Crossing the Pond: The Draper, the Farmer and the Garden Makers
A talk to the Garden History Society February 2013 by Kath Clark

The theme of this year's series of Garden History Society lectures is internationalism, and so this first lecture focuses on one of the most important international horticultural relationships of the eighteenth century, resulting in a business venture which ensured that the gardens and landscapes of Britain would never look the same again. [SLIDE: Bartram and Collinson] I am of course referring to the partnership of John Bartram, a farmer in Philadelphia, and Peter Collinson, a draper in London, and their trade in plants and seeds from North America to Britain from the 1730s to the 1770s.

Bartram agreed to collect seeds and plants from the eastern seaboard of North America, pack them into boxes and send them by sea to Collinson, who would in turn distribute them to subscribers. The basic cost of a box of about 100 seeds was 5 guineas (up to £500 in today's money), but some subscribers would also get special commissions outside the box scheme. This extraordinary business partnership started in about 1733 to 1734 and continued until Collinson's death in 1768 and Bartram's in 1777. Bartram's sons John and William continued sending plants and seeds to Europe after their father's death and produced a catalogue in 1789, and the business continued through a third generation until well into the 19th century. However, for today's lecture I am concentrating on the start of the exchange and the period to Collinson's death in 1768[1].

Their efforts, and those of their more than 100 subscribers, ensured that a steady supply of new and interesting plants from the New World would fill gardens and nurseries across the country. It also provided an opportunity to learn more about how the plants grew in their native soil, to help acclimatise them to the British conditions, and enabled a broader spectrum of keen naturalists and gardeners to indulge a passion for growing 'exotic' new plants from the other side of the world.

[SLIDE: Jamestown, early settlers, Virginia Company]
I'd like to start by going back in time a little, because, of course, Bartram and Collinson were not the first to introduce plants from North America. From the beginnings of colonial exploration and the settlement of Jamestown in Virginia, tales and samples of strange new plants had found their way back to Britain. With the creation of the Virginia Company in 1607, and regular ships crossing the Atlantic for trade and passengers, there was a way of getting the new finds back to the home country, for the 'curious' to investigate. It was therefore becoming possible to obtain viable seed and live plants, so they could be grown and sold on by British gardeners and nurserymen.

[SLIDE: John Tradescant the Elder]
One example of this new trade can be found in the work of the John Tradescants, father and son, who were collecting seeds and plants from Europe, Russia and Asia as well as the recently established colonies in North America. The publication by John the younger (with Elias Ashmole) of the *Musaeum Tradescantium* in 1656 revealed the extent and variety of their collection of 'curiosities', including plants, at what was known as 'The Ark' in Lambeth. John senior had begun to receive plants from North America via subscription to the Virginia Company, and contacts, in both England and France, that he had made through his employment by the Duke of Buckingham (Lord Admiral to England under
James I): one of these new plants was the spiderwort, *Tradescantia virginiana*; it is also possible that he received the False Acacia (*Robinia pseudoacacia*). [SLIDE: John the Younger] Then, in 1637, John the younger made his first voyage to Virginia, where he stayed for a year, returning in June 1638, having found and collected over two hundred new plants, including the Swamp Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*), the Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*) and the Tulip Tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*).

[1] Edward Berkeley & Dorothy Smith Berkeley, *The Life and Travels of John Bartram*, (University of Florida Press, 1982).

[SLIDE: Bishop Compton]

The next major influence on the collection, introduction and distribution of North American plants was Henry Compton (1632-1713), Bishop of London from 1675, who created a garden of exotic trees and shrubs at Fulham Palace, many collected from Virginia by his clergyman, John Banister (1654-92). Compton not only propagated and produced hardy plants from the colonies in his own garden he also made them available to the great Brompton Park Nursery of London and Wise. With clients within the royal family and the aristocracy, George London and Henry Wise ensured that the new 'exotics' would soon populate some of the most important estates of the day. When Compton died in 1713, some of these trees and shrubs were bought by nurserymen Robert Furber of Kensington and Christopher Gray in Fulham, of whom more later.

[SLIDE: Catesby]

By now the growing interest in plant introductions, particularly from the North American colonies, was becoming a passion, fuelled by the publication, in instalments, of Mark Catesby's *The Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands*, (1731-1743), with exquisite illustrations of plants, animals and birds he had seen[2]. Catesby travelled to the American colonies first in 1712, and then again in 1722, this time sponsored by William Sherard, Sir Hans Sloane and other senior botanists. As well as notes and sketches which formed the basis of drawings for the book, he sent both live and dry plant specimens back to his sponsors, and is credited with introducing a number of American trees and shrubs to Britain, including the Indian Bean Tree (*Catalpa bignoniodes*). So the stage is now set for the entrance of the two players who turned this cottage industry into an international business venture.

[SLIDE: Quakers]

When I began this talk, I referred to its two central characters as 'a farmer' and 'a draper', which might sound like an unlikely combination for such an enduring friendship, especially given a separation of 3,000 miles. Apart from their abiding curiosity in all living things, and the desire to collect, grow and distribute new plants as a business venture, it was their shared Quaker faith which informed much of their thinking and response to the natural world. This was the cement which helped to create their relationship and hold it for 40 years. From its beginnings, Quakerism had a respect for the natural world. To quote from the text of *Quaker Faith and Practice*:

> '*We do not own the world, and its riches are not ours to dispose of at will. Show me a loving consideration for all creatures, and seek to maintain the beauty and variety of the world. Work to ensure that our increasing power over nature is used responsibly, with reverence for life. Rejoice in the splendour of God's continuing creation.*'[3]

Although neither Collinson nor Bartram subscribed to a very strict form of Quakerism (indeed, Bartram was at one point ostracized from his Meeting for not toeing the strict Quaker line), finding their God in nature rather than the letter of the Bible; nevertheless Collinson was able to write to Bartram in 1762:

> '*There is no end to the Wonders in Nature, the More I see the more I covet to see not to gratifie a trifling curiosity but to raise my Mind in Sublime Contemplation on the unlimited Power & Wisdom of the Great Creator of all things.*'[4]

[SLIDE: Gracechurch Street and Thames Wharf]

Quaker religious principles also affected the business practices of its members, and many became successful and influential merchants in large cities such as York, Bristol and London. One centre of activity in London was the area of Gracechurch Street, where Collinson grew up at the sign of the Red Lion at numbers 39 and 40 and

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[2] Mark Catesby, *The Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands*, (1729-1747), (http://xroads.virginia.edu).
[3] David Sox, *Quaker Plant Hunters*, The Ebor Press, York, 2004.
[4] *Bartram Correspondence*, p.565.

where the business was carried out. Perfectly placed close to the London Bridge and the Thames trade routes, the proximity of Collinson's offices to the Customs House meant that he could supervise the clearing of his goods personally, and keep informed of the arrival of the ships. As a prominent member of the mercantile class, he could also pick his captains, and prevail upon them to bring home rare specimens of interest for his collections. Across the Pond, even before William Penn reached America and purchased it, the area to be called Pennsylvania had become a refuge for Quakers escaping persecution, and there were thriving communities there and in New York, New Jersey and Rhode Island. These all provided Collinson with more contacts for pursuing trade and his love of the natural world.

[SLIDE: Peter Collinson in London]

Peter Collinson was born in Clements Lane, Lombard Street in 1694, his father having moved from Cumbria to become a mercer and married the daughter of a corn merchant from Southwark. The family moved to Gracechurch Street in 1706, where, following his father's early death, Collinson's mother continued the business until the sons Peter and James were old enough to take over. In addition to the premises in Gracechurch Street, Collinson's grandmother had a property in Peckham; Collinson and his brother first spent as much of their time there as they could, and subsequently they each had their own house and garden. Collinson's plot soon became full of plants, and by the time he moved to Mill Hill in 1748, was famous for its rarities. This was a mixed blessing, as he reports robberies of plants (much to his rage and despair) at both gardens. Linnaeus's protégé, Pehr Kalm, commented on the Peckham garden as being '*full of all kinds of the rarest plants, especially American ones which can endure the English climate…*'.

[SLIDE: Liriodendron, Sassafras, Rubus odoratus]

Collinson's mother's family had contacts in Maryland, North America, and Collinson notes in his copy of Miller's 7th edition of the *Gardeners Dictionary* receipt of ' *the great common Tulip Tree sent per my cousin Rich: Hall from Maryland anno 1723.*' A memorandum of the same year states '*some of the first seeds I had given mee [from] Maryland [were the] Tulip Tree, Sarsifraxe, Dittany [Cunila origanoides], Raspberry [Rubus odoratus]*'. Collinson's business and his love of the natural world also brought him into contact with the most senior members of the scientific world on both sides of the Atlantic.

[SLIDE: Sir Hans Sloane and the Royal Society]

In this country, possibly the most important connection was with Sir Hans Sloane, who, having been its Secretary from 1692, had become President of the Royal Society in 1727, following Sir Isaac Newton's death. It is not certain when the two men met and started their correspondence, but by the late 1720s they were in regular contact, both by letter and personally. Their correspondence ranged from discussions on shells, fossils, insects and animals as well as plants and their uses. An extract from one of Collinson's letters gives a flavour of their relationship as well as showing how Collinson was juggling work and pleasure.

> ' *I am heartily Sorry I happen'd to be so Engaged when you was so Kind to Call on Mee, but I hope you' l please to Consider Mee as a Trades Man in Hurry of Business wch prevented Mee paying the Respect I would a done. I have had Lately come 50 Bottles of Curious Creatures in Spirits & Several other Curiosties. If thou wou'd please to do Mee the favour of another Visit any Morning I hope I shall be att home and Disengaged to Wait on thee, wch is a pleasure I am very fond of & will be particularly acceptable to thy Sincere Friend, P. Colllinson.*'[5]

In 1728, Sloane sponsored Collinson's election as a Fellow of the Royal Society and within three years Collinson was elected onto the Council, where he continued to serve for 37 years. This in turn, gave him the opportunity to sponsor other candidates for Fellowship, including Mark Catesby, Georg Ehret, John Fothergill, Benjamin Franklin and Carl Linnaeus.

[5] BL, Sloane MSS 4058, f.166

[SLIDE The Americans – Philadelphians]
Among Collinson's American friends, Benjamin Franklin is probably the one most generally known today, although his friendship and correspondence with Collinson related largely to Franklin's scientific experiments, especially with electricity, and their promotion and discussion at the Royal Society. One of his contacts within the Franklin coterie was James Logan, a friend of William Penn, and variously Secretary to the Province, president of the Provincial Council and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Their correspondence reveals their mutual love of the natural world and its workings, there are exchanges of seeds and cloth, and Collinson was also able to provide Logan with botanical books, which the latter used in his experiments on corn. Logan stated that he was '*more obliged to [Collinson] than to any man in England for his diligence in obliging me in what I want'.*[6]

Another key figure, who would lead directly to Bartram, was Joseph Brientnall, also a Philadelphia Quaker merchant and a friend and associate of Benjamin Franklin. Brientnall was Secretary of the Library Company of Philadelphia, created by Franklin, and to which Collinson had sent Newton's *Philosophy* and Miller's *Gardeners Dictionary* in 1732. This gift led to Collinson being asked to act as agent in procuring books from England to create the Library, which Collinson willingly did.[7] One of Collinson's most enduring friendships and correspondence was with Cadwallader Colden, who became Lieutenant Governor of New York, following a successful career as a doctor and a merchant in Philadelphia. This was a classic case of mixing business and pleasure, with both men being in the mercantile trade but with a passion for natural history. Among the plants sent by Colden to Collinson were Pitcher Plants (*Sarracenia sp.*) and Cranberries (*Vaccinium macrocarpon*); in June 1755, Collinson was able to report:

> ' *I have the pleasure to tell you that the Saracenas are now in flower by planting them in Moss in Artificial Boggs I had your Cranberries fruited last year by the same method'.*[8]

Benjamin Franklin, James Logan and Joseph Brientnall were based in Philadelphia, and Cadwallader Colden was based in New York, but many of Collinson's most influential American contacts for plants and seeds were based in the southern colonies. [SLIDE American friends – the Virginians] One of Collinson's most important southern relationships started with a meeting in London with William Byrd, who had spent a number of years there before returning to Virginia. A correspondence started, which soon extended to Byrd's brother-in-law, John Custis of Williamsburg. The first contact was the sending by Custis to Collinson of a plant he knew the latter had been craving; the Virginian Cowslip (*Mertensia virginica*). Here is Collinson's response to its receipt!

