



G. S. Lilly at Westview Cemetery with the original Burfordi holly bush, which is the parent plant of all the Burfordi holly growing today.

Famous Christmas Holly First Grew in Atlanta

By JANET ALLCORN WILLIAMS

BURFORDI HOLLY is Atlanta's own Christmas greenery.

Nurserymen say that this handsome plant, which was "born" in Atlanta less than 65 years ago, is fast becoming the South's most popular shrub.

It is named for Thomas W. Burford, an Englishman who came to the South in the 1880s. He either discovered or originated the plant and began propagating it soon after his arrival in Atlanta. His holly now grows in abundance all over the South and is gaining in popularity throughout the rest of the United States.

"The millions of plants of Burfordi holly around our homes and buildings are all children or grandchildren of the original bush, which is just inside the gates of Westview Cemetery," says G. S. Lilly, who knew and worked with Mr. Burford and is now head gardener at Westview.

The parent plant could better be called a tree now, as it is about 40x40 feet. Although it has not been pruned in more than 10 years, this original bush was trimmed for a number of years and thousands of cuttings were taken from it. For this reason, the mother shrub probably has children which have outgrown her. Several of these can be found in the cemetery. Others are in Virginia and Tennessee where some of the originator's few friends took cuttings before the turn of the century.

"Mr. Burford was an eccentric Englishman who did not have a relative in

this country," said Mr. Lilly. "I suppose I knew him as well as anyone living today, but he always managed to evade questions about himself or the holly that was named for him. He was unmarried and devoted no time to making friends and little time to his new holly, for that matter. He propagated plants and set them out in the cemetery, then watched them only to see that they were not picked or sold. Our greenhouse did not sell any until after he left Westview. He gave away only a few cuttings and seemed to take pleasure in refusing even a stem. In all, there are less than 400 of his plants in the cemetery and he worked here for more than 30 years."

The Englishman was head gardener at Westview from around 1886 to 1919. The cemetery records do not reveal any pictures of him. This unconventional man, who would get a haircut only once in three years, was well-read and claimed to have been to college. He had a long mustache and a beard and was of medium build. He was trained as a botanist and loved his flowers, which he cared for most tenderly. He always thought much more of his flowers than of his holly.

His home was a large 10-room house on Gordon Street, but he confined himself to one room. Mr. Lilly remembers one photograph in this room—a group picture which included the gardener. Sometimes he would talk about himself, but his conversation usually contradicted what he had said previously. He did say repeatedly, however, that his father was a gardener for Queen Victoria

GALLE:
SEEDS FROM
USDA IN
EARLY 1900'S
TO T.W. BURFORD
"MANY
CONFLICTING
STORIES ON
ORIGIN OF
SEEDS"
I. CORNUTA
VAR. BURFORDII