

7 Flower Collage: a New Art

It was during the period of her second widowhood, when Mrs Delany spent about half her time at Bulstrode, that she began her finest work of all. In the autumn of 1772 in her seventy-third year she wrote to her niece Mary Port, 'I have invented a new way of imitating flowers, I'll send you next time I write one for a sample.'

By continuing over the years to amuse herself and her friends with cut paper, Mrs Delany had developed remarkable skill with scissors. Through her needlework in particular, she had shown a love of plants combined with a superb sense of design and meticulous attention to detail. Her friendship with the Duchess of Portland had brought her into contact with some of the great botanists of the eighteenth century, and she built up a large store of botanical knowledge and appreciation. Her skill, her knowledge, her experience, and her artistry, reached their fulfilment in her flower collages. At an age when most people's powers are declining she created over a period of often years a collection of nearly one thousand pictures of plants, made from paper, of botanical accuracy unsurpassed in that medium. The historical and social notes on the backs of the plant pictures greatly add to their value, making the collection an original herbarium.

Many years later Mrs Delany recalled how she had begun her new recreation. Sitting in her bedchamber at Bulstrode, she noticed the similarity of colour between a geranium and a piece of red paper that was on her table. Taking her scissors, she cut out the scarlet paper and, using more coloured paper for the leaves and stalk, she created a picture of a geranium. The Duchess on entering the room mistook the paper petals for real ones. Modest as she was, Mrs Delany considered her paper flowers to be a mere '*whim* of my own fancy' that 'might fondly beguile my judgement to think better of it than it deserved. . .', but the Duchess' enthusiasm encouraged her to persevere with her new art: 'Her approbation was such a sanction to my undertaking, as made it appear of consequence and gave me courage to go on with confidence.'

Today we would call Mrs Delany's pictures paper collage; she referred to them as 'paper mosaicks', and to her collection as her 'Herbal' or '*Hortus Sjccus*'. She wrote later that her work was intended as an imitation of a *hortus siccus*, which is a collection of dried flowers. Such collections were popular at the time and it was typical of Mrs Delany's originality that her hortus siccus should be composed of paper flowers.

For Mrs Delany cutting her flowers of paper was more than merely a pleasurable pastime. After the death of Dr Delany there had been a gap in her life that she had not been able to fill. Her old enthusiasm for her previous activities was gone; the paper flowers were to be an '*employment* and *amusement*, to supply the loss of *those*, that had formerly been delightful to me; but had lost their power of pleasing; being deprived of that friend, whose partial approbation was my pride, and had stamped a value on them.' Mrs Delany now became absorbed in her flowers, and they gave her a fresh direction for her energies and a new challenge.

It is possible that Mrs Delany's venture into this medium was influenced by the seventeenth-century Turkish art of inserting flowers cut from coloured papers into the borders of manuscripts--if, in fact, she ever saw examples of these. Or she might have been influenced by the work of the Dietzsch family who often made drawings of flowers in opaque colours on deep brown or black paper. It is certain that at Bulstrode she knew the work of Ehret which the Duchess of Portland had commissioned. That and the drawings of other great botanical artists must have aroused her own creative powers, but it is likely that her flower collages began exactly as she described. Her quick eye for botanical detail, her highly developed colour sense and her gift of being able to cut out

images as easily as she could draw them are enough to account for an invention which was probably fortuitous but which she developed into an art entirely her own.

With the plant specimen set before her she cut minute particles of coloured paper to represent the petals, stamens, calyx, leaves, veins, stalk and other parts of the plant, and, using lighter and darker paper to form the shading, she stuck them on to a black background. By placing one piece of paper upon another she sometimes built up several layers and in a complete picture there might be hundreds of pieces to form one plant. It is thought she first dissected each plant so that she might examine it carefully for accurate portrayal, certainly she displays not only an artist's eye but that of a botanist, as she included berries in 'Mespilus piracantha' (see p. 70), and the roots and bulb in 'Meadow Saffron' (see p. 130).

Initially she used a thin, shiny paper for background, but in 1774 she discarded this for a better matt surface, using paper which she obtained from a newly established paper-mill in Hampshire, and which she first washed with Indian ink. The dimensions of the background vary, but the plant is always cut to life size, by eye. The paper she used for the plants was procured from sailors who were bringing it from China, or obtained from paper-stainers whose colours had run; sometimes she dyed the paper herself to get the correct shade. Occasionally she touched up the pictures with watercolour after sticking the paper into position, but this was the exception rather than the rule. It is uncertain what glue she used to stick down the paper, possibly egg-white or flour and water, as a laboratory test on one picture has detected a starch-based agent. Each picture has her initials MD generally in a corner below the plant, always cut in paper in one piece, although the style of the initial may vary.

Mrs Delany's skill in cutting paper in the first three years was shown by the 'Feather'd Pink' (see illustration), also by 'Willow-Leav'd Dogsbane' (*Trachium venetum*) where the casing of the pod has 114 spines individually cut, and by the fine strips of lighter paper which edge the petals of 'Jacobean Lily' (see p. 160). The earliest pictures are numbered on the back up to fifty-two but then instead she began to record the day, month and year that each one was completed. These dates are of particular botanical interest because her pictures included some of the seven thousand plants which arrived in Britain in the eighteenth century, brought back by explorers not only as proof of reaching the unexplored world but for their economic, scientific and medicinal value. She also wrote the place where she had worked the picture, generally either her home in St James's Place, or Bulstrode, and occasionally added a social note, 'Lady Weymouth at Bulstrode', or 'Mr Montague and Mr Mason here'. By the end of 1775 she had created over one hundred pictures.

By this time her skills had reached their peak. With the greater use of varying shades of paper she had virtually eliminated the need to use watercolour and the pictures began to be made of hundreds of finely-cut snippets of coloured paper. There is more movement in the plants, with leaves curled to show the lighter shades beneath, and paper cut with hair-like precision for the veins and stamens, giving a more life-like appearance to the plants.

In April 1776 Mrs Delany wrote from her house in St James's Place to her niece: 'The spring flowers now supply me with work, for I have already done since the beginning of March 20 plants.' It had become her habit to start her 'paper mosaicks' after breakfast. However, there were often callers to interrupt her hobby. Lady Bute brought the Duchess of Gordon to meet Mrs Delany for the first time under the pretence of showing the Duchess Mrs Delany's Herbal, but 'really to treat me with her beauty. She is beautiful indeed, is very natural and good humour'd but her very broad Scotch accent does not seem to belong to the very great delicacy of her appearance.' Sometimes a direct reference to a plant was made in a letter as, for example, to Viscountess Andover who was so skilled at cutting landscapes that a magnifying glass was needed to appreciate her intricate

workmanship. Mrs Delany wrote 'I have been at my usual presumption of copying beautiful nature: I have bungled out a horse chestnut blossom that would make a fine figure in a lady's cap'--an indication of the fashions of the day. Her friend Mrs Boscawen had Mrs Delany's botanical hobby much in mind when she wrote of a yellow carnation in her hot-house: 'How perfectly you would represent it' and later Mrs Boscawen wrote 'is this Indian paper good for anything to you, my dear madam. It is real Indian . . . I have half a dozen sheets more if this would be any use to you.'

The fame of Mrs Delany's '*hortus siccus*' spread beyond her own circle. One day in the summer of 1776 the King drove the Queen in a little low chaise the half-hour journey from Windsor to Buistroke, accompanied by Lady Weymouth, her lady-in-waiting, who was one of the Duchess's daughters. It was an expected but informal visit to drink tea and they arrived between six and seven in the evening. Mrs Delany wrote:

All things were prepared for their reception, and the drawing room divested of every comfortable circumstance. I pleaded hard with her Grace for permission to go that day to London; she was inexorable; but I still had hopes that so insignificant a person would be over-looked, and that I should be fully gratified with seeing their royalties thro' ye windows, or thro' the keyhole. But I was mistaken, and Lady Weymouth was sent by the Queen to desire I would bring the *Hortus Siccus*.