> ' *It wou'd have given you pleasure to see the Contending passions of Joye and trouble Exert themselves by Turns. You may be sure I had Joye Enough to hear the box was Come but when I recev'd It & not one remains of a Leafe appear'd How my heart sunk & all my hopes Vanish'd but then again when I turn'd the mould out, to see such a fine sound root, what an Exult of pleasure. … As a small token of my Gratitude for your Favour I desire your acceptance of a Box of Horse Chestnuts….'*[9]

Such connections as this, and those with other Virginian and Carolinan plantation owners and naturalists, were important to Collinson, not only because they gave him further opportunities for trade (in linens and plants), but also for the exchange of botanical information and observations on natural phenomena of all kinds. In turn, Collinson sent them plants and seeds from Europe for them to try in their gardens.

[6] O'Neill and McLean, p.91, note 82.
[7] O'Neill and McLean, p.92, Collinson to LCP, Jan 24, 1735.
[8] Colden papers,5,16 (O'Neill and McLean)
[9] Collinson to Custis, October 20, 1734 (Armstrong, p. 19)

[SLIDE: Lord Petre and Thorndon]
Back on this side of the Pond, Collinson was building a formidable collection of plants in his gardens, in Peckham until 1748 and then at Ridgeway House, Mill Hill; he was also becoming known as someone who could obtain and grow rarities. As a member of the Royal Society, he was coming into contact with noble estate owners and enthusiastic 'improvers' such as the Dukes of Norfolk, Richmond, Argyll and Bedford, Lord Jersey of Middleton Hall, and the Earls of Bute and Lincoln. They in turn recognised a man who could help them source the exciting new 'exotics' they craved, and advise them how to get the best out of them in their landscapes.

The most important of these, and the one which cemented his role as a receiver and distributor of the new and 'exotic' in England, was Robert, 8th Lord Petre, of Thorndon Hall, Essex. Petre was also a member of the Royal Society, so he and Collinson probably met there. Certainly, by 1733, Collinson was able to comment on Lord Petre's 'Surprising Genius for Building, Designing and Planting', working on two 'Great Plans' for the garden and 'Plantations above the Park' at Thorndon Hall.[10] Petre was also working on an extensive plan for the re-planting of his cousin, the Duke of Norfolk, at Worksop Manor, Nottinghamshire. Lord Petre's desire for trees and shrubs for his estate soon became insatiable, as he planted up acre after acre of mixed European, Asian and North American species and it soon became clear that a more regular source was needed. So Collinson put out some feelers to his contacts in Pennsylvania, and soon got his answer, in the person of a certain John Bartram, farmer and keen self-taught naturalist in Pennsylvania.

[Slide: Bartram in Philadelphia]
So now we come to the other half of the great exchange programme – the Farmer!

John Bartram's family had originally come from Derbyshire and farmed in the west of Philadelphia. Following the death of his mother, his father re-married and moved with his new family to North Carolina, leaving John and his brother James with family in Philadelphia. In September 1711, John's father was killed by Native Americans, and his second wife and children returned to Philadelphia. Like Collinson, Bartram had an enquiring mind and a love of nature, which led him to begin observing his local flora and fauna, and investigating their workings. In this he was helped by contact with leading Quakers like James Logan, who may have helped teach him enough Latin so he could read botanical nomenclature. Logan is said to have remarked, after meeting Bartram only twice, that he was 'a botanist by nature'. [SLIDE: Bartram's garden photos] In 1728, following the death of his first wife, Bartram bought land at Kingsessing, on the banks of the Schuykill River outside Philadelphia, built a stone house with his own hands, and began to farm. Here he re-married, and had further children, nine in all.

His skill with plants and land ensured that his farm prospered, and by 1738 he was able to purchase a further 180 acres of land. His farm was also near a good road and close to the ferry across the river to Philadelphia proper. But all the while, he was investigating and enquiring into the workings of the natural world, and with sons growing up and a prosperous business behind him, he was able to travel further afield to collect and bring back plants to grow on in his garden. Thanks to Quaker contacts like James Logan and Joseph Brientnall, word about the skill Bartram was showing in botany began to spread. So when Brientnall's friend Dr Samuel Chew (a Maryland physician who had moved to Philadelphia in 1732) asked Brientnall, on Peter Collinson's behalf, if he knew anyone who could collect and distribute seeds and plants, he could unhesitatingly recommend John Bartram.

[SLIDE: Rattlesnake, first plant exchanges, Kalmia, Rhodo viscosum, box]
The first surviving letters between Bartram and Collinson date from 1734, and set the tone for their relationship. In July 1734, Bartram sent Collinson an account of an encounter with a rattlesnake, which he

[10] Collinson's 'Commonplace Book', O'Neill and McLean, p.67.

took home and dissected. There follows a detailed account of his investigations of the tooth structure and arrangement. Collinson's first surviving letter is dated January 1735 and is a very full and detailed account of the safe arrival of a number of boxes of plants and seeds, and requests for more. Also included are detailed instructions on how to take herbarium specimens to assist Collinson and '*our most knowing Botanists'* with identifications, and on constructing boxes to carry the plants which will protect them and be small enough to store under the captain's bed on board ship. Collinson's excitement at finding a new source of material is evident, both in the length of this letter, and its detail. He falls over himself in his pleasure at how well the plants travelled: '*Thee cans't not think how well the Little Case of plants came, being putt under the Captain's bed …*'

He can't wait to share his experiences of growing American species, and comparing notes on their culture; and the thought of getting plants and seeds from further north (his most prolific sources having been Maryland and Virginia) to grow alongside his others in Peckham and Mill Hill.

