The plant collectors

Travel and exploration in the last century was often arduous and dangerous. Travel with plant collections must have been a very stressful business as exotic plants plucked from the tropics needed to be nurtured through numerous changes in weather and temperature. Whole plant collections were often lost due to these changes and Peter Veitch lost a whole collection from Fiji when the ship transporting them was lost in a gale. With all of the problems in mind it is a wonder that much of what we see and take for granted in our parks and gardens today originated elsewhere.

The house of Veitch employed twenty-two recognised plant hunters and these included three members of the Veitch family, John Gould, James Herbert and Peter, who went on to run the Exeter nurseries. Many of these collectors had their moments of glory, but four of them were prolific and in the Lobb brothers and Ernest Wilson the Veitchs had some of the greatest collectors of all time.

William Lobb was born in 1809 near Wadebridge in Cornwall. It would be true to say that his contribution to any typical plant catalogue has been immense. Employed with great vision by James Veitch, his first voyage of discovery started at Falmouth in November 1840 and took him to Brazil, the Andes and Chile. Initially it was the multitude of fuchsias, orchids and other exotics returned to Mount Radford that kept the nursery busy, but Berberis Darwinii, Ceanothus x veitchianus, Escallonia macrantha, Crindodendron hookerianum, Desfontainea spinosa and the lovely rose 'William Lobb' all represented here, soon followed. Despite the huge range of plants he collected for his employers, he will probably be best remembered for the commercial introduction of Auracaria auracana, the 'monkey puzzle' tree from Chile and the massive Sequoiadendron giganteum from North America which can be seen in most notable landscapes around Exeter. A particularly interesting specimen can be seen at the location of Gras Lawn and is protected by a Tree Preservation Order.



Fremontendron californicum



Ceanothus x veitchianus



Thomas Lobb worked at the Mount Radford nursery and was sent on his first voyage just three years after his brother left for South America. Thomas concentrated his efforts throughout India, Malaya, Singapore and Java and has a long list of notable introductions to his name including orchids, pitcher plants, rhododendrons and lilies. He is represented in this garden by Thuja plicata 'Lobbii' which was introduced by his brother William.

Ernest Wilson was known as 'China Wilson' because of his sorties in that vast country. In one year he sent seeds from 671 different species of plant as well as bulbs and rhizomes back to Mount Radford. He is represented in this garden by Berberis wilsoniae and Actinidia chinensis, but was also responsible for numerous acers, vines, viburnums, magnolias, spiraeas, roses and the delightful Davidia involucrata.

Charles Maries was an academic and collector who spent much of his time in China, Japan and India. He was a Fellow of the Linnean Society and one of the many people associated with Veitch to receive the Victoria Medal of Honour. His travels in India led to employment as the Superintendent of the Gardens for the Maharajah of Durbhungah and the Maharajah of Gwalior where he died in 1902. He is represented in this garden by Hammamellis mollis, Viburnum plicatum 'Mariesii' and Hydrangea 'Mariesii'.





/iburnum plicatum

List of Messrs Veitch's travellers and the countries they visited

Richard Pearce	Chile, Peru and Bolivia	1859 - 1866
John Gould Veitch	Japan, South Sea Islands and Australia	1860 - 1870
David Bowman	Brazil	1866
Henry Hutton	Java and the Malay Archipelago	1866 - 1868
Carl Kramer	Japan and Costa Rica	1867 - 1868
Gottlieb Zahn	Central America	1869 - 1870
George Downton	Central and South America	1870 - 1873
J Henry Chesterton	South America	1870 - 1878
A R Endres	Costa Rica	1871 - 1873
Gustave Wallis	Brazil, New Granada, Tropical South America	1872 - 1874
Walter Davis	South America	1873 - 1876
P C M Veitch	Australia, South Sea Island & Borneo	1875 - 1878
Guillaume Kalbreyer	West Coast of Africa, Columbia South Amercia	1876 - 1881
Christopher Mudd	South Africa	1877
F W Burbridge	Borneo	1877 - 1878
Charles Curtis	Madagascar, Borneo, Sumatra, Java and the Moluccas	1878 - 1884
David Burle	East Indies, Burma and Columbia	1881 - 1897
James H Veitch	India, Malaysia, Japan, Korea and the Australian	
	Colonies and New Zealand	1891 - 1893

Viburnum rhytidophyllum