to bring them to Europe – ‘Slater’s Crimson China’, ‘Parsons’ Pink’, ‘Hume’s Blush’ and ‘Parks’ Yellow’.

But who were Slater, Parsons, Hume and Parks? And are their roses as important as Hurst’s research suggests? Let’s start with some context.

Until roses began to arrive from China in the 18th century we had no red roses. The Tudors had the “red rose” of Lancaster and Shakespeare would write about red roses, but the *R. gallica* referred to is nearer deep pink. We had only one repeat-flowering rose – *R. × damascena* var. *semperflorens* or ‘Autumn Damask’. And there were only two yellow roses – *R. hemisphaerica* (the sulphur rose) and *R. foetida*.

Recent DNA research has taught us that the remontant ‘Autumn Damask’ has *R. fedtschenkoana* in its bloodline – a white rose that originates from the foothills of the Ala Tau, Tien Shan and Pamir-Alai mountain ranges in central Asia and northwest China.

“Until roses began to arrive from China in the 18th century we had no red roses.”

It is likely to have come to Europe via the old silk routes. The two yellows also originated in Asia.

Exploration

The first roses to be sent home by a European from China arrived in 1702. They were herbarium specimens collected by James Cuninghame in Chusan – a small island just south of Shanghai on China’s west coast.

Cuninghame was a ship’s doctor – a job that depended on herbal treatments – and so he had a professional interest in plants. His roses are today in the Sloane archive at the Natural History Museum in London. They are small, browned specimens, with descriptions in Latin (this is before the Linnaean binomial naming convention became popular). Cuninghame’s descriptions identify them as two white roses and a wild rose with small purple flowers.

Cuninghame stopped off in India on the journey home to collect more plants, leaving his roses to travel on without him. They reached London, he did not. His ship appears to have sunk on the way. These were dangerous voyages; they lasted months and there were few comforts.

They were hard for plants, too. One estimate suggests that before the invention of the Wardian case as few as one in a thousand survived the perils of the journey, including neglect and harsh temperature changes.

By 1757 China had confined all European trade to a narrow strip of land, covering around 22 acres, by the edge of the Pearl River in Canton in the south of the country (modern day Guangzhou). Here they could build permanent ‘factories’ to house their agents.

This trade only took place during the winter tea-trading season, between October and March. The rest of the time they had to live on what was then the tiny island of Macao (now Macau and part of the mainland, following land reclamation).

Imagine the boredom! One gardener sent to find plants and dispatch them home was William Kerr (after whom is named *Kerria japonica*). Among his many discoveries is the first of the Banksiae roses – the double white *R. banksiae* var. *banksiae*. But after seven years out there Kerr appears to have succumbed to either alcohol or opium. He was eventually given a change of scene and re-energised with a switch to Ceylon (Sri Lanka), only to die of a brain fever a few weeks after landing.

In Canton foreigners were restricted even from visiting the town itself.

The only way to get plants was to go three miles upriver to the *Fa Tee gardens* – a group of nurseries. By 1819 even that journey was allowed only on two or three days a month for a fee. Most of the plants sent back over the next 60 years came from these nurseries.

Unsurprisingly, the British got fed up of being confined to Canton. In 1791 they sent an official embassy to the Chinese emperor to ask for the removal of restrictions. The delegation was led by Lord Macartney and his deputy Sir George Staunton. George took his son with him. The boy was just 12. He already spoke Latin, Greek and French and spent much of the voyage with Chinese interpreters learning the language.

Once they reached China they were to travel overland – a great chance to collect plants, so two gardeners joined the delegation. But their Chinese hosts kept them under tight guard for the journey.

The audience appeared to go well – the emperor was particularly impressed by young George. But 12 days later they received his reply. No change. They had to pack up and return the 1,800 miles to Canton. There was disappointment in London, but the party were able to introduce some plants back to Britain. One of these was the evergreen climbing rose, *R. bracteata* (syn. *R. lucida*) – or the ‘Macartney rose’, a native of southeast China. In 1918 William Paul crossed *R. bracteata* with a

“Britain became a primary conduit for Chinese plant introductions to the West after 1760 because of its demand for tea.”

double yellow Tea Rose, to give us ‘Mermaid’.

Tea significance

Britain became a primary conduit for Chinese plant introductions to the West after 1760 because of its demand for tea. By 1785 the British were exporting over 12,000 tonnes a year – six times more than any other nation. And by 1804 the tax paid on tea provided one tenth of the British government’s total annual revenue.

The British East India Company became the principal European commercial enterprise in China. It had a large resident staff and its own fleet in Macao and Canton. Nearly everyone involved in finding plants was connected with the tea trade in some way. Which brings us to the first of our ‘stud’ roses.

‘Slater’s Crimson China’

Gilbert Slater’s family had strong connections with the East India Company (EIC). His grandfather, father and uncles all served on company ships. His father, another Gilbert, was captain of the EIC ship *Triton* on two of its voyages.

Gilbert Slater Snr did well, eventually rising to own shares in ships leased to the company.

Gilbert Slater Jnr was born in 1753. At the age of 14 he was apprenticed as an ironmonger to James Goodchild and a few years later had risen to be able to take on an apprentice himself.

In 1784 he married Elizabeth Jackson, the daughter of a wealthy family from the Northeast of England. They moved into a grand house in Leytonstone, near London, with 24 acres of garden. He immediately set to, adding hot houses. By this time he was the principal owner of two ships and so not only wealthy, but in a good position to encourage his captains to bring home plants. He even sent two gardeners to Canton.

He needed to know what he was asking them to bring so he encouraged his ships’ officers to buy pictures of Chinese plants that were readily available for sale around the Canton factories, labelled with Chinese names.

Slater had the names traced and given as lists to pass to his captains and gardeners to go shopping. Between 1789 and 1793 he was to introduce several important Chinese plants to Europe.

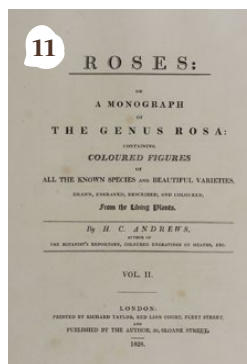
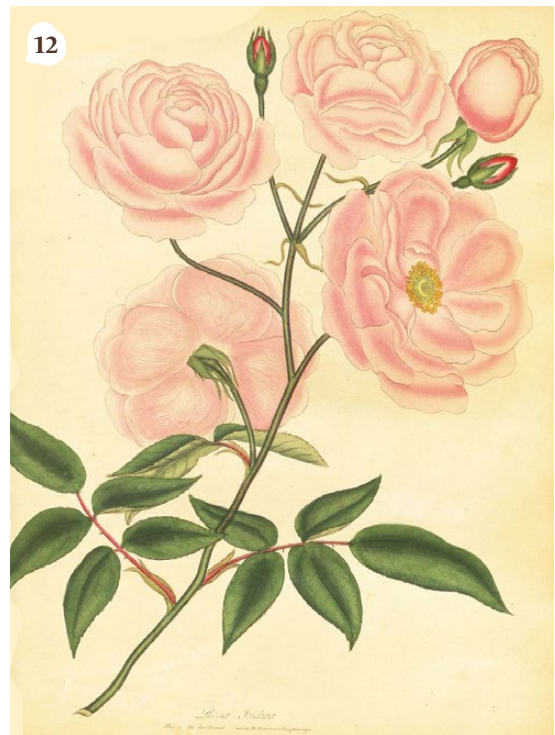
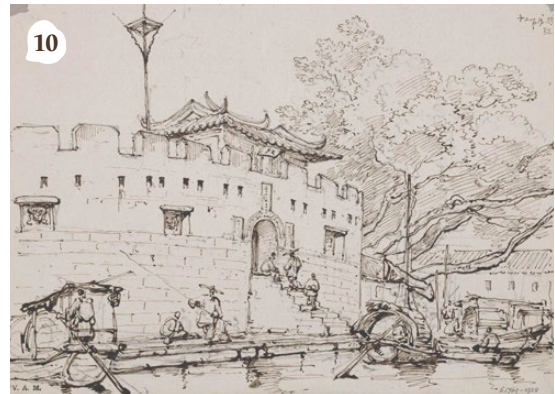
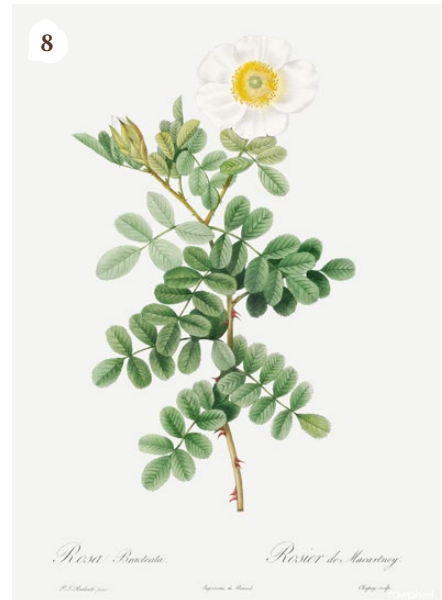
In 1791, a box arrived with a rose in it – he could tell that from the foliage. But what kind? Imagine the excitement, seeing the buds swelling and then emerging –



- 1. *R. fedtschenkoana* which originates from the foothills of the Ala Tau, Tien Shan and Pamir-Alai mountain ranges
- 2. Painting of the Thirteen Factories in Canton China in circa 1805
- 3. 'A boat florist' – watercolour, Guangzhou, China 1800-1820
- 4. 'Slater's Crimson China' – its ancient Chinese name translates as "White pearl in red dragon's mouth"
- 5. 'Old Blush' at the Shanghai Chenshan Botanical Garden
- 6. "Hume's Blush" at the Shanghai Chenshan Botanical Garden

Images: Martin Stott, Public Domain, V&A Collection and HQ CC BY 2.0





7. 'Lord Macartney Embassy To China 1793', by William Alexander, showing the meeting of the young George Staunton and the Emperor
8. 'Macartney Rose' or *Rosa bracteata* from *Les Roses* by Redouté
9. 'Slater's Crimson China' in Curtis' *Botanical Magazine*
10. Drawing of a small fort on the river opposite the factories in Canton, China
11. Henry Andrews' *Monograph of the Genus Rosa*, published 1805
12. 'Parsons' Pink' in Andrews' book – the first account of this rose in England.

Images: Public Domain, Library of Congress CC BY 4.0, V&A Collection, RHS Lindley Collections and Project Gutenberg

flattish semi-double flowers in bright scarlet. A true red rose! The first in Europe. And repeat flowering. It was a sensation.

Curtis Botanical magazine described it as “one of the most desirable plants in point of ornament ever introduced to this country.” It became known as *R. chinensis* ‘Semperflorens’ and ‘Slater’s Crimson China’. Slater was generous with cuttings, and it was soon widely available.

It is still grown today, and we saw it several times in China during the heritage rose conference. In China its name is much more poetic – it translates to “white pearl in red dragon’s mouth”. With that description in mind, you cannot fail to spot it with its distinctive white pearl centre.

In 1793 Gilbert Slater died. He was just 40. It seems he was a man of passion in many ways – not just for plants but for food. He had virtually eaten himself to death. He was obese and, according to the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, “so corpulent, through excessive eating, that he kept a regular weekly fast, without reducing his corpulency. Having been long subject to violent attacks of the stone and a lethargic habit, he died of obstruction in his kidneys, which brought on a diarrhoea.”

Gilbert had five children. His fifth had only just been born when he passed away. His three-year-old daughter also died three weeks later and is reportedly buried alongside

“In 1791, a box arrived with a rose in it... Imagine the excitement, seeing the buds swelling and then emerging – flattish semi-double flowers in bright scarlet. A true red rose!”

him at St Mary’s Parish Church, Hendon. His wife Elizabeth sold his house and collection and moved back to live with family in the north, dying herself just four years, later aged 37.

I am currently trying to confirm Gilbert’s burial spot. It would be nice to plant some of his roses in the churchyard.

‘Parsons’ Pink’

The second stud rose was ‘Old Blush’ (syn. ‘Parsons’ Pink’). In the first account of the rose, by Henry Andrews in 1805, he described it as “one of the greatest ornaments ever introduced to this country”. Commending its “unceasing and abundant bloom”, Andrews reported it growing in 1793 in the garden of John Parsons in Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire. From there it reached the well-known Colville nursery and quickly spread.

Parsons was the son of a wealthy London brewer, who died when John was just 18. The young man, suddenly very wealthy, married an Italian dancer and eventually settled

in a large house with 15 acres of land. One of his neighbours was Thomas Bates Rous, a director of the EIC.

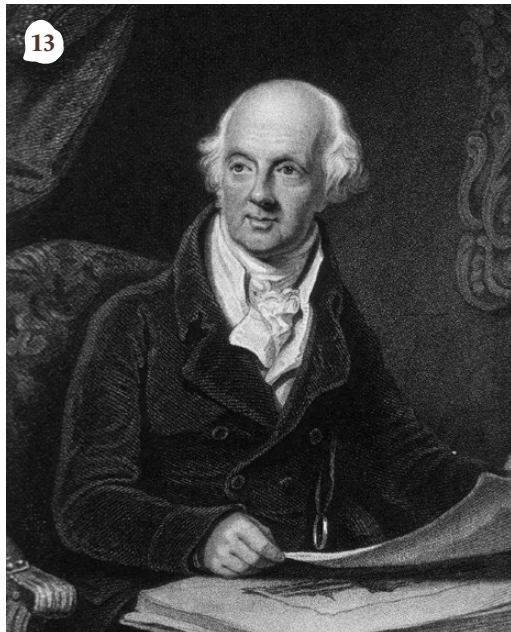
It is not known whether Parsons was an investor and got the rose from this route or via Rous. But it was soon being distributed by nurseries and by 1798 had reached Paris. From there it went to Charleston in South Carolina and the garden of nurseryman Philippe Noisette. It led to ‘Noisette Carnée’ – widely known as ‘Blush Noisette’ – and the Noisette roses. On the French Ile de Bourbon – Réunion – ‘Parsons’ Pink’ hybridised with the ‘Autumn Damask’ rose to give us the first of the Bourbon roses. One way or another ‘Parsons’ Pink’ has found its way into the bloodlines of thousands of the roses we grow today.

Did Parsons deserve the credit for this rose? That’s questionable. Philip Miller is said to have been growing a pink China rose at the Chelsea Physic Garden as early as 1759. A decade later Kew had one.

‘Hume’s Blush’

Our third stud rose is ‘Hume’s Blush’, the first tea-scented rose – another pink repeat-flowerer – that arrived in England around 1809.

Sir Abraham Hume was an MP and the 2nd Baronet of Wormleybury, Hertfordshire. He succeeded his father in 1772, inheriting not just the title, but the Wormleybury estate with 140 acres. He and his



13



14



15

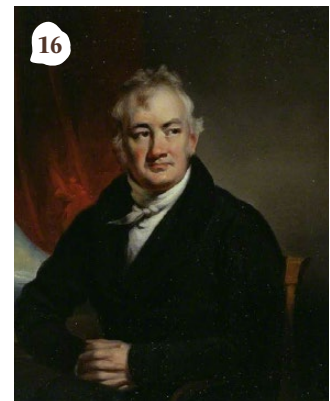
13. An engraving of Sir Abraham Hume by J Jenkins

14. 'Hume's Blush' by Redouté

15. A study of 'Parks' Yellow' from John Reeves' manuscripts – RHS Lindley Collections / RHS Reeves Collection

16. John Reeves by George Chinnery. Plant collector, Reeves, supported Parks' work collecting plants in China on behalf of the Horticultural Society

17. *R. banksiae* var. *banksiae* was introduced to England by John Dampier Parks



16

Images: Public Domain, RHS Lindley Collections / RHS Reeves Collection, Fitzwilliam Museum and Charles Quest-Ritson



17

wife, Lady Amelia, had an outstanding collection of Chinese plants, under the supervision of James Mean. Many new plant species were first cultivated at Wormleybury on arrival in England, with Mean's skilled guidance.

The Hume family had strong EIC links – the 1st Baronet was principal managing owner of five EIC ships between 1752 and 1772 and his brother owned five ships, too.

There is a “Hume’s Blush” rose still today but also a lot of argument about whether it is the original. During the Napoleonic War, this rose was one of those said to have been carried across to France to the Empress Josephine at Malmaison through the royal naval blockade.

‘Parks’ Yellow’

Our fourth stud rose is ‘Parks’ Yellow’ tea-scented rose. John Damper Parks (1792-1866) was sent to China by the Horticultural Society in April 1823, arriving six months later. The gardener, who had worked for the Earl of Arran in Bognor Regis, was to collect plants for the Society’s new garden at Chiswick.

Like other collectors, he was confined to Macao and Canton and relied heavily on locals and the Fa Tee gardens for his finds. He was only there for three months but, supported by the tea inspector and keen plant collector, John Reeves, he introduced several plants to England from China, including the

“Professional plant hunters were dispatched to hunt down more plants in the north of the country – plants that might be better suited to the colder climate of Europe.”

aspidistra, several camelias, a double yellow form of the *Banksiae* rose, *R. banksiae* ‘Lutea’, as well as the yellow rose that was to be named after him. ‘Parks’ Yellow’ rose was too tender for the British climate, but many rose breeders used it in their breeding programmes for its yellow colour.

The rose was considered lost, but we saw one claiming to be this rose in the Shanghai Chenshan Botanical Garden.

The Treaty of Nanking, which marked the end of the first opium war and China’s humiliating defeat, opened China to much greater exploration. Professional plant hunters were dispatched to hunt down more plants in the north of the country – plants that might be better suited to the colder climate of Europe. Robert Fortune, Ernest ‘Chinese’ Wilson and George Forrest brought more roses back.

Reconsidering the “Stud Chinas” theory

Botanic science has come on hugely in the past century. DNA

and the double helix were not discovered until the 1950s. Today scientists are sequencing the genes of roses, mapping their historic development and enabling us to understand so much more.

Hurst’s thesis of four single roses, each with different qualities, making that perilous voyage across the world from China and introducing dramatically new gene material into rose hybridisation makes for a great story.

But with so many plants arriving in Europe from China at the turn of the 19th century it seems too simplistic to pick on four as the “studs”. Perhaps a range of close relatives to these four were influential. Time will tell.

Exciting research is now being done in China and new papers are being published. We are learning more all the time about the journey of roses within and from China and their impact. In future editions we’ll try to summarise some of the key findings.

The story of the stud roses may need reframing. But it still speaks to the passion of gardeners of the time and the excitement of discovery. It still reminds us of the risks that were taken in making our roses and our gardens generally what they are today.

Chinese conference takeaways

Martin Stott



Scientists in China are continually discovering new species roses, untangling the rose's genetic history and learning more about how it can be used as a commercial crop. Meanwhile hybridisers are collecting and utilising species roses previously neglected in breeding programmes in their search for resilience and variety. These were key lessons delegates took away from the 17th International Heritage Rose Conference in Nanyang and Shanghai.

China is home to half of the world's rose species – it has 95. “It is the global centre of distribution and diversity of the genus *Rosa*,” said Dr Luo Le, a professor and Vice-Dean of the School of Landscape Architecture at Beijing Forestry University.

Luo, is co-author of the magnificent new *Genus Rosa L. in China* book, The first comprehensive monograph on native *Rosa* taxa in China in 20 years. The book includes four recently discovered roses.

“China is home to half of the world's rose species – it has 95.”

Giant beds of roses at small rose park in Nanyang

Image: Martin Stott



These include cold-resistant *R. tomurensis*, once considered to be a variety of *R. laxa* but now recognised as a distinct tetraploid species; *R. yangii*, a wild tea collected in Yunnan Province in the southwest of the country – a key distribution centre for the rose in China – with gigantic flowers and mutable petal colour; and *R. funingensis*, a rose with light salmon-pink flowers that fade to white, which shares morphological characteristics with both *R. gigantea* and *R. rubus*.

Perhaps the most exciting find is the fourth rose, *R. forrestiana* var. *maculata*. First discovered in northwest Yunnan in 2018, it has purple basal markings – a rare feature previously only associated with *R. persica* (which has red spots).

Because these first roses found did not have a particularly deep colour, the botanists were hesitant



Above: *R. forrestiana* var. *maculata*

Below: Dr Yu Chao head of the Rose Breeding Research Group at the Beijing Forestry University on a field trip with colleagues.

Images: Dr Yu Chao

to define it as a new variety, but since 2021 they have detected several populations of the rose growing in river valleys and forest edges in Kongqueshan Mountain. These have more variable and stable petal spot traits.

The discoveries are likely to be of interest to breeders, but they simply add to a resource hitherto underutilised. Luo told the conference: “Throughout breeding history, only 10 to 15 wild species have been intensively used to create the tens of thousands of modern rose varieties we have today.”

He listed the key ancestral species native to China as *R. chinensis*, *R. × odorata*, *R. gigantea*, *R. multiflora*, *R. luciae*, *R. rugosa*, *R. bracteata*, *R. hugonis*, *R. spinosissima* and *R. moyesii*.

Chinese breeders are now taking advantage of their location to



address that shortcoming. We visited two large nurseries where the hybridisers had collected dozens of Chinese species roses. Jiang Zhengzhi in particular at the Lang nursery is embracing the use of Chinese species roses within his programme.

In a giant glasshouse we saw 90 or more different species roses being grown for potential hybridisation. Jiang employs genetic scientists to support his research and to help shape the direction of his work.

Dr Yu Chao head of the Rose Breeding Research Group at the Beijing Forestry University, has spent more than two decades with his team, exploring possible applications of the rose in food, health products and pharmaceuticals. He told the conference that the flowers and fruits of the rose are being discarded as horticultural waste currently, leaving abundant *Rosa* germplasm resources unused.

