

A Withington Plant Collector

A Blue Plaque on the Sycamore Close sheltered housing in Heaton Road is inscribed-

FRANK KINGDON WARD
(1885 - 1958)
PLANT EXPLORER BOTANIST
AND AUTHOR, BORN AT
No. 14 HEATON ROAD
WITHINGTON, WHICH
STOOD ON THIS
SITE

Francis Kingdon Ward was the son of Harry Marshall Ward, who was a professor of botany at Owens College. He went up to Cambridge, but in 1906 his father died and he had to leave. He obtained a post as a master at a boarding school in Shanghai but soon found this was boring. He took part in an expedition hunting for animals and would have liked to continue travelling, but he had little money.

In 1910 he was received an offer from Arthur Bulley, the founder of Bees Seeds, offering him a job as a plant collector. He later recollected that 'Bulley`s letter decided my life.....for the next forty-five years.' He left Shanghai in February 1911 to search in Yunnan and Tibet. Among the seeds he collected were those of the blue poppy, *Meconopsis speciosa*, and he began writing his book, *The Land of the Blue Poppy*.

He continued to work for Bees and many of his plants and seeds were first grown in Arthur Bulley`s garden at Neston, Wirral, which is now the Ness Botanic Gardens. As his fame grew he was employed by many other groups to collect plants. He made about 25 expeditions, travelling to China, Tibet, Burma and India. He often worked alone and survived many accidents, including falling off a cliff, being crushed by a tree in a storm and walking into the centre of an earthquake. He also served as a British spy in the 1930s. He never retired and made his last expedition in 1956.

Frank Kingdon Ward wrote 25 books, but his real memorial can be found in the many gardens which grow the plants he introduced including *Primula florindae*, *Rhododendron wardii*, and *Lilium wardii*.

John Davies

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