

[Skip to main content](#)[University links](#)

## University links

### For staff

- [For Staff](#)
- [Services A-Z](#)
- [Student Education Service](#)

### For students

- [Minerva](#)
- [Mobile app](#)
- [For Students](#)

### Faculties

- [Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures](#)
- [Faculty of Biological Sciences](#)
- [Faculty of Business](#)
- [Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences](#)
- [Faculty of Environment](#)
- [Faculty of Medicine and Health](#)
- [Faculty of Social Sciences](#)
- [Lifelong Learning Centre](#)
- [Language Centre](#)

### Other

- [Staff A-Z](#)
- [Campus map](#)
- [Jobs](#)
- [Alumni](#)
- [Contacts](#)
- [Library](#)
- [IT](#)
- [VideoLeeds](#)
- [Leeds University Union](#)

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- [Facebook](#)
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- [Weibo](#)
- [The Conversation](#)
- [RSS news feed](#)

[Close quicklinks](#)

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Search  Search Destination  [Living With Dying](#)

- [Home](#)
  - [Home](#)
- [Blog](#)
- [Family Historians](#)
  - [Family Historians](#)
  - [Workshop: Family history and academic history](#)
- [Leeds General Cemetery](#)
- ['Remembrance' Exhibition](#)
  - ['Remembrance' Exhibition](#)
  - [Events Programme](#)
- [The Grief Series](#)

1. [Home](#)
2. [Blog](#)
3. My Garden of Memories

# My Garden of Memories

Category

[Family Historians](#)[Research](#)

Date

Monday 3 September 2018



## A guest blog from Carolyn Huston, a member of our family historians group

My garden here in Leeds is the place that I spend a lot of leisure time enjoying. Gardening has always given me pleasure and it has always been the place I go to drown my sorrows. An hour pottering lifts my spirits and

gives me solace in times of trouble and strife. It has always been thus. I come from a family of gardeners on my father's side of the family, and although my father was a forest officer, he was always a keen gardener, so perhaps it comes with my genes. My sister and my cousins are the same, as were my father's siblings and aunts and uncles.

As a child my sister and I were given small patches of ground to garden.... mainly nasturtiums....but I can remember in exquisite detail all the plants and trees in our acre garden in Africa. My father and his able assistant gardener built the garden for our new house out of what had been a mealie (maize) field. There was a veggie garden, a fruit orchard, a shrubbery, a herbaceous border, a tatty rose garden, trees, hedges, and spiky grass which prickled our bare feet. There were lots of places to hide, trees to climb, lots of lovely flowers and smells. We had chickens (and fresh eggs) and a huge compost heap that was apt to burst into flames spontaneously because it got so hot with the chicken manure! My father hankered after British plants from his youthful memories so grew, with great difficulty in the hot climate, delphiniums, sweet peas, and gaudy, bright dahlias. We also had garden wildlife....snakes and huge cane rats along with more recognisable bees, butterflies and masses of birds.

Such was my gardening background.

We moved to this house in Leeds over 30 years ago. Almost daily I wander round the garden whatever the weather or season just to enjoy it and in doing so remember people linked to the plants. I watch the seasons change and plants come into flower. I cannot for the life of me remember proper names for my plants and certainly not the Latin names but the plants do talk to me of far flung places and friends and relatives.

For, example, the pesky pigeons remind me of my granddaughter, Queen Clara, who chases pigeons and instructs them solemnly to 'go away', wearing her crown woven from twigs from my weeping willow. The grandchildren love the hidden places, the birds, the foxes, bats, the solar pebble fountain (given to us by my mother-in-law for our silver wedding), the tiny, tiny pond and the mouse we saw last time they were here. The hedgehog has not reappeared this year to my great sadness.



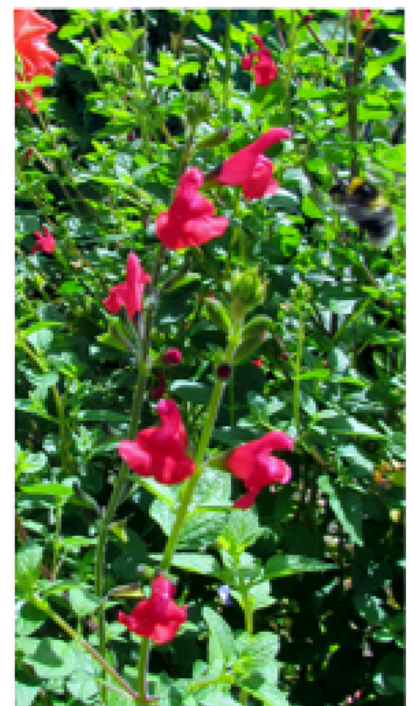
My apple trees remind me of my son, Stephen, who went to great trouble to find them and gave them to me for my sixtieth birthday, but they also remind me of my Barnes relative who was head gardener at Eaton Hall in Cheshire. His name was Nicholas Friend Barnes and he originally came from Devon. One of his interests was in breeding new apples by crossing pollen from one type of apple tree to another. He successfully bred two which were produced commercially and they are named after his daughter, Mildred Barnes, and his oldest son, Arthur William Barnes, who was sadly killed during the First World War. My father, who was born just after the First World War, was named after his second cousin, Arthur. Around the base of Arthur's apple tree I grow forget-me-nots in spring and red poppies in summer.