This was the beginning of a friendship between Mrs Delany and the royal family that was to last until the end of her life. The King and Queen became frequent callers at Bulstrode, often unexpected and even unannounced. Mrs Delany described the stir that one such visit caused in 1783, soon after the birth of Princess Amelia, the last of their fifteen children:

The Dss of Portland and I were sitting in the long gallery very busy with our different employments, when, without ceremony, his Majesty walked up to our table, *unperceived* and *unknown* till he came quite close to us. You may believe we were at first a little fluttered, but his courteous manner soon made him a welcome guest. He came to inform the Duchess of Portland of the Queen's perfect recovery after her lying-in, which made him doubly welcome.

The King stayed for two hours, an indication of the pleasure he took in their company. Another time the King and Queen brought five of the princesses: 'They were all dressed in white muslin polinises, white chip hats, with white feathers, except the Queen who had on a black hat and cloak . . . the King was in his Windsor uniform blue and gold.' The Queen gave Mrs Delany a frame for weaving fringe:

. . . of a new and most delicate structure . . . you will easily imagine the grateful feeling I had when the Queen presented it to me, to make up someknotted fringe which she saw me about . . . the King at the same time said he must contribute something to my work and presented me with a gold knotting shuttle of most exquisite workmanship and taste; and I am at this time, while dictating, knotting white silk to fringe the bag which is to contain it.

These gifts were in addition to a locket given her by the Queen containing a tress of the Queen's hair with crown and cypher on the back, and a necklace with a locket containing a miniature of the King, set in gold and diamonds. Etiquette demanded that these royal visits should be returned by a personal call to Windsor Castle to enquire after the welfare of their Majesties, and Mrs Delany accompanied the Duchess whenever she was able. There were many invitations to the ladies to spend an evening at the Queen's Lodge in the castle grounds to listen to a concert or hear Mrs Siddons reading from *The Provoked Husband*.

The King and Queen were both interested in botany, and at the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew plants were grown that were new to Britain. It was after the King and Queen had made a visit

to Bulstrode and admired her paper mosaicks that Mrs Delany recorded 'Kew' on the back of her pictures; it was presumably by direct command of their Majesties that plants were sent from Kew for her to copy. Sir Joseph Banks had been in charge of the gardens since 1772, and would have been pleased to send her the eighty-four plants which she received. A letter to her niece in 1777 indicates the steady flow: 'I am so *plentifully* supplied with the hot-house here, and from the Queen's garden at Kew, that natural plants have been a good deal laid aside this year for foreigners, but not less in favour.'

Another botanical garden that was to supply Mrs Delany with many plants was the Chelsea Physic Garden, nearly a hundred years older than the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew. She must have recalled with pleasure Philip Miller's visits to Bulstrode during his fifty years in charge of Chelsea. Miller was particularly successful at germinating seeds sent to him by a large number of correspondents. He distributed plants to other botanic and private gardens; cotton seeds were sent out to the new colony at Georgia and became the staple crop, and in return seeds of new species were received from the Americas. Mrs Delany copied fourteen plants from Chelsea, including the magnificent 'Tree Aloe' (*Aloe barbadensis*).

