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The Kenneth Black Bursary Scheme

Anna Peacock

Members who have studied the balance sheet for the year ending 2018 will have noted that approximately two fifths of the Hardy Plant Society's assets relate to the Kenneth Black Bursary fund. We are talking about a sum in excess of £200,000, which is ring-fenced for the purpose of helping horticulturists – as students or in employment – develop their knowledge of the hardy plants which are within their area of work or study. In this act of charity, we are fulfilling the objectives of the Society as set out in our constitution.

Where did this money come from? I'd like to be able to say that it was bequeathed to the Society by a generous member of the Hardy Plant Society, as has been reported in the past. In fact, there are no records to show that Kenneth Black was ever a member. We do know that he

was a gardener with Enfield Council, and there were no heirs to inherit his estate. It is my understanding that in 2009 the HPS was just one of the plant-related organisations to be chosen as a beneficiary by the solicitors managing his estate. No matter that Kenneth Black did not personally make the bequest; his name, together with (one must assume) his love of plants, are being honoured every time an award is made. I like to think that it would have pleased him greatly to know that his life in horticulture is continuing, if in name only.

Since its inception in 2009, a few changes have been made as to who qualifies for a bursary. Now the bursary is open to anyone of any age who is either studying or working in horticulture. It aims to provide support for an activity that is not undertaken in, or paid for, by

their place of work or study, such as a travel scholarship or a conference. In all cases the activity must enhance their knowledge and development in horticulture, and in particular be related to hardy perennial plants. Applications must fulfil the criteria laid down in the objectives of the Society, and be accompanied by a reference from an employer or tutor.

Applications are assessed by a panel of three, which includes the coordinator. All successful applicants are asked to submit a report on completion of their trip or task. This not only validates our decision to have made the award, but also allows our members to see how the bursary is being spent.

The Society has strong connections with the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and its internationally renowned horticultural training schemes.

Almost from the outset applications have been received from Kew; students, apprentices and staff have applied and make up most of the beneficiaries to date. Last year we helped Elie Wilms, a first-year apprentice at Kew, travel to Yunnan in China, where he would see plants with which he was familiar at Kew, growing in their natural habitat. His inspiration for the trip came from reading about the plant-hunting expeditions of Wilson, Forrest and David. His time in China included working at Kunming Botanical Gardens, before heading to the mountainous region of Yunnan, where he delighted in botanising at high altitudes. His excellent report can be found on the bursary page of the website at www.hardy-plant.org.uk and by clicking on his name.

The Bursary Scheme is becoming more widely known as it is now listed on the 'Bursaries and Grants' page of the Chartered Institute of Horticulture website, and we are distributing more promotional leaflets. Last year we received applications from students at Askham Bryan College in East Yorkshire for the first time – we helped Kit Murphy, one of their students, conduct research in several central European countries and also visit some well-known gardens in the UK. His report can be seen on the HPS website, along

with many other accounts of exciting excursions and work placements here and overseas.

So far this year we have received applications from a range of horticultural establishments including the botanic gardens of Birmingham, Oxford and Logan; English Heritage's Wrest Park; Gravetye Manor and RHS Wisley.

Unless they have reached celebrity status, horticulturists are not well paid. It is gratifying to know that the Hardy Plant Society, in a small way, is giving support to those in or training to be in the profession, who wish to extend their knowledge and develop their understanding of hardy perennial plants. Thank you, Kenneth Black. 🌿

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Hypericum sp. and *Cornus capitata* growing in the forests near Fugong

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Meconopsis sulphurea growing with *Rodgersia pinnata* in the Nu Mountains

Anna Peacock is the coordinator of the HPS Kenneth Black Bursary Scheme. She and her husband moved to Lincolnshire 20 years ago to renovate a Victorian farmhouse and garden. She is a member of the Lincolnshire Group, and studied the history of English garden design via a degree in Heritage Studies at Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincoln.