

The life of Isaac Bunting

— The Victorian Colchester nurseryman
who ‘discovered’ the Erabu Lily —

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本年王立園芸協会（RHS）が二百周年を迎えたイギリスは園芸愛好家の実に多い国である。彼等の庭園や庭は古来巡礼者、十字軍参加者、宣教師、軍人、旅行者、外交官、商人等様々な人々によって持ち込まれた多種多様な植物で賑わっていることは周知の通りである。

本稿では英国の著名なプラント・ハンター（植物採集探検家）達を概観した後、その末裔とも位置付けられる英国コルチェスター出身の養樹園主で横浜の山手百番地に店を構えていたアイザック・バンティング（1850-1936）の生涯を、主に同氏の甥でその研究家でもあるブルー・ジェームズ女史の助力を得て蒐集した情報、並びに現地コルチェスターでの生地、ナースリー跡地視察等を元に考察する。アイザック・バンティングこそは鹿児島県の「花の島」沖永良部島に自生し、それまで雑草同然に見なされていた「エラブユリ」の商品価値の「発見者」である。

Introduction

Britain, which this year has seen the 200th anniversary of its representative horticultural society, RHS (the Royal Horticultural Society), is a country full of people with green fingers and a love of gardening. Its gardens are rich in miscellaneous species of beautiful and fascinating plants brought home since antiquity from almost every corner of the world by a variety of people such as pilgrims, crusaders, missionaries, military and medical officers, travellers, diplomats and merchants.

In this paper I shall, after a brief look at well-known plant hunters and how Japanese lilies were first introduced to Europe, give a brief sketch of Isaac Bunting, a Victorian Colchester nurseryman who settled in Yokohama, Japan and ‘discovered’ the Erabu Lily.[†]

<Plant hunters>

Serious plant hunting, for the Royal Family and the nobility at first and then gradually for the *nouveaux riches* such as industrialists, merchants and bankers in Victorian times, seems to have started with John Tradescant the Elder (c.1570–1638), gardener to Charles I and founder of his “Ark” at Lambeth, London, the first English museum of its kind in which he displayed rare and unusual plants he had collected, and his son John the Younger (1608–62), also gardener to Charles after his father’s death. Both of them travelled extensively; the elder to Europe, Russia, Algeria and Morocco and the younger to North America, introducing to England a number of new and exotic plants which included a sweet-smelling single rose *Rosa acicularis* Lindl., *Tradescantia* (the spiderwort), and *Liriodendron tulipifera* (tulip tree).

Plant hunting then gathered momentum through the 18th century and culminated in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Among the plant hunters active in the 18th century were, to mention a few, Sir Joseph Banks (1743–1820), who joined Captain Cook’s exploration (1768–71), served as the President of the Royal Society, and helped to found the RHS; Francis Masson (1741–1805), the Royal Garden’s first plant collector who, sent by Banks, travelled to the Cape of Good Hope, the Canaries and Azores, Spain, Portugal and America; David Nelson (d.1789), who joined Captain Cook’s third voyage; and Archibald Menzies (1754–1842), a botanist and surgeon who joined Captain George Vancouver’s exploration along the coast of California, and introduced the monkey puzzle into Britain. The great number of collectors who were active in the 19th century include the collectors for the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew: George Caley (1770–1829), who collected in Australia; Peter Good (d.1803), who collected plants in India and East Indies; James Bowie (c.1789–1869), who collected in Brazil; Joseph Burk (1812–1873), who went on a collecting trip to Canada and the USA; Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker (1817–1911), the son of the first Director of the Kew, W.J. Hooker (1785–1865), who collected plants in Nepal, Bengal, Morocco and the USA; Richard Oldham (1837–64), Kew’s last official collector, who was dispatched to Japan in 1861; and Charles Wilford (d.1893), who visited Japan, China and Hong Kong. Those who collected plants for the benefit of the RHS included such as David Douglas (1798–1834), a famous Scottish collector who introduced American conifers into Britain, and another great Scottish collector, Robert Fortune (1812–80), who made celebrated expeditions to China, and the famous Veitch Nursery collectors include the Lobb brothers from Cornwall, William

(1809–63) and Thomas (1817–94), their first collectors who collected in Chile, South and East Asia, etc., John Gould Veitch (1839–70) who collected in Japan, China, etc. and contributed to the Japanese fad in Britain in the 1860s, his son James Herbert Veitch (1868–1907) who also visited Japan and further fired the fascination for Japanese gardening in England, Charles Maries (1851–1902), the first plant collector in Hokkaido, and their penultimate, E.H. ‘Chinese’ Wilson (1876–1930), who collected a great number of rhododendrons in China.

Among other collectors were Joseph Paxton (1803–65), the first flowerer of the giant water-lily *Victoria amazonica*, Augustine Henry (1857–1930), an Irish botanist who became one of the greatest authorities on the plants of Western China, and George Forrest (1873–1932), another famous Scottish plant hunter who collected extensively in and around Yunnan, China.

It was not, however, only these famous plant hunters and botanists but ordinary gardeners and (commercial) nurserymen who took huge financial risks and invested years of labour in collecting plants that made a vital contribution to making Britain the home of ‘English gardens’.

At first, the new and foreign flowers decorated the gardens of only the royal family and the nobility, but in Victorian times as industry and agriculture developed, there appeared in the suburbs around industrial towns houses and villas of the leisured classes with garden plots, which further increased the demand for new and foreign plants brought back to Britain by plant hunters and nurserymen who travelled to and/or did business in China, Japan, Africa, Australasia, the Americas, and other areas.

<Exportation of Japanese lily bulbs>

Japanese lilies, together with aucuba, skimmia, hydrangea, bamboo, ginkgo, prunas, camellia and many others, seem to have been first introduced to Europe in the pictorial book *Flora Japonica* published in Germany in 1712 by Englebert Kaempfer (1651–1715), a German physician and scientist who came to Japan in 1690 as an adviser to the head (‘*Capitão*’) of the Dutch East India Company at Nagasaki, stayed for two years, and joined the annual pilgrimage to Edo (Tokyo), botanising along the way.¹

It seems, however, to have been, as far as the earliest trustworthy historical record is concerned, another German, the eye surgeon and naturalist Philipp Franz von Siebold (1796–1866) that first took lily bulbs out of Japan, though some Japanese lily bulbs seem

to have been taken to Europe as early as the mid-18th and early 19th centuries.² Siebold had taken up the position of physician-naturalist with the Dutch East India Company, but was caught in possession of forbidden maps of Japan, and was deported by the Shogunate in 1829. [He was later pardoned and returned to Japan in 1859 and stayed till 1862]. After a long voyage of more than a half year, he landed the bulbs and planted them in the Botanical Garden at Ghent (a city formerly in Holland where gardening was already quite sophisticated by 1700, but now in Belgium), and published *Flora Japonica* (1835-42) illustrated by Japanese artists, thus helping Japanese lilies becoming very popular in Europe. As for the Japanese trumpet lily or *L. longiflorum* Thunb., however, the bulbs planted on that occasion seem to have failed to flower. The bulbs which successfully flowered for the first time were those sent for the garden in 1840.³

As for the English man who first collected Japanese lily bulbs, it seems to have been the 21-year-old young botanist John Gould Veitch, who was sent to Japan by the famous Veitch Nurseries (Exeter and Chelsea) and arrived in Japan on 18 July 1860. It was soon after the Empire of Japan signed the Treaty of Peace and Amity with the United States (and Great Britain as well later in the same year) and opened two ports (Shimoda and Hakodate) to American (and British) ships in 1854 (followed by more after the conclusion in July 1858 of the United States - Japan Treaty of Amity and Commerce, with the signing of which Yokohama was opened to foreign trade in the same year.) In 1862 he sent from Japan the Golden-rayed Lily, *Lilium auratum*, renowned as the 'aristocrat of lilies', which caused a sensation when it was first exhibited at South Kensington in July the same year.⁴ In his official role as a British 'Legation Botanist' John Gould also collected and sent cases of plants (which included dwarfed trees, or *bonsai*) to Kew and Queen Victoria's gardens at Osborne on the Isle of Wight. He was soon followed by the famous Scottish plant collector and botanist Robert Fortune, who, on his return to England, made a lot of money by selling lily bulbs.⁵ Incidentally it was Robert Fortune who first introduced Japanese anemones to Europe.

According to Ichiro Suzuki, the author of *Nihon Yurine Boeki no Rekishi* (History of the Trading of Japanese Lily Bulbs), the exportation on a commercial basis of Japanese lily bulbs seems to have been started at Yokohama in 1867 by an Englishman named John Joshua Jarman who was born in 1840 at Cloyton (Croydon?) in south London. He had come to Japan in 1864 as a naval officer to guard the foreign settlement at Yokohama. His father was a well-known botanist and rose grower in London, and he

also was greatly interested in plants and flowers. So he left the Navy in 1867 and worked for Kramer & Co., established by a C. Kramer, an English (German?) horticulturist and exporter of Japanese plants, who had founded in 1861 Kramer & Co., probably the first company of its kind in Japan, at Yokohama. In the same year (1867) John tried sending lily bulbs to his home in London. Most of the first bulbs were rotten when they arrived, but the ones sent next year flowered and became very popular. Jarmain inherited Kramer's company and expanded the business further first at 66 Yamate and then at 99 Yamate [next to which Isaac Bunting established his business, probably in 1877], became famous as "*Ijinbaka-no-Jaa-mein*" or "Jarmain at the Foreign Cemetery", but died in 1892 at the age of 53. He is also said to be the first Englishman who imported and introduced into Japan Western roses, gladioluses, hyacinths, dahlias, etc. as well as the first builder of a greenhouse in Japan.⁶ (The two terms with ? marks in the brackets in this paragraph are my suggestions.)

Other contemporary lily bulb exporters seem to have been H. Grosser, a German who arrived in Japan in 1868 and exported lily bulbs in quantity to Germany; Samuel Cocking, a British exporter of mints, who began exporting lily bulbs in c.1880; and F.H.R. Manley, an American who moved to 90 Yamate in his later days and ran his business till c.1900.⁷

Isaac Bunting – Father of the commercialisation of Erabu Lily –

Isaac was born on 27 June in 1850 at a house in Snake Lane, Mile End (in the parish of Myland), in Colchester as the fifth child and last son to a nurseryman William Bunting and his wife Harriet Ellis Belcher. [On the site of the house now stands a garage, named Osborne Garage, which deals not in Japanese lilies but Japanese cars, namely Isuzu.] He was named after his grandfather Isaac, who had died in February the same year, leaving the North Nursery in North Station Road (a substantial house in Snake Lane, with several acres of land and a half share of his nursery business) to his eldest son William, and the other half (at the Lexden Road site) to his third son Horatio. The latter site had to be bought back by William and a family friend after Horatio went bankrupt.⁸ Isaac the grandfather (1783–1860), an independent nurseryman and seedsman (and a florist as well by around the 1830s), was the founder in 1819 of the Buntings Nursery, and lived till his death in a big white two-storeyed house in Lexden Road in the

parish of St Botolph, which Isaac the grandson often visited when young. Isaac's birth was registered by his father at the registrar's office in Colchetser on 27 July.

In 1857 Isaac was given by his father a copy of *The Floricultural Cabinet, and Florists Magazine* (January to December 1837, constructed by Mr Joseph Harrison, nurseryman, Downham Nursery, Norfolk, and published by Whitaker & Co., London). It was, according to Mrs Prue James, Isaac's great-great-niece and an expert on his life, probably given as a reward for working hard at school or (to promote) recovery from an injury or tooth taken out, or it will also be guessed that it was because he was showing interest in his father's work. This kind of book must have furthered his interest in horticulture.

Isaac seems to have received a sound education (at Tilney House Academy in Colchester), and in 1865 at the age of 15, was examined at London in December, and passed the Examination for Junior Students prescribed by the Regulations of the Syndicate for conducting the Examination of Students not Members of the University, and attained to the Second Class in Honours. According to the certificate signed by the Vice-Chancellor, James Cartmell of Cambridge University, the subjects in which Isaac, son of William Bunting of North Nursery, Colchester, satisfied the examiners were:

<Subjects of preliminary examination>

1. Reading aloud from an English Prose Author.
2. Writing from dictation.
3. Rudiments of English Grammar.
4. Elementary Arithmetic.
5. Elementary Geography.
6. Outline of the History of England.

<Subjects selected by the student himself>

1. Religious Knowledge.
2. English.
3. Latin.
4. Pure Mathematics.
5. French. (Mentioned specially as *Distinguished.*)

This was the end of young Isaac's formal education, and he then worked hard together with his elder brothers and his two elder sisters for his father William Bunting, Nurseryman and Florist, at North Nursery, Colchester (whose nursery sign says he deals in fruit & forest trees, shrubs, &c., and greenhouse & bedding plants), earning first 4/- (20 pence) per week half a year after leaving school, and £ 13 per annum in three years' time.⁹ Isaac and his brothers seem to have had a profound influence on the future success of the firm.

According to Suzuki, Isaac arrived at Yokohama in 1874, and first stayed with the Jarmains from London. He had come to Japan counting on the help of John Joshua Jarman, an acquaintance from England from Isaac's father's time. John, as has already been mentioned in the introduction of this paper, was a marine turned successful exporter of lily bulbs. In 1877, after a few years of a kind of apprenticeship with the Jarmains, Isaac returned to Colchester, withdrew his total savings of £ 22 from his savings account¹⁰, came back to Yokohama, (where there was already created a lucrative export trade in lily bulbs sent directly to Europe in Wardian cases¹¹), established his own business, "Creekside Nurseries" at 100 Yamate and started sending Japanese plants and trees to Colchester, the lily bulbs exported by him eventually accounting for a major part of the Buntings' turnover in the years to come.¹²

The Buntings seem to have had an interest in the lily bulb trade because lilies and other exotic plants had, as we have seen in the introduction, become increasingly popular in Europe and Britain in the middle of the 19th century, and they seem to have made a joint decision to have Isaac do this business on behalf of the family, for his father was nearly 70 years old and his two brothers had wives and families at that time.¹³ The journey by sea (via the Suez Canal, opened in 1869) must have been a tough one, though the steamships in the 70s seem to have had electric light on board, some years before towns in Britain began to be lit by electricity.¹⁴

On 17 August 1880, Isaac Bunting of Yokohama, Japan, married Sarah Ann (Annie), the only daughter of George French of Woodham Walter and Virley Hall of Kelvedon, at the church at Woodham Walter, which was reported on 20th August 1880 in *The Essex County Standard*, a local weekly newspaper based in Colchester, which is still published every Friday.

Isaac's business seems to have fared well, and his business catalogue of 1885, *Special Offer of lilies and other Japanese bulbs, &c. from Isaac Bunting, Creekside Nurseries, Yokohama, Japan*, advertises a great number of bulbs, plants, trees, and shrubs on offer, which include: lilies, fritillaria, irises, cycads, acers, camellias, *Kaki* (persimmon), magnolias, azaleas, loquats, plums, bamboos, camphor trees, chestnuts, fern balls in various designs, and others on application. The catalogue adds that packing of bulbs and persimmons was made in September and October respectively, and specifies "Cash business only as soon as the goods are safely packed and on board the mail boats. (No complaints whatever to be entertained as to condition of shipments on arrival at destination, though size and description guaranteed.)"

