

A gardener's diary at Heysham Tower

(extract from *The Heysham Peninsula* ed. Eileen Dent HHA 2000)

From 1st January 1884 to 10th July 1888 William Stephenson of Heysham kept a gardener's diary. Each dahe describes the wind direction and other significant aspects of the weather. He was head gardener at Heysham Tower from before this time until his death in 1897. The house belonged to Mr Bennett who was probably in frail health at the time. Mr Bennett had sons living in Liverpool, to whom Mr Stephenson sent baskets of grapes and other fruit by rail, and baskets of flowers and grapes to hospitals and asylums and similar organisations locally.

Most plants and flowers are given their Latin names.

He worked every day except Sundays and Christmas Day.

These are some of his entries:

January 1884

Tuesday 1st : Wind south east, dull, fine.

W. end Wind south east, dull, fine, began to dig the orchard, brought plants out of the Conservatory. Took others in. Cut down (wind) chrysanthemums.

Thursday 3rd : Wind south east moderate, drizzly rain all day. Working in the orchard. Pruned vines, potted plants.

Friday 11th : Wind north west stormy, heavy showers of hail. Digging in the orchard. Pruned vines in 2 (vinery). Repaired kitchen tap.

Thursday 17th : Wind south west moderate, dull, fair. Working in the orchard took the worm casts from the grass in the centre garden. Finished white-washing the new shed. Put fires in. Took R Woodmans planks home.

These kinds of entries make up the majority, but there are some interesting insights into local life.

On 3rd April he orders plants from Mr Shepston of Belper.

2 dozen wallflowers, Double yellow and dark

1 dozen Hollyhocks

4 dozen yellow Auriculas

2 dozen Alpines

Daisies. 6 hen and chickens

6 Lady Hope

6 White Queen

6 Smiths White

6 Flowers of Spring

6 Early Red

6 Defiance

2 Dozen Polyanthuses Mixed

2 Plants Harlequin

3 - do - Socratees

1 - do - Princess Thyru

1 - do - Isabela

1 - do - Lady Hardy

2 - do - Duchess de Morney

3rd (April) Wind south east moderate, fine, a shower. Cleaned walks. Washed bottles. Got in Hay. Planted Auriculas in Mr B's garden. Planted daisies, polyanthus in north east garden. Potted hollyhocks, wallflowers, potted plants in No 8.

June 1885

18th ... R. Hodgson took out the horses for a drive.

19th ... R. Hodgson took the horses for a drive ...

and similarly on 20th, 22nd, 23rd, 24th, 25th, 26th, 27th, 29th, 30th; also on July 1st, 4th, 8th, 10th, 13th, 15th and 17th.

20th ... R. Hodgson took horses for a drive. Dr Saul brought 2 new horses to the Tower.

23rd ... Took the new horses back home.

September 1885

17th Wind south east moderate fine. Cleaned walks in south east garden. Mowed the grass by the drive. Destroyed 9 wasps nests. Mr B. died.

19th West strong showers. Put gravel on the top walk in centre garden. Put Mr B. into his coffin.

21st Wind north west moderate fine. Took Mr B. to Liverpool to inter.

Dec. 1st Wind west, moderate fine. Dug beds in south garden. Repaired the old rabbit house. The first election under the New Franchise, Mr Marton, Capernraw (*sic*) and Mr MacCoan, Major Marton got the seat in parliament.

14th ... killed a pig by R. Hodgson.

15th ... Salted the pork.

16th ... Sent to Liverpool a Hamper of pork and apples.

April 1886

30th Wind east to west. Moderate fine frost. Ice half in thick. Cleaned the drive.

June 1888

25th ... Picked caterpillars from the gooseberry trees. Water peas and broccolis. Mrs Bennett died this afternoon between 4 and 5.

27th ... Cut flowers for wreathes and crosses.

28th ... Mrs B. interred.

The last entry, incomplete because of a cut page, was on August 10th 1888.

Mr William Stephenson appears as gardener in the 1891 census and died at the age of 72 in 1897. He was head gardener at Heysham Tower. He and his wife lived in Tower Lodge with her son, Christopher Cornthwaite.

Mr Thomas Ogden, a visitor to the Tower spoke to him and in the middle of a sentence he suddenly fell with his face to the ground. He appeared to be dead a moment afterwards. The jury at the inquest agreed on a verdict of 'death by natural causes'.