Since 2003 Yu's team has carried out nationwide field surveys and collected germplasm across Xinjiang, Ningxia, Xizang, Sichuan and Yunnan. A total of 205 *Rosa* accessions have been collected, including 158 wild rose resources, 27 old cultivars and 20 modern cultivars, enabling the team to conduct the most comprehensive molecular phylogeny of roses to date.

Their research shows that rosehips are a valuable source of bioactive compounds, including vitamin C,



Jiang Zhengzhi at the Lang nursery, which is embracing the wider use of Chinese species roses within its breeding programme.

Image: Martin Stott

“Dr Yu Chao head of the Rose Breeding Research Group at the Beijing Forestry University, has spent more than two decades with his team, exploring possible applications of the rose in food, health products and pharmaceuticals.”

polyphenols, carotenoids, tocopherols and polysaccharides, with unique antioxidant, anti-inflammation, antimicrobial, antiaging, and osteoprotective qualities. They are rich in protein, essential amino acids, unsaturated fatty acids, and trace elements. The team identified 151 medicinal compounds and 73 bioactive constituents.

Much of this is arguably already widely known, but Yu's team has been examining which roses in particular are richest in these potentially valuable substances. Certain species exhibit vitamin and mineral contents tens to over a hundred times higher than conventional fruits.

For instance, *R. rugosa* at the mature stage exhibits more vivid coloration and higher levels of nutrients. Oil extracted from its seeds is rich in natural antioxidant compounds with potential for skincare applications. *R. rugosa* and *R. multiflora var. pubescens* showed the highest total lipid content, and *R. laevigata* exhibited the strongest overall antioxidant capacity.

They have also identified 47 candidate astringent compounds that may contribute to the undesirable flavour that prevents many from using rose hips in foodstuffs.

More than half of the global population lacks sufficient vitamin C intake, leading to malnutrition, weakened immunity and other health issues. Yet unpublished



1. Delegates welcomed with roses at one park.
- 2-4. The Nanyang World Rose Grand Garden – a garden of 1.8 million roses, and 6,100 varieties.
5. Rose topiary at a nursery in Nanyang.

Images: Martin Stott





research by the team shows that Vitamin C content in rose hips can reach more than 2500 mg/g, far exceeding that of common fruits like kiwifruit and sea buckthorn.

Looking into scent, using phylogenetic analysis, Yu and his team have identified *R. gigantea* as the ancestor of modern roses and the evolutionary origin of the tea-scented trait in *R. odorata*. The team has taken out several patents on applications of its research that may enable breeders to produce more fragrant roses, as well as patents for five new tea-scented cultivars.

The overriding emotion through this trip was awe at the scale of things in China – the garden of 1.8 million roses in Nanyang, the vast production nurseries we visited. There was concern at the heavy use of fertilisers, pesticides and fungicides.

A rose nursery in Nanyang, which has 871 rose enterprises and produces 1.6bn roses a year for sale in China and overseas.

Image: Martin Stott

“The overriding emotion through this trip was awe at the scale of things in China – the garden of 1.8 million roses in Nanyang, the vast production nurseries we visited.”

But I suspect many of us came away believing that the speed of progress there means China will soon be producing some spectacular, highly-scented and resilient roses and at incredible scale, and therefore cost. It's hard not to think that what China is doing to the global electric car industry and others, it will do for roses.

Forthcoming international events

San Diego World Rose Symposium

April 30th – May 4th 2027

Hosted by the World Federation of Rose Societies and American Society Conventions.

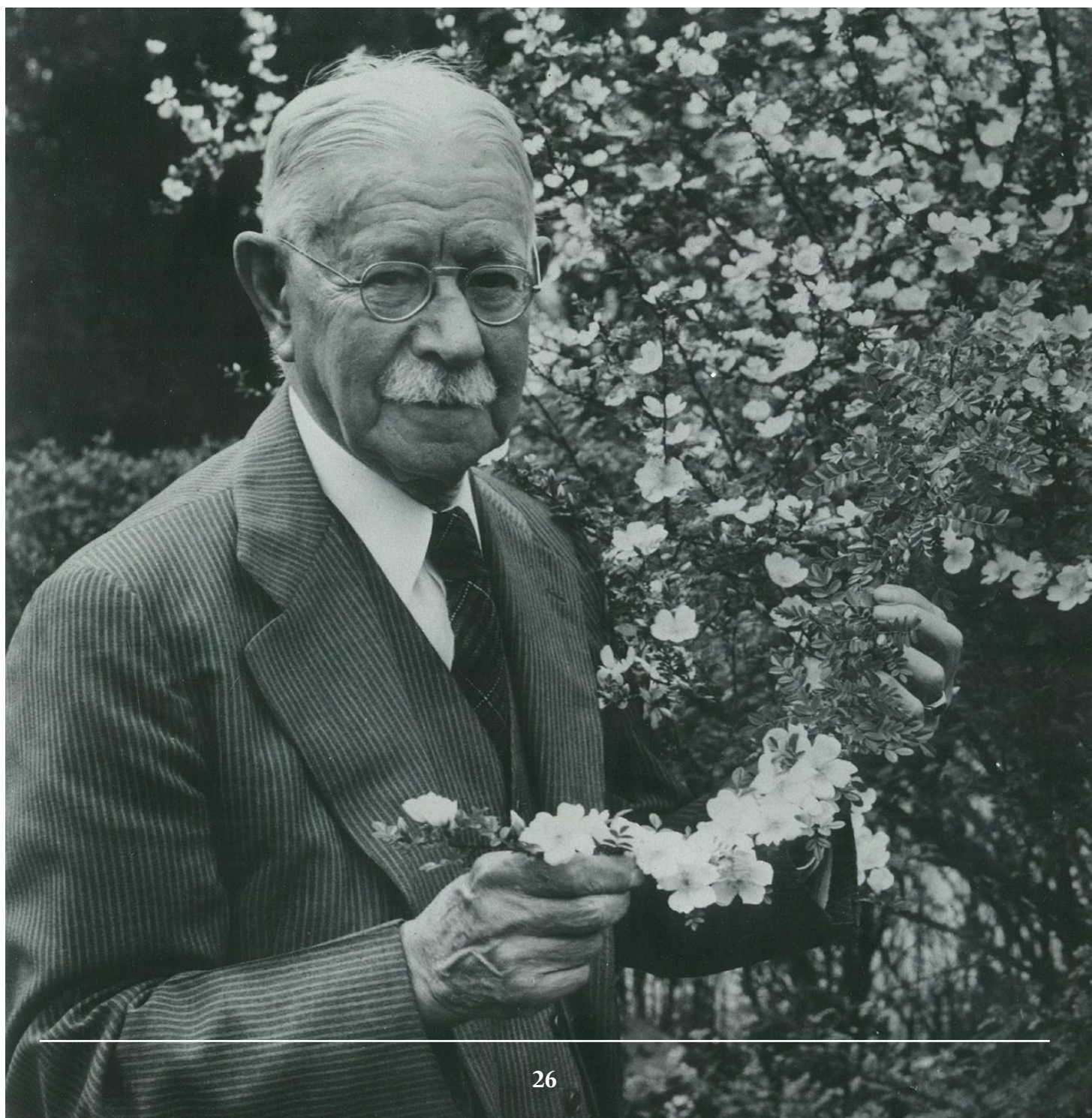
Visit: sandigorosesociety.com for more information.

21st World Rose Convention 2028 Bhopal India

January 7th – January 13th 2028

Horace McFarland: Father of the American Rose Society

Jeff Wyckoff



“Because the rose is unique among plants in acceptance, without explanation or qualifying word, we have taken it, as our forefathers for years have taken it, as a matter of course. We explain to the children that the lilac is a shrub, the peony is a herbaceous plant, the cabbage is a vegetable, the apple is a fruit, but the rose is – just a rose.”

J. Horace McFarland,
The Rose in America

J. Horace McFarland dedicated much of his life to promoting public education and garnering support for civic improvement initiatives, all while ensuring the preservation of America’s natural beauty. As noted by Ernest Morrison in his book *J. Horace McFarland: A Thorn for Beauty*: “McFarland’s tireless efforts played a significant role in shaping horticultural and civic landscapes.”

But to rose lovers he was “Doctor Rose” and the man who helped transform the fortunes of the American Rose Society (ARS).

Born in McAlisterville, Pennsylvania in 1859, McFarland (the J stands for ‘John’) was an

entrepreneurial young man. His father was a nurseryman who also ran a modest temperance newspaper printing business.

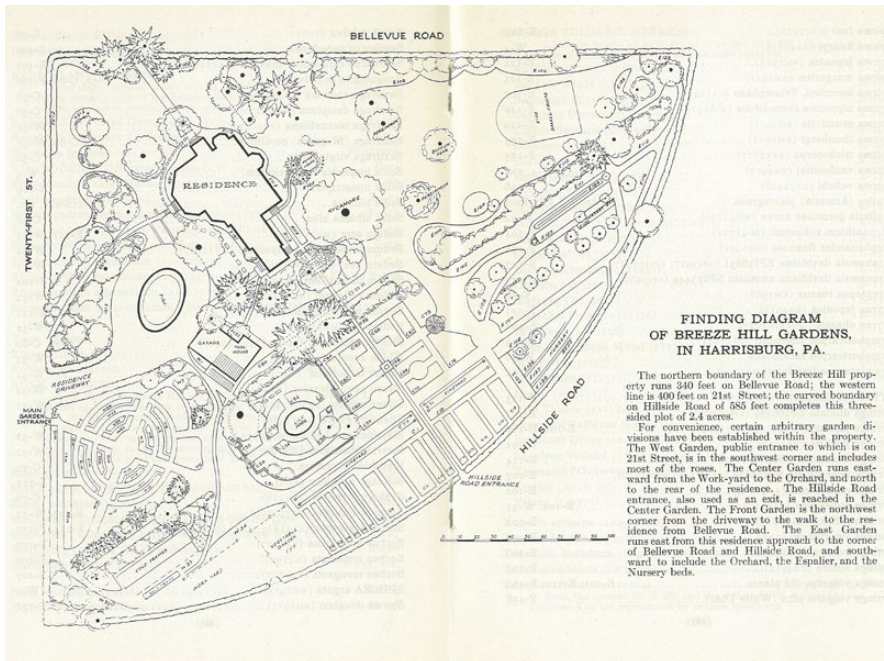
At 19 McFarland became a “job printer.” Leveraging his knowledge of horticulture and printing, he established a flourishing business, the Mount Pleasant Press – incorporated as the J. Horace McFarland Company. He specialized in nursery catalogs and horticultural publications. McFarland convinced nurserymen to expand their price lists into horticultural advertisements and colorful catalogs. He was early to see the benefits of photographs over wood cut prints and also offered his customers art, copy and advertising support services. He

Previous page: J. Horace McFarland holding a branch of a rose bush in his garden at Breeze Hill, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Right: A garden wall at Breeze Hill covered ‘Climbing Orleans’ [Levvasseur, 1913]

Images: McFarland, Smithsonian Institution and Special Collections, USDA National Agricultural Library





Map of Breeze Hill from the 1930s.

