

Frank Kingdon-Ward was born Francis Kingdon Ward (no hyphen) on 6th November 1885 in Manchester where his father was professor of botany at Owen College. His middle name came from his mother's maiden name. Selina Mary Kingdon (always known as Lina) came from a moderately wealthy family her father was third in a line of Exeter lace makers. The Kingdon family is very numerous in its home counties of Devon and Cornwall and has more than its fair share of Oxbridge graduates, clergy, armed services officers and government officials.

His father Harry Marshall Ward was already a distinguished botanist in his own right he eventually became professor of botany at Cambridge University. Despite his many achievements his son surpassed him in the same field. Frank had a sister Winifred 13 months older they were close friends throughout their lives. As a young boy he wanted to be a cab driver, probably because in those days it would have been with a horse drawn cab so he would have been in the outdoors. I am pleased that I have achieved that ambition for him!

Frank went to Colet court (prep school for St. Paul's) then on to St. Paul's itself. In 1895 Frank's father was appointed professor of botany at Cambridge University and Frank made his best friend Kenneth Ward (no relation). They formed a lasting friendship and got up to many scrapes. They had a club (rather exclusively they were the only members) the object of which was to go on adventures preferably involving hardship. On one cycling trip to Oxford their bikes were both damaged so they went on by boat. After a drenching in the rain they got to their camp (they seldom used tents as these were considered sissy) They built a huge fire to dry their clothes but unfortunately slightly burned them instead. They spent a cold night huddled together in a hole in the ground and stuffed straw into the single holes in their clothes. The next day they reached Oxford, did a bit of sightseeing then, after collecting their bikes enjoyed, on their journey home, "...a ripping ride in the moonlight".

When Frank was still young he overheard a conversation between his father and a colleague just back from the Far East. While most of it was of no interest one phrase stuck out "There are places up the Brahmaputra where no white man has ever been". This one phrase may well have been the start of Frank's entire career.

In 1904 he went to Christ's College Cambridge. In 1906 sadly his father died aged 58. This forced Frank to cut his education short. He sat tripos and got a second. After agreeing to finish his third year later he went in search of paid work.

A friend of the family arranged a post in Shanghai at a public school, a piece of the Home Counties in China. Frank had no wish to teach but Singapore was nearer to the Brahmaputra than London so he took the job. After two years of boredom he was offered a place on a zoological expedition led by an American and funded by the Duke of Bedford to search for new species in western China. He agonised over the decision for about a nanosecond before taking extended leave from school and joining the Bedford expedition up the Yangtze. On this trip he discovered a new species of mouse and two new shrews as well as sending back a small collection of plants to Cambridge. On one occasion he wandered off from the main party (a frequent habit of his in years to come) and took two days and nights to get back. This first taste of being lost and alone in a desolate place was good training for his later escapades.

In 1911 with his first publication "On the road to Tibet" published by Shanghai press and elected fellow of the Royal geographical society he was commissioned by A. K. Bulley of Bees seeds to collect hardy plants from Yunnan and Tibet to grow in English gardens. He had barely got back to the school when he accepted this offer and quit his teaching job once and for all. He experienced some doubt about his ability to come up with the goods on his first solo expedition (he was often racked with self doubt) but he need not have worried.

He brought back about 200 different species including 22 new to science. As well as sending back seeds for cultivation to Bees he made as always contributions to Kew gardens herbarium. Once again he became separated on this expedition. He was on a hunting trip and he sent his personal boy back because he was not well. He then lost the path and spent a cold night in the open with nothing but a rain mac. The next day he survived by sucking nectar from flowers and eating a variety of plant life some of which gave him stomach cramps. Towards the end of the second day he began to hallucinate. He was stepping over imaginary boulders and logs with great care but falling over every real obstacle that the path could throw at him. As well as several worthwhile plants he also collected malaria on this trip, an illness which never left him the rest of his life. The book "The land of the blue poppy" was written about this trip.

