

Obituary—Neil G. Treseder

Reprinted from *The Cornish Garden*, 1977

An important chapter in the history of gardening in Cornwall spanning more than 175 years has closed with the death in December of Neil Treseder, a vice-president of this society and one of its greatest supporters.

He was the fourth generation of the family that ran the noted firm of nurserymen, seedsmen and florists, Treseders of Truro. The business, which closed in 1987, had an important influence on gardens throughout Britain and beyond through the introduction of Australian plants and a number of fine ornamental subjects.

It is believed that there was a nursery run by a Treseder in Truro at the time of the battle of Waterloo, growing evergreen shrubs for the gentleman's garden and trees for landscape-garden planting. The Moresk nursery, with its red-brick fruit walls, originally formed part of the garden of the Daubuz family. James Treseder, who took over in 1820, developed the business. He sent three sons, the eldest, John Garland, and Thomas and Charles, to try their luck on the Australian goldfields. Garland was John's mother's family name and was given as a second christian name to the first son in successive generations of this branch of the Treseder family. It was not long before John and Thomas gave up the hunt for gold and started the Treseder Bros nurseries near Sydney, later opening a flower and seed shop in the Sydney Arcade. John designed many parks and government gardens in New South Wales and Victoria. He travelled widely in Australia, New Zealand and Tasmania, as a result of which he introduced many of the hardier Australian plants to Britain's milder gardens, in particu-



Neil Treseder unwraps magnolias kept in cold storage for an exhibit at the 75th county spring flower show at Trelissick in 1987

lar the New South Wales tree fern, *Dicksonia antarctica*. He also visited several of the Pacific islands, including Norfolk Island and Lord Howe Island. He started an international seed trade, dealing with the big seed houses in Europe and the USA, and was instrumental in making the Norfolk Island Pine and two palms from Lord Howe Island popular as indoor plants. John and Thomas wrote the first book to be published in Australia on *Gardening in the Colonies*.

The Truro nursery passed out of Treseder hands when James died, but John bought it back in 1897. He returned to Cornwall, leaving his sons, Ira Garland and Jack, to wind up the business in Australia. Later they joined him, and the partnership of father and sons developed the Truro business, designing and landscaping parks and gardens in many places remote from their Moresk base.

They introduced to gardens in Cornwall and other mild regions such Australian plants as acacias, eucalypts, bottlebrushes (callistemons and melaleucas), grevilleas, leptospermums and cordylines. The Moresk

nursery proved suitable for testing the hardiness of supposedly tender exotics. It was in a small valley and across the mouth of it was built first one and then a second railway viaduct, the piers of the first (Brunel's work) being left in situ when the second was built. This mass of masonry effectively ruined the valley's air drainage. It became a reservoir of cold air, and was, therefore, a frost pocket where on nights and mornings of radiation frost, temperatures were much lower than the average for the district. If plants survived a cold winter at Treseders, then it was certain that they would do well far beyond the confines of the supposedly mild western peninsula.

Pacific gales and salt winds had taught the Treseders a lot about which plants were best for seaside and gardens exposed to winds, and this knowledge came in very handy in Cornwall. They pioneered the use of *Pinus radiata* as wind shelter, and escallonias and fuchsias as hedge plants. They also pioneered the transplanting technique that gives conifers a root-ball so that they can be shifted when quite large. Meanwhile, the family were acquiring more nursery land and were doing landscape planting for, among others, the Great Western Railway.

About ten years after returning to Cornwall, Jack founded his own nursery business on the outskirts of London. His corner site at Brixton became a landmark because he introduced such sub-tropical plants as cordylines and the Chinese fan palm, which had not been seen there before.

John Treseder died at 83 in the early 1920s and was succeeded as head of the firm by Ira, who continued to develop the business and was responsible for landscaping many large gardens in Cornwall, Devon and beyond. Neil Garland Treseder, Ira's son, was born in Truro in 1913. He attended Truro School, studied horticulture at Exeter University, and gained the National Diploma in Horticulture. When his father retired in 1955, he took over control of the business and over the years developed one of the largest collections of ornamental plants in Britain with a considerable export trade.