Image: Special Collections, USDA National Agricultural Library

“It is estimated that over many years trialing various roses, he grew more than 5,000 rose plants and 800 varieties at Breeze Hill.”

encouraged producers to expand the growing season and educated customers on gardening. The success of the business gave him time to pursue the causes that interested him (see side panel).

Incredibly, despite all his public service efforts, McFarland still had time for his roses. In 1915, he published *My Growing Garden*, about his experiences at his home, Breeze Hill, in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania where he had created a beautiful two-and-a-half-acre garden. This garden was a backdrop for many of the photographs he used in his various publications. He had started it with his wife, Lydia, in 1909 and was to live there till his death in 1948. His daughter, Helen, stayed on till she passed away in 1980.

More than half of June’s chapter – “The Feast of Flowers” – was devoted to roses. He observed:

“Conditions and preferences have united to give the rose a dominating place in this growing garden” and waxed lyrical about roses like “the stately, full white ‘Druschki’” and “the continuously performing ‘Teplitz’”.

It is estimated that over many years trialing various roses, he grew more than 5,000 rose plants and 800 varieties at Breeze Hill. McFarland described it as a “garden laboratory where the best that grows is observed, recorded, photographed, and color-noted for passage through perfected processes into catalogue, book, or magazine.” Many of the 50,000 photographs of specimen blooms or displays he took in his lifetime were from Breeze Hill. He shared what he learned in his garden with readers, writing with an easy style.

American Rose Society

The same year he published *My Growing Garden*, McFarland met with Samuel Pinnock, then-president of the ARS. Their collaboration led to a pivotal agreement that would transform the Society into a widely embraced public institution.

The ARS had been founded in 1892. However, at its inception, it operated primarily as a commercial trade association, focusing on the interests of businesses. According to biographer Morrison, amateurs were intentionally excluded from the Society as their involvement was deemed irrelevant to the professional growers’ objectives.

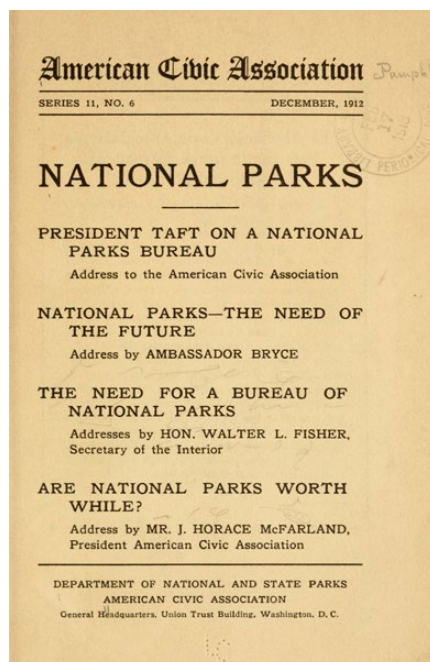
A life of public service

McFarland was one of the first Americans to sound the call for environmental and scenic protection and has been hailed the father of the National Park Service. He argued: "Great parks are in the highest degree... a sheer expression of democracy".

He helped defend Niagara Falls from power company interests, fought together with John Muir and others to preserve the Hetch Hetchy Valley at Yosemite, and advocated the preservation of the Grand Canyon.

McFarland drafted the first version of the bill to preserve the country's parks and then suggested calling in the nationally known landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmstead, Jr., for further drafts. Six years and three secretaries of the interior later, the National Park Service was established in 1916. McFarland served on the Department of the Interior's Educational Advisory Board for the parks and also as a member of the National Park Trust Fund until his death in 1948.

He recognized the value of smaller landscapes, too. As president of the American Civic Association, McFarland promoted the "City Beautiful" movement in cities across the United States, arguing in favor of parks as a remedy for society's ills.



American Civic Association newsletter, 1912, showing McFarland's topic addressing 'Are National Parks Worth While?'

Image: Special Collections, USDA National Agricultural Library

McFarland and Pinnock agreed that the ARS needed to change and opened membership more widely, adopting the slogan: "A rose for every home, a bush for every garden." But how to attract the amateur gardener?

McFarland, the printer, had the answer. In 1917 he launched the *American Rose Annual* and *American Rose Magazine*, which he edited and published for nearly 30 years. These publications became an essential resource for rose enthusiasts.

In 1927, the "Proof of the Pudding" feature was launched in the *Annual*. In it various rose growers shared their evaluations of new rose varieties.

The *Annual* was held instrumental in increasing ARS memberships twelve-fold during its first year. By 1923, membership reached 3,310 and continued to grow for the next several years at an annual rate of 30%. McFarland became president of the ARS between 1930 and 1932.

His *Modern Roses* book, published in 1930, described over 2,500 varieties. Three roses were named after him by French breeders, including Mallerin's 1931 HT 'Editor McFarland' and 1943 HT 'Horace McFarland', as well as Meilland's 1940 HT, 'McFarland', demonstrating his influence beyond the US. A climbing version of 'Editor McFarland' was introduced by the Roseglen Nursery in Australia in 1948.

Sadly, the garden at Breeze Hill was lost after his daughter's death, but thousands of the pictures taken there over the years now reside in the Smithsonian Gardens Archives of American Gardens – a reminder of a remarkable man and his remarkable garden.



Jeff Wyckoff is a past president of the American Rose Society. He is author of the *Better Homes and Garden* book, *Rose Gardening*.

The wisdom of McFarland

On choosing a rose:

"The burning question of the rose-lover, new or old, a veteran or a tyro, is, 'What varieties shall I plant?' To the beginner it is perplexing, almost distracting, this matter of 'the right roses'. To the victim of many a try-out, many a disappointment, comes continually the query as to which of the glowingly-described new sorts he shall adventure with. Something better in color, in form, in size, in fragrance, in habit, in bloom continuance, in disease resistance, in hardiness, is the constant hope of the grower."

On species roses in America

"I have said at the opening of this chapter that the species roses are but little known in America. Botanists differ as to the number of our native forms. One includes them all in 99 species, but Rydberg's *Flora of North America* (1918) describes 129 species, 14 of which are introduced escapes, while two belong south of the United States and Mexico, thus leaving us 113 natives."

As this is not a work on the botany of the rose, I do not feel that it is incumbent on me to follow all the North American species. I ought to mention the forms of *Rosa carolina*, sometimes called *R. humilis* which is the 'Pasture rose'."

On using roses to the best advantage

"The Queen of Flowers needs to dominate, to hold court, to be 'No. 1,' whenever she blooms, whether it be in her roadside incarnation as a native wild rose, in well-served importance within the glass-roofed acres of the commercial cut-flower establishment, in queenly place controlling the costly formal rose-garden, or in cherished beauty as the one best thing in an humble back-yard garden. She must always reign; she is always regal!"

Extracts from *The Rose in America* by John Horace McFarland, 1923.



1. McFarland in his rock garden, 1942
2. 'Mevrouw G. A. Van Rossem' [G. A. Van Rossem, 1926]
3. 'Emily Gray' [A. H. Williams, 1916]

Images: McFarland, Smithsonian Institution and Special Collections, USDA National Agricultural Library





4. Rose arbor at Breeze Hill, 'Bess Lovett' [Van Fleet, 1908] right and 'Zéphirine Drouhin' [Bizot, 1868] left
5. McFarland looking over 'Mary Wallace' [Van Fleet, before 1922] roses in his garden
6. 'Vanguard' [Stevens, 1932] rose card
7. 'Editor McFarland' [Mallerin, 1931] rose card
8. 'Gruss au Aachen' [Hinner, 1909] lining a garden path at Breeze Hill
9. 'Ghislaine de Féligonde' [Turbat, 1916] growing up a rustic arbor at Breeze Hill
10. 'Miss Marion Manifold' [Adamson, before 1913] climbing garden arches at Breeze Hill,



Images: McFarland, Smithsonian Institution and Special Collections, USDA National Agricultural Library



Alister Clark of Glenara

Di Durston



“Alister used *R. gigantea* to produce many vigorous climbers. His knowledge was encyclopaedic and he sought roses that were suitable for the climate of Victoria.”

Mr Clark's Station, Deep Creek, near Keilor
by Eugene von Guérard, 1867

This painting depicts the Clark family homestead, Glenara. A three-year-old Alister Clark – future owner of Glenara – is presenting a bouquet to his widowed father. His younger sisters and elder brother sit on the verandah and his two-year-old sister, Jessie, after whom Alister was to name one of his roses in 1915, is attended by her nurse.

Image: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Alister Clark was Australia's greatest rose breeder. He was born at Glenara (pronounced 'Glenaira'), his family estate near Melbourne in 1864. The house is a colonial mansion, not far from the modern airport, classified by the National Trust of Australia and listed on the Historic Buildings Register. Alister lived here for almost all his life. He was educated in England and Scotland, and later at Cambridge University where he studied Law, though he never practised as a lawyer. On his marriage certificate, his profession is listed simply as 'Gentleman'.

Early in his life Alister Clark was primarily an enthusiastic breeder of daffodils. An article on his work in the *Daffodil Year Book* of 1915 mentions seedlings bred at Glenara. But he was not a professional nurseryman, just a gifted amateur.

In 1948, the Royal Horticultural Society of Great Britain awarded him the Peter Barr Memorial Cup in recognition of his development of new daffodils. The person who introduced Alister to daffodils in 1897 appears to have been a banker in England who was reputed to have paid thirty three pounds for a seedling bulb named 'Dorothy Kingsmill'. Alister later became closely associated with two of the trustees of the Royal Horticultural Society, who formed a syndicate to buy stock of new daffodils. One was the famous Miss Ellen Willmott, the greatest plantswoman of the day, who published *The Genus Rosa* at her own expense in 1910. Alister's

“Alister was the first Australian to win the Dean Hole Medal for services to the rose, a life member of American Rose Society and a Vice-President of the Royal Horticultural Society.”

personal copy is now in the hands of the National Rose Society of Victoria. Alister's connections among the horticultural greats was matched by his racing connections, where he rubbed shoulders with the British Royal family.

In 1897, Alister and his wife visited his mother-in-law on holiday at Pau in the south of France. During this trip, Alister also visited the famous rose nursery of Clément Nabonnand at Mandelieu on the French Riviera and the Hanbury gardens at La Mortola, just across the Italian border. He wanted to acquire some of Nabonnand's breeding stock to bring back to Australia. And he also became interested in using *R. gigantea* in his hybridising. *R. gigantea* was a novelty: in his *List of Roses at Chateau Eléonore, Cannes* in 1898 Lord Brougham called it 'the most desirable and by far the finest single rose I have ever seen... and imported from upper Burmah at an altitude of 4 to 5000 feet and also from Manypore (Manipur) 2000 feet higher in north-eastern India.'

