



Samuel Broome

“The Floral Oracle of the Working Classes”

Master Simon Brown, past Master of the Garden, describes the work of the 19th Century gardener who made the Inner Temple Garden accessible to all.

Whilst London was being developed into the world's largest city and the capital of the British Empire, the Great Garden of the Inner Temple became the 'central park' and showground of the City of London. The man responsible for that was Samuel Broome FRHS (1806–1870), who was the Head Gardener for 38 years from 1842 until his death.

Broome was a countryman who came to the London as the Industrial Revolution was taking hold. He had undertaken an apprenticeship at the seat of the Earl of Bradford at Weston in Staffordshire, landscaped by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown.

The city he arrived at would have been akin to that of the cities of China today: teems of poor workers and their families living in cramped conditions in the outskirts of the city, blighted by smog, as described by Dickens in his graphic novels. Unlike the country he had come from, the conditions were unsuitable for horticulture, and those at the Temple worse than elsewhere. At the same time, floriculture began to develop in those pre-football days as the competitive sport amongst the working classes, with the introduction in 1845 by Robert Fortune of the revered semi-double reddish brown small 'Chusan Daisy' from an island off the east coast of China, where chrysanthemums had been a legendary plant ever since the 15th Century BC. From this was bred the 'Pompom', so named after the tufts on the top of the hats of French soldiers. In 1846, these arrived in England via Paris at the Versailles Nursery in Hammersmith of John Salter, the English 'Father of the Chrysanthemum', and that of Samuel Brookes, whose nursery was in Stoke Newington.

These plants created a sensation. A group of growers and enthusiasts formed the Stoke Newington Florists Society for the Cultivation and Exhibition of the Chrysanthemum, and the first competitive show was held in the upstairs room of the Rochester Castle public house with a dinner to follow.

Shirley Hibberd, a leading member of the burgeoning gardening press, observed:

“Chrysanthemum growing became a metropolitan garden fashion – perhaps a mania, and a very good one, for it appears that from the date of the dethronement of Louis Philippe in 1848 and the first multiplication of

chrysanthemum societies, November suicides began to decrease in number, so that now every well-intentioned city, town and village has its annual show, the month of November is found to be less characterized by suicides than any month in all the year.”

Broome, immersed in this febrile atmosphere, discovered that the chrysanthemum thrived in the Inner Temple Garden despite the pollution from the gasworks next door at Bridewell and from the factories on the Surrey bank of the river. In 1854, he persuaded the Benchers to open the gates of the Inner Temple to the public in the summer and late autumn.

In 1862, the guide, *London: What to See and How to See It* reported:

“The garden is laid out and kept in good order. It is of considerable extent, chiefly covered by greensward surrounded on three sides with beds of flowers and has a graveled walk or terrace on the bank of the river commanding fine views of Westminster, Blackfriars Bridges and Somerset house. The garden forms a delightful promenade during the summer evenings, which is open to the public from six till dusk commencing the first week in June. During the months of October and November these gardens are radiant with a gay profusion of chrysanthemums by the gardener Mr. Broome, who has rendered the Temple Gardens as one of the most attractive shows of the Seasons and the gardens are then freely open to the public.”

These shows continued until the end of the century when his successor, John Newton FRSA (awarded in 1888 after the first RHS Temple Show), was dismissed in 1895 and not replaced. Joseph Dale FRHS, the Head Gardener of the Middle Temple next door, also bred and exhibited chrysanthemums. In his *Floral World and Garden Guides* during the 1860s, Shirley Hibberd annually commented very favourably upon the free displays to the public by both of them. Comparisons were inevitably made between the respective displays of Broome and Dale taking into account the “*more sheltered position*” from the frosts and high winds that favoured the smaller more manageable Middle Temple garden. This friendly competition led to ever greater excellence, the breeding of new varieties by the protagonists and collaboration

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in co-authoring the eighth edition in 1867 of a book on their culture that Broome had first written in 1858.

The *Culture of the Chrysanthemum As Practised in the Temple Gardens With List of Plants, Including All the Latest Varieties* was published by W Walker & Co, 196, Strand (booksellers to the Honourable Societies of the Temple). It reached its 18th edition by 1893 under John Newton's editorship. It is still regarded as a classic reference work on the subject and on practical gardening.

Broome's reputation spread from the precincts of the Temple and earned him a place as honoured guest at the first annual dinner of the Tower Hamlets Chrysanthemum Society held on 5 December 1859, at Eagle Tavern in the Mile End. The Chairman, George Glenny, declared that, *“floriculture had never made such progress among the people as within the last 18 months”*. He quoted Samuel Broome as, *“the floral oracle of the working classes”* and as saying, *“The chrysanthemum was the only flower the working classes could successfully cultivate without an expense beyond his means.”*

In 1861, Broome wrote to the editor of the *Penny Illustrated Paper*: *“The working classes are getting passionately fond of flowers and those among them who enjoy the advantage of a sunny spot of ground out of town cultivate them in their leisure hours on summer evenings as an amusement. They form themselves into little societies. They exhibit their productions in friendly rivalry with one another and those who are successful go away highly delighted with their prizes.”*

The rivalry was anything but friendly. In 1864, two rival societies held their shows at almost the same time: Tower Hamlets Society at Eagle Tavern and the East Tower Hamlets Society in the Edinboro Castle in Stepney. The respective

chairmen Glenny, a ‘horticultural hornet’ of a journalist, and his counterpart William Eickhoff, traded vicious insults in the local press.