According to a c.1900 edition of *Benham's Guide to Colchester* (These guides were typical town guides and directories published from the mid-1800s until the 1950s, when they were superceded by telephone directories), Messrs. Bunting & Sons, large growers of roses and all other flowers and plants, devoted special attention to the lily, and "Bunting Lilies" became known throughout the UK. They imported bulbs from various parts of the globe, such as Bermuda (where *L. longiflorum*, which had been brought into Britain in 1830 from the Miyako Islands, Okinawa, was grown in large quantities until 1895, when diseases nearly wiped it out, causing Japanese lilies to be used instead¹⁵) and South Africa, but Japan supplied by far the greatest number. They also shipped daily supplies to Paris, whence some were forwarded as far as St Petersburg. (Regarding *Lilium Longiflorum var. insulare*, *Lilies of the World* (1925, p261) states that "The name *insulare* was given to this variety by Mr R.W. Wallace under the impression that the bulbs sent him from Yokohama by Isaac Bunting had been collected in the Bonin Islands.¹⁶")

In 1895 Isaac's father William died, and the business was carried on by Isaac's two brothers, William and Alfred, at the nurseries in Lexden Road and Snake Lane (The North Nursery). Some of the lily bulbs exported from Japan by Isaac were stored at a warehouse in London, where, according to the *Price List of Japanese Lilies, Plants, &c. (season 1895-96)* published on 4 November in 1895 by Bunting & Sons, Colchester, all the bulbs were taken from their heavy clays and carefully sorted and repacked for their customers to receive with the least carriage, some were forwarded to and kept in their nurseries in Colchester for propagation and for providing the cut flowers which were

such a feature of Victorian public occasions, and others were sold to other nurseries. The price list, which also advertises their “Books of Lily Flowers” representing 36 of the best known varieties that come from Japan and Japanese paintings of lilies on silk, refers to *Lilium Henryi*, a rare Chinese lily with dark green, thick leaves with shining surface and flowers of shaded yellow, slightly varying in colour. To procure a stock of it, the price list says, their relative, Isaac Bunting of Yokohama, had to send a traveller to the interior of China (just like in the case of *Kanoko-yuri* referred to below).

In 1896 Isaac selected *Kurojiku-teppo-yuri* (black-stemmed *L. longiflorum*) from among several varieties, and successfully cultivated and made them popular, and thus he is regarded as the discoverer of this variety.¹⁷ In 1897 Isaac exported bulbs of *Aka-kanoko-yuri* (*Lilium speciosum magnificum*) collected on Koshikijima Islands, Kagoshima, to Britain and made a lot of profit thereby, and never let it known where the lily came from for several years! He had been fascinated by *Aka-kanoko-yuri* which he saw at Minatogawa-jinja, Kobe, traced the lily’s origin to Koshikijima, and ‘discovered’ it by despatching his men Izawa Kusakichi and Saita Chojiro to the islands and having them collect its bulbs.¹⁸

Regarding the secrecy of the lily’s origin, Suzuki quotes an interesting episode that a Japanese trader, eager to obtain such a high-price-fetching, popular variety and hearing rumour that it came from Korea, sent his son there, but the bulbs he brought after a lot of trouble, turned out to be *tengai-yuri*, a different variety, which made the son a laughing stock among his fellow traders.¹⁹ As is also guessed from his trade catalogues, in which he demands cash payment up front at Yokohama before the bulbs’ release on their long and hazardous journey on the sea to England, Isaac does seem to have been shrewd and strict in business matters. On the other hand, however, he seems to have been a very generous boss for his Japanese employees, who were treated very generously and favourably by him and admired and loved him.²⁰ We may safely argue here that that was one very important reason why he was so successful in Japan. Anyway, “working in great secrecy and acting on another’s misfortune” seems to have been not so uncommon among the British nurserymen at that time, unlike their Japanese counterparts, who seem to have got on well.²¹ (Although Suzuki says that Isaac introduced *Aka-kanoko-yuri* (*Lilium speciosum magnificum*) and *Kurojiku-teppo-yuri* into England for the first time, Kobayashi says that the *Aka-kanoko-yuri* had been exported to Europe by L. Boehmaer as early as 1877 and that a great amount of *kanoko* lily bulbs

were taken from Koshikijima in 1893.²²)

While searching for wild lilies in 1898, Isaac is believed to have been cast ashore [though no evidence of the incident has been found yet²³] at Kibiru Beach, Okierabu Island, Kagoshima, and was saved by Ijichi Suemichi and other islanders. While taking a walk, so the story goes, he found wild lilies, which had been treated as just a mere wild flower or rooted up and discarded as weed before) and encouraged the islanders to cultivate them.²⁴ By that time, Isaac seems to have been dealing in lily bulbs quite extensively, for *The Gardeners' Chronicle* (Saturday, 28 May, 1898) refers to *Lilium Rubellum*, a fine lily, new to cultivation and to European botanists, as a new and noteworthy plant, which was (understood to have been) imported from Japan by Messrs. Bunting & Son, of Colchester, and passed into the hands of Messrs. R. Wallace & Co.

The following year, the islanders of Okierabu Island (Hereafter Erabu Island), led by Ijichi Suemichi, thus started cultivating lilies for the first time.²⁵ [Incidentally two of Ijichi's younger brother's grandchildren live in Kagoshima City: one runs a flower shop and the other, his elder sister, a bar, which is almost always decorated with lilies supplied by the florist brother.]

In 1900 Isaac, as he had promised, visited Erabu Island and bought all the lily bulbs cultivated by the Ijichis for 3,000 yen (now approximately equivalent to 30–50 million yen!, for the price of one egg at that time was about 0.005 yen), an incredibly high price which made Ijichi Suemichi tremble all over, and created a sensation among the dumbstruck islanders.²⁶

In 1902 his chief purchase clerk Izawa Kusakichi visited Erabu Island and bought lily bulbs from Ichikizaki Jimbei.²⁷ In 1904 Isaac visited Erabu Island with Izawa (as interpreter as well) and instructed Ichikizaki Jimbei how to collect, pack and ship lily bulbs. Interestingly enough, Isaac is observed by some curious islanders to have eaten only fried prawns (or lobsters?) while staying at Erabu and seems to have caused a bit of trouble to those who accommodated and entertained him.²⁸ Unfortunately no reason is provided as to why he ate prawns only. Suzuki says that Isaac was an enthusiastic lily researcher, often visited Amami Islands to buy and supervise the transport of lily bulbs from Erabu Island to Yokohama, and discovered that the dried sugar cane leaves used as packing prevented the bulbs rotting, the method still in use today.²⁹

In the same year, the Trans-Siberian Railway, extending about 4,600 miles from

Chelyabinsk in the Ural Mountains to Vladivostok on the Japan Sea, was completed (except for the area near Lake Baikal) and made it possible for the Buntings to travel mostly by land, though the lily bulbs were always transported by sea. Prue James says that it was one of the duties of her grandfather, Herbert Alfred Bunting (1874-1960), Isaac's nephew and junior partner at the Hythe, Colchester, to take Isaac's wife, Annie, (who, not liking so much her life in Yokohama, despite an increasing number of Westerners there: e.g., 808 British residents out of 1621 Westerners in 1893³⁰, usually stayed in Colchester a few months longer than Isaac when they visited England,) to Paris and see her safely onto the train there for her long journey back to Japan.³¹ She also says that her mother Doris Esther (1903-87), who remembered Isaac as a handsome man with snowy hair and beard (often) in a long dark coat lined with fur and with a fur collar (See Appendix-③), and rich (and probably a bit showy) enough to always put not a coin but a note (of ten shillings, which was a lot of money in those days) in the collection plate at church, enjoyed the visits to Colchester of Isaac, Annie, and their four grown-up children, who brought with them an array of wonderful gifts and Japanese novelties – tiny Japanese dolls, kimono, plates, exquisitely painted fans, colourful paper parasols, and egg-shaped stones from Ural mountains, which Isaac must have bought somewhere in Russia on his way home. Prue James keeps memorabilia on Isaac which include an exquisitely-made ivory fan with a country-scape painted on the silk screen on one side and a mountain-scape and flowers on the other (See Appendix-③), several *Kakiemon*-style plates, a fabulous folding book of hand-painted wood-prints by Miyagawa Shuntei (1873-1914: a popular *ukiyo-e* artist and illustrator) published in 1897 by Hakubundo, Co., several *netsuke* (pieces of sculptured wood or ivory used to secure cords carrying personal belongings attached to the *obi* or a belt on traditional Japanese-style dress) and trade catalogues, all of which were given as gifts to her parents. Isaac seems to have been a much loved figure in the family, though, as we have already seen, very strict in his business, which is also illustrated in one occasion during the First World War, on which Isaac got angry at the thought of his bulbs being ruined by the hold-up of his cargoes at the Suez Canal and ordered his junior partner Herbert Alfred to go to the War Office and demand their release (which order, however, was disobeyed.)³²

Although he seems to have left his nursery at Yokohama in the hands of his eldest son

Ernest Isaac Bunting (1881–1951) around 1905,³³ and the shop was moved to Yamashita-cho, Yokohama, Isaac pursued his business vigorously both in England and Japan.

The Special Trade Offer (a catalogue of Japanese Lily Bulbs – Season 1905–6 from Isaac Bunting, North Nursery, Colchester) mentions that ‘the first consignments of the Japanese lily bulbs of more than 30 varieties are expected to arrive in England early October, followed fortnightly, as the roots mature and are dispatched from Yokohama.’ The catalogue, which announces that “I do not grow flowers for sale either in England or Japan”, also implies his canny and steady business practices in its following terms of sale:

- 4.– Cash with order or two references are required from unknown correspondents. References should accompany the order to prevent delay.
 - 5.– Five per cent. discount is allowed for cash payments made within one month from the date of invoice. All accounts are due nett at Christmas and June 1st.
 - 6.– Prices quoted are for goods delivered F.O.R. (free on rail) Colchester, and all goods are forwarded at Owner’s Risk Rate unless otherwise ordered.
 - 7.– Every care is taken in repacking and forwarding, but my responsibility ceases when the goods are put on rail. No charge is made for packing, but cases are charged at half-cost prices.
- (The brackets in term 6.– are mine.)

Isaac’s business prospered year after year, and in the early 1900s he acquired property at Back Lane on the Hythe Quay in Colchester, and built there an office, a warehouse, an ice house (a plan for this ice house close to his sheds and office there was submitted in 1905) and a yard. He also had a house on the North Nursery land, which since the death of his father William had belonged to his brother Alfred (1843–1926). The Isaac family made a number of fairly lengthy visits to England between the turn of the century and WW I, and enjoyed their own house in Colchester.³⁴

He seems to have been by now a very successful nurseryman, well-known both in England and Japan. We may argue that his distinction in Colchester is endorsed by his presence at the annual Oyster Feast at the Colchester Town Hall in October (when the native oysters, for which the north east of Essex was famous, were at their best) in 1909,

which was attended by more than 400 invited male guests. Among the distinguished guests were the Mayor of Colchester, H.E. the Japanese Ambassador, MPs, mayors of neighbouring towns, knights, clergymen, military officers, Isaac's brother Alfred (1843-1926: North Nursery), and his nephew William Whorlow (1843-1922: Lexden Road Nursery). William Whorlow was a Justice of Peace as well, and, active in local affairs, founded in 1906 *the Bunting Room*, a gymnasium for the youth in Colchester. He is still remembered as its benefactor, though, to the chagrin of the Buntings, he unwisely left the Lexden Nursery to one of his employees, who lost the entire business in a few years' time. It can well be guessed that the Japanese Ambassador was invited to the Feast because of the popularity of the Buntings and their lilies, which had been very favourably introduced with a photograph of them in *Benham's Diamond Jubilee to Colchester* (1897) as follows:

