

Jadoo Fibre: The Magic Compost

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When I was researching F. W. Meyer, I was intrigued by several references to 'Jadoo fibre'.¹ The unusual name means 'magic' in Persian and Indian languages and would have caught the attention of anyone reading or hearing it. Its meaning would probably not be known to them: Kipling thought translation was necessary when writing *Kim* in 1908.² Despite some confusion, the name provided a talking point and a marketing opportunity.

Further exploration of the references led to the company which produced and marketed this material and the man who invented it: Colonel Charles Halford Thompson. Obituaries for Thompson portrayed a typical Victorian ex-army businessman. Born on 18 March 1843 in Chesterfield, Derbyshire, he was educated at Cheltenham College and by January 1860 was a Lieutenant in the Royal Bengal Artillery.³ In 1873 he was promoted to Captain but had no war service. He was recorded as on half-pay in January 1876, so no longer on active duty. After marriage in December 1871 to Kate Sanders, a daughter of Ralph Sanders of the Exeter Bank, they moved into 9 Colleton Crescent, Exeter, in January 1876 but this property was for sale in May 1880.⁴ (Figure 1) Two children, Ralph (5) and Edith (3), were recorded in the 1881 census when the family were living at Claremont, Exeter.⁵ Their father was still on the army active list but had a second occupation as a wine merchant. Sadly, their mother died on 18 January 1882 and was buried in the churchyard of St Mary Magdalene, Stoke Canon, with the inscription 'Blessed are the pure in



Figure 1. 9 Colleton Crescent, Exeter, the marital home of Colonel Charles Halford Thompson from 1876 to 1880. © Author 2021.

heart for they shall see God'. Her parents were later buried under the same grave slab.⁶

Widower Charles was married again on 5 January 1885 to Alice Coey Waud, who had been born in 1861. In 1891 the family was in Port View House, Heavitree, Exeter, the home of his first wife.⁷ Ralph had left home, but Edith (14) had been joined by William (3 years old) and Barbara (6 months old). Soon afterwards the family moved to East Cliff, Teignmouth (Figure 2).⁸ Alice died in October 1892, possibly due to the birth of Alix, which was recorded in the same month. The third marriage of Charles, aged 51, was to Elizabeth Emily Harvey in October 1895. She had been born at Fareham, Hampshire in 1862 and died in Canterbury on 27 May 1949. The 1901 census recorded three Halford Thompson children living at East Cliff and their father as managing director of Kennaway & Co., wine merchants of Palace Gate, Exeter. Barbara (10 years old) and Alix (8 years old) were the younger children of Alice but Charles Vaughan (3 years old) was Elizabeth's son. Later in 1901 the family moved to Cample Haye, Lamerton, north-west of Tavistock, but Charles caught influenza and died of pneumonia there on 22 December 1901, aged 58.⁹ 'Enfeebled health'



Figure 2. East Cliff, Teignmouth, renamed and with added steps, about 1930. Courtesy of Teign Heritage.



Figure 3. Teignmouth Harbour, probably in the 1880s. Courtesy of Teign Heritage.

had previously crippled his energy; possibly a motive for the move.

Halford Thompson was a Major and then Colonel in the 2nd Devon Volunteer Artillery until 1893 and his eldest son fought in South Africa with the Artillery Militia, being invalided home in 1900. Initially a Conservative in politics, the Colonel joined the Liberal party to support Home Rule. ‘To the last he was a conspicuous figure in commercial circles.’¹⁰ Locally he was active in the Exeter Chamber of Commerce, advocating Fair Trade and changes to improve the running of the Exeter Ship Canal. He participated in the winding-up of the short-lived Bude Canal Co. in 1884 and was a magistrate while living in Teignmouth.

