

# THE PLANT HUNTERS

Meet the explorers who brought the world to Britain

Produced by Award-winning Theatre Without Walls  
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“Can’t recommend them highly enough!”  
Gloucestershire County Council

“Excellent”  
The Scotsman

“Reliable and always a pleasure to work with”  
John Down, Prince’s Trust

Have you heard of the handkerchief tree or ever wondered how the monkey-puzzle got its name? Find out how and why your favourite plants came to Britain in this unique and special event where you can meet the intrepid adventurers who risked their lives to bring new seeds across the world.

Clients Include:  
National Trust  
RHS  
Forestry Commission  
BBC

Hear the Plant Hunters’ stories and adventures in their own words taken from lecture notes, articles, letters and diary entries. Even the Plant Hunter’s costumes and general appearance are taken from photographs, paintings and contemporary descriptions. And we haven’t just taken the plant hunters word for it, we’ve also found out what their rivals and friends thought of them to enable our actors to create as authentic a portrayal as possible.



## Event Outline

The event is very flexible and easy to run in several ways to best suit your venue. Past events have had Plant Hunters stationed near plants which they are associated with or emerging from behind a bush as if in mid-hunt. On other occasions Plant hunters have lead an organised tour around gardens stopping off at appropriate points to tell stories of their adventures and how they discovered certain plants.

### The Costs

One day:	£300 per character
Two consecutive days:	£500 per character
Additional consecutive days:	£175 per character

Repeat booking in the same season £250 per character for first two consecutive days, £175 thereafter.

Budget option: £200 first day/£175 per additional day for costumed walkabout (without script)

Our fees include one day’s preparation, costume hire, performance, insurance, admin. and travel expenses. Longer term contracts negotiable but subject to Equity (Actors Union) minimum rates.

### Optional: Management/ on-site rehearsals

We can provide event management, including site visits at £150 per day plus expenses if required. On-site rehearsals, if required by the client, cost an additional £150 per actor plus expenses. These rates are only applicable to plant hunters events.

### Optional: New Scripts and adaptations

Our existing scripts are available at no extra charge. They refer to key adventures and plants associated with each plant hunter. Existing scripts can be adapted to include detail relating directly to your venue’s requirements for £150 per day research/writing. Depending on the amount of research required and the length, completely new scripts can be created from £600.

### Optional: Education packs/ workshops

We can also create education workshops from £200 and educational resources including teachers packs from £600-£3000 including CD’s, DVD’s, CD-Roms.

## Some practical notes on running an event

The Plant Hunters is a simple event to run. There are only a few basic requirements.

### In advance of the event we will need:

1. A map of where you would like the event to take place within the gardens and where possible marked with locations of plants relating to the plant hunter.
2. Any additional background material or historical information that may be available that links the plant hunters to your venue.
3. Directions to get to the venue and your postcode
4. A risk assessment noting potential hazards on your site and any access problems

### On the day of the event the actors will need:

1. A contact at the venue to meet them and their telephone number.
2. Somewhere to park
3. A room with privacy to change in- ideally with a mirror.
4. Somewhere quiet to have a break away from the public during breaks.
5. A break at least every 2 hours and a lunch break

### Other Notes:

Our actors are Equity members. They have PPL insurance up to £10million and have had enhanced CRB checks. Unless otherwise engaged under your normal contract terms we work to ITC/Equity guidelines.

We have done a general risk assessment for this event that considers all normal eventualities but we require details of potential risks/hazards and health and safety requirements specific to your venue or organization.

Theatre Without Walls has policies for disclosure, health and safety, social inclusion, disability access, interaction with the public, ethical and environmental practice etc. but please let us know of any issues that we should be aware of.

Unless otherwise agreed the Plant hunters are booked between 10am and 4.30pm- with the first tour no earlier than 11am. This booking includes their onsite preparations. If a prior rehearsal hasn't been arranged it will take us about 1 hour to rehearse before being ready to deliver to the public- ideally this time would include a brief tour with a member of staff giving the actors some additional background information about the gardens.

We can provide quality publicity photographs and a press release and we are happy to do interviews with local radio/TV /newspapers in advance. We are happy for you or press photographers to take pictures



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## Key dates in Plant Hunting

The first instance of plant hunting was recorded in 1495BC when Queen Hatshepsut sent an expedition to Somalia for Incense trees. Since then plant collecting has continued. Up until mid 1500 most plants came to Britain from Europe. Then from 1550-1600 the emphasis shifted to plants from the Middle East. The colonization of the US from 1620 also increased plant collecting.

Most famous 17<sup>th</sup> century plant collectors were John Tradescant the Elder and his son. They introduced numerous specimens including Stags Horn, Swamp Cypress and the Tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*). They started the boom in plant collecting that has continued for the last 200 years.

The Royal Horticultural Society was founded in 1804 for 'the improvement of horticulture' and provided funding for collection trips. This was a time of discovery and introduction of new plant specimens to Britain.

By 1851 the year of the Great Exhibition, The enormous greenhouse of Crystal Palace was built. In 1845 repeal of the Glass tax had cut glass prices by 80% and Iron was used to create boilers and pipes for circulating hot water so for the first time temperature could be accurately controlled.

Novel and exotic plants were in great demand. The Handkerchief tree was 'discovered' in China in 1869 by Pere David and first introduced to Britain in 1901 by Ernest Wilson.

Plants were collected on scientific expeditions but economic research was just as vital. The transference of economically important plants between countries encouraged by Kew e.g. rubber, quinine, tea etc. led to the growth of Colonial Plantations. Plant hunting was an essential part of imperial expansion.