It is worth noting that the blue poppy for Frank was *Meconopsis speciosa*. Sadly this "most magnificent of flowers" did not survive in England and so was forgotten and *Meconopsis betonicifolia* became the blue poppy for everyone else. (Frank commissioned a painting of *M. speciosa* by lady Charlotte Wheeler Cuffe in 1917 it was 4 feet by 2 feet, done in watercolour. If anyone knows of this painting and if it still exists I would very much like to know, especially since I have never seen this plant which Frank enthused so much about.) At the end of this trip he spent some time with his friend Kenneth Ward who was in Rangoon, working, then he came home to Cambridge. During this brief stay he fell in love (infatuation) with a girl who not only rejected his advances but also eloped with another man. He gave a lecture in London his slides of the great mountains of the Himalaya caused great awe among the audience who had of course never seen anything like it. He also took time to go climbing with friends in the Swiss and Italian alps.

1913 saw the publication of his book "The land of the blue poppy" and a return to Yunnan and Tibet for Bees. This trip was racked with trouble before it's start. He had great difficulty getting permission to travel at all. Revolution in China had caused some upset to his previous efforts and was to prove more tiresome this time. On the outward voyage a storm in the Mediterranean (?) nearly destroyed the ship he was on. The last time he spent mostly in the Mekong valley, this time he wanted to cross the Salween and explore further into Tibet. But Chinese red tape and soldiers and the fearful Tibetans, combined with bad weather etc. made this impossible. He wrote to his sister "If I survive another month without going dotty or white haired it will be a miracle; if my firm get any seeds at all this year it will be another." Apparently many of the seeds he brought back the year before refused to flower (including *speciosa*) and he was worried that another failure would make him look "pretty cheap". Despite all his best efforts the Chinese won the day on this trip and he returned frustrated. Whilst his exploration work was a disappointment to him he did succeed in returning several new species including 5 *Rhododendrons* (*Rhododendron* history) a genus with which he became closely linked. The book of this expedition was delayed because he wanted to call it "The great gutters of Kham" His publishers thought this unwise (I'll say) it ended up as "The mystery rivers of Tibet."

In 1914 Frank went to Burma on what turned out to be a nightmare trip. A 40-foot tree fell on his tent in a storm. Fortunately it was partially caught on other trees and he crawled from the wreckage unscathed, much to the amazement of his porters. During a stay at a village a storm broke. In Frank's words it, "suddenly burst on us with awful fury, simply crashing down on the village from the mountains, as though someone was tipping barrels of hot water and compressed air on top of us."

Frank's hut was squashed against the next one, which was almost crushed completely. These huts were not little round hovels but large long constructions of considerable weight and Frank climbed inside through a hole in the roof to search for injured people. To his relief he found none and to the villagers relief he emerged before the hut subsided further. Also he fell off a precipice but managed to grab a tree and hang on till he could be hauled to safety another time he rolled down a short slope in pitch darkness. When a light was brought it was seen that he was on the edge of a sheer drop. On the return leg he came across some British officers. He asked if there was any news. He had been away for several months. "You know about the war?" said one. "You mean China? Or is it civil war in Ireland?" The officers stared blankly and said "No, England France and Russia against Germany and Austria". Frank forced himself on a quick march to Fort Hertz the main British garrison to join the war effort as soon as possible. He arrived just in time to go down with fever for six weeks! If he had been a day longer he would probably not have made it at all. From here he joined the Indian infantry as a 2nd lieutenant and made every effort to get posted to the front to "have a go at the hated Hun". Unfortunately the army kept him in India and Burma for special duties, namely censorship. He hated this work which consisted of a handful of letters a week along with inspecting the disinterested indigenous troops. He got up to a number of interesting adventures that a skilled writer might weave into a good comic novel. He filled the rest of his time collecting plants where possible, writing up his new book and planning his next expedition. After two years he was posted to Mesopotamia (Iraq) and given the rank of acting Captain. Despite all his efforts he still did not see any action for the whole war unless you count chasing elephants or escaping from crocodiles. On the subject of his wishes to fight at the front his sister Winifred wrote "...anyone old enough to remember that war -the wholesale slaughter, the gradual blackening of the London streets as mothers, wives, daughters, sweethearts went into mourning, the long daily lists in the Times - will understand..."that they hoped this wish would not be fulfilled. At the end of the war he was given the rank of Captain. As soon as the war was over he went straight back to Burma. No book was published about this trip and I have found little about it. In 1920 he returned to England for the first time in 7 years.