However, this otherwise conventional gentleman ‘took a great interest in gardening’.¹¹ The house at 9 Colleton Crescent occupied the corner plot and therefore had a large garden as well as a greenhouse (Figure 1). The glass in this proved to be a temptation to small boys!¹² In August 1881, Halford Thompson won second prize at the Devon and Exeter Flower Show for *Pblox drummondii*.¹³ He was employing a gardener in December 1880, who may have been responsible for this win, but there was no doubt that his garden at Claremont ‘became famous for the cultivation of violas’:

Captain Halford-Thompson, of Claremont, who is known as a very successful cultivator of pansies has had the pleasure to see one of his seedlings, “Miss Edith Thompson”, carry off the prize at

the exhibition of the Pansy Society at Edinburgh, on Friday, as the “best blue fancy pansy in the room”, although the flower had been carried six hundred miles... Another of the gallant Captain’s seedlings, “Ralph Sanders”, got a first class certificate of merit.¹⁴

At the first Axminster Show in August 1884, Captain Halford-Thompson (gardener, Mr. J. Coombes) exhibited pansies and hollyhocks and showed several flowering plants growing entirely without earth. These were in moss, mixed with a fertilising fibre invented by the exhibitor. ‘The arrangement of the ferns, palms, and flowers, with a perfumed water fountain in their midst, was a very pretty sight.’¹⁵

Ten years later the Colonel had resumed his experiments with fibre and been presented with a medal by the Royal Botanical Society for his success in growing plants in this novel way. The improved fibre was to be marketed as more effective and convenient than conventional methods.

Nearly forty kinds of flowering plants had been ‘trans-potted’ into the fibre without ‘flagging’ and some were exhibited at the Devon County Agricultural Show in May 1894.¹⁶ On 1 December 1894, Thompson’s application for a patent was granted to ‘Jadoo fibre: an improved fertilized fibrous or spongy material... as a substitute for earth for supporting, nourishing and sustaining the vitality of plants’. The fibrous material would be peat moss from Holland for preference but ‘ordinary moss, cocoanut fibre or clippings of sponges’ could be substituted.

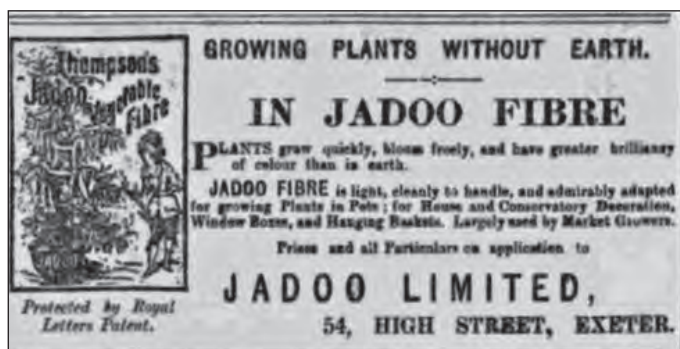


Figure 4. An early advertisement in *Exeter Flying Post*, 30 March 1895, p. 4.

This was boiled with dilute phosphoric acid and the fertilising mix of soot, bonemeal and gypsum in specified proportions, then partially fermented. The residual liquor was drained off and made a good fertilising treatment for plants when diluted. Full details of the processes and alternative chemicals were specified. The patent claimed that, compared to earth, it was much lighter and cleaner, required less watering and suited all types of plants. The plants could be grown in smaller pots, did not ‘flag’ when bedded out, the fibre ‘brings out the colour of the flowers and the flowers have less tendency to fall off’.¹⁷

The 1895 seed catalogue issued by the Exeter nursery of Robert Veitch & Son, offered Jadoo fibre for sale as ‘a boon to floriculturists’.¹⁸ Two months after his patent was confirmed, Thompson lectured at the People’s Palace Horticultural Society in Mile End, London, on the virtues of Jadoo fibre. He demonstrated these with a wide variety of potted plants, many in clear-glass pots to show the free-rooting action achieved. Peter Veitch from Robert Veitch & Son was present to add his approval of the fibre. In March 1895 the Teignmouth Quay Company was putting up two large stores for the manufacture and export of Jadoo plant fibre.¹⁹ The railway that ran directly in front of them conveniently connected to the GWR mainline (Figure 3).²⁰

When the private Jadoo Company was launched, the shares were over-subscribed in this ‘new industry for Devonshire’. Thompson was chairman and Peter Veitch among the directors; the office was at Veitch’s shop at 54 High Street, Exeter (Figure 4). There were already forty-five agents and one had sent back for a third consignment of twenty bushels within six weeks. A pamphlet was to be published containing the text of Thompson’s East End lecture and illustrated to show the success of plants in Jadoo. While commending the fibre for amateurs finding difficulty in obtaining good soil for potting, the lightness of Jadoo would

reduce the cost of rail transport for nurserymen. The newspaper report drew attention to the Veitch display at the current Exeter Gardeners’ Improvement Association Spring Exhibition, which included bulbs grown in Jadoo fibre, as did Thompson’s own exhibit. Not surprisingly, both won prizes provided by Thompson for pots of six hyacinths grown in Jadoo! Interestingly, refreshments were provided by the Exeter Vegetarian Society.²¹ A description of the exhibition repeated details of the new company and added that a ton of the material had been supplied to Mr. J. C. Schmidt of Erfurt for experimental purposes.²² Peter Veitch had worked for a seed company in Erfurt in 1869 and F. W. Meyer, the Veitch landscape gardener, was born and trained in Germany. Two months later, Thompson wisely retracted his initial suggestion of washing the roots of plants growing in other composts before planting

POTTING SEASON

JADOO

REDUCED PRICES AT THE WORKS

ONE TON LOTS	£4
HALF TON LOTS	£2 5s
QUARTER TON LOTS	£1. 5s.

Apply

W. HANNAFORD and SON,

NURSERYMEN & SEEDSMEN

2, DEN STREET, TEIGNMOUTH

Figure 5. Hannaford’s advertisement in *Teignmouth Post*, 23 April 1897, p.1. Courtesy of Teign Heritage.

them in Jadoo.²³ The first meeting of the company in June 1895 offered bright prospects for Jadoo. Excellent results with strawberries, potatoes and bedding plants were noted.²⁴

A letter in the *Gardeners’ Chronicle* commended Jadoo fibre for cuttings and seeds. ‘At Teignmouth, where the Jadoo Company have their works, it is used in many of the gardens in the neighbourhood, and in Mr. Hannaford’s nurseries there are several specimens of *Coniferæ* doing well in it.’²⁵ William Hannaford had established a nursery in Teignmouth in the 1850s. He became a well-respected nurseryman, seedsman and florist, exhibiting and judging regularly at flower shows. By 1895 there was a shop in Teign Street and three nursery sites at Brimley, Ferndale and Woodway. Hannaford’s were offering Jadoo fibre at reduced prices direct from the works in 1897 (Figure 5). William had been joined in the business by his son,

