

FREDERICK WILLIAM MOORE (1857-1949)

On the occasion of the RHS Orchid Committee's first visit to Ireland it seems appropriate to look back at their earlier connections. There have been three members with strong Irish links, the first, Frederick Moore, was Curator of Glasnevin Botanic Gardens between 1879 and 1922. He was a member of the committee from its foundation in 1889 and was present at the inaugural meeting on March 26th; he would attend regularly over the next sixty years and became one of its longest serving members.

By 1889 Moore's collection of orchids at Glasnevin was well established and particularly strong in species. Although Moore was a skilful grower he relied on others to identify and name them for him. Initially it was Professor Reichenbach in Hamburg but after his death in 1889 he used Robert Allen Rolfe at Kew, who was also a committee member and Editor of *The Orchid Review*. Moore kept Rolfe busy; he would go on to describe around sixty new species from the Glasnevin plants. Rolfe even named a genus after him, *Moorea* in 1890, which he had to amend slightly in 1904 to *Neomoorea*.

Moore used other contacts from the committee; he was generous with plants and exchanged duplicates with nurserymen, other Botanic Gardens and private individuals including Sir Trevor Lawrence, President of the RHS and another member. Lawrence had a large collection, similarly predominately species and holds the all-time individual record for the number of RHS awards at just over five hundred. Moore achieved a more modest sixty seven but given the distance he travelled this was still quite an achievement. Five were for his beloved *Masdevallias* including an Award of Merit in 1895 to *Masdevallia chimaera* 'Aurea' (now *Dracula chimaera*) which he had selected from his eighteen different forms. A species both Moore and Lawrence grew was *Eulophiella peetersiana* (now *Eulophiella roempleriana*). Moore wrote almost nothing, however he did write about this orchid in the text of a talk he gave to the RHS in 1907 describing how, as he lacked space for such a large plant, he kept the young growths tied in and ended up with it coiled around itself like "a snake".



THE ROYAL HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY ORCHID COMMITTEE

THE IRISH CONNECTIONS

Clare and Johan Hermans



Eulophiella roempleriana photographed for Moore to use in his 1907 RHS lecture. From the Glasnevin collection.

Nevertheless, Moore was able to keep the collection in the spotlight with Rolfe's descriptions of the new species and RHS awards in *The Orchid Review*. Moore's personal standing within the RHS was high; he received one of the original sixty Victoria Medals of Honour (VMH) in Horticulture in 1897 and became the longest surviving recipient of the first batch. He later received a Gold Veitch Medal in 1933 and was a Vice President of the RHS from 1944 until his death. Additionally he served on other RHS Committees; including the Daffodil and Tulip and the Examinations Committee. He received many honours from Ireland, was made a Fellow of the Linnean Society, London and knighted in 1911 by King George V for 'Services to Irish Horticulture'. He retired in 1922, never having had a day off sick, aged sixty-five. He then moved to Willbrook, Rathfarnham near the Dublin Mountains where he developed his garden. He died in 1949 aged ninety-two. Obituaries in *The Times* and *The Gardeners' Chronicle* called him "a horticultural and arboricultural authority", a term that portrays him very well.

FREDERICK BURBIDGE (1847-1905)

The second is Frederick Burbidge, who is certainly the most interesting of characters. He was elected a member in 1892, when his commercial collecting days were over and had settled as Curator of Trinity College Botanic Garden, Dublin where he succeeded Sir Frederick Moore in 1879.

Burbidge was born in Wymeswold, Leicestershire; he started his career in horticulture working in private gardens and then became a student at the RHS Garden in Chiswick before moving to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. At Kew he developed an interest and undoubted skill in botanical art, this culminated in him writing one of the first books on botanical drawing '*The Art of Botanical Drawing*' published in 1873.