Alister used *R. gigantea* to produce many vigorous climbers.

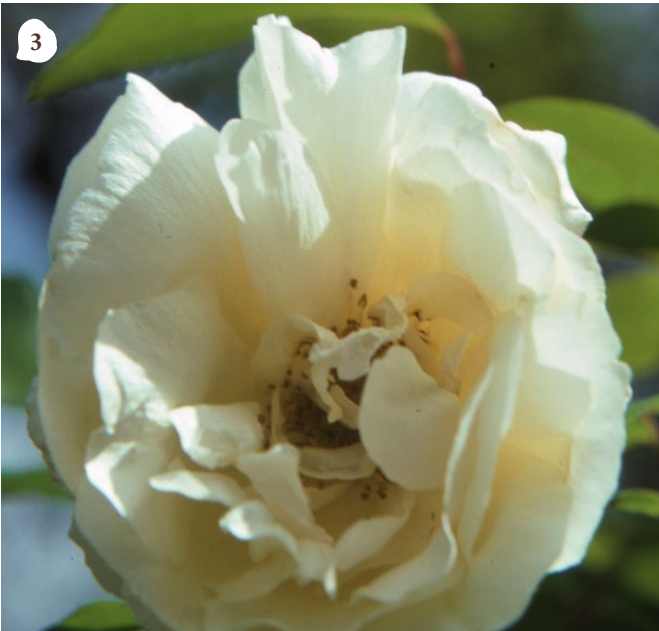
His knowledge was encyclopaedic and he sought roses that were suitable for the climate of Victoria. They should flower all the year around and not require pampering. They must be disease-free and decorative – roses for the garden, not the Show Bench – and be able to stand up to lack of water and hot summers. Alister was the first Australian to win the Dean Hole Medal for services to the rose, a life member of American Rose Society and a Vice-President of the Royal Horticultural Society.

Alister developed several distinct breeding lines. One was for drought-tolerant Polyanthas – 'Australia Felix' and 'Borderer' are still widely grown in Australian gardens. He also bred Hybrid Teas, including 'Lady Huntingfield' and 'Restless', recording his breeding programme of roses and daffodils in a black notebook, a stud record of all his hybridising that was mistakenly left out in the garden and destroyed by rain when he was very old. In 1932 there were over 5,000 entries of seedlings under test, of which about 150 were released and listed in catalogues. Alister did not breed commercially, even though some of his roses were planted at Bagatelle in Paris and Sangerhausen in Germany. Many were named after leading society figures of the time (for example 'Nancy Hayward' and 'Mrs Richard Turnbull') or given to rose societies for the purpose of raising funds. In 1915, he named 'Jessie Clark' for his sister. 'Lorraine Lee', a second-generation *Gigantea* hybrid, flowered so prolifically that



- 1. 'Australia Felix' [Clark, 1919] a Hybrid Polyantha
- 2. 'Lady Huntingdon' [Clark, 1937]
- 3. 'Traverser' [Clark, 1928] at Glenara
- 4. 'Mrs Richard Turnbull' [Clark, 1945]

Images: Eric Timewell / CC BY-SA 3.0, Di Durston and Charles Quest-Ritson





1. 'Lorraine Lee' [McKay, 1932], a climber
2. 'Lorraine Lee' [Clark, 1924]
3. 'Jessie Clark' [Clark, 1915]
4. 'Kitty Kininmonth' [Clark, 1922]
5. The Alister Clark Memorial Rose Garden, situated near to Glenara in Victoria. The roses in the middle distance are 'Kitty Kininmonth' [Clark, 1922] and 'Amy Johnson' [Clark, 1931].
6. The abandoned garden at Glenara in November 1997.

Images: Eric Timewell/CC BY-SA 3.0, Di Durston and Charles Quest-Ritson



the *Rose Annual* reported in 1932 that ‘Lorraine Lee’ had been shown at every meeting of the National Rose Society for twenty consecutive months.

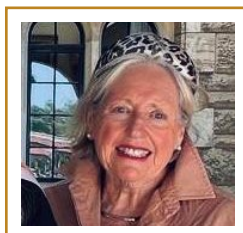
Alister’s roses lost favour after his death at Glenara in January 1949, just before his eighty-fifth birthday. By the 1980s only three were still widely available from Australian nurseries. More modern roses were thought to have more to offer. And some Clark roses are huge climbers that were considered too vigorous for modern gardens.

It was in 1983 that Tommy Garnett, the retired Headmaster of Geelong Grammar School, started to write about Alister’s life. Tommy had found ‘Lorraine Lee’, ‘Nancy Hayward’ and ‘Black Boy’ in a local nursery and mentioned them to a friend of his called Susan Irvine. Susan was an energetic, recently-retired headmistress from Melbourne, but she had never even heard of Alister Clark. Tommy suggested she might like to look out for Clark roses and make a collection in her garden at Bleak House on the Calder Highway near Melbourne. Susan took up the challenge. In the wilderness at Glenara she collected cuttings of 64 different roses, though not all were Alister’s own varieties, and started to travel to old or abandoned gardens across Victoria in search of his roses. One old lady of over eighty with a twinkle in her eye who reminisced about Alister said that she still had a nice selection of his roses at the bottom of her garden. It turned out to be the biggest collection of Clark roses

in one garden that Susan found. On other occasions she travelled many miles to find just one rose to save. Cicely Lascelles, a great golfer who played at Royal Melbourne Gold Club where Alister had been a foundation member, brought Susan a plant of the rose named after her. In all, Susan succeeded in finding 85 roses of the 122 varieties she sought.

Susan Irvine worked closely with Jon Nieuwesteeg, the nurseryman in the Yarra Valley and one of Australia’s leading rose scholars. He helped to identify them, then propagated them and put them back into commerce. Jon and Susan’s enthusiasm for this unique corner of Australia’s horticultural heritage had inspired Australian rose-lovers to recognise Alister Clark roses and to cherish them, though most of the grand old gardens where they flourished have passed away, and so have the personal connections to Alister Clark. All are agreed, however, that we must not lose these roses ever again. They are an irreplaceable part of our heritage. Susan passed away in 2019 in Tasmania, at the age of 91, but knowing that she had achieved her ambition of saving as many of Alister’s roses as possible.

“One old lady of over eighty with a twinkle in her eye who reminisced about Alister said that she still had a nice selection of his roses at the bottom of her garden.”



Di Durston is Western Australia’s leading heritage-rosarian and co-author of *Tea Roses: Old Roses for Warm Gardens*, [2008].



A rose garden from the bare veld

Jacqueline Kalley looks back on the creation of The Midlands Heritage Rose Garden in South Africa, which is preserving old roses.



Created and maintained by the Midlands Rose Society, the heritage rose garden on the Garlington Estate boasts over 146 different varieties of heritage roses, dating from the 1500s to 1945.

Image: Garlington Estate

Diary 2017: The newly levelled and fenced land on the Garlington Estate was dusty, brown and empty. A long stick, a tape measure, a mallet and a large ball of thick string were our main tools, along with lots of enthusiasm and camaraderie.

Our first task was to find the centre of the garden, which we accomplished quite quickly. Then we had to mark out a one-and-a-half metre path around the perimeter to accommodate two people walking comfortably side by side to view the roses, or to provide enough space for a lawnmower or wheelchair to be easily pushed around. Our trusty stick proved to be an excellent marker, but when we tried to spray-paint the tracks to delineate the path the white paint simply disappeared into the sand. We implemented Plan B, tying thick green string onto short stakes, all of which had to be hammered into the hard earth. As the area is 40 x 30 square metres this took some time. But a walkway eventually materialised out of the dust. Creating archways – six to form a tunnel at the entrance and three to form tunnels midway on each of the other sides – proved challenging.

The real geometrical test was to come – to create an oval in the middle of the garden. Several small drawings appeared in the sand and intense discussion on circles and intersecting concentric circles ensued. In the end it was quite easily done by creating a huge circle that touched the ends of the paths on two opposite sides of the ground



“The real geometrical test was to come – to create an oval in the middle of the garden.”

Above: Construction of the garden in 2017 with the Bobcat tractor in the background.

Below: An exhausted Gail Birss finishing the planting before the garden's opening.

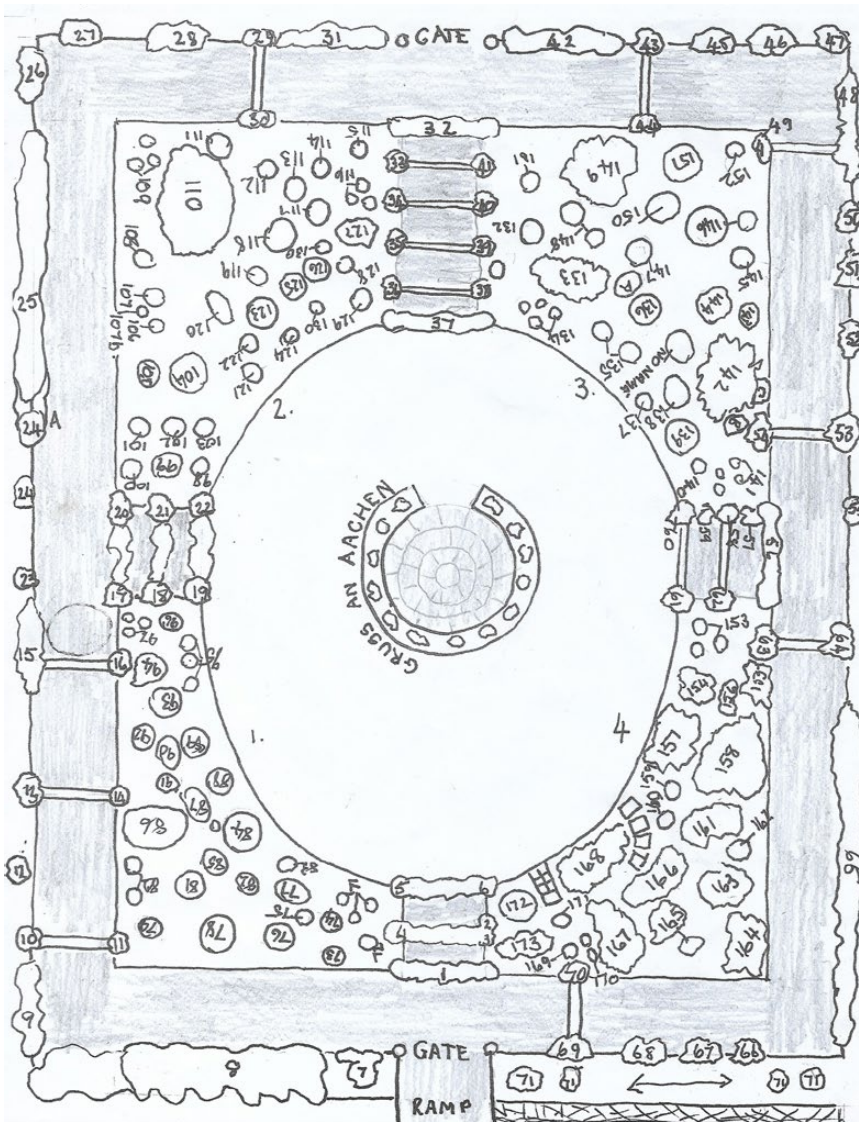
Images: Gail Birss



and drawing a freehand join to complete the oval. We again had to secure our markings with green string and bricks, dreading windy gusts that would blow away our carefully calculated work.