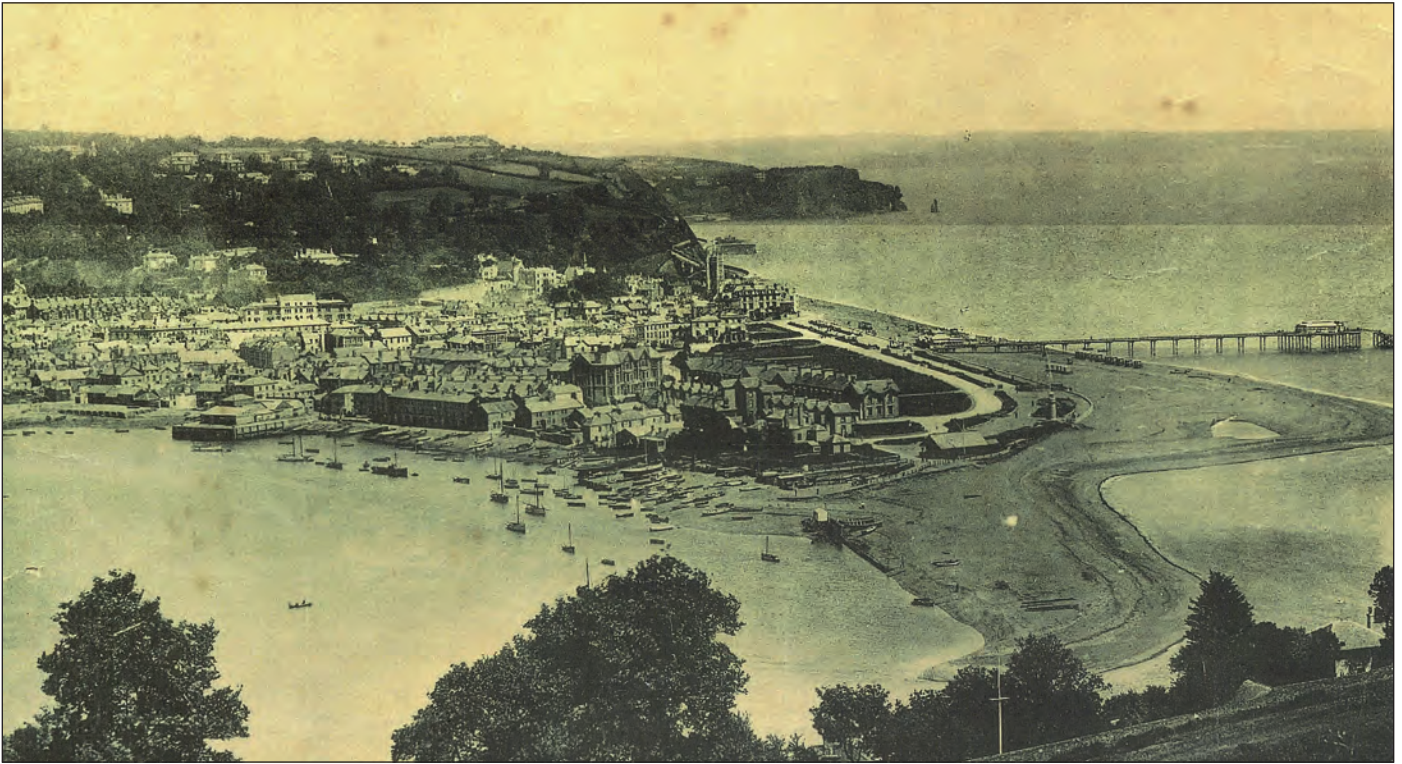


Figure 6. Teignmouth Docks from above Shaldon c. 1900. Courtesy of Teign Heritage.

Frederick. They supplied trees and shrubs suitable for coastal situations and were particularly skilled at growing *Cupressus macrocarpa* from seed. Euonymus with variegated leaves, veronics (*Hebe*) and round-leaved laurel were among the recommended shrubs. Traditional Devon violets were ‘grown to perfection’. The greenhouses were well-stocked to supply house plants and table decorations. As early as 1884, Hannaford was forcing imported plants of *Helleborus niger* in ‘Cocoa fibre and soil’ but the results were poor.²⁶

Evidently Thompson was not the only person in Teignmouth experimenting with composts. Importing coconut fibre (coir) into Teignmouth possibly dated back to the eighteenth century. *The Royal Magazine* reported in 1762 that ‘the women... spun ‘jadoo’ thread, Teignmouth thread, for which the town became famous’. It was still being produced into the late nineteenth century, probably to make coir ropes and mats.²⁷

Further commendations of Jadoo fibre came in *The Garden*. ‘Growing ferns in Jadoo fibre’ was based on a visit by A. Hope to Thompson’s ‘charming’ garden and illustrated with a large photograph of one of his ferns, 4½ (1.4 m.) across in a 7” (18 cm.) pot. Other plants were flourishing: ‘Col. Thompson as the patentee, is naturally proud of his success, and from the way in which Jadoo has been tested, he has much reason to be’.²⁸ G. Wythes wrote in support

and commented particularly on the value of Jadoo for growing bulbs and striking vines.²⁹ *Lilium speciosum* did well and T. J. Weaver intended to try other lilies in Jadoo.³⁰ Wythes responded to confirm his success with all bulbs in Jadoo and indeed ‘any plant requiring a well-drained soil.’³¹ An enquiry as to the growth of orchids in Jadoo received the response that ‘nearly all kinds do well in it’, if watered sparingly.³² Alexander Wallace, Physician, was enthusiastic about the improvements he attributed to the use of Jadoo on outdoor vegetables, pot plants, lilies and gladioli. Wallace had also visited Thompson and particularly admired his conservatory plants, pot-grown dwarf apples and pears and ‘a bed of violets in great round clumps’.³³