He became an acknowledged authority on camellias, magnolias and coastal planting. His book *Magnolias*, published in 1978, was the first comprehensive work on the subject since J. G. Millais's *Magnolias* in 1927 and was especially popular with magnolia lovers in the USA. He spent 10 years researching the book, studying magnolias in Cornish gardens and visiting collections in other parts of Britain, in America and in the Far East. This was followed in 1980 by *The Book of Magnolias*, which featured colour plates by botanical artist Marjorie Blamey. Mr Treseder once recalled that he owed his interest in magnolias to Charles P. Raffill, at one time assistant curator at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. 'Just after the Second World War, Charles Raffill came down to Caerhays and Trengwainton to see the Asian magnolias in flower, many of them blooming for the first time in this country,' he said. 'He came over to the nursery and tried to persuade me to get plants and stock them. I went to see these fantastic trees and found the sight of those huge flowers on the bare stems sensational.' The nursery began to stock magnolias and as a result they became more widely available to gardeners. At one time they had 50 different magnolias and had quite an export trade to America, Japan and Korea.

Mr Treseder's love for and knowledge of magnolias was only rivalled by that for camellias. He was co-author with Edward Hyams of *Growing Camellias* (1975) and in the 1960s the nursery grew about 250 different varieties.


He became known as an authority on choosing plants for coastal sites, a skill evident in his retirement garden on a cliff-side at Falmouth. Here could be found some of the 30 named cultivars of ornamental trees and shrubs he introduced into gardens. Many were found by Mr Treseder as sports on plants growing at his nursery or in gardens he visited. They included *Griselinia* 'Bantry Bay', *Myrtus apiculata* 'Glanleam Gold', *Cupressus macrocarpa* 'Goldcrest' and the popular hedging plants *Escallonia* 'Crimson Spire' and 'Red Hedger'. One of the most popular plants introduced by the Treseder nursery was the pink and cream variegated form of the Ontario poplar, *Populus* ×

candicans 'Aurora'. This was discovered as a sport on a tree in North Devon by Ira Treseder. [A fuller list of the plants introduced by Treseders can be found following this article.]

Neil Treseder retired from the family firm in 1976 and was succeeded by his eldest son, Andrew Garland, who had trained at the RHS gardens at Wisley in Surrey, and had worked for a London-based firm of garden landscapers and on a nursery at Boskoop in Holland. Andrew, who became the youngest-ever Mayor of Truro, died from cancer, aged 42, in 1983. The business closed four years later and the nursery at Moresk was sold for housing development.

Neil Treseder's interest in plants and gardens extended beyond the nursery. He was a major contributor to the setting up of the former Rosewarne Experimental Horticulture Station at Camborne, and was director of the horticulture section of the Royal Cornwall Show for many years. He was one of the longest-serving and most active supporters of the Cornwall Garden Society, having been a member of the sub-committee set up by the former Cornwall Spring Flower Society to review its activities and which led to the formation of the Cornwall Garden Society. He took over as the society's technical director and adviser for the spring flower show after the death of Capt H. W. Abbiss in 1965. In 1974 he was made show director and the following year was elected as a vice-president. Mr Treseder continued as show director until 1982 when he became assistant director. He masterminded the memorable special exhibit at the 75th anniversary festival show at Trelassick in 1987. This long, double-sided exhibit, which occupied the centre of the large marquee, illustrated the contributions that Cornishmen and those living in the county have made to gardening in Britain, the plants brought home by Cornish plant-collectors, those raised by plant-breeders in the county, and those selected, collected and propagated by keen-eyed nurserymen and gardeners here in Cornwall. Neil Treseder returned to the post of show director the following year, retiring in 1991 when he was made show director emeritus in recognition of his work for the society. Over the years, he raised thousands of pounds for the society by

organising the annual plant sales, for which he propagated thousands of plants. He was always ready to help the society in whatever way he could. For example, in recent years he had checked the proofs of the society's Journal and acted as horticultural adviser to its editor. His death is a great loss to the society.

Although the Treseder nursery is no longer in existence, the family's connection with gardening is continuing through Neil Treseder's youngest grandson, James, who is studying horticulture at the Duchy College at Rosewarne. 

References

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