Taking shape

Bright yellow, small and cheeky, the Bobcat tractor tore into the impacted earth with great gusto ripping up large clods of soil and breaking them down. As the Bobcat had smudged the borders of our carefully calculated beds, we had to meet on site armed again with our tape measures. The real lure of the morning was the prospect of a vision manifesting itself. The arches and their side struts were stacked in the centre of the garden – an innocuous pile of metal with the potential of transformation. Holes were dug, the side struts erected, nuts and bolts applied, and the arch fixed in place. No concrete was used as roses



don't care for concrete. Excitingly, our entrance tunnel of six arches followed the master plan; the side arches went up quickly as our tactics were by now perfected; but the three-arched exit caused consternation. It was discovered that the gates for the entrance and exit were not opposite each other. After much debate, we eventually decided to call in the fencing firm to align the gates so that the arches would be aesthetically synchronised. The ground on the exit side proved so hard that the bottom horizontal on the strut was bent. Thwarted, we left the final tunnel-arch for another day.

Ludwig Taschner's driver offloaded a treasure trove of roses, placed in safe custody until they could be planted. However, that could not be done until the irrigation pipes had been installed. When, we did not know!

Planting party

The garden still looked bleak but by the beginning of September the grass had been planted in the oval centre and stone crush had been laid on the paths. This brought all the disparate parts together and it began to look like the garden we had envisaged. With the planting and the irrigation, the grass seeds in the soil began to sprout, necessitating the organisation of work parties to



Above left: The original drawing layout of the garden with each rose numbered in the planting arrangement. **Left:** 'Gruss an Aachen' around the Gazebo in the centre of the garden.

Images: Jacqueline Kalley and Gail Birss

“As the pioneers moved into the country’s interior, they took Bourbon, Gallica, Damask, Centifolia and Moss roses with them to plant on their farms and graves.”

weed and prepare the garden for the opening. It was amazing how the garden responded to the first Spring rains and, some plants gallantly rewarded us with flowers.

Origins

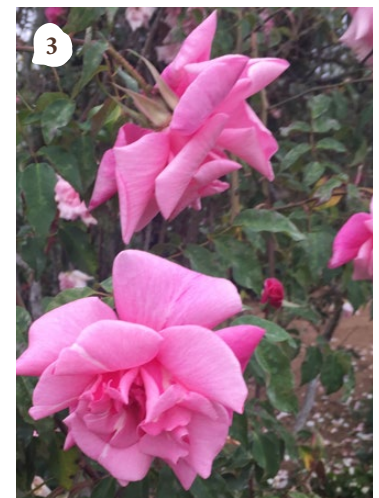
The idea of creating an Old Rose Garden in KwaZulu-Natal originated early in 2017, when Gill Wilson, Gail Birss and I decided to collect as many as possible of the old roses that had been brought to South Africa, beginning with the first roses brought to the Cape by the Dutch East India Company. In 1659, Jan van Riebeeck wrote in his diary: “Picked the first Dutch rose (a Centifolia) at the Cape from rose trees brought here in the past year.” As the pioneers moved into the country’s interior, they took Bourbon, Gallica, Damask, Centifolia and Moss roses with them to plant on their farms and graves.

Later the 1820 settlers arrived. Mainly from Great Britain, they brought cuttings with them to ward off homesickness and as a beautiful reminder of their homes. They often named them after the family member who had been responsible for transporting them. As their children grew up, married and



1. ‘Général Gallieni’ in front and ‘Phyllis Bide’ and ‘Mme Alfred Carrière’ in the background
2. “Stalkers Rose” an alias for ‘Marie van Houtte’ [Ducher, 1871]
3. ‘La Follette’ [Busby, 1910]

Images: Jacqueline Kalley and Gail Birss



moved away, they took cuttings with them, guided by the same feelings of nostalgia. The “Grandmother Wiggill 1820”, which was found all over the Eastern Cape, was later identified as *R. moschata plena*. The “Stalker Rose” – an alias for ‘Marie van Houtte’ – was named after an early teacher at Maritzburg College, the Reverend Stalker, who planted many of these roses in the school grounds.

The above are amongst the many treasures in the Rose Garden, all of them paying homage to the inspiration provided by earlier local lovers of Old Roses, Lyn Keppler, Claire Neville and Fay Clayton.

In the years following the planning, digging, and planting, Gail Birss and her small but dedicated team have devotedly tendered and cared

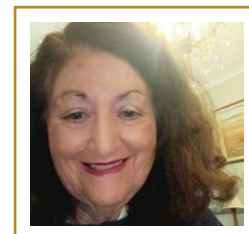
for the garden through drought, hail, wind and wild storms. It is now a showpiece with each cherished achievement marking the way forward. Each new acquisition has been joyously celebrated; each rose bush is labelled and the date on which it was raised is indicated; the Kikuyu grass lawn has been contained by metal dividers; and the original six entrance arches have become nine.

But, of course, it is the roses that take centre stage. The growth, after years of careful nurturing and monitoring, has been breath-taking and gives the impression of a garden established a long time ago. Many of the roses have been donated over the years, and it is a delight to be able to reciprocate. For example, Pietman Diener, from Rustenberg Manor in the Cape,

came to visit the garden armed with cuttings, and left equally as laden with cuttings of roses that they do not have in that spectacular garden. There are now one hundred and sixty different varieties of Old Roses represented; they range from Albas, Bourbons and Centifolia, to the Teas, and others in shapes shrublike, small or tall, while the arches stand proud with their trophy roses. Colours of the roses are evident in each corner and gradually meld from pink, then yellow, cream and white, going to deeper shades. The underplanting complements the roses and the swirl of pansies, Shirley poppies, verbascum, perennial linaria and others of that ilk, provide a dreamlike impression. When the garden is in full flush of shape, form, colour and of course, perfume, it is like walking in a perfect world from which one never wants to leave.

Below left: ‘FJ Grootendorst’ [De Goey, 1918]. Below right: ‘Cornelia’ [Pemberton, 1925]

Images: Garlington Estate



Jacqueline Kalley is Pietermaritzburg, South African born and bred. She attended the universities of the Witwatersrand and Natal where she obtained both her undergraduate and PhD degrees. A librarian by training, she is CEO of Otterley Press and was editor of the ROSA Annual for three years. She has served as Secretary of the Gold Reef Rose Society and Chairman of the Heritage Rose Society of South Africa.

A gun, a bible and some seeds

Barry Slabbert



Imagine an ox-wagon in 1836, its wooden wheels creaking under the weight of everything a family needed to begin again. Dust curls from the Cape's dry tracks as it inches northward. Tucked inside a simple kist (or 'chest') – between a well-thumbed family bible, a gun, and strips of biltong – lie something far more fragile: a few rose cuttings wrapped carefully in damp linen.

A Voortrekker mother had snipped them from her grandmother's garden in the Boland. They were more than plants; they were living memories of home, defiant splashes of colour against the endless veld, and perhaps a quiet source of vitamin-rich hips to ease the journey's hardships.

These were no pampered modern hybrids. They were the tough, old heritage roses of the Cape: fragrant Damasks with their heady perfume, once-blooming Gallicas in deep crimsons and velvety purples, blowsy Centifolias – the true cabbage roses, heavy with petals – and the early China roses that astonished everyone by flowering again and again, even through our subtropical summers.

Moss and Persian roses were also noted to have made the journey into the unknown. The Voortrekkers travelled light on many things but

hope rode with them in every bundle. And roses, with their perfect blend of beauty and resilience, embodied quiet optimism.

As families pushed inland – British 1820 settlers into the Eastern Cape, then Voortrekkers heading north into Natal, the Free State and the Transvaal – they left a living trail of petals and thorns.

Cuttings and seeds travelled in those wagons, just as old stories and diary fragments recall: “a gun, a bible, some seeds.” The roses were practical as well as lovely. Their hips eased ailments and sweetened preserves; their scent lifted weary spirits after days of dust, danger and relentless sun.

The routes were unforgiving. Most parties set out from the eastern Cape districts – Grahamstown, Uitenhage, Graaff-Reinet – and converged near Thaba Nchu, the welcoming Barolong stronghold that served as a kind of crossroads. From there the paths diverged: some northwest toward the Highveld and eventual Transvaal, others toward the Orange River. Those bound for Natal faced the sternest test – the steep, heart-stopping descent of the Drakensberg escarpment. To ease the heavy kakebeenwaens ('jawbone wagons') down those precipices, they removed

“Cuttings and seeds travelled in those wagons, just as old stories and diary fragments recall: “a gun, a bible, some seeds.””

Previous page:

Limpopo scene – The Malikoe-Marico Ford, in Transvaal, South Africa. Engraved by Hildibrand; drawn by Alfred Paris, 1885

Image: Antiqua Print Gallery/
Alamy

the hind wheels and lashed thick branches beneath as makeshift brakes. One slip, and the wagon could plunge to destruction.

They used passes near what became Oliviershoek and the dramatic stretch around Van Reenen's Pass – the same N3 corridor between Harrismith and Ladysmith today – following ancient game trails through the mountains. It was back-breaking, perilous work: laagers formed at night for protection, oxen straining, children lending small hands where they could. Yet the trekkers pressed on, carrying their fragile cargo of hope.

Dr Gwen Fagan, the beloved rose historian and honorary president of the Heritage Rose Society of South Africa, captured much of this living legacy in her book *Roses at the Cape of Good Hope*. She showed how many of our surviving old-rose “mother stocks” still grow on remote Eastern Cape farms and in forgotten graveyards – places the early trekkers passed or settled. These plants endure because they are genuinely tough. They shrug off drought, poor soil and long neglect. While modern hybrid teas sulk at the slightest stress, (luckily new varieties are being released that have the resilience of the heritage roses) these old soldiers simply bloom on, season after season, generation after generation.



'Old Blush' growing in Barry's own garden. This is a descendant from cuttings that he took in his teens on a family holiday to Lisbon farm just outside Van Reenan, South Africa.

Image: Barry Slabbert

“While modern hybrid teas sulk at the slightest stress... these old soldiers simply bloom on, season after season, generation after generation.”

Some of these hardy survivors earned local nicknames that still echo through gardens and stories. In the high, rolling hills of Wakkerstroom – long celebrated for its spectacular rose displays – the vigorous rambler 'Dorothy Perkins' became affectionately known as the “Wakkerstroom Rose”. Introduced long after the Great Trek, this American beauty was never a Voortrekker rose that travelled north in 1836. Yet it found a perfect home here, its cascades of soft pink blooms turning trees and fences into clouds of colour. It thrived so reliably that the town itself feels like a living rose garden,

and the name “Wakkerstroom Rose” is now spoken with the same loving familiarity as any heirloom.

I carry my own small thread of this trekker history. I still remember the day my grandfather taught me to take cuttings from an old China rose on the farm called Lisbon, just outside Van Reenen – right in the shadow of those same Drakensberg routes the Voortrekkers once descended. We spent weekends and holidays there with friends as teenagers in the ancient farmhouse.

Beside the sheds, under a stand of blue gums, stood a tough old bush that had clearly been there for decades. I was still in high school. I wrapped those cuttings exactly as Oupa showed me.

That rose proved to be ‘Old Blush’ – also called the “Monthly Rose” or ‘Parsons’ Pink’ – one of the earliest repeat-flowering Chinas to reach the West and a true workhorse in South African gardens. Its descendants have bloomed in my own garden for more than 20 years. I’ve propagated dozens and shared them with friends and fellow gardeners. They flower reliably, carrying a sweet scent of fresh tea and apples, asking for almost nothing in return.

When I last visited Lisbon, the original plant had finally surrendered. The blue gums had

crowded in, and years of drought and overgrazing had tipped the scales. Standing there, not far from the historic wagon trails that once rang with the creak of ox-wagon wheels and voices of determined trekkers, I felt a quiet pang of loss.

Yet heritage roses teach a deeper lesson: nothing lasts forever unless we choose to carry it forward. Those schoolboy cuttings still bloom today, quietly linking one small farm – and the larger trekker story – to the future.

In our time of water scarcity and shifting climates, these Voortrekker roses offer more than nostalgia. They are living proof of resilience – surviving the Great Trek’s droughts, dust storms, river crossings and jolting wagons without irrigation or chemicals.

Beauty and toughness rode together in the same wagon, down the same steep passes. Places like the Bedford Rosarium and the Midlands Heritage Rose Garden are already safeguarding many of these treasures, propagating them so future generations can plant “Trek roses” in their own spaces, helping to ensure the roses of the Voortrekkers keep opening under South African skies for another two centuries.

“Yet heritage roses teach a deeper lesson: nothing lasts forever unless we choose to carry it forward.”



Barry Slabbert is a multidisciplinary artist and garden designer with over 20 years’ experience shaping gardens across South Africa’s varied landscapes. Based in Ladysmith, KwaZulu-Natal, Barry cultivates rare and unusual species. Obsessed with roses since childhood, he serves on the committees of the Heritage Rose Society of South Africa and the Midlands Rose Society.

The conservation of heritage roses in Uruguay

The 'Duarte de Oliveira' case

Inés Díaz de Licandro



“Heritage roses teach a deeper lesson: nothing lasts forever unless we choose to carry it forward.”

‘Duarte de Oliveira’
in the garden of
Mrs. Jovita Courdin

Image: Inés Díaz de Licandro



Over the last few years I have been researching Uruguay’s heritage roses, focusing mainly on listing, identifying, propagating and conserving them, while also emphasising their cultural importance. At the moment, I am working on a programme involving the principal heritage roses found in Uruguay, fostering their reproduction and promotion, and encouraging a sense of ownership in the communities where they are located.

My first step is to select rare or representative roses in approximately 30 locations in Uruguay with the aim of propagating them. At the same time, we try to make contact with the relevant authorities to ensure that the selected roses are valued, properly cared for and, later, declared to be a botanical asset that is part of their cultural heritage. All this involves not just the owners and growers but also their communities who, with a sense of belonging, cherish these special ‘local roses’ for their intrinsic beauty and, in particular, for the cultural ties to their ancestors and their local history that they represent.

After they have been chosen and propagated, the roses are planted in suitable public places where they can be maintained and conserved by the relevant local authority. In all cases, backup mother plants are kept and, if there are any surpluses, the propagated plants are sold to interested parties, perhaps by a closed auction, with the aim of spreading these heritage varieties in different parts of the country.

Roses as Cultural Heritage botanical assets

In August 2023, the municipal government of Dolores in western Uruguay pioneered our work by declaring the pink Hybrid Tea rose located in Plaza Constitución to be a ‘heritage asset’, following a civic resolution.

Subsequently, I was able to promote, with help from the Colonia Valdense Branch of the Uruguayan Rose Association (AUR), a similar declaration regarding the Noisette rose 'Duarte de Oliveira'.

When I first encountered this magnificent specimen in May 2024, I immediately included it in the inventory of Uruguay's heritage roses without knowing its identity. I gave it a working name "COCV001-Centenaria Jovita", referring to its owner, Mrs Jovita Courdin Stemphelet. It is in her family's garden that the huge rose bush has stood for almost a hundred years. Mrs Courdin generously allowed me to take samples of the plant for botanical analysis, as well as for the Colonia Valdense branch of the AUR to organise its propagation at a specialist nursery in Uruguay. The rose was quickly identified as the Noisette 'Duarte

“When I first encountered this magnificent specimen in May 2024, I immediately included it in the inventory of Uruguay's heritage roses without knowing its identity.”

de Oliveira' by Ms. María Fernanda Otero, the horticultural expert in charge of the Montevideo Rose Garden. Following this, the Colonia Valdense Branch of the AUR approached the municipal authorities of Colonia, which culminated on 19 March 2026 with a Departmental Resolution (No. 230/026) and an expression of 'Departmental Interest'. The rose was ceremonially planted on 5 March in Libertad Square and declared to be part of the cultural heritage of the city. This event was attended

by municipal officials from Colonia, as well as members of the AUR and its branches. It demonstrates that a rose can be a heritage asset.

The "Centenaria Jovita" rose is cherished by its owner because it is a legacy from her ancestors, who arrived in Uruguay from Piemonte, Italy, at the end of the 19th century. A witness to the past, the gigantic plant represents a personal pride and affection which have now been passed on to the community. Members of the Colonia Valdense rose group are glad of its recognition as an item of local heritage and have spread this pride to the whole Valdense community. Planting the rose in the main square of the city (Plaza de la Libertad) means that it can be enjoyed by all citizens and preserved for the future.

The recognition of two heritage roses by local governments is an



Asociación Uruguaya de la Rosa, Colonia Valdense Branch members with 'Duarte de Oliveira' just planted at Colonia Valdense Liberty Square.

Image: Inés Díaz de Licandro

important step in the process of valuing all roses introduced to the country in past centuries. And it is a process that other towns and municipalities can emulate.

I'm always intrigued by the names of roses. In many cases, they are witness to links between their breeder and his or her contemporaries, as is the case with 'Duarte de Oliveira,' named in honour of José Duarte de Oliveira Junior.

José Duarte de Oliveira Junior, was born in Vitória, Porto, Portugal, in 1848 and died in 1927. As the son of a prosperous textile merchant, he was sent to England to study commerce. After his return from London, he went on to become a successful businessman, expanding his father's family business by founding the *Grandes Armazéns do Carmo* department store. He also

“The recognition of two heritage roses by local governments is an important step in the process of valuing all roses introduced to the country in past centuries.”

cultivated vines and made wine on land inherited from his mother. However, his real passion lay in horticulture, an area in which he excelled all through his life. He had no descendants beyond a red camellia with white spots, bred by José Marques Loureiro in 1871 in his honour.

The prestigious Porto publication *O Jornal de Horticultura Prática* was founded by the renowned José Marques Loureiro – an important Portuguese horticulturist and

owner of the *Horto das Virtudes* – jointly with Duarte de Oliveira Junior, who became its editor for 17 years. The founding of this prestigious publication on gardening and agricultural topics stemmed from a general interest in gardening within society at the time. A passionate group of gardeners had grown up within wealthy families who owned country estates and built grand country houses and gardens.

In addition to being editor of *O Jornal de Horticultura Prática*, the multi-talented Duarte de Oliveira Junior was a member of several academic institutions and a correspondent for such organisations as *Journal des Roses*, the *Royal Association of Agriculture and Botany* of Ghent, and the *Belgian Arboricultural Association*. In 1880 he was vice-president of the General Jury of Horticulture at the Brussels Universal Exposition. He was also the author of various articles in the *Almanaque do Horticultor*, the popular book *O Jardim na Sala* (1876), and others such as *O Campo e o Jardim* (1873) and *Diccionario de las Peras Portuguesas* (1880).

Duarte de Oliveira's ironic, elegant and witty books and articles captivated the better-off readers of his day. And they fostered horticultural knowledge, gardening skills and the maintenance of public spaces. He also developed a great interest in camellias, particularly those native to his country, known as the 'Portuguese camellias,' which were frequently mentioned in his monthly columns for *O Jornal de Horticultura Prática*.



Above left: José Duarte de Oliveira. **Above right:** *Jornal de Horticultura Prática*, Porto, Portugal Volume XV, 1894

Images: Inés Díaz de Licandro

Eighteen famous varieties, created by Marques Loureiro and named after members of the Braganza dynasty, were exhibited at the 1865 International Exhibition at the Palácio de Cristal in Porto. Duarte de Oliveira also took part in rose-related activities, including the annual Portuguese Rose Festival – at the 1891 Festival he lavished praised upon the yellow-flowered ‘Maréchal Niel’ rose.

The personal achievements of this man from Porto earned him great national and international recognition. It was his friend the Marques Loureiro who named one of his camellias ‘Duarte de Oliveira’. A begonia, a caladium,

“Duarte was a polyglot who travelled all over Europe during the golden age of Portuguese gardening.”

and a canna lily bear his name, as does a dahlia bred by Sousa Pires.

Duarte was a polyglot who travelled all over Europe during the golden age of Portuguese gardening. He had contacts with many important figures in European horticulture, which may explain why François Brassac, a rose breeder from Toulouse, named one of his creations ‘Duarte de

Oliveira’, a gesture for which the man himself expressed his gratitude in *O Jornal de Horticultura Prática*, 1879, volume 10, page 56.

The ‘Duarte de Oliveira’ rose

‘Duarte de Oliveira’ is a rose bred in 1878 by François Brassac (c. 1844–1903) and launched in 1880. Brassac was a nurseryman at 17 Faubourg Bonnefoy, Toulouse; he later owned a nursery in Grand-Rond, in the same city, where he sold fruit trees and shrubs, forestry trees, ornamental trees, and roses, among other plants. Other notable Hybrid Perpetual roses developed at his establishment were ‘Exposition de Toulouse’



Above left: ‘Duarte de Oliveira’. **Above right:** Botanical analysis of ‘Duarte de Oliveira’

Images: Inés Díaz de Licandro

(1873), 'Louis Brassac' (1872), and 'Triomphe de Toulouse' (1873).

Brassac also bred an almond variety in 1872 and a strawberry variety in 1896 ('Tardive de Toulouse'). His renown earned him the honour of Chevalier for his 27 years of experience. He died in 1903 (obituary in *Journal des Roses*, 1903).