## Sir Joseph Banks 1743 – 1820



Joseph Banks was Born to a wealthy and landed family and had both money and privilege

One evening after swimming in the Thames he was captivated by a hedgerow bathed in sunshine and resolved to learn about the plants in contained

In 1764 came into his inheritance - £5000 per annum

It was the height of the Grand Tour to Italy to see Renaissance artists (e.g. Capability Brown) – Banks said, "every blockhead does that. My grand tour shall be one around the globe"

In 1766 he was Naturalist on HMS Niger during survey of Labrador and Newfoundland

In 1768 he Paid £10,000 for himself and his team to join Captain Cook's voyage on the Endeavor to find the fabled 'southern continent'

Having been banned from plant hunting by the Viceroy at Rio de Janeiro he bribed local people to bring plants to the ship under the pretence they were for food

At Tierra del Fuego he lost 2 of his team to hypothermia in a severe storm and survived by eating raw vulture

In New Zealand he had several run ins with Maori war parties and discovered cannibals

In 1770 Australia was discovered. Among the plants he discovered were Eucalyptus and acacias. He named the bay they first landed at Botany Bay on account of the impressive flora.

During the voyage around the coast the Endeavor struck a reef and all the ships cannons and drinking water had to be thrown overboard and all hands had to man the pumps to prevent the boat sinking – indeed the boat would have sunk had it not been for a large piece of coral plugging the hole

He caught malaria in Jakarta – by the end of the voyage 42 of the original 94 crew had died.

In total he had collected 1,300 new species and 110 new genera

Although Kew Botanic Gardens had been established back in the 1660's Banks worked hard to make it the world's premier botanic garden – becoming its unofficial director (appointed by the King George) in 1772 when it was still little more than a royal pleasure ground. Under his eye he helped create a research orientated botanic garden – using his contacts to gather new material as well as sending out plant hunters. He is also credited with starting the transfer of economic plants to colonies – one of the reasons behind England's emergence as a world power.

## Ernest Henry Wilson 1876 – 1930

Ernest Henry Wilson was born in Chipping Campden and he served his apprenticeship at Birmingham Botanic Garden and following this he did his Diploma at Kew.



In April 1899 he was dispatched to China by Veitch Nursery to find and collect the beautiful Handkerchief or dove tree first discovered by Pere David – a French missionary who traveled in China after improved access was granted in 1860. Unfortunately all specimens known were dried herbarium specimens.

He arrived in Yunnan province in the middle of a bubonic plague epidemic and thus left to Hanoi without an interpreter. When he arrived he met with Augustine Henry a customs officer and amateur botanist who gave him a crude map covering 20,000 miles on which he marked the rough location of a single handkerchief tree. Undaunted he set off into Sichuan, only to arrive at the spot to find a new house standing next to the stump of the tree. Depressed he retreated to Ichang where he discovered the now erroneously known Kiwi fruit. Then while clambering through dense woodlands he suddenly came across a handkerchief tree in full flower. Satisfied he turned his attention to the plants around him and quickly discovered literally hundreds of species including the paperbark maple and many rhododendrons.

On return none of his seeds germinated – unbeknownst to Veitch Nursery they needed 18 months alternating cold/hot to germinate.

## William (1809-64) and Thomas Lobb (1811-94)

Little is known of the Lobb Brothers' childhoods in Cornwall except that their father was a keen amateur naturalist and gamekeeper. They soon joined Veitch Nursery – Thomas joined when he was just 13. Unfortunately although the nursery paid handsomely for its plant hunters they did not request that they make records and thus much of their travels were unrecorded but what we do know is that William first went to S. America in 1840 and here he rediscovered and brought back Monkey Puzzle seeds as well as the Chilean fire bush. These seeds were worth a fortune with Veitch selling 100 seedlings for £10. This reintroduction alone confirmed the importance and profitability of sending out plant hunters.



On his return William was quickly sent back to South America. William also traveled to California to collect seed from many of the firs discovered by David Douglas in the process getting caught up in the gold rush. He also discovered three conifers overlooked by Douglas – the Western red cedar, Californian red fir and Colorado white fir. The amount of seed he sent back allowed Veitch & Sons to grow literally thousands of seedlings. During this trip he also heard an amazing story from a hunter named Dowd who had been chasing a bear when he came into a grove of giant trees. Eagerly William followed his directions and discovered the Wellingtonia grove known as Calaveras Grove (giant sequoia – relative of the coastal redwood) named after the recently deceased Duke of Wellington (although some argued it should have been called Washingtonia after the first President). Today the grove is part of a national park famous for General Sherman – the largest living organism – 3,200 years old, 275 ft tall, 82ft girth and an estimated weight of 2500 tons.

Eventually they germinated but by then seed from a French collector had already begun to grow – robbing them of the valuable 'Introduced by' label.

He was sent back to China to collect the Alpine Yellow Poppywort that he duly found after narrowly escaping drowning on the Yangtze and altitude sickness. Buoyed he also found red poppywort and the regal lily. Over 10 weeks he had traveled some 650 miles.

He returned to China a third time on behalf of the Arnold Arboretum and Charles Sargent. – the first trip that was driven by science rather than commerce. This was followed by a fourth trip to collect more regal lilies although on this trip he was caught in a rock fall and severely broke his leg thus curtailing future arduous expeditions.

In 1914 and 1917 he traveled with his family to Japan on two final collecting trips. In total he introduced over 1,000 species.

*"Some Friends have said 'You must have endured much hardship wandering in out of the way corners of the Earth.' I have. But such count for nothing, since I have lived in Nature's boundless halls and drank deeply from her pleasures. To wander through tropical or temperate forest with tree trunks more stately than gothic columns, beneath a canopy of foliage more lovely in its varied forms than the roof of any building fashioned by man, the welcome cool, the music of a babbling brook, the smell of mother earth and the mixed odors of a myriad flowers – where does hardship figure when the reward is such?"*