'Colchester has become famed within the last six years as the Home of the Lily. Messrs. Bunting and Sons have devoted special attention to the lily, and have identified Colchester with this flower by exhibiting their beautifully grown specimens all over the country. These flowers, owing to their suitability for bold decoration, their fragrant and lasting qualities, are every year becoming more popular. Fresh bulbs have to be imported every year for growing under glass. Great risk is attached to this; often whole shipments arrive entirely rotten. Messrs. Bunting and Sons have blooms under glass all now [sic] the year round.'

The Buntings' business had by now further prospered, and their contracts included such a variety of work as planting a new cemetery, laying out gardens at the new seaside towns of Clacton and Walton, and decorating civic functions which included the annual oyster feast mentioned above.³⁵

On 2 April in 1910, Isaac's elder daughter, Annie Harriet, married Herbert Geddes at Yokohama, where the three elder children were born and all four children (two sons and two daughters) of Isaac and Sarah were brought up.

A special offer advertisement (5th September 1911) of *L. Longiflorum, True Easter Lily*, by Isaac Bunting, Bulb Grower and Oriental Merchant (of 100 Yokohama, Japan), North Nursery, Colchester, which proudly states as follows, clearly shows that Isaac is

still enthusiastically engaged in his lily bulb trading business:

I especially recommend this popular lily, 1st. as a substitute for *Harrish and Azorean longiflorum*, 2nd. for early work, and also for growing naturally in pots, 3rd. for best retail trade. My first shipment arrived about a fortnight ago, and was sold out in a few days. Second shipment has arrived today and I am pleased to state the bulbs are in grand condition, and are the finest I have ever handled. They are really of exceptionally high quality, being very deep heavy bulbs, and most liberal as regards size. ... (price list) ... All sizes guaranteed. All rolled in clay in Yokohama to protect from bruising. (Usual terms of sale.)

According to Herbert Alfred Bunting, who was on the receiving end at the Hythe in Colchester, the packing and carriage of the lily bulbs seem to have been a perpetual nightmare. He and his men, after checking the damage done to the bulbs by salt water, delays in transportation and careless handling, had to pack the clay balls into crates measuring approximately 24" x 18" x 12", which had then to be inspected at the Hythe before being sent to their final destinations.³⁶ Incidentally, the Japanese lily bulbs seem to have been exported in wooden containers made of cedar (5-*bu* or c.1.5 cm in thickness), measuring 2-*shaku* or c.60.6 cm (width), 3-*shaku* or c.90.9 cm (length), and 1-*shaku* or c.30.3 cm (height) till c. 1887, when they were replaced by cheaper, wooden containers (made of deal) measuring 62.6, 36.4, 30.3 (centimetres).³⁷

With Isaac's business faring ever better, an agreement was made on 3 April in 1912 between Isaac Bunting of Main Street, South Vancouver, British Columbia and his nephew Herbert Alfred Bunting of Colchester mentioned above for the former to give the latter a one-fourth share in the profits made at Colchester. Herbert thus acted as Isaac's (junior) business partner and was in charge of the site on the Hythe, Colchester. We do not know why Isaac was residing in Vancouver at that time, but it could be hazarded that he was there to seek a new business chance as a war was looming in Japan and the wild lily bulbs in Japan were getting scarcer due to excessive collecting.

In 1913 Isaac paid another visit to Erabu Island and bought lily bulbs on a large scale,³⁸ and in 1914-15, together with other lily bulb dealers such as Yokohama Ueki and Arai Seitaro Shouten, Isaac donated money to Wadamari Town, Erabu for repair work on

its wharf aimed at improving their lily bulb trade³⁹ with the islanders.

The first page of Isaac's trade catalogue of 1915-16 gives us three interesting aspects about his business:

- 1) *L. Henryii*, the rare Chinese lily, is now offered in large quantities by his nursery at Yokohama.
- 2) There was a blow to his business caused by the War: shortage of shipping and consequent hikes of freight rates, though he assured his customers that his prices were, with a few exceptions, no higher.
- 3) Isaac (still) does not grow flowers for sale either in England or Japan.

The following three years were very sad ones for Isaac, for he lost his eldest brother William Ellis Bunting in 1916, his younger son Frank Ellis Bunting in 1917, and his sister Harriet in 1918. The obituary of William Ellis Bunting appeared in *The Gardeners' Chronicle, A Weekly Illustrated Journal of Horticulture and Allied Subjects* (Vol. LX.-Third Series. July to December, 1916), which says that Mr Bunting regularly attended the autumn sales in London, that the deceased specialised in seed growing, and that his strains of vegetable and flower seeds were famous. In the same year, because of the First World War, the importation of lily bulbs was banned by the UK and other European governments until the end of the war in November 1918.⁴⁰