In August 1776 she paid two short visits, the first was to Lord and Lady Bute at Luton Park. Lord Bute, one time Prime Minister, was a keen horticulturalist and grew many interesting plants at Luton. Mrs Delany was fond of Lady Bute so it was always a pleasure for her to go there. In a brief visit of three or four days she portrayed 'Scarlet Blood Flower' (*Haemanthus coccineus*) and 'Blue African Crinum' (*Agapanthus umbellatus*) she then moved on to Lady Gower's at Bill Hill, near Reading, with 'Blue Garden Chich Vetch', (*Larythus sativus*, 'chichling vetch') and 'Climbing fumetory' (see p. 41) from the garden at Luton, crammed in the tin box in which she conveyed her precious plants. At Bill Hill, in a single week, she completed not only the two plants from Luton, but also another five from Lady Gower's garden. One of these was a flower taken from a magnolia tree (see p. 32), much admired by the two ladies; some years later Lady Gower wrote to Mrs Delany, 'Mother Magnolia and all her daughters have been in full bloom this month past.' As Mrs Delany pasted down the cream-coloured paper to represent the petals of the magnolia she may have recalled that Ehret had walked the three miles between Chelsea and Parson's Green in Fulham almost daily in order to watch a magnolia grandiflora unfold its magnificent buds in Sir Charles Wager's garden in 1733, when the tree was new to this country. The work that she did on these two occasions indicates she travelled about with her cutting implements and paper; what an easy guest she must have been for her hostesses, who knew she would be happily employed whatever the weather.

In the autumn Mrs Delany continued her work at Bulstrode with even greater speed, writing happily to Mary Port: 'We are alone, save Mr Lightfoot, and we are as busy as bees.' She excelled with the 'White flowering accasia' (see illustration), with its 543 leaves and 120 stamens in one bloom alone, as well as showing pod and seeds, and in 'Musk or nodding Thistle' (see illustration), its leaves swirling like waves in a turbulent sea.

After spending the first five months of 1777 in London, Mrs Delany moved to Bulstrode where the extent of her Herbal immediately increased. There was the 'Burnet Rose' (see p. 108) with thorns of various sizes on the stalks, followed the next day by the dainty 'Wood Strawberry' (see p. 42). Sometimes she included a real part of a plant, generally one or two leaves, or, as in her 'Dog Rose' (*Rosa canina*), a small sprig of leaves; in the 'Winter Cherry' (see p. 148) she used the real skeleton of a pod case to stick over the paper seeds. Only one picture contains a real flower: a floret of 'Scarlet Flower'd Heath' (*Erica cruenta?*), one of a collection of ericas which had come from the Cape of South Africa.

The speed with which Mrs Delany worked at her pictures was truly amazing. In October of the same year she created twenty-eight, a record for one month. She wrote to Mary Port:

Now I know you smile, and say what can take up so much of A.D.'s [Aunt Delany's] time? No children to teach or play with; no house matters to torment her; no books to publish; no politicks to work her brains? All this is true but idleness never grew in my soil, tho' I can't boast of any very useful employments, only such as keep me from being a burthen to my friends, and banish the spleen; and therefore are as important for the present use as matters of higher nature.

Many of the collages were of flowers from the garden or hot-house at Bulstrode but as her skill became known, plants were sent to her from many sources. In 1778 there is a variety of names amongst the donors of plants, noted on the back of her pictures. Lord Dartmouth, Secretary for Trade and Plantations, gave her 'Turnsole' (*Heliotropium peruvianum*); Mrs Astley, her waiting-woman, brought her 'Double Flowering Peach' (*Prunus persica*) from Barnes; Lord Rockingham, one-time Prime Minister, presented her with 'Asphodil Lilly' (*Crinum latifolium* var. *zeylanicum*); from Lord Willoughby's marsh garden came 'Dwarf Almond Amygdalus nana' (*Prunus tenella*) and from Lord Mansfield she received 'Cassia Mary-landica', which he probably brought from his garden at Kenwood.

She was unwell in the summer of 1778 and in July wrote to Mary Port of her returning health and of a visit to Lord and Lady Bute:

I have for some weeks past been a sort of rambler in a little compass trying my wings for a longer flight, if my strength will allow me. I spent my time at Luton very agreeably, but more of magnificence than comfort belongs to that place, except in the very kind and obliging manner I was received by the owners, who had every consideration for me, to make my situations as easy as possible, and a curious and enquiring mind can't fail of being gratified there, as well as at Bulstrode.

