**Report of the Storrington Horticultural Society March 2023 meeting**

At our March meeting Alex New gave us a fascinating insight into Hightown Gardens, its history and the aspirations of Sir Fredrick and Lady Sybil Stern from 1909 to 1967 and onwards to the present day.

The gardens are situated just below Highdown Hill a gateway to the South Downs National Park. This 81m, (266ft) high ancient chalk crossroad is a site of myths and history that fascinated Victorian Archeologists. It was here that this unique chalk garden was created by Sir Fredrick and Lady Sibil Stern from 1909 – 1967 when they were living at Highdown Tower (now a Hotel) and the estate owned part of Highdown Hill.

Fredrick and Sybil marry on 26th June 1919. Their London Home was at 16 Montague Square and High Down was their weekend home

The initial garden was created by Sir Fredrick from a chalk quarry where there was little soil and unfavorable conditions for plant growth and later actively supported by Lady Sibyl after their marriage and is an achievement of the Sterns who worked for 50 years to show that plants would grow on chalk.

The interest in gardening grew from 1920 and they started to assemble plants collecting plants worldwide that were growing in challenging conditions for transfer to their chalk garden. This was achieved by funding syndicates of plant hunters such as George Forrest, Dora Stafford and Frank Kingdom – Ward.

The Sterns developed as experts at plant propagation and creating hybrid flowers and the garden developed with this expertise as well as some unusual specimen plants resulting from the earlier plant collecting syndicates.

During the second world was Sir Fredrick Stern was Commander, West Sussex Home Guard and promoted Colonel he was also awarded during this time the Horticultural Victoria Medal, Stern continues his work with counting plant chromosomes and is knighted in 1956.

Fortunately Sir Fredrick kept a very complete record of each plant in the garden on individual record cards. This information is being used by Alex New Curator and Plant Officer of the Garden in a restoration project to re establish some of the plants that have been lost over time. This is being supported by the National seed Bank where Sir Fredrick had the foresight to arrange storage of seeds from a number of the plants in the garden who are now growing plants from these for transfer back to the garden in an ongoing plan of restoration.

Sir Fredrick Stern died in 1967 and Lady Sybil donated the garden to Worthing Council to ensure it is maintained for the public.

One condition of the donation was that entrance to the garden was to be free; the garden also has a plant sale section and offers light refreshments.

Our next meeting is on 21st April in the Village Hall Storrington at 7.30pm when

David Potter will be presenting a talk entitled **‘Life above a railway tunnel’**

M.J.Webber

Web Site: storrington.org.uk