Isaac's younger son Frank Ellis Bunting (Private, Essex Yeomanry) was killed in action at the age of 32 on 11 April in 1917 at Monchy Le Preux, Arras, France and 'rests' peacefully (with almost 35,000 servicemen from the United Kingdom, South Africa and New Zealand who died in the Arras sector between the Spring of 1916 and 7 August 1918, the Eve of the Advance to Victory, and have no known grave⁴¹) at the Arras Memorial, Pas de Calais, France. He is also remembered with other war dead (61 Britons, 15 Frenchmen and 7 Americans) on a WW I memorial at the entrance to *Gaijin-bochi* or the Foreign General Cemetery located on the top of a hill overlooking the City and Port of Yokohama. The cemetery is only c. 200 m away from the place on an uphill road called *Yatozaka*, where his father Isaac had his shop "Creekside Nurseries". [Frank's name is not listed in the name list of the cemetery (which was established

in 1854 and had more than 4,200 graves as of 1985) kept at the memorial house at its gate.] There still remain several Western-style buildings in the vicinity standing there from the early years of the Showa Era (1926-89), though unfortunately no trace at all of the Bunting nurseries is found thereabouts. Before his death, Frank Ellis had, probably fearing that he might lose his life in the war, made his last Will and Testament, giving most of his property to his mother Sarah Ann Bunting, his library of books to the Superintendent of the Yokohama Union Church Sunday School, and 10 pounds each to the three Japanese servants – the Housekeeper O’katsan, the man Kato, and the Cook, which visualises before us a very considerate young Englishman. [The Union Church was founded in February 1863 at the American Consulate (later moved to 167 Yamate) by S.R. Brown, an American minister belonging to the American Dutch Reformist Church, and others.⁴²]

Isaac’s sister Harriet died in 1918 and was buried in the graveyard of the Parish Church of St Michael, Myland, where his son Frank Ellis is also remembered. Frank Ellis’s name is inscribed on the monument to those who fell in WW I in Chelmsford Cathedral as well. Isaac’s sister Julia, who died in 1924, was buried in the same grave plot as her sister Harriet.

In 1927, after exporting the Erabu Lily (*L. longiflorum*) for the last time in August, the Buntings finally closed the shop at Yamashita-cho, Yokohama. Suzuki and Kobayashi say the closing was triggered by their failed dealings in (importation of) ammunitions for the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5), which ended earlier than he had expected,⁴³ but this sounds rather dubious, because as the trade catalogues of 1905/6, 1915, and other information indicate, his business was obviously faring very well. According to Prue James, whose interpretation I believe is more plausible, the decline of Isaac’s business seems to have been caused by:

- 1) WW I which caused havoc in the transportation of lily bulbs.
- 2) over-hunting (extensive collecting) which stripped the indigenous environments (hillsides in Japan) of lily bulbs.
- 3) a dramatic build-up of virus disease triggered by close cultivation by the nurserymen.
- 4) circulation in England of cheaper and more reliable houseraised bulbs thanks to

improvements in cultivation.⁴⁴

Incidentally, two years later, the last foreign firm in Yokohama, Robert Fulton & Co. (former L. Boehmer & Co.), also closed due to slack business.⁴⁵

In 1929 the Buntings finally moved to No.5464, Larch Street, Kerresdale, Vancouver,⁴⁶ and seem to have continued in the lily (and/or timber) business.

On 18 October in 1936, Isaac died of cancer at the age of 86. His wife Sarah (Ann French) had died of cancer at the age of 86 on 25 March in the same year. Their tomb stands in a cemetery in Fraser Street, Vancouver, Canada.⁴⁷

Unfortunately there seem to be no direct offspring of Isaac's, for all of his children (Ernest Isaac who inherited his business, Frank Ellis who perished in the First World War, and their two sisters Annie Harriet and Edith Julia) died childless.

The Buntings & Sons, Colchester, which gradually shifted its business from the sale of lily bulbs to the propagation of tomato plants, continued its business until the late 1980s, when their glorious nursery business came to an end after a run of nearly 200 years.

According to Prue James, the present day Buntings are still trying to get permission for various projects in the north of Colchester, which include opening a heritage and countryside centre with the famous landscape painter from Essex, John Constable, as its focus, though the plan seems to be facing a lot of opposition from the locals who are concerned about extra traffic, etc.

Concluding remarks

With tremendous help and encouragement from Mrs Prue James, the great-great-niece of Isaac Bunting, to whom I am indebted for a great part of the information on Isaac which appears in this paper, and Mr Patrick Denney, a Colchester historian and a contributor to the East Anglian Daily Times, who kindly introduced me to Mrs James, and, together with her, showed me around Colchester with its sites of the former Buntings Nursery and places related to them, I hope I could give here a concise and brief sketch of Isaac Bunting, the 'discoverer' of the Erabu Lily and a contributor to the fame and popularity in Europe of Japanese lilies, especially the Easter lily or *L. longiflorum* from Okierabu Island, Kagoshima, Japan. However, I have to admit that the study on

Isaac's early days at Yokohama and his relationships with his predecessors in Japan is still far from satisfactory. Therefore I shall further research the said circumstances in the years to come, with a special focus on his relationships with John Joshua Jarman and other contemporary merchants who did nursery business in Yokohama.

Notes:

† This paper is a research report of the author's visit in summer 2003 to the RHS Lindley Library in London, RHS Wisley Garden in Surrey, Mrs Prue James's house at Writtle, Chelmsford, and the sites of the former Buntings Nursery in Colchester sponsored by Shigakukan University.