*The apple trees from the beginnings to fruit production.*

Another ancestor remembered in my garden is Agnes Jeffrey, nee Thomson. She was my great-grandmother and her husband, James Jeffrey, was Head Gardener at various places around Britain, eventually retiring to a smaller estate in Kirkubright, Scotland. Agnes was keen on gardening in her own right and, as a hobby, listed all the plants to be found on St Mary's Isle at Kirkubright. She also wrote poetry, but in my garden I have a special salvia that came from cuttings, taken originally in her garden in Kirkubright and passed down through the family via my father's cousin, Violet James, one of Agnes' grandchildren. All my cousins and my sister also have cuttings, so Agnes lives on in our memories through 'Agnes' red salvia'.





Other plants that remind me of family and friends are the pretty pink peonies that my parents grew outside their flat in Oxford. They took ages to get established and flower in Oxford and also here when my mother gave me some. Then there is a lovely azalea that my parents gave me as a birthday present, toting it up the M1 from Oxford, and my Dad used to check up on its health and give me advice on its care every time he visited. He needn't have worried....it has flourished!

There is a fuchsia from my sister's garden in Guildford which is hardy and keeps going however hard the frost.

I also have hardy orchids from my cousin, Anne, who lives in Scotland and they bloom every year and remind me of her and her tiny garden in Dundee.



My grumpy friend, Geoff, bought this ornamental dock for me when I took him out to visit Scampston gardens. It has grown and grown and grown. Every summer it gets masses of flowers and attracts every honey bee for miles around. Geoff left me other stuff too, but it is this plant that reminds me most of him and his eccentricities.

I also have a rose from my mother-in-law's garden. When she gave it to me, I was less than grateful for it because I thought it dull. However I was completely wrong. It gets covered in pink blossom in early summer, has lovely red hips in autumn (which the blackbirds love), and has pretty grey green, pinkish foliage. It grows up a north facing wall and sees little sun where little else will grow, but keeps on growing and giving me and my husband pleasure.



Poppies....red English, and orange Californian.... grow all over my sunny front garden. They originated from seed given as a wedding favour at my son and daughter-in-law's wedding in California 7 years ago. I let them self-seed, which they do freely, provoking memories of one of the most important and happiest days of my life.

I also grow pink spring flowering cyclamens and blue anemones to remind me of seeing them in Cambridge on a freezing, but sunny day in February when my son graduated with his PhD. My future daughter-in-law was there too and we had a lovely, lovely day in the college and the ceremony afterwards. There were Morris dancers by the church, and the cyclamens were under the trees whilst the anemones flowered along the banks of the River Cam.



In winter I have always grown Helliboires and my son has added to the collection. Every winter as the flowers peep out I remember his thoughtfulness about the gifts he chooses for his aged parents and remember how much I love him and his family.



I was sorry to have to stop keeping bees. I just loved them and spent hours watching them come and go so busily with pollen on their legs. My garden plants have always been chosen with insects in mind and the bees were part of that. The hives have a particular smell which I always felt was so familiar, but it wasn't until a friend from my youth pointed it out that I remembered that bees were kept on Stapleford, one of the forest reserves on the Eastern Districts of Zimbabwe where we lived for a few years. One of my earliest memories is of my sister crawling, as a baby, amongst bees on the veranda of the house (without being stung!) when a swarm settled on the beams. These were African bees which are very fierce, but presumably, like all bees, are much quieter when they swarm with their tummies full of honey. Sadly I had to give up my bees here in Leeds when they foolishly stung a neighbour and children arrived next door.





So, as you can see, my garden is much more to me than just colours, plants and 'peace and quiet'. It is not a sad place, but instead reminds me of happy times, family and friends.

My mother-in-law once gave me an apple tree.....the apples are sour and have never done very well, but I have grown mistletoe on the tree. It is a good thing she doesn't know or she would come back to haunt me, but every Christmas, when I harvest the mistletoe I remember her and giggle!



I have tried to grow my memories, but not terribly successfully. Year after year I kill poinsettias at Christmas....we had a huge one in our garden in Africa. I also have tried to grow flame lilies (*Gloriosa Suberba*) which grew wild in the vleis near our house, but with only very limited success. I have killed off aloes which flourished in our garden in Africa and in the wild. My mum used to grow them in the herbaceous border and a friend from Zimbabwe has grown them easily in his Spanish garden. He sends me photos, just to boast!

Plants tell stories of people and no doubt I shall continue to stuff my garden full of plants and memories. My most recent acquisition comes from my husband (who thinks I 'bury £5 notes in the soil' as he puts it). For Christmas he gave me a camellia that flowers at Christmas time....a really early flower, only he bought two plants by mistake....I am truly grateful, but can't resist a smile when I see them!



## Footer navigation

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