> '*the Two Laurells was very Fresh & lively & the shrub Honeysuckles, which I have had formerly from So Caroliny flower very fine but in Two or Three years went off, neither our soil or Climate agreed with It but yours p'haps from the Northward may do better –*'

[SLIDE: non-plant material, turtles, bulbs]

From the start the exchanges worked both ways: Bartram sent Collinson boxes with 'curious' plants, animals, shells and fossils, with detailed observations on where he had found them and how they grew; Collinson reciprocated with seed and plants from Britain, together with clothing, linens and books, both from himself and grateful patrons, like Lord Petre. In October 1740, Collinson sent:

> *'… a box of bulbs … a collection as is rarely to be met with, all at once; … There is above twenty sorts of Crocus – as many of Narcissus – all sorts of Martagons and Lilies – with Gladiolus, Ornithogalums, Moleys, and Irises, with many others I don't now remember which time will show thee.*'

I am concentrating on the plant exchanges today, but it should be noted that a great deal of the correspondence between the two men concerned everything from climate, geology, insects, birds, amphibians, reptiles to shells, corals, seaweeds and fauna and flora of all sorts. As Collinson wrote to Bartram: 'My inclination and fondness to Natural productions of all kinds is agreeable to the old proverb: Like the parson's barn, --refuses nothing.'[11]

Collinson had a particular fondness for turtles and terrapins, and one of my favourite letters concerns a batch of turtle eggs sent by Bartram in 1737:

> *'I shall now tell the some thing which very much pleased Mee & will surprise thee – the Box of Turtle Eggs (which was an Ingenious thought of thine to send) on the Day I brought it from on Board ship being the 20 of October I took off the Lid having a Mind to see the Eggs & on peeping about I saw a Little Head just above the ground & while I was looking, I saw the ground Move In a place or Two More, In short in the space of 3 or 4 Hours, Eight Tortoises were hatch'd, it was very well worth observing how artfully they Disengaged themselves from the shell & then with their fore feet scratch their Eyes Open, …*'[12]

[SLIDE: flowers]

As the number of subscribers to the box exchange scheme increased, the main part of the business focused on trees and shrubs. They were what the customers wanted for their 'improved' landscapes and, in a good year, were readily available for collection. But, on reading the correspondence, it is clear that the exchange of

[11] 20 December 1737.
[12] 20 December 1737. Berkeleys, *Correspondence*, p.74.

herbaceous plants and bulbs was also important to the two men. I have already quoted the letter in which Collinson sent Bartram a box of bulbs, and this was by no means a rare occurrence. As early as 1735, Collinson writes:

> '*Please to Remember those Solomons Seals that Escap'd thee last Year. The Great & Small Hellebore are grat Rareties here so pray send a Root or Two of Each next year. Please to remember all your sorts of Lillies as they happen in thy Way & your Spotted Martagons will be very acceptable. The Divils Bitt or Blazeing Star [Liatris spicata] pray add a Root or Two and any of your Lady Slippers [Cypripedium].*'[13]

My friend and colleague, Karen Bridgman, has produced a table of all the mentions of herbaceous plants in the correspondence between Bartram and Collinson, and it runs to 22 pages! And it wasn't just Collinson who was interested on this side of the Pond; his horticultural and botanical friends like Philip Miller, Jacobus Dillenius and John Forthergill also received such treasures.

[SLIDE: Pennsylvania and New Jersey]

At first, Collinson was happy for Bartram to collect from his local area, not wishing to impose on the time and energy of a full-time farmer. However, it was not long before he was asking Bartram to travel further afield, to other parts of Pennsylvania and into New Jersey, in search of new specimens or larger quantities. Bartram therefore soon got into the pattern of completing his harvest, and then setting off on collecting trips. The map on this slide (although not terribly clear I'm afraid) shows the extent of his travels over a 30year period; many of these would be repeated year after year as he found his favourite hunting grounds.

[SLIDE: Batsto Lake and the Pine Barrens, with Kalmia, Ilex]

In 2006, I was fortunate enough to be able to travel to one of Bartram's favoured hunting grounds myself, when I visited Batsto Lake in the Pine Barrens of New Jersey, and was able to see for myself the sort of country Bartram travelled through. What struck me was the range of oaks and pines in this area, the understorey of high bush cranberries (*Viburnum trilobum*), sheep laurel (*Kalmia angustifolia*) and grasses, with plantations of Magnolias, Inkberry (*Ilex glabra*) and Sweetfern (*Comptonia peregrina*); all plants which feature so much in the correspondence between Bartram and Collinson, and form the contents of their 5 guinea boxes.

[SLIDE: Onandago and Lake Ontario]

Most of Bartram's collecting trips, although often extensive, are described through his letters to Collinson. However there are two for which Bartram produced a fuller written account, and on both occasions Collinson was able to get them distributed to his friends, as well as published by the Royal Society and the *Gentleman's Magazine*.

In 1743 Bartram was invited to join Conrad Wieser and Lewis Evans on a trip to Oswego on the shores of Lake Ontario, where Weiser was to act as interpreter to the conference of the Five Nations of Indians, and Evans was surveying the route. This journal is as interesting for its account of the journey and encounters with Native Americans, their hospitality, way of life and customs, as for the plants found. It also provides a revealing portrait of the topography of the country they journey through, such as this from July 8, 1743:

> *'…we crossed the creek and rode along a rich bottom near the river for two miles, producing most kinds of our forest trees and a large species of Scutelaria two feet high; thence along the river side, near a mile N.20 deg. E., to the foot of a fertile hill, where leaving the river, our way N.E. through several narrow valleys and over small hills, generally middling land, yielding oak, hickory, chesnut, and some pine, to the sumit of a high hill, where we saw Shamokin Hill, distant four miles only.'*[14]

[13] 20 January 1735, Armstrong, p.22.
[14] *A Journey from Pennsylvania to Onandago in 1743*, p.32-33.

[SLIDE: Carolinas, Georgia and Florida]
The second long journey, Bartram's longest ever and done when he was in his 60s, followed his appointment as King's Botanist (largely through Collinson's efforts) in 1765. With the stated aim of finding and surveying the source of the St. John's River in Florida (now part of southern Georgia), and joined by his son William in North Carolina, where the latter had been engaged in a trading venture on the Cape Fear River, Bartram embarked on a journey he had long wanted to undertake, from July 1765 to April 1766.

