

The Mathers Foundation (talk at Burnham Nurseries and on Zoom, 20th February)

At our latest meeting we welcomed David and Gill Mathers from the Mathers Foundation to give us a talk on the founding, work and future of the foundation. They joined us on Zoom from their home in the South-East and it was simultaneously broadcast for those at Burnham Nursery and those who joined us from home which was very successful.

The Mathers Foundation was set-up as a charity focussed on the conservation of both hybrid and species orchids within the UK. This was in response to the dwindling range of commercial nurseries and specialist collectors, the need to conserve historic UK collections and very much by Gill and David's passion for the UK orchid growing scene. They were also highly



Above: The modern greenhouse facility loaned to the Mathers Foundation

influenced by the Eric Young Foundation and had many plants donated from them as well as by Sara from Burnham Nurseries.

To that extent the Mathers were fortunate to be acquainted with a Dutch greenhouse manufacturer in the UK who had a site where demonstration growing facilities included extensive Dutch greenhouses and modern climate control systems were trialled. Understanding that demonstrating his company's products with actual plants growing within them would be very positive, he offered the Mathers many acres of glass to house their collection which has been extremely beneficial to the setting up of the charity and continues to provide first class facilities to look after the plants.

Also fortunate was the timing of the winding down of the McBean's Orchid nursery in 2019, as Jim Durrant, the celebrated orchid nurseryman, who had worked there since 1971, moved to the Mathers Foundation to supervise the Orchid cultivation.



Above: David and Gill joined us on Zoom both in the nursery and at Home



Above: *Oncidium alexandrae*

The Mathers foundation, although only 3 years old, has accrued an amazing collection of orchids including significant examples of *Oncidium* (don't get David started on the *Oncidium*/*Odontoglossum* reclassifications), *Miltonopsis*, *Cymbidium* and more recently Ian Butterfields *Pleione* collection and Jim's recent interest in *Masdevallia*.

Many of the collections have now been given National Collection Status by Plant Heritage, and they still await to receive a reconfirmation of Collection Status for Ian's *Pleione* collection which they are more than confident to receive.

Not content with resting on collecting and preserving orchids at their borrowed nursery, they are also supporting many other orchid-related

projects including the soon-to-be built wing of the Wisley Greenhouse that will be a direct replacement to the much loved Singapore Orchid Wing of the old greenhouse, sponsoring a digitisation project for a collection of Orchid Paintings in the RHS Library archive, helping to fund Andre Shuiteman, Kew's Chief Orchid Botanist, on his botanising trip to New Guinea to search for *Dendrobium* and, probably most personally for them, is raising funds for the preservation of a piece of orchid-rich Columbian Rainforest, La Reserva Orquideas.



Above: Ian Butterfield's *Pleione* collection in its new home.

Overall David and Gill conveyed a real passion for the work they are undertaking and I believe many will enjoy and benefit from the foundation's involment in the UK orchid scene for the years to come. We at Devon Orchid Society are hoping to arrange a visit to the Foundation in 2023.

Saul Walker