So meticulous was Mrs Delany in portraying the plants accurately that she took great care to cut the correct number of stamens and styles, and this was recorded on the back of most of her pictures using the Linnaean sexual system of classification. Carl Linnaeus (1707-78), the Swedish doctor and scientist, was one of the great naturalists of that century. The system he had devised was widely used between 1737 and 1810. He divided all flowering plants into twenty-three classes based on the male organs, that is according to the number of stamens: Monandria has one stamen, Diandria two stamens, Triandria three stamens and so on. These classes were further divided into orders based on the female organs: Monogynia with one style or sessile stigma, Digynia with two styles or sessile stigmas, Trigynia with three, and so on. Thus on the back of both 'Jacobean Lily' (see p. 160) and 'Sea Daffodil' (see p. 144) Mrs Delany has written Hexandria Monogynia, the six stamens and one style have been cut with such dexterity that even the anther at the end of the stamens, and the stigma on the style are shown.

In July 1778 Dr Solander made a return visit to Bulstrode accompanied by the Swedish botanist and explorer Claes Alstroemer (1736-96), after whom the Peruvian Lilly (*Alstroemeria*) is named; their visit is recorded on the back of the 'Stewartia Malacodendron' together with the date and a note that the flower came from Kew. She wrote to Mary Port: 'Dr Solander etc came, as expected and I am now going to get a botanical lecture and to copy a beautiful flower called Stuartia.'

One of her most magnificent pictures is the 'Melon Thistle' (see previous page). The bloom is made up of 90 parts and 399 spines protrude from the stem, which itself is composed of ten shades of paper. On the back she wrote, 'Bulstrode 12 August 1778, The Day the King and Queen

and the Royal Family were at Bulstrode.' This was one of the formal Royal visits, and is described in a letter to her niece:

The order in which the King and Queen and Royal Family with their attendants, went from Windsor to breakfast with the Duchess Dowager of Portland at Buistrode, on Wednesday the 12th of August, 1778 the Prince of Wales birthday.

2 Servants on horseback

The Prince of Wales and Prince Frederick on horseback

General Bude and Montagu, Riding Master

2 Footmen and 2 Grooms

King and Queen in a phaeton and pair

2 Servants on horseback

A postchaise and 4 horses, in which were the Princess Royal, Prince

Adolphus the King's seventh son and Lady Weymouth

2 Servants on horseback

A coach and six horses, in which were Princess Augusta, Princess Elizabeth, Lady Charlotte Finch, the Governess to the Royal children, and Miss Goidworthy, 2 footmen behind
A coach and six horses, in which were Prince William, Prince Edward, the Bishop of Lichfield and Mr Arnold Sub Precentor, 2 footman behind.

2 Servants on horseback

A coach and six horses, in which were Mr Hotham, Mr Smelt, Mr Lake, Mr Light, 2 Servants behind the coach

2 Servants on horseback

A phaeton in which were the Duke of Montagu and General Fretock. N.B. The Duke of Montagu's phaeton went before the last coach and 6. Each coach had a helper besides footmen and grooms, in all 33 servants, and 56 personages.

Before 12 o'clock the cavalcade drove into the court, the Dss Dr of Portland ready on the stone steps at the hail door to receive her royal guests. I was below stairs in my own apartment not dress'd and uncertain if I should be thought of. But down came Lady Weymouth (with her pretty eyes sparkling) with the Queen's commands that I should attend her, which I did. The Queen most graciously came up to me and the 3 princesses. The King and the 2 eldest princes were in the dining-room looking at the pictures, but soon came in, and then they all went in a train thro' the great apartment to the Duchess of Portland's china closet, and with wondering and enquiring eyes admired all her magnificent curiosities. They staid above half an hour, and I took that time to take breath and sit down quietly in the drawing-room; when they returned the Queen sat down, and called me to her to talk about the chenille work, praising it much more than it deserved, but with a politeness that could not fail of giving pleasure, and indeed her manners are most engaging, there is so much dignity and affability blended that it is hard to say whether one's respect or love predominates. The Duchess of Portland brought her Majesty a dish of tea, roles and cakes. . . everything proper for the time of day was prepared, tea, chocolate and bread and butter... and on another table all sorts of fruit and ice ... The King drank chocolate and was all good spirits and good humour.