Parts of the journal he made on this journey were sent to Peter Collinson, who managed to include one of them in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1767 (under the name 'William Bartram' in error). This was the portion dealing with the trip from Savannah to Augustus, Georgia, and back in September 1765; here is a short flavour from 5 September:

> *'… observed much of ye Collinsonia at which I was surprised having never observed it in ye lower part of either Carolinas here growed ye spegelia & hammamelis all over ye countrey in good land ye common alder & Siliquastrum after noon we rode over higher ground yet crossed mayny swamps ye soil red some feet under ye surface saw A great Magnolia alltissima [Magnolia grandiflora] ye banks of ye savannah is A mixture of A red yellow & ash coloured clay or marl; prodigious numbers of large sturgeons continually Jumping…'* [15]

This extract is taken from the *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, Volume XXXIII, Part 1; a version of the diary annotated by Frances Harper, Research Associate of the John Bartram Association, and published in 1942. Apart from all the research to get the diary together and fully annotated, Harper and her colleague and friend Arthur Leeds travelled to the Carolinas, Georgia and Florida themselves, following as far as they could the Bartrams' route, and taking a series of photographs which appear in the article (and which I have used on these slides).

[SLIDE: Augusta Road and Franklinia and type location]
The enduring legacy of this journey by John and William Bartram, was their discovery (and William's later collection of seed from) a brand new plant found on the banks of the Altamaha River; the *Franklinia alatamaha*. I'm not going to discuss the *Franklinia* story here, because it does not have a direct bearing on the core plant and seed exchange business, but it is interesting to ponder, given that it was only ever seen once more in the wild, whether it would ever have been known if the Bartrams had not found it and been able to grow it successfully back in Philadelphia.

[SLIDE: Propagation, Growing and Planting]
From Collinson's point of view, the notes and observations made on these journeys were invaluable, as they not only painted a picture of plants in their native habitats, but the details of soil type, other vegetation, the proximity of water and so on, would have helped him enormously in growing the plants himself, and passing this knowledge on to his patrons and customers. Although Collinson sometimes grumbled about having to give endless advice to customers (and their gardeners), I think he probably loved having the knowledge to use himself and to pass on!

As more people were able to experiment for themselves, exchanges of information and growing tips were passed around. For example, Gilbert White, writing to his friend Daines Barrington records that:

> '*Dr Fothergill and others have experienced the same inconvenience with respect to the more tender shrubs from North-America; which they therefore plant under north-walls. There should also perhaps be a wall to the east to defend them from the piercing blasts from that quarter.'* [16]

[15] Harper, p.23-4
[16] White, *The Natural History*, Letter 61 to Daines Barrington, 237-40.

In 1766 Dr John Hope, the King's Botanist for Scotland, made a trip to London, visiting important nurseries and gardens on the way, including Kew and Painshill. He noted his observations on the techniques used for growing American exotics, such as screening them from the sun with baskets, protecting them from frosts with coverings of dried ferns and growing them in damp, shady borders.

Growing the more 'ticklish' American exotics could prove challenging, and any help Collinson could get from Bartram was gratefully received. Some always proved recalcitrant, such as the 'dusty seeds' of the *Rhododendrons* and *Kalmias* that Collinson was so fond of. For these, Collinson had another card up his sleeve; James Gordon (Lord Petre's gardener before setting up a nursery in Mile End) and Christopher Gray (the Fulham nurseryman).

By the 1760s, the seed exchange business had over 100 customers, including people from many different backgrounds and walks of life, and North American species had populated most of the great estates of the day. In a pamphlet written in December 1766, giving an account of his seed exchange business, Collinson signed off with the words:

> '*It hath pleased God to prolong my life nigh 72 to see the reward of my labours crowned with success in the numerous plantations spread over this delightful island which gives infinite pleasure to Peter Collinson, December 16, 1766.*'[17]

It is time now to have a look at some of these customers, and see how the Americans fared in the temperate British Isles.

[SLIDE: Miller and Dillenius]

The subscription lists, as collated by Edward and Dorothy Smith Berkeley in their biography of Bartram, and showing the first box order for each customer[18], give a clear indication of how the business grew, and how the customer base expanded, from primarily nobility and personal friends of Collinson's in the early years, to an increasing number of nurseryman and the gentry by the 1750s.

The Chelsea Physic Garden was founded by the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries of London in 1673 for its apprentices to study the medicinal qualities of plants. In 1722, Philip Miller was appointed to the post of Gardener, and his enthusiasm and expertise over the next 49 years ensured the continuation of the Physic Garden, and it became a centre for receiving and growing hundreds of new plants from around the world. Miller's was often one of the first boxes ordered for the season by Collinson, and he would receive live plants as well as seeds. Miller and Bartram also corresponded directly, exchanging ideas and views on the growing habits and management of these new plants; Miller also returned the compliment by sending Bartram plants from his Physic Garden for his interest and experimentation in the North American climate.

Another important botanist subscriber was Johannes Jakob Dillen (or Dillenius as he was known), who had become the University of Oxford Botanic Garden's first chair of botany in 1734. It is to Dillenius that Collinson was referring when he asked Bartram to send two copies of his herbarium specimens, so he could send one to 'our knowing Botanists', and Dillenius was diligent in preparing lists of identifications, which he would send back to Bartram for his records. This started a regular correspondence as they discussed the various characteristics of plants, and Dillenius sent Bartram useful reference books.

Ibid., 238. For further information on Dr Fothergill's American plantings, see Laird, *The Flowering*, 98.

[17] Quoted in *Brothers of the Spade*, E.G. Swem, 1957, p.5.
[18] Ibid., 'Appendix 6', pp.311-318.

[SLIDE: Linnaeus]
Of course, I can't discuss famous botanists of this period without mentioning Carl von Linne (Linnaeus), with whom Collinson started corresponding following a meeting in 1736. As Linnaeus was developing his new system of nomenclature, Collinson was sending specimens over to him in Holland, where he was working at the University of Leiden, and encouraging John Bartram and others to do the same. In recognition of Collinson's assistance, Linnaeus named *Collinsonia* after him, for which he expressed his gratitude in May 1739.[19]

Bartram's links with Linnaeus were generally through others, but, having had the new system explained to him by James Logan, Bartram was quick to test it out for himself, and created detailed descriptions of the parts of flowers, which Logan then sent on to Linnaeus. Finally in 1769, the University of Stockholm recognised Bartram's contribution to Linnaeus's work and made him a member of its Philosophical Society. Bartram's letter of thanks includes a detailed list of plants growing on the north-eastern seaboard of America, by latitude, which he had compiled over the previous 30 or so years.