Broome was no mere specialist; he was also quite simply the best all-round gardener of his era, perhaps any. The *Gardeners' Chronicle* of 13 February 1858 thought so and described how he had been *“rewarded by a complete triumph over all such difficulties as were not insuperable”* in rescuing the *“almost desolate”* Inner Temple Gardens. He demonstrated this by exhibiting 24 trusses of roses at the Central Horticultural Society Show in 1864 in order to prove to doubters such as Thackeray and Dickens – both regular visitors to the Great Garden – that the *“War of the Roses”* could still thrive there if one had *“Diligence, Patience and Perseverance”*.

The public perception of Broome and his garden was expressed by John Timbs:

“The flower-beds next to the main walk he managed to secure four successive crops of flowers – the pompons were especially gaudy and beautiful; but his chief triumph was the chrysanthemums of the northern border. 200 families enjoy these gardens throughout the year, and about 10,000 of the outer world, chiefly children, who are always in search of the lost Eden, come here annually. The flowers and trees are rarely injured, thanks to the much-abused London public.”

Broome's reputation as the ‘floral oracle’ spread far and wide. The ‘Father of the Chrysanthemum’ in America was ‘Uncle’ John Thorpe, who established his famous nursery in New York in 1870. In 1883, he looked back upon his success and explained that it was due to Samuel Broome: as a boy growing up in London, he recalled climbing up on ‘Old Sam’ Broome's knee during 1851 and being told all about chrysanthemums, how they were

such a lovely and neglected flower and how they were destined to become popular. One day, he said, 'Sam' sent him 50 flowers and a copy of his book, which he would never part with, "not even for \$1,000". Upon that, he swore to make the chrysanthemum the most popular autumn flower in America – and he did just that.

On 19 March 1860, the *Sydney Morning Herald* in Australia reported from the *Illustrated London News* of 14 January that "A silver cup has just been presented to Mr. Samuel Broome, gardener to the Honourable Society of the Inner Temple, by Mr. John Salter, nurseryman, of Hammersmith, as an acknowledgment of his great success in promoting horticulture among the working classes."

Just before his death, the last great embankment of the Thames took place to accommodate Bazalgette's sewer and railway. In his book, he wrote that this, "would afford him the fine opportunity of laying down a comprehensive plan for a conservatory or winter garden in the Temple as well as an arena for drill and practice for our loyal volunteers upon the surplus ground to be gained from the rivers and banks. It will also be a happy means of restoring our patriotic Grass to its original verdure." Sadly, he died before realizing his dream. The current landscaping was done by his successor and Robert Marnock, the pioneering landscape designer,

emulating what Baron Haussmann had done in Paris by planting the rows of smog tolerant plane trees on either side of the Broadwalk, overlooking the Thames.

He was buried at Nunhead Cemetery. His friends erected an Aberdeen granite monument to his memory with his name, dates and a chrysanthemum engraved upon it. His obituary reads: "Samuel Broome, for forty years gardener to the Honourable Society of the Inner Temple, whose annual Chrysanthemum Show was one of the sights of London, and who, in their culture, gave such valuable testimony to the effects of Lord Palmerston's Smoke Act, is dead, at a ripe old age. He lived respected, and he died happy."

Chrysanthemum mania reached its zenith in 1883 when the first local chrysanthemum society, the Stoke Newington Society, elevated itself to become the National Chrysanthemum Society. At the same time, in recognition of the great chrysanthemum shows of Broome and Dale, the new Royal Courts of Justice Restaurant, at 222, the Strand (now Lloyd's Bank), was decorated with Royal Doulton tiles depicting some of the 500 varieties of chrysanthemums exhibited at the 1882 show, including a dusky pink one called 'Inner Temple'.

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Punch paid its own fulsome poetic tribute to the great man:

Poor old Broome, art thou gone! and shall we hear
 Thy annual Jubilate never more,
 O’er the Chrysanthemums that were so dear
 Unto thy honest heart, as, year by year,
 They decked the Temple Garden’s swarded floor!
 Like Henry Brougham, thy greater homonym,
 Thy pride and joy was to see cleared away
 The stagnant, stifling, smoke-clouds, that made dim
 The Temple of the law, and on Thames’ brim
 Alike for flowers and lawyers darkened day.
 And when the Smoke Act passed – and on Thames stream
 Steamers forbore to smoke, and on Thames’ shore
 Chimney-shafts ceased from sooty mouths to teem
 The blacks, that turned to griminess the gleam
 Of the Chrysanthemums thou didst adore –
 Never was simple man more glad than thou,
 Never were gentler pride and joy than thine –
 Pleased to see pleased crowds round thy Pompons bow,
 Children, maids, barristers of parchment brow,
 Who rarely noticed sun’s or blossom’s shine.
 Along Thames’ bank thy blooms stood brave and bold,
 The brighter for the brick and mortar round:
 And if thy flowers were flowers of gold,
 So innocent none grew from Temple mould,
 None so enriched, yet cumbered not, the ground.
 How oft, when autumn daylight in the west
 Was blended with the City’s lurid flare,
 Pale cheeks and aching brows thy flowers have blest,
 That breathed a breath of Nature and her rest,
 On brains o’erwearied with law’s cark and care.
 Farewell to thee, kind, honest, old Sam Broome,
 In boutons d’or above thee bloom the mould –
 No London smoke distress thee in the tomb,
 And whosoe’er i’ the Temple fills thy room,
 May the new Broom sweep clean as did the old.