- 1 S. Shephard, *Seeds of Fortune* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2003) p.137.
 - I. Suzuki, *Nihon Yurine Boeki no Rekishi* (The History of Japanese Lily Bulbs Trading) (Tokyo: n.p., 1971.) (Kobayashi says it was another German, G. Meister (who came to Japan in 1682 and introduced lilies and other Japanese plants in his publication in Germany in 1692) that introduced Japanese *L. longiflorum* to Europe for the first time. See Notes 3.)
- 2 Suzuki, p. 3.
- 3 M. Kobayashi, "Okierabu-tou niokeru Teppouyuri Saibai Hyakunenshi" (The 100 years of lily cultivation in Okierabu Island), *Erabuyuri Saibai 100 Shumen Kinenshi* (A Bulletin Commemorating the 100th Anniversary of Erabu Lily Cultivation) (China: Yurisaibai Hyakushunen Kinenshi Henshukai (Editorial Committee of the 100th Anniversary Bulletin) p. 144.
- 4 S. Shephard, p. 140, p. 44.
- 5 M. Kobayashi, p. 144.
- 6 I. Suzuki, pp. 8-11. Cf. S. Shephard, p. 165.

(Kobayashi says lily bulbs were first exported in 1871 and started to be 'commercially' exported by a German horticultural adviser turned businessman and explorer Louis Boehmer who established a firm at the foreign settlement in Yokohama in 1882 after the lilies were exhibited in 1873 at the World Exposition in Australia and attracted the attention of the Westerners. (M. Kobayashi, p.144.))
- 7 I Suzuki, p. 8., p. 13.
- 8 P. Denney, "A blooming good business." 6 July 2001. n.pag. Online. Internet. 16 Sept. 2004. <http://www.eadt.co.uk/content/features/heritage/asp/010706buntings.asp>
- 9 P. James, p.22
- 10 P. James, P. Denney (Internet above mentioned.), op. cit.
- 11 S. Shephard, p. 190.
- 12 P. Denny, (op. cit.) Suzuki says Issac first dealt in woolen cloth (or linen?) for Western and military clothing. (Suzuki, p. 11)

- 13 P. James, p. 22.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 M. Kobayashi, p. 145.
- 16 Ogasawara Islands, so called because they used to be called *bujin* ('no person') islands.
- 17 I. Suzuki, p. 13.
- 18 *ibid.* p. 12.
- 19 *ibid.* p. 13.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 S. Shephard, p. 148.
- 22 M. Kobayashi, p. 144.
- 23 Looking favourably on the fact that there was a storm which hit the island in August in the same year, Kobayashi says that it is possible that a ship which had Isaac onboard was hit by it. (Kobayashi, p.146.)
- 24 T. Kii, *Okierabu Teppoyuri to Furijia no Ayumi* (The history of *L. longiflorum* and Freesia in Okierabu Island), 1991.
"Ingü - Yume to Kizuna, festival UK 98 Plant Hunter" 9/10/1998 Minaminihon Daily Newspaper.
- 25 T. Kii, *Okierabu Teppoyuri to Furijia no Ayumi* (The history of *L. longiflorum* and Freesia in Okierabu Island, 1991, pp.56-7.
- 26 T. Kii, *Kibiru Ango Reri* (Ango Lily of Kibiru) (Wadamari: Kibiru Longevity Society, 1994) pp.29-30.
"Ingü - Yume to Kizuna, festival UK 98 Plant Hunter" 9/10/1998 Minaminihon Daily Newspaper.
- 27 M. Kobayashi, p.148., p.271.
- 28 T. Kii, "Yuri Jijo" (The Situation of Lilies), *History of Wadamari Town*, pp. 472-3
- 29 I. Suzuki, p.12.
- 30 Yokohama Kaiko Shiryokan (Yokohama Archives of History), *Yokohama Gaikokujin Kyoryuuchi* (The Foreign Settlements at Yokohama) (Yokohama: Yurin-do Ltd., 1998) p. 31.
- 31 P. James, p. 24.
- 32 *ibid.* pp. 24-5.
- 33 I. Suzuki, p.11., M. Kobayashi, p. 147.
- 34 P. James, p. 24.
- 35 P. Denney, (op. cit.)
- 36 P. James, p. 24.
- 37 I. Suzuki, p. 22.
- 38 *Kagoshimaken no Norin-chiku-suisan-shi* (The History of Agriculture, Stockbreeding, and Fisheries of Kagoshima Prefecture) (Kagoshima: Kagoshima-ken Kyoiku-kai, 1938), quoted in *Erabayuri Saibai 100 Shunen Kinenshi* (A Bulletin Commemorating the 100th Anniversary of

- Erabu Lily Cultivation), p. 105.
- 39 M. Kobayashi, p. 152.
- 40 *ibid.* pp. 152-3.
- 41 Commonwealth War Graves Commission. "Debt of Honour Register. In Memory of Frank Ellis Bunting" n.d., n.pag. Online. Internet. 11 October 2002.
<http://www.cwgc.org.uk/detailed.asp?casualty=742966>
- 42 Yokohama Kaiko Shiryokan (Yokohama Archives of History), *Yokohama Monono Hajime-ko* (The things that started in Yokohama) (Yokohama: Yokohama Kaiko Shiryokan, 2000), pp. 172-3.
- 43 I. Suzuki, p. 12., M. Kobayashi, pp. 147-8.
- 44 P. James, p. 25.
- 45 I. Suzuki, p.19.
- 46 *ibid.* p. 12.
- 47 M. Kobayashi, pp. 147-8.

Suzuki says (p. 13) that he heard probably in 1932 that Isaac, at the age of 96, was living peacefully with his wife in Vancouver, but Suzuki's memory must have been wrong, for Isaac should have been 82 years old in 1932.

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