The King asked me if I had added to my book of flowers, and desiring he might see it. It was placed on a table before the Queen, who was attended by the Princess Royal and the rest of ye ladies, the King standing and looking over them. I kept my distance, till the Queen called me to answer some question about a flower, when I came, and the King brought a chair and set it at the table, opposite to the Queen, and graciously took me by the hand and seated me in it, an honour I could not receive without some confusion and hesitation: 'Sit down, sit down,' said her Majesty, 'it is not every body has a chair brought them by a king.'

The following day Mrs Delany copied 'Pomegranate' (*Punica granatum* var. *nana*) and wrote on the back, 'Bulstrode 13th August 1778 The Day after their Majesties, the Prince of Wales, the Bishop of Osnaburg and the three younger Princes, Princess Royal, Princess Augusta and Princess Elizabeth had been at Bulstrode.'

One week later the Queen is recorded as the donor of a carnation (*Dianthus caryophyllus*). The carnation was by far the oldest of the florist's flowers and had been cultivated in England since at least the fourteenth century. It was the latest of the florist's flowers to bloom, and the only one to have much fragrance; in the days when dahlias, chrysanthemums and michaelmas daisies were still

unknown it was to many gardeners the final important flower of the year. 'For my part,' wrote William Cobbett in the *American Gardener* (1821), 'as a thing to keep and not to sell; as a thing the possession of which is to give me pleasure, I hesitate not a moment to prefer the plant of a fine carnation, to a gold watch set with diamonds.'

Mrs Delany, who had always delighted in sharing her pleasures, was as generous as ever with her paper flowers, and friends received pictures as presents. To Mrs Anne Viney, a friend who had moved to Gloucester, she sent two pictures, but, she warns, 'allowance must be made that it is the work of an old woman, nearly ent'ring into her 80th year. You will have my dog-rose and jessamine a little sooner but it has been a week so filled with Royal favours that it allowed me no leisure for anything else. I like my new servant (Lydia Rea) very much, she is sensible, lively, and attentive, and she reads aloud very well, which is very comfortable to me.' The Countess of Stamford, another of the Duchess of Portland's daughters, so connected botany with Mrs Delany that when the name of the new servant caught her eye she 'thought Lydia Rea was a curious new type of flower--it look'd Linnaean.'

Mrs Delany was back again at her house in London for the winter months and was looking after her great-niece Georgina Port, then aged seven. From 1778 Georgina regularly came to stay with her aunt in London. Mrs Delany delighted in the company of her young great-niece, whom she took under her wing. She supervised her education, and took her on her many visits, introducing Georgina into her social circle. George Keate, a poet and friend of Mrs Delany wrote of her influence on Georgina:

With that benevolence which condescends
To guide its knowledge to the youthful heart
O'er thee, my child, the good Delany bends
Directs thy scissors, and reveals her art.

Ah seize the happy moment! she can show
The mazy path mysterious Nature treads
Can steal her varied grace, her varied glow
And all the changeful beauties that she spreads.

Then mark the kind instructress, watch her hand
Her judgement, her inspiring touch attain;
Thy scissors make, like hers, a majic wand;
Tho' much I fear thy efforts will be in vain.

Failing in this my child forbear the strife;
Another path to fame by her is shown;---
Try by thy pattern of her honour'd life,
With equal virtue to cut thine own.

Mrs Delany wrote to Georgina's mother in the spring of 1779, of their call on the Quaker and philanthropist John Fothergill:

I am so busy now with rare plants from all my botanical friends, and idle visitors and my little charge must have a share of my time that it generally drives my writing to candlelight, which does not suit my age-worn eyes. Last Thursday I took my little bird and Mrs Port to Upton in Essex, 10 miles off, to Dr Fothergill's garden, crammed my tin box with exoticks, overpowered with such variety I knew not what to chuse! Georgina delighted fluttered about like a newborn butterfly, first trying her wings, and then examining and enjoying all the flowers.