Around this time he left Kew to work for William Robinson's weekly periodical '*The Garden*' as a writer and artist. However four years later in 1877 Burbidge left his sedentary safe life in journalism and swapped it for two years of adventure and discomfort to become a collector and explorer for Messrs. Veitch, it is not entirely certain how this conversion happened. Harry Veitch sent him to Borneo, then Mount Kinabalu and on to the Sulu Archipelago, now part of the Philippines. Burbidge's instructions were to collect orchids, ferns and especially *Nepenthes*. The entire trip was chronicled evocatively in '*The Gardens of the Sun - A Naturalist's Journal of Borneo and the Sulu Archipelago*' published after Burbidge's return in 1880.



Watercolour of *Disa crassicornis* from Natal, copied at Kew by Burbidge in 1869



Watercolour of *Trichotosia ferruginea*, copied at Kew by Burbidge in 1870

In total his living and dried collections amounted to one thousand different species so the Veitch Nursery was kept busy for a long time establishing these new novelties. Just a year after Burbidge's return in 1878 he moved to Ireland to take up the Curator's post. He still travelled regularly to London as a Fellow of the Linnean Society and from 1885 as a member of the RHS Science Committee. In 1892 he was finally invited to join the Orchid Committee and continued to attend the Science Committee even after his retirement from the Orchid Committee in 1895. His immense contribution to science and horticulture was recognised by the RHS when he, like Moore was one of the original recipients of the VMH.

Burbidge died on Christmas Eve 1905 aged fifty-eight shortly after his wife Mary. A report in *The Times* noted “*Mr. Burbidge had the academic as well as horticultural mind... and made many important contributions to the literature of his subject, on which he was a recognized authority*” which seems a fitting description of the man Moore called a “*distinguished botanist-gardener.*”

AMBROSE CONGREVE (1907-2011)

The third person with a strong link to Ireland was Ambrose Congreve who was a member of the Orchid Committee from 1938 to 1956. Conversely orchids were not his main claim to fame; instead it was the garden he created at his family home, Mount Congreve near Kilmeaden, County Waterford. He started establishing it in his late teens but began in earnest from the mid 1950s creating a new woodland garden. He credited childhood visits to the gardens of Lionel Rothschild at Exbury, Hampshire for his inspiration and went on to develop his own renowned collection of Rhododendrons.

After university Congreve worked for Unilever and travelled to China where his fascination with the Orient began. From 1936 he ran Humphreys & Glasgow, the gasworks manufacturer, overseeing its diversification into petro-chemical engineering. It prospered during the 1950s and 1960s which coincided with his redevelopment of the garden and the acquisition of rare antiques for the house. He retired in 1983; having sold the company to an American firm and devoted all his time to the garden.

At Mount Congreve there was a large walled garden and glasshouses where fruit and flowers for the house, including orchids, were grown. In 1968 the Cymbidium houses were damaged and the plants were moved to Glasnevin and never returned. In the displaced collection was *Cymbidium* Irish Melody (= *Cym.* Jason x Martin). It was the only orchid Congreve received an award for, an AM, in 1948. He did win fifteen RHS Gold Medals for his rock and formal garden exhibits at Chelsea during the 1950s and 1960s.



Cymbidium Irish Melody AM RHS in 1948,
painted by Nellie Roberts. RHS Lindley Library

Congreve served for some years on the RHS Shows, the Joint Rhododendron followed by the Rhododendron & Camelia Committees. His contribution to Horticulture was acknowledged when he was made a CBE in 1965. The RHS appreciated him too; in 1987 he became a VMH and was made a Vice President in 1998. It was on his annual visit to Chelsea that Congreve died in 2011 aged one hundred and four, the contents of the house were sold but the gardens remain open to the public. Sadly there are few photographs of him because he hated having them taken. However there is a fitting anecdote that at his centenary lunch, he quoted what he described as an old proverb: “*To be happy for an hour, have a glass of wine. To be happy for a day, read a book. To be happy for a week, take a wife. To be happy for ever, make a garden.*” ■

CLARE AND JOHAN HERMANS