[SLIDE: Richmond, Norfolk, Argyll]
Among the first wave of subscribers were members of the nobility, men who knew Peter Collinson either personally or through his many contacts. Lord Petre was, as we have heard, the initiator of much of the trade, and he was closely followed by his cousin the Duke of Norfolk at Worksop, the Duke of Argyll at Whitton, and the Duke of Richmond at Goodwood. These were all wealthy aristocracy, with large estates and a keen interest in stocking them with the latest fashions in plants, especially from North America.

Charles Lennox, 2nd Duke of Richmond was receiving shipments as early as 1736, and placed orders for boxes almost every year until his death, when the baton was passed to the 3rd Duke from 1757. Peter Collinson's Commonplace Book at the Linnean Society includes the note that the Duke "was extremely fond of planting and had all that Time the best Collection of Exotic hardy Trees that was then in England."[20]

The Duke was so keen to enlarge his collection that he also made extensive use of the nurserymen who specialised in North Americans, such as John Williamson and Christopher Gray. When Lord Petre's widow was considering disposing of some of her late husband's collection, Richmond wrote to Collinson from his estate at Goodwood in Sussex putting in a request for some 'Virginia Tulip Trees' (*Liriodendron tulipifera*)[21]. Ten days later he wrote again for confirmation of what he might receive, 'that I may bespeake in good time at Greys or Williamsons, else the Dukes of Norfolk and Bedford will sweep them all away'[22].

Archibald Campbell, 3rd Duke of Argyll, received his first box in 1747 and his orders continued for ten years. As well as planting out his own plantations at Whitton, Hounslow, he is also know to have sent seeds and plants to friends and relatives, including Lord Litchfield at Ditchley Park in Oxfordshire. Visitor accounts by Joseph Spence and Richard Pococke confirm the variety and extent of Argyll's plantations populated with many American trees and shrubs. Pococke described 'a plantation of mostly Evergreen and American plants … laid out much in the wilderness way.'[23]

[SLIDE: Hamilton and Painshill]
Another aristocratic landowner and garden maker/improver of the period, with a direct link to the Bartram/Collinson scheme (and one particularly dear to my heart) was the Hon. Charles Hamilton of Painshill in Cobham, Surrey. Hamilton not only subscribed to the box scheme from 1748, he also commissioned boxes

[19] Armstrong, p.72.
[20] Linnean Society, Collinson's Commonplace Book, MS. 323b, f. 47. See again Armstrong, *"Forget not Mee & My Garden . . .,"* 222
[21] Collinson correspondence, Vol.1, Lord Richmond to Peter Collinson, (Dec. 17 1742), f.126.v.
[22] Ibid., Richmond to Collinson, (Dec. 28 1742), f.127.v- f.128.r,.
[23] Laird, p. 86, from Pococke, 1750, 1751 and later years.

for his friends and neighbours, including the Abbe Nolin in Paris. He knew Collinson personally, well enough to be exchanging plants outside the box scheme and entertaining each other to dinner; and they collaborated on improvements to the gardens of Hamilton's great friend, Sir Henry Fox, at Holland Park in London.

Two letters, dated 1751, were found, by Lady Jean O'Neill during her researches into Collinson at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia, which demonstrate this good relationship and include offers to share plants from Painshill, and requests for boxes on behalf of neighbours. These would have been exchanged within a couple of years of Hamilton receiving his first box of seeds, and it appears that his connections with Collinson were already encouraging others to join the business of growing American introductions.

It is also clear from Hamilton's correspondence with the Abbe Nolin that cultural advice was being exchanged; for example, the Catalpa liked damp ground; the Cedar of Lebanon and Pencil Cedar propagated easily; the Portugal Laurel was fully hardy, and some Myrtles would survive in open ground while others needed protection in winter. This echoes the advice Collinson was giving his customers, based on his own experience and his correspondence with Bartram.

[SLIDE: Americans at Painshill – Woollett, Pin Oak, Swamp Cypresses]

The evidence for how Hamilton used his American plants at Painshill is limited to a couple of references to 'exotic trees and shrubs' and an exceptional variety of pines. However a few trees remain at Painshill to give a clue or two, and suggest that, in the case of the forest trees, they were sometimes planted in groves or plantations with trees from other parts of the world and sometimes as specimens. The Swamp Cypresses (*Taxodium distichum*) by the Mausoleum, and the Pencil cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) which stood in parkland near the lake until it blew over in the winter of 2007, seem to have been planted in isolation, but written accounts suggest that the firs and pines were used as part of 'winding walks' and that 'exotic' trees and shrubs could planted together for dramatic effect.

If this is true, it would fit rather neatly with Collinson's description in an article for the *Gentleman's Magazine*, in 1756:

> '*All these American evergreens incorporated and mixed with our yew, laurel, pines, bays, gilded hollies, box … and other evergreen shrubs … a surprising delightful effect, in the modern taste of planting, where little woods, clumps or groups of them, set here and there, interspersed with single trees, enrich the rural scene with their various shades of green.*'[24]

[SLIDE: The nursery trade – Gordon and Gray]

Nurserymen and seedsmen are the next big group of customers to consider, as they felt an increasing need to find sources for new seeds and plants to meet the demand from garden improvers in the 'modern taste in gardening'[25]. The first nurseryman to receive a box of seeds from Bartram and Collinson in 1746 was James Gordon. Gordon had been gardener to Collinson's friend and client, Lord Petre, at Thorndon Hall, where he remained until Lord Petre's death in 1742, after which Gordon established his nursery in Mile End, London.

Gordon's skill with the 'ticklish' Americans like *Rhododendron* and *Kalmia* has already been mentioned, and his ability to propagate and grow these specimens helped ensure their endurance in English gardens. Mind you, they are still 'ticklish' and don't grow anything like as prolifically in Surrey as they do in Pennsylvania or New England!

