



Friends News

October 2020

Keeping in Touch during Covid-19

Dear Friends

We'd like to keep in touch ...

Send us your story or article to share

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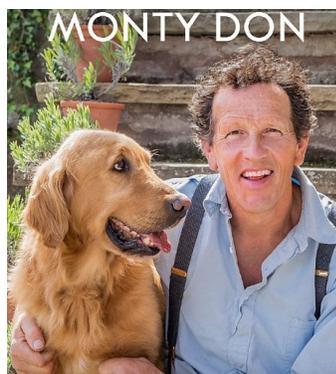
We may not be able to meet for our monthly talks and concerts at Cobham Hall, but we can keep in touch online.

Britain's colonial past

Musings from Monty

There has been much in the news recently about Britain's colonial past. In a recent article written by Monty Don (he whose name is synonymous with anything gardening related) he remarks how he remembers his lessons in history and geography at school - in an era when colonialism was maybe not so open for discussion as it is today - as including many dates that were intrinsically linked to the days of Empire as well as pre-war maps of the world that were coloured in large swathes of red. Whilst, no doubt, many of us can share these memories to a

degree, we are probably not all as aware of how those days in history had, and still have, a large impact on the gardens we all know and love. As Monty remarks **"From lilies to lupins - every garden in Britain bears witness to our colonial past."**



Monty readily admits that he feels deeply uncomfortable with regard to what he calls "retrospective moralising based on modern sensibilities" but he is clearly under no illusion that we must re-visit all aspects of our colonial past and our views towards it. And whilst he does not shy away from expressing opinions on some of those less attractive aspects, it is plants and gardens which are, as you would expect,

the focus of his attention. Many of the plants we have in our gardens today he points out - plants such as "rhododendrons, pines, lilies, lupins clematis, cornus, acers, primulas" etc., are indeed "symbols" of our colonial past and were gathered by "plant hunters" who have been celebrated for "braving hardship and extreme conditions" to bring many beautiful plants to back to our shores. But, as he is equally quick to point out, that does not mean we should feel guilty about having those plants in our gardens but rather be "inspired" by them to "create a better future." After all, he concludes, even as there has been a shift in our thinking about our colonial past, there has also been a growing awareness of the "power of gardens to heal mental illness." And, to quote him for one final time, it is his belief that "gardens can help to heal social hurt, with real humility, kindness and a sense of respectful kinship that extends to all people."

Wise words indeed.