Another day they went for 'an airing to the Physic Garden at Chelsea . . . We returned loaded with the spoils of the Botanical Garden. Georgina was suprised at a live chameleon she saw in a hothouse.'

Sometimes they went to Islington where the physician Dr Pitcairn gave Mrs Delany many plants from his garden of five acres; at other times they journeyed to the Lee and Kennedy nursery garden at Hammersmith:

I am just returned from a pleasant tour this morning with your dear child--we went to Lee's at Hammersmith in search of flowers, but only met with a crinum, a sort of *Pancreatium Crinum Asiaticum*, from there returned to Kensington, bought cheesecakes, buns, etc, a whole i8 pennyworth; from thence to a lane that leads to Brompton, and are now come home hungry as hawks, dinner ready, and we must dress.

James Lee was one of the great gardeners of the day; after leaving the employment of the Duke of Northumberland at Sion, Middlesex, he had entered into partnership with Lewis Kennedy at the Vineyards, Hammersmith. There they opened a nursery garden where they grew exotic plants, including the first seeds from Botany Bay. Lee gave Mrs Delany many plants, including 'Scarlet Flower'd Ipomea' (see p. 1) which, not being hardy, must have grown in one of Lee's extensive greenhouses.

Georgina returned to her mother for the summers but she was missed by her great-aunt, who wrote to her: 'I wrote a letter, and then went to my work and finished the flower I began yesterday, but my little handmaid was wanting to pick up my papers, to read to me, to hum her tune, and to prattle to me!' Georgina was also kept fully informed of Mrs Delany's social life, especially royal visits:

The Queen was dress'd in a embroider'd lutestring; Princess Royal in deep orange or scarlet, I could not by candlelight distinguish which, Pss Augusta in pink, Pss Elizabeth in blue; these were all in robes without aprons. Princess Mary (a most sweet child) was in cherry-colour'd tabby, with silver leading strings; she is about four years old; she cou'd not remember my name, but, making me a very low curtesy, she said, 'How do you do, Duchess of Portland's friend; and how does your little niece do. I wish you had brought her.' The King carried about in his arms by turns Princess Sophia, and the last Prince, Octavius . . . I never saw more lovely children, for a more pleasing sight than the King's fondness for them, and the Queen's; for they seem to have but *one mind*, and that is to make everything easy and happy about them. The King brought in his arms the little Octavius prince to me, who held out his hand to play with me, which, on my taking the liberty to kiss, his M. made him kiss my cheek... we staid till past II; came home by a charming moon; did not sup till past 12, nor in bed till *two*. Now don't you think my dearest G.M.A. [Georgina Mary Anne] that A.D. was a great rake? . . .

In July 1779, Mrs Delany wrote an introduction to her *Hortus Siccus*, which she placed at the beginning of the first volume. It was headed: 'Plants, Copied after Nature in paper Mosaick begun in the year 1774.' She probably considered her first efforts in 1772 and 1773 were not worth recording, although some were kept and placed in her volumes. She continued with an acknowledgement to her friend the Duchess of Portland who had given her so much encouragement in this work:

To *her* I owe the spirit of pursuing it with diligence and pleasure. To *her* I owe more than I dare express, but my heart will ever feel with the utmost gratitude, and tenderest affection, the honour, and delight I have enjoy'd in her most generous, steady, and delicate friendship, for above forty years.

These two introductory pages include a verse:

Hail to the happy hour! when fancy led

My Pensive mind this flo'ry path to tread;
And gave me emulation to presume
With timid art, to trace fair Natures bloom:
To view with awe the great Creative Power,
That shines confess'd in the minutest flower;
With wonder to pursue the Glorious line
And gratefully adore The Hand Divine!