[24] Collinson, 'Of the Cultivation of Exotics', *Gentleman's Magazine* 26, 1756, p.114.
[25] Horace Walpole, *The History of the Modern Taste in Gardening*, (first published 1780), (Reprinted by Ursus Press, (New York, 1995).

In *Hortus Collinsonianus,* (the list of plants in Collinson's Mill Hill garden, annotated with notes and memoranda by L.W. Dillwyn in 1943), there are several notes to the effect that Collinson is sending new seed to Gordon to propagate[26], and In 1763, Collinson wrote of Gordon:

> '*I never saw or heard of any Man before Him that could raise the Dusty Seeds of the Calmias Rhododendrons, Azaleas these charming Hardy Shrubs that Excel all others by His Care, He Furnishes Every Curious Garden all the Nursery Men and Gardeners come to him for them.*'

Christopher Gray of Fulham, received seed boxes from Bartram from 1750[27] and was also in direct correspondence[28]. Gray was a prominent figure in the nursery trade and had long been a supporter and grower of North American species. He is known to have purchased some of Bishop Compton's large collection of North American trees and shrubs from Lambeth Palace after Compton's death in 1714; and he had a close relationship with Mark Catesby. Collinson described Gray in 1760 as 'the greatest nurseryman between Parson's Green and Fulham'.

[SLIDE: Williamson, Webb, Powell]

John Williamson was a nurseryman and seedsman in Kensington from at least the early 1740s and, in 1756, took over Robert Furber's Kensington Nursery, in what is now Gloucester Road. Having received his first box from Collinson in 1748, John Williamson had become his best customer by 1751. In that year, Bartram confirmed an order for four boxes 'at Ten Guineas each for the Friends of Mr. Williamson Gardner at Kensington', Bartram's largest ever order.[29]

Other professional subscribers to the scheme include John Webb, a seedsman at the Acorn near Westminster Bridge, who purchased his first box of seeds in 1760[30]. However, his Catalogue published that year already listed a large number of North American trees and shrubs[31], and in 1756, Webb supplied the third Earl of Litchfield at Ditchley Park, Oxfordshire with seed including a quantity from what appears to be a Bartram seed box[32]. For more on the Ditchley seed and plant lists, I would refer you to the forthcoming article by Michael Cousins in *Garden History*, Part II of a series on the history of the gardens at Ditchley Park.

Another key seedsman subscriber was advertising 'A Collection of Tree Seeds etc [from North America] that will grow in any part of England, Scotland or Ireland'[33] in 1752, and published a list of American trees and shrubs, 'lately arrived', in *The Gentleman's Magazine* for 1755. His name was Nathaniel Powell[34], he had been subscribing since 1750[35] and was their second best customer after Williamson. Powell's business was based at the King's Head near Fetter Lane, Holborn[36], where he had been an active professional seedsman from the 1720s and he joined the Bartram/Collinson seed box scheme in 1750[37].

[SLIDE: Southwark seed shop, Adlestrop and Belhus plans]

The case of Samuel Driver of Southwark provides another example of the way in which nurserymen helped spread American introductions via the Bartram/Collinson scheme. Driver was a seedsman, nurseryman and

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[26] Dillwyn (ed.), *Hortus Collinsonianus,* e.g. p.4, Footnote of Collinson's dated Sept. 2 1763.
[27] Berkeley & Berkeley, *The Life*, p.313.
[28] Berkeley & Berkeley, *Correspondence*.
[29] Berkeley & Berkeley, *Correspondence*, John Bartram to Peter Collinson, (Jan. 30, 1747/8), p.291.
[30] Berkeley & Berkeley, *The Life*, p.313.
[31] John Webb, *A Catalogue of Seeds and Hardy Plants with Instructions for Sowing and Planting*…, (London, 1760).
[32] Cousins, 'Ditchley Park', 'Appendix III', p.83-4, Box 72, undated list (DIL.XXVI/4).
[33] *Daily Advertiser*, Issue 6560, (Friday, January 17, 1752, *Burney Collection*.
[34] See above p.25.
[35] Berkeley & Berkeley, *The Life*, p.312.
[36] Nathaniel Powell (d.1773), seedsman at King's Head Court, Fetter Lane, Holborn from at least 1726, partner with Alexander Eddie in the 1760s.
[37] See below, pp.29-34.

landscape designer (in what Fiona Cowell calls the third rung of significance, after Lancelot Brown at the top and those like Richard Woods in the 2nd tier!). Driver's clients were often members of the lesser gentry, ladies and gentlemen with relatively small properties, but keen to be part of the craze for plants from the New World. He had a seed shop in Kent Road, Southwark, but also travelled extensively working for clients in London, Essex, Hertfordshire and, most significantly, at Adlestrop in Gloucestershire. Here Driver was designing and providing plants, and the range of plants on his 1763 list for Adlestrop includes many from North America.

[SLIDE: The 'curious' gardeners - Fothergill]
Before I move to the final group of subscribers in this section I need to mention one particular individual who was in a class of his own: Dr. John Fothergill of Upton Park, Essex.

Collinson's friendship with Fothergill began in about 1740 and had its basis in their shared Quakerism as well as a love of the natural world. Born in Yorkshire in 1712, Fothergill was first apprenticed to an apothecary before going to study medicine at Edinburgh University, and then at St. Thomas's Hospital in London. Fothergill's friend and protégé, Dr. John Lettsom, who published a catalogue of the plants in Fothergill's garden at Upton Park near Stratford in 1780, commented that 'the sphere seemed transposed, as the Artic Circle joined with the equator'.

Fothergill was also an early correspondent of John Bartram, having been brought to his attention by a visiting American physician, Thomas Bond, in about 1738. So Fothergill was soon at the heart of the Bartram/Collinson exterprise, forming such a firm friendship with Collinson that he wrote a glowing obituary on the latter's death in 1768. He also helped John's son William get work, and his nephew took over the London end of the seed exchange business after Collinson's death.

[SLIDE: the curious gardeners]
To return to Collinson's other customers, these were the lesser gentry, professional men such as the clergy, lawyers and doctors, and the number of gentlemen who were keen amateur gardeners with enough garden space to grow some of the latest introductions, and who were subscribing to the scheme in their own right. Jean O'Neill and Elizabeth P. McLean provide a neat snapshot of the sort of people Collinson was dealing with[38]. It did not appear to matter what their social background was, if they were keen plantsmen and 'curious gentlemen' he was eager to share experiences with them, and extol their successes in his correspondence and notes.

