

Two Fabergé plant studies from the Collection of Lady Sackville (1862-1936).

These two plant studies now in a clients collection have a long and well documented history. Both are illustrated by H. C. Bainbridge in his monograph on Fabergé. As the Fabergé London branch manager from 1906 to closure in 1916, Bainbridge was perfectly placed to write this foundation book, on the history of the firm published in 1949. He illustrates no less than six flowers purchased by Victoria Josepha Sackville (Lady Sackville) one in St Petersburg and the remainder in London. (Plates 78 and 79). In the matter of these much-copied plant studies provenance is most important, in fact it is an absolute requirement.



If Poklewski speaks for Lady De Grey, Rudyard Kipling puts in a claim for Mrs. Sackville-West, the third Lady Sackville of Knole, for he has said this of her: 'On mature reflection *the* most wonderful person I have ever met'.* She came as a flood upon you, and it was a flood which divided and then joined up again, leaving you bound as on an island by her beauty, her charm, her enthusiasm and, most captivating of all, at any rate to one who was doing his best to send folk to heaven the Fabergé way, her full agreement with you about what to do in the Fabergé manner with birds and flowers, animals and fat *izvoschiks*. She was, I think, as much of an inspiration to Fabergé as he was to her, for he never failed to ask after her every time I went to Petersburg: 'And how is Mrs. West?' he said. I have a note of a meeting with her and her daughter on January 23rd, 1908, when she saw the Chatsworth box with a view of the house in monochrome enamel which Fabergé had just made, and ordered a similar one of Knole. On this day, too, we arranged about some flowers, in miniature, climbing poles and luxuriating in lily ponds, certain of which I reproduce in Plates 78 and 79.

Bainbridge in 1949 on page 87 provides for a provenance when he notes that on, January 23rd 1908 Lady Sackville and daughter (Vita the famous gardener at Sissinghurst) visited the shop: *On this day, too we arranged about some flowers, in miniature, climbing poles and luxuriating in lily ponds, certain of which I reproduce in Plates 78 and 79. This entry provides for a perfect provenance!*

Bainbridge uses a quotation by Kipling taken from *Pepita* a biography of her grandmother written by Vita Sackville-West (1892-1962) that describes her remarkable mother Lady Sackville (1862-1936) who inspired Fabergé, to create five of the illustrated plants. Lady Sackville was to inherit through the widow of Sir Richard Wallace, half the fortune left to her advisor and secretary Sir John Murray Scott a sum that exceeded 600,000 pounds in property objects and cash. This bequest instigated one of the most famous court cases of the 20th century. A case won by Lady Sackville, the KC representing the Scott family the great F. E. Smith in closure stated:

...you saw in that box one of the strongest and most striking personalities which any of you have ever met in your lives.



Plate 79, the Bainbridge image published in 1949 the studies having then been sold to Spink & Son presumably by Vita on the death of her mother to fund her garden at Sissinghurst.



The Lingonberry cutting still in its original case, was purchased by Lionel and Victoria Sackville-West, later Lord and Lady Sackville, from Fabergé in Russia, during their visit to attend the coronation of Emperor Nicholas II in May 1896.

A lingonberry by Carl Fabergé, with aventurine quartz and purpurine berries, carved Siberian jade leaves and a naturalistically engraved gold stalks standing in a trompe l'oeil rock crystal pot. In its original silk and velvet lined fitted hollywood case, the lid satin bearing the stamp 'Fabergé, St. Peterburg, Moscow, Odessa' beneath the Imperial warrant. St. Peterburg, circa 1896. Height 11.4 cm

Lingonberry is a wild plant native to Northern Europe. It is evergreen and lies throughout the winter, buds forming with the coming of spring. The appearance of the buds was welcomed as a harbinger of the new season. It grows wild in the forest north of St. Petersburg and would have been familiar to Fabergé and his patrons.

There are two other versions of this plant, one in the Royal Collection RCIN 40250 purchased by Queen Alexandra before 1925, the other in The India Early Minshall Collection 1966.44, now at the Cleveland Museum of Art.



Left: The Royal Collection RCIN 40250.



Right: The India Early Minshall Collection 1966.446. Described as:

This flower study depicts a lowbush cranberry or lingonberry. To achieve a naturalistic effect of ripening fruit, Fabergé varied the coloring of the berries. Some are made of chalcedony in hues of milky white to represent unripe berries, while others appear in deep reddish agate to represent ripe ones. Fabergé's inspiration for his flower studies is said to have come from the floral brooches of precious stones that were made in the 1700s for Catherine the Great as well as from the Japanese art of flower arranging, known as ikebana. Fabergé's flower studies were given as intimate gifts to friends by the tsarina and others in the court. She also liked to take them around to wherever the imperial family was residing as a reminder of spring during the harsh Russian winters.

The second plant study has always been stated to be a lotus or a lily, from being set in rock crystal simulating water. Bainbridge's words, *luxuriating in lily ponds*, springs to mind when discussed in 1908 with Bainbridge, however this may not be so, as from the number and shape of the six petals and the leaves, that have to be thicker than real life to secure the gold stems to the nephrite.



A Japanese six petal Miss Bateman clematis(?) by Carl Fabergé, the gold petals naturalistically enamelled opaque white with light pink colouration, the stamens in hessonite garnets and the leaves carved nephrite, mounted on rendered gold branches, standing in an oriental curved triangular brown orletz vase containing rock crystal imitating water. St Petersburg, engraved to rear of stalk with Fabergé inventory number: 16103. Circa 1910.

Miss Bateman is an heirloom clematis dating to 1869, developed by the nurseryman Charles Noble of Surrey, from a *Clematis patens* cross of 'Fortunei' with 'Standishii.', spotted by a Robert Fortune near Tokyo and sent to Charles Noble & John Standish for their nursery in the early 1860s. Noble's hybrid

was named after Catherine Bateman, the daughter of the famous orchid grower, James Bateman of Biddulph Grange Staffordshire. The famous garden was created by Bateman, as a home for his collection of plants from around the world. Assisted by his wife Maria and by their friend, the marine artist Edward Cooke who was largely responsible for the rockwork and ornamental buildings, they acquired a range of plants and diverse architectural features to conjure an array of distant environs, from an Italian terrace to an Egyptian pyramid, a Himalayan glen to a Chinese water garden.

Charles Noble was in partnership with John Standish for 10 years from 1846 at the Sunningdale Nursery Bagshot, Surrey a connection with Knole the Sackville's and its garden remains unknown. The business extended for nearly a mile along each side of a main road which was a busy route for horse-drawn coaches.

Both men had made their mark during the partnership and were well regarded by plant hunters and benefactors of the day. Besides their own comprehensive catalogue, they sold plants obtained by Robert Fortune on his China/Japanese expedition between 1843-1846.

After the partnership split up, Noble stayed at Sunningdale and Standish moved on. It seems that Noble's clematis hybridisation dates from this later period. He is credited with introducing many clematis cultivars mainly by crossing C. 'Standishii' with C. 'Fortunei' and various forms of C. *patens*.

Noble retired in 1898 and disappeared into obscurity. The place and date of his death are not known.

Adapted extracts from Charles Noble of Sunningdale by Everett Leeds in The Clematis Winter 2000.



The Japanese Gateway (Chokushi-Mon) from the Japanese Exhibition at White City London visited by over 8.5 million people in 1910, one of two constructed from scratch at the White City Exhibition site. Since authenticity was regarded to be of the utmost importance, trees, shrubs, wooden buildings, bridges, and even stones were brought directly from Japan. Seen in this context the ordering of a Japanese clematis by Lady Sackville in a Japanese container must be considered the height of fashion.