It was after the Queen and three of the Princesses had made one of their many informal calls to Bulstrode that we get a hint of the tools that Mrs Delany used. 'The Queen sate down to my working table,' she wrote, 'view'd all my implements, look'd over a volume of the plants, and made me sit down by her all the time.' When the Royal party left the Queen handed a gift to Mrs Delany as she was returning to London for some months. The incident was described by Mrs Delany's waiting-woman: 'Inside was a beautiful pocket case, the outside satin work'd with gold and ornaments with gold spangles, the inside lined with pink satin and contained a knife, sizers, pence, rule, compass, bodkin.' A bodkin was used when she worked the 'Eatable Wake Robin' (see p. 156) where holes of varying sizes have been pierced in yellow paper in the pistil to reveal off-white paper beneath. But of other tools she gives us no idea except referring to scissors. At one end of the packet was a pocket containing a letter from the Queen written in her own hand. The envelope addressed to Mrs Delany measured approximately 2 X 2 3/4 inches, inside in neat handwriting the Queen wrote:

Without appearing imprudent towards Mrs Delany, and indiscreet to her friends who wish to preserve her as her excellent qualities well deserve, I cannot have the pleasure of enjoying her company this winter with which our amiable friend the Duchess Dowager of Portland has so frequently and politely indulged me with during the summer. I must therefore desire that Mrs Delany will wear this little pocket book in order to remember at times, when no dearer persons are present, a very sincere wellwisher, friend and affectionate Queen.

CHARLOTTE

Queen's Lodge
Windsor
the 15th December 1781

Sadly the Queen's gift arrived just at the time when Mrs Delany's eyesight was beginning to fail. She continued with her collages for the next year, producing among others 'Meadowsweet' (*Filipendula ulmaria*) with minute white petals, and 'Bombax Ceiba' (seep. 159), which was copied from a painting by the intrepid traveller Lady Anne Monson (c. 1714-76). But in her eighty-third year her eyesight deteriorated rapidly and, always a perfectionist, she laid down her scissors.

The success of Mrs Delany's 'paper mosaicks' inspired other ladies to try their hands, and among those to whom she gave instruction was Miss Jennings, 'a sensible agreeable, and ingenious woman a pupil of mine in the paper mosaick work (and the only one I have any hopes of) came here last Thursday.' A few of Mrs Delany's pictures worked in the last years have 'begun by Mrs Delany and finished by Miss Jennings' written on the back.

Ten large volumes contain the pictures, nine with one hundred each, and the tenth with seventy-two. Each volume is indexed with botanical and common names written in her clear hand.

There were many tributes to this superb herbarium: amongst the artists, Sir Joshua Reynolds acknowledged them as unrivalled in perfection and outline, delicacy of cutting, accuracy of shading and perspective, harmony and brilliancy of colours. They were also the admiration of botanists, Sir

Joseph Banks remarking that they were the only representations of nature he had ever seen from which he could venture to describe botanically any plant without the least fear of committing an error. Erasmus Darwin, grandfather of Charles, added his praise, and Horace Walpole referred to her collage in *Anecdotes of Painters*, mentioning Mrs Delany as 'a lady of excellent sense and taste, who painted in oil, and who invented the art of paper mosaic, with material (coloured) she executed ... 20 of 1000 various flowers and flowering shrubs with a precision and truth unparalleled.' He gave her a new edition of the book and told her she had founded a new branch of painting.

With poignant words Mrs Delany takes leave of her flowers:

A FAREWELL

The time has come! I can no more
The vegetable world explore;
No more with rapture cull each flower
That paints the mead or twines the bower; No more with admiration see
Its beautiful form and symmetry;
No more attempt with hope elate
Its lovely hues to imitate!
Farewell! to all those friendly powers
That blest my solitary hours;
Alas! Farewell! but shall I mourn
As one who is of hope forlorn?
Ah no! My mind with rapture feels
The promise which Thy word reveals
Come Holy Spirit, on thy wing
Thy sacred consolation bring
Teach me to contemplate that grace
Which hath so long sustained my race;
Which various blessings still bestows,
And pours in balm to all my woes!
O sanctify the pointed dart
That at this moment rends my heart;
Teach me submissive to resign
When summoned by Thy Will Divine.

St James's Place, May 1782.