[SLIDE: Shaddock, *Corylus corluna*, *Cedrus libani*, *Cornus florida*]
So, as well as enjoying his correspondence and friendships with the great and the good of the botanic gardens and the aristocratic estates, he was also enthusiastic about the achievements of such lesser mortals as:
---the butcher, Mr. Clarke of Mortlake (who collected seed from local Cedrus libani and was able to propagate and grow them in bulk);
---Mrs. Gastry of Parson's Green (who grew pomegranates and nectarines);
---a Mr Foxe (who gave him seeds of the shaddock, a type of citrus);
---Mr. Sharp of Enfield Chase (with a handsome 'Virginia dogwood' [Cornus florida]);
---and 'my gardening friend Mr. Bennett' (who gave Collinson the 'Turkey nut' [Corylus corlurna] for his Mill Hill garden).

These examples show the range of subscribers rushing to be part of the influx of newly introduced plants to Britain and starts to suggest ways in which they spread the word across the country; by advertising, articles in the press, or the exchange and sale of seeds and plants from gardener to gardener in all walks of 'gentlemanly'

[38] Jean O'Neill, Elizabeth P. McLean, *Peter Collinson and the Eighteenth-Century Natural History Exchange*, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, 2008, Chapter 3.

life. It would of course be well into the 19th century and early 20th century before the gardening 'bug' was available to working people.

[SLIDE: Collecting seed in Bartram's garden]
As a footnote to this discussion, and bringing the transatlantic exchange into the 21st century, we at Painshill have been following in the Bartram/Collinson footsteps, from collecting seed in Bartram's garden

[SLIDE: Pine Barrens]
and his favourite collecting sites in the Pine Barrens, to sourcing seeds and plants from North American nurseries as close as possible to Bartram's collecting grounds. In this we have been proud and delighted to have had the support and assistance of Joel Fry, Curator at John Bartram's Garden in Philadelphia, who has compiled a 'list of [the] lists' made at various times of the contents of Bartram's seed boxes. By investigating where these seeds were collected and translating the 18th century American common names to modern botanical Latin, Joel has made our search for plants to make our collection so much easier. His advice and answers to our inevitable questions echo those of John Bartram to Peter Collinson 250 years ago.

[SLIDE: transport 21st century style]
Transportation may seem easier now, but it can still take up to two months to get hold of the precious cargo; and our excitement easily matches that of Collinson 250 years ago! Also our rage and disappointment when things go wrong; one of our consignments was held for over a month at Customs and then sent back to South Carolina because the Customs Officer found ONE dead white fly on a herbaceous plant!!!!

[SLIDE: growing on and Bartram collection]
Our experiments with growing the plants on in our nursery until they are large enough for planting in our display garden (one of Charles Hamilton's original Walled Kitchen Gardens) echo those of the 18th century nurserymen and gardeners, and we often use their writings to help us.

[SLIDE: Americans in the Serpentine]
Then we finally see them planted out in the Painshill landscapes and gardens, where they can take the place of those which Hamilton himself (or rather his gardeners) may have planted.

[SLIDE: Plant Heritage logo plus RHS Gold Medal with stand shot]
In May 2006, our efforts were rewarded with the award of full collection status by Plant Heritage (National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens), the first in a new category, for the John Bartram Heritage Collection.

The icing on the cake was then to be awarded a Gold Medal at the RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show in 2007 for our stand representing John Bartram's house, garden and collection sites! Our experience of importing and growing these plants and seeds has given us a real insight into the complexities of what those men were achieving all those years ago, and it is exciting to be walking in their shadows. It is also an education to find that the same plants which were 'ticklish' for Collinson and his friends are just as troublesome today – oh, for a James Gordon to propagate some Kalmia for me!!!!

[SLIDE: Collinson at Mill Hill]
In 1764, ensconced in his gardens at Mill Hill, Collinson wrote to his New York friend Cadwallader Colden, counting his blessings: 'With a Pious Mind filled with admiration I contemplate the Glorious Constellations above, and the Wonders of the Vegitable tribe below. I have an Assemblage of Rare Plants from all quarters, the Industrious collection of forty years.'[39]

[39] See Alan W. Armstrong, ed., *"Forget not Mee & My Garden . . ." Selected Letters 1725-1768 of Peter Collinson, F.R.S.* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2002), 254-257. Collinson to Colden, February 25, 1764.

Cataloguing his favourites from around the known world, Collinson pays tribute to his friends from both sides of the Atlantic, who have sent him these treasures, and writes:

> '*Regard but the Variety of Trees and Shrubs in this plantation as mountain Magnolia, Sarsifras, Rhododendrons, Calmias & Azaleas etc, etc etc, all are the Bounty of my Curious Botanic friend J. Bartram of Philadelphia, …'*

[SLIDE: London docks + boxes]

The business enterprise set up and run by Peter Collinson and John Bartram was an extraordinary phenomenon of its time, and still resonates today. Taking advantage of a blossoming trade with the new colonies in North America, it revolutionised the way in which new plant introductions could be imported and distributed to gardens and estates across the country.

[SLIDE: Americans at Painshill]

While they by no means started the trade in plants, Collinson and Bartram expanded it beyond anyone's wildest dreams, creating as well as fulfilling an ever-increasing demand for the new and exotic to populate 'improved' landscapes in the fashionable English Landscape style.

[SLIDE: examples of plants]

Peter Collinson did not much over-state the case when he declared, in 1756, that "England must be turned up side down & America transplanted Heither"[40], and the results can still be seen in gardens and the nursery trade today, in spite of later crazes from the Far East and Australasia.

Nearly all the plants illustrated on this slide are obtainable in today's nurseries, although many only as varieties or cultivars; only committed anoraks like us insist on straight species and provenance!!

Thank you.
Kath

Editor's Note: I am sorry to say that we were not able to obtain the slides from Kath that accompanied this talk before she passed away. MHPS

[40] Edmund Berkeley and Dorothy Smith Berkeley, eds., *The Correspondence of John Bartram, 1734-1777* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1992), 392.