

Kew, economic botany and empire: an annotated reading list

Compiled by Mark Nesbitt, June 2008 (Annotations represent the personal view of the compiler)

This is a highly selective list, omitting much general literature on plant exploration and the history of empire. Readers should bear in mind that the history of Kew falls in two parts: 1759-1840, encompassing the reign of George III and the *de facto* directorship of Sir Joseph Banks. The archives relating to this period, insofar as they survive, are very scattered (and mostly not at Kew), and it can be hard to form a clear view of the Gardens' role in plant transfer. From 1840/41, Kew was re-established as a research institute, under the directorship of Sir William Hooker. From then on, very substantial archives have been formed at Kew, forming a still under-used resource for the history of colonial botany.

For more on Kew's Archives, see: www.kew.org/library/archives.html

For a detailed bibliography on the Kew Economic Botany Collection (former Kew Museums), see: www.kew.org/collections/ecbot/biblio.html

General studies

Core reading

Brockway, L.H. 1979. *Science and colonial expansion: the role of the British Royal Botanic Gardens*. New York: Academic Press, 215p.

The first book to investigate Kew and empire, still a very useful survey. Takes a highly critical view of 19th century science. Case studies of cinchona, rubber and sisal. Useful appendix of colonial gardens in 1889. Yale paperback £15.95

Desmond, R. 2007. *The history of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew*. London: Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, 480p.

Detailed narrative history with useful appendices. 2007 edition adds many colour photos and detailed citation of sources. A standard work. Hardback £29.95 from www.kewbooks.com

Drayton, R.H. 2000. *Nature's government: science, imperial Britain and the 'improvement' of the world*. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 345p.

Nuanced and highly influential study of Kew's role in colonial botany. In print as Orient Longman paperback £6, available via www.abebooks.com

Hobhouse, H. 1999. *Seeds of change: six plants that transformed mankind*. London: Papermac, 381p.

The first popular book on the subject; covers cinchona, coca, cotton, potato, sugar, tea. Excellent starting point. Paperback £10.99

McCracken, D.P. 1997. *Gardens of Empire: botanical institutions of the Victorian British Empire*. Leicester: Leicester University Press. 242 pp.

Detailed study of the relationship between Kew and the colonial gardens. Long out-of-print, unobtainable second-hand.

Other useful books

Banks, R.E.R., Elliott, B., Hawkes, J.G., King-Hele, D., Lucas, G. Ll. (editors) 1994. *Sir Joseph Banks: a global perspective*. Kew : Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew on behalf of the co-sponsors, 1994.

Good coverage of Banks's extraordinarily wide range of activities. Paperback £17.50

Desmond, R. and Hepper, F.N. 1993. *A century of Kew plantsmen: a celebration of the Kew Guild*. Kew: Kew Guild, 188p.

Kew gardeners and botanists as plant explorers; many historic photographs. Out-of-print.

Gascoigne, J. 1998. *Science in the service of empire: Joseph Banks, the British state and the uses of science in the age of revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 247p. Out-of-print.

Musgrave, T. and Musgrave, W. 2000. *An empire of plants: people and plants that changed the world*. London: Cassell, 191p.

Popular history covering same ground as *Seeds of change*, well illustrated. Out-of-print?

Rubber

Dean, W. 1987. *Brazil and the struggle for rubber - a study in environmental history*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 234p.

Broad-ranging, very useful survey. Paperback £22.99.

Loadman, J. 2005. *Tears of the trees: the story of rubber - a modern marvel*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 336p.

Detailed study by leading historian of rubber, based on much original research; sceptical of Henry Wickham's reliability as a source. Hardback £24, also online at: www.bouncing-balls.com

Jackson, J. 2008. *The thief at the end of the world: rubber, power and the seeds of empire*. New York, London: Viking Books, 414p.

Readable recent account, based largely on Wickham's autobiography. Hardback £14.

See also the chapter on rubber in: Hobhouse, H. 2003. *Seeds of wealth: four plants that made man rich*. London: Macmillan, 255p. Paperback £10.99.

Cinchona

Honigsbaum, M. 2001. *The fever trail: the hunt for the cure for malaria*. London: Macmillan, 333p. Paperback £7.99.

Very readable, concentrating on plant exploration for cinchona.

Rocco, F. 2003. *The miraculous fever tree: malaria, medicine and the cure that changed the world*. London: HarperCollins, 348p.

A more personal account. Paperback £8.99.

Other crops

Karch, S. B. 2003. *A history of cocaine: the mystery of Coca Java and the Kew plant*. London: Royal Society of Medicine Press, 2003. Paperback £27.50.

Lane, A. 2007. Joseph Conrad's "The Planter of Malata": Timing, and the Forgotten Adventures of the Silk Plant "Arghan". *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture* 5: 276-299.

The Story of a failed "novel crop", promoted by the Arghan Company & Sir Henry Wickham, 1919-24.

Some colonial botanic gardens For a complete list, see Appendix I of McCracken, *Gardens of Empire*. India: Calcutta (Howrah), Saharanpur, Ootacamund (Ooty); Sri Lanka (Ceylon): Peradeniya; Singapore; Hong Kong; Australia: Sydney, Adelaide; Melbourne; Brisbane; New Zealand: Wellington; Fiji; South Africa: Cape Town/Kirstenbosch, Grahamstown, Durban, Pietermaritzburg; Malawi: Zomba; Uganda: Entebbe; Ghana (Gold Coast): Aburi; Nigeria: Abutshi; Calabar (Duketown), Olokemeji; Sierra Leone: Freetown; Mauritius: Pamplemousses; St. Helena; Jamaica: Cinchona (Hill) station; Hope Gardens; St. Lucia; Barbados; Grenada; Trinidad; Dominica; Antigua; Montserrat; St. Kitts; St. Vincent; Guyana (British Guiana): Georgetown; Belize (British Honduras).

Individual gardens – some studies

Australia Aitken, R. 2006. *Seeds of change: an illustrated history of Adelaide Botanic Garden*. Adelaide: Board of the Botanic Gardens and State Herbarium.

India: Calcutta (Howrah) Hastings, R.B. 1986. The relationships between the Indian Botanic Garden, Howrah and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew in economic botany. *Bulletin of the Botanical Survey of India* 28(1-4): 1-12.

Thomas, A.P. 2006. The Establishment of Calcutta Botanic Garden: Plant Transfer Science and the East India Company 1786–1806. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 16: 165-177.

Jamaica Spelman, K. and Yesko, J. 2007. Paradise lost: Jamaica's forgotten Cinchona Gardens. *Herbalgram* 74: 44-53. www.herbalgram.org/wholefoodsmarket/herbalgram/articleview.asp?a=3121

Mauritius Duncan, R. 2007. *James Duncan and the Garden of Mauritius*. Edinburgh: Lurs Publishing.

Sri Lanka (Ceylon): Peradeniya Webb, J.L.A. 2002. *Tropical pioneers: human agency and ecological change in the highlands of Sri Lanka, 1800-1900*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press.