The 'Duarte de Oliveira' rose belongs to the Noisette class. The flowers are salmon-pink with coppery tones and a moderate fragrance, medium to large in size (average diameter of 8 cm) and full (26-40 petals), borne repeatedly in clusters throughout the season. It is a very vigorous climbing plant with arching branches that reach 1.5 to 2 m in height. The parents of 'Duarte de Oliveira' were 'Ophiré' × 'Rêve d'Or': the former was a Noisette rose with coppery yellow and salmon-orange tints, with pink outer petals; the latter is a Tea-Noisette with yellow tones and coppery tints.



Inés Díaz de Licandro is Vice-President for South America at the World Federation of Rose Societies and Chair of the Federation's Conservation & Heritage Committee.

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Rosier Noisette Duarte de Oliveira. *Journal des Roses* 1891, June, p. 88 (Chromolithography)

Rosier Noisette Duarte de Oliveira, *Journal des Roses* 1891, June, p. 89.

"...Very vigorous. It can be used to advantage in the Midi of France, against walls, pillars, or to adorn the trunks of large trees. Its splendour is most apparent in autumn, when it is covered with an abundance of large, salmon-pink flowers with coppery petal-backs. The rose was raised by François Brassac, a horticulturist from Toulouse, by fertilizing 'Ophiré' with 'Rêve d'Or'. The pollen from 'Rêve d'Or' was used to fertilize 5 flowers of 'Ophiré', of which only one produced a hip, containing 8 good achenes. These were sown in December 1876; of the 8, 5 took root, and only 1 produced worthwhile flowers; the other four were abandoned. The 'Duarte de Oliveira' rose was dedicated to the well-known editor of the *Jornal de Agricultura Pratica*, of Porto, Rua da Carmo No. 6, Correspondent for *Journal des Roses*. It was launched in November 1880 by its breeder. P. du Plouy."

Acknowledgement from Duarte de Oliveira to the breeder. *Jornal de Horticultura Pratica* 1879, vol. 10, p. 56

Editor's Postscript

Several roses bred by Brassac are grown in historic rose collections but are no longer available in commerce. It would be good to reintroduce such beauties as the crimson Hybrid Perpetual 'Marguerite Brassac' [1874], the charming Hybrid China rose 'Ville de Toulouse' [1876] and palest apricot-pink 'Hérodiade' [1888], which is a seedling of 'Duarte de Oliveira'. Perhaps even more desirable is a very fine colour sport of 'Duarte de Oliveira' called 'Gruss an Friedberg' which was introduced by Rogmanns in the Mosel valley in 1902 and still grows at Sangerhausen, where it is trained up a rustic pole. 'Gruss an Friedberg' used to be available from Martin Weingart's nursery in Bad Langensalza and should certainly be widely grown in Mediterranean climates round the world.



'Gruss an Friedberg' [Rogmanns, 1902]

Image: Charles Quest-Ritson

Honouring influential rosarians

Helga Brichet

Zhang Zuoshuang and Laurie Newman beside the 'Zhang Zuo Shuang' rose.

Image: Helga Brichet



Zhang Zuoshuang

Zhang Zuoshuang was born in Laoting, in the province of Hebei, in 1946. It was a time of great internal upheaval in China after the Second World War. Shortly after his birth, Zhang's father, a medical doctor, decided to leave for Taiwan, where he resided for 40 years, returning to Beijing only in 1988 to be reunited with his family.

This family background cast a shadow over the development of the young boy's growth in that era. Therefore, after finishing junior high school at the age of 16, he joined the Beijing Botanical Garden (now the North Garden of the China National Botanical Garden), as a landscape worker in 1962.

At the time conditions were extremely harsh, and Zhang's initial work consisted of manual labour – planting trees, applying fertiliser and tending to the orchard in the spring while cutting grass on the mountains in the autumn. A decade of valid practical experience in plant maintenance and cultivation, plus the studying of pomology in his spare time and the care of the fruit tree experimental area, set him in good stead for progression eventually to director of the garden.

One of his biggest achievements there was to have the botanic garden included in Beijing's key construction projects so that funds could be allocated to reclaim 33.3 hectares of adjoining land. This included the relocation of four natural villages of over 100 rural centres and the demolition of more than 1,000 houses within the garden's premises. Relocating the residents was an arduous task, but this became a significant milestone in the history of the garden's development. The garden's two main entrances, the rose garden and the administrative office buildings are all located on the reclaimed land, allowing the overall management of the area to become significantly more efficient and convenient.

One of the garden's core missions is the collection of living plant material. Zhang has long focused on introducing rose species and cultivars, with old garden roses as a key priority. He personally led teams to various regions of the country to collect more than ten thousand plants for the rose garden's initial layout. He was also helped by the generous support of his Australian friend, Laurie Newman.

Helga Brichet with Zhang (centre)

Image: Helga Brichet



Laurie Newman

Newman, who died in 2023, was the Australian National Rose Cultivar Registrar. He founded Reliable Roses, a nursery specialising in wild rose species and old garden roses. Starting in the 1980s, he began studying Chinese, firmly believing that China represented the future of the world. In 1998, he visited the Beijing Botanical Garden for the first time and met Zhang.

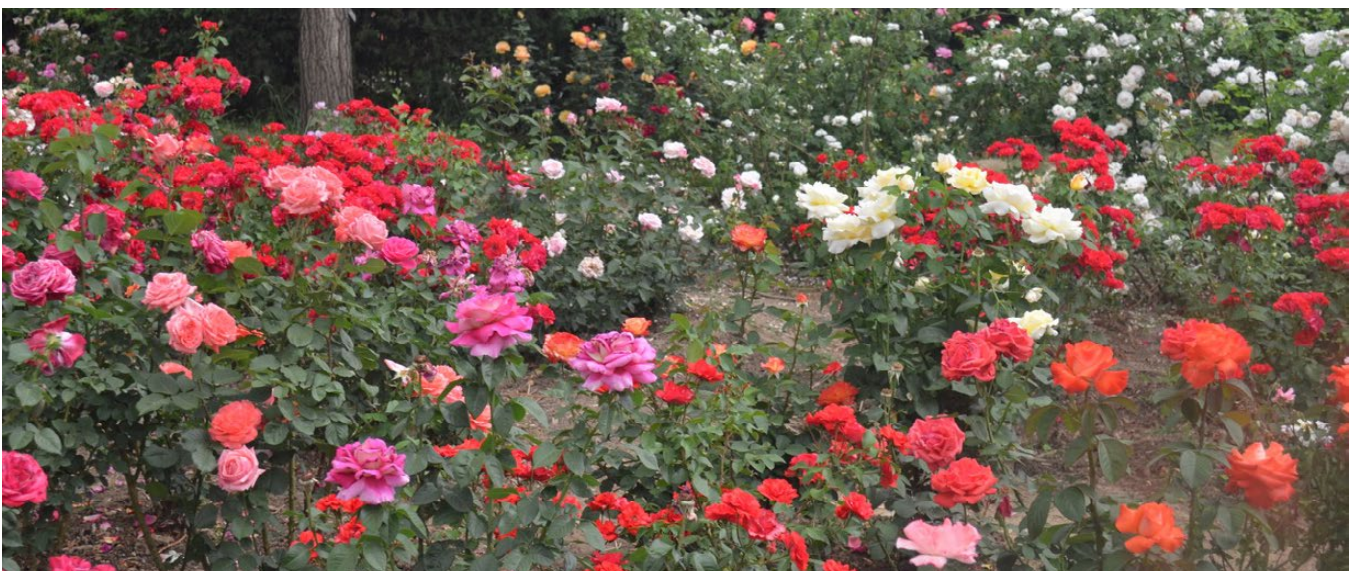
Moved by Zhang's broad vision, Newman offered to donate 300 old garden rose accessions to help elevate the rose garden to international standards.

Between 1998 and 2005, Newman travelled to Beijing ten times, donating more than 700 plants, representing 400 old garden rose taxa. These rare roses, donated at no cost, covered diverse groups: European and Central Asian wild species such as *R. damascena*, *R. alba*, and *R. gallica*; historic cultivars including Bourbon roses, hybrid perpetuals, and 'La France', the first modern rose. Among them were several old Chinese rose cultivars that had been lost in China, as well as varieties introduced to the country for the first time. These plants serve as both valuable teaching materials and important genetic resources for breeding.

Below: Zhang and Laurie in Daxing.

Bottom: Rose beds in the Beijing Botanical Garden. Laurie made many visits to the garden to share his knowledge of caring for old roses with the workers.

Images: Helga Brichet and Derek Lawrence



Friendship

In 1999 Zhang was elected President of the China Rose Society, which soon after became a member of the WFRS. In May 2003, the Old Garden Rose Garden at the Beijing Botanical Garden was completed and named the China–Australia Friendship Rose Garden.

The establishment of the Old Garden Rose Garden elevated the Beijing Botanical Garden’s rose collection to world-class status. In 2015, at the 17th World Rose Convention held in Lyon, France, it received the Award of Garden Excellence from the WFRS.

Driven by Zhang’s efforts, Changzhou in 2010, Beijing in 2016 and Nanyang in 2019 successfully hosted Regional Conferences. The 17th International Heritage Rose Conference took place in Nanyang and Shanghai this year and the prestigious World Rose convention will take place in Hangzhou in April, 2031.

Each international rose event in China has spurred the creation of exquisite rose gardens, most of which, such as the Zijing Park in Changzhou and the world’s largest rose garden, (66.6 hectares) in Nanyang, have then received Garden of Excellence awards from the Federation. Special mention must be made of the Rose Garden and the World Rose Museum which were developed in Daxing, Beijing, and which integrate scientific research, cultivar conservation and tourism and have not only beautified urban landscapes but also elevated the cities’ profiles.

Zhang was awarded the 2018 Lifetime Achievement Award for China’s Botanical Gardens. In 2023 he wrote his much-appreciated autobiography, “Chasing Dreams in the Botanical Garden for Sixty Years”.

Zhang is blessed with an extraordinary memory, and countless friends around the world have found a sincere friend in this kind and generous gentleman.

To express his gratitude for Director Zhang’s trust and friendship, Newman named a rose he bred, ‘Zhang Zuo Shuang’, which also bears the name ‘China Sunrise’. This cultivar won a Silver Medal at the 2005 National Rose Society of Australia International Trial Ground Awards.

In turn, Beijing Botanical Garden (China National Botanical) bred a new rose cultivar, ‘Laurie’ in memory of Laurie Newman’s invaluable support for its old garden rose introduction program – an appropriate gesture to honour this cross-border friendship and shared passion for roses.



Helga Brichet is a distinguished rosarian, plant-hunter and lecturer. She is passionate about introducing rose lovers in the western hemisphere to old and historical roses from China. Helga is President Emeritus of the WFRS.



Laurie and Zhang opening the China–Australia Friendship Rose Garden with Jenny Sparks from the Australian Embassy

Image: Helga Brichet



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