

THE HISTORY OF YOUR AREA

18th century Fulham was resplendent with fine mansions and the decoration of their extensive grounds became a source of pride and rivalry amongst their owners. The fashion for elaborate and exotic trees and plants created a lucrative nursery garden business with some of the major suppliers located in Parsons Green.

Fulham Nursery, occupying twenty acres between the New Kings Road and Hurlingham Road, was owned by the Gray family and was said to have had the largest collection of plants and trees in the world at that time. Christopher Gray bought some of the plants collected at Fulham Palace by the 'Great Gardening Bishop' of London, Henry Compton. Amongst them was the magnolia grandiflora which was the first cultivated in this country. Gray died in 1764 leaving no children and his widow sold the freehold to local landowners The Burchells who lived at Churchfield House – where Churchfield Mansions is now on the New Kings Road. One family member, William Burchell, was a renowned botanist, explorer and naturalist who amassed over 60,000 species of plants, seeds and insects from his travels in Africa and South America. He even brought a panther back from one of his trips which he kept in the gardens at Churchfield.

Running from Broomhouse Road to the river, another important nursery was owned by the Rench family. The founder's son, Nathaniel, lived to be 101 and died in the same house he had been born – he reportedly had thirty children with two wives.

The business was eventually taken over by Sir Harry Veitch, founder of the Chelsea Flower Show.

The largest nursery was owned by the Dancer family on land stretching from Munster Road to Parsons Green Lane and down to St Dionis Road – around 28 acres. Their house, Vine Cottage, was on the corner of Winchendon Road. They also were known for selling the mimosa bush which Bishop Compton had been the first to cultivate in this country around 1680.

Two hundred years later, at the end of the nineteenth century, the nurseries began to close, the land sold for development and their collection of plants, trees and shrubs destroyed. The names Dancer Road and Mimosa Street mean they will not be forgotten.

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Mimosa Street c.1905