



**BETH CHATTO –  
A LIFE WITH PLANTS**

by Catherine Horwood

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*An intriguing insight into the personal life of one of the greatest gardeners of our time, this book is a fascinating, open and honest read.*

*Reviewer Fergus Garrett is head gardener at Great Dixter.*

The late Beth Chatto has long been a part of gardeners' lives; she changed the way we think and look, and left a huge footprint on the horticultural world. In her books, lectures and interviews, Beth was extraordinarily open about her life, her influences, and the challenges she faced. Her *Garden Notebook* (published in 1988) and the exchange of letters between her and Christopher Lloyd in *Dear Friend and Gardener* (1998) have already given us an insight into her personal world, so could a biography add anything more? A book like this could so easily disappoint – especially if the biographer hasn't dug deep.

Catherine Horwood's book is, however, a triumph, beautifully crafted by an author who has thoroughly researched and understood her subject. She has concentrated on Beth Chatto the person, reading 30 years' worth of her private

diaries, and interviewing dozens of her friends, colleagues and family. From start to finish, this publication gives us a real understanding of Beth's life.

The author paints a vivid picture, from Beth's humble beginnings as a village constable's daughter, gardening alongside her mother Bessie, to her romance with Andrew Chatto and their ensuing marriage, followed by family life with her daughters Mary and Diana, to her involvement with flower arranging, to her meeting with influential artist and iris breeder Sir Cedric Morris, to success and recognition, through to the final years. Beth's drive and determination is clear from the start.

The text is well supported with black-and-white photographs from the family's private collection, paintings and sketches by Andrew Chatto, as well as pages from Beth's notebook. There is so much here to keep the reader gripped.