Local approval for the fibre was given by the Devon and Exeter Gardeners’ Association. Their annual outing in 1896 included a visit to Eastcliff, where they were able to see the excellent results of using Jadoo. There was a large free-standing greenhouse to the east of the house and a lean-to on the west side.³⁴ After luncheon on the lawn, Mr. Hope proposed the health of the Colonel. Andrew Hope was an agent for Jadoo at 54 High Street, Exeter, and presumably the author of the article on ferns.³⁵ Hope referred to Thompson’s successes as a Pansy amateur, including in Edinburgh where he had ‘bearded the Douglas in his hold’, as well as praising his current experiments with Jadoo. Thompson gave details of the manufacture, which the party then saw for themselves at the factory on

Teignmouth quay (Figure 6). ‘The process of boiling, and pressing, and fermenting, and drying was fully explained.’³⁶

In January 1897, a meeting of the Jadoo Fibre Company (Limited) heard how rapidly the product had gained ground and it was agreed that the company would acquire from Thompson the patents existing in France, Belgium, Germany, Spain, the Spanish Colonies, and Jamaica, plus those being obtained in India and Ceylon. Agencies were established in Australia, New Zealand, Italy, Japan and Germany. An increase in capital was agreed and financial adjustments were made, including a royalty to Thompson on both the fibre and Jadoo liquid.³⁷ As well as the works on Teignmouth Old Quay, the company had an office in Palace Gate, Exeter.³⁸ An advertisement referring to the share prospectus in the *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* gave further details and a form to apply for the 25,500 £1 shares available. Depots were established at London, Leith, Glasgow and Liverpool. There were foreign agencies in Bordeaux, Cognac, Bregentved (Denmark), Frankfurt-on-Main, Calcutta, Madras, Cape Town, Kingston (Jamaica), Colombo and Adelaide. Of the seven directors, five were local but H. St. John Kneller gave the Oriental Club, London, as his address and George Foster lived at The Hawthorns, Dudley. Testimonials were available from the Agri-Horticultural Society of India, and planters in Ceylon and Grenada, West Indies, as to the readiness with which cuttings rooted in Jadoo. Jadoo was being trialled for propagating oranges in Jamaica ‘since the failure of the crops in Florida’ and also for coffee, sugarcane, bananas and sarsparilla. It was proving very good for rooting vines in France and Spain, especially the American hybrid which would replace those lost to *Phylloxera* fourteen years previously. A works was to be erected in Bordeaux. Most of the 400 trade customers were advertising Jadoo themselves and further advertising by the company was one of the uses designated for the new share capital. The factory was producing five tons a day, but a small injection of capital would be used to double that.³⁹ Confidence and expansion were the dominant themes.

In April 1897, the employees of the Jadoo Company were entertained to a dinner at Marke’s Railway Hotel, Teignmouth. The Colonel presided with his son, Ralph, as vice-chair. Mr. Frederick Hannaford was amongst those present ‘to celebrate the dispatch of a cargo of Jadoo from the works at Teignmouth Quay, per schooner ‘Aim Well’ for London Docks, to be reshipped per Royal Mail steamer for Jamaica and

other places.’ In a speech wishing “Success to Jadoo”, a Mr. Baird commented that:

Jadoo was the Hindoo word for magic. He had spent a good many years in India, which was supposed to be the home of magic, but he never heard of any wizard in that country who could equal the magic that had been produced by Colonel Halford Thompson in the preparation of Jadoo.

Thompson declared that this first shipload would not be the last. Of the three tons, one was for cocoa growing, another for nutmegs, and the third for India rubber plants. In France approximately 20 tons of Jadoo were being used for growing young vines.⁴⁰ A paragraph in the *North Devon Gazette* and in the *Norfolk News* mentioned French vines alongside positive results from India and with vegetables in Ceylon. The Principal of Kent Horticultural College had endorsed the use of Jadoo.⁴¹ Comment on the annual report admitted that Jadoo was initially thought to be ‘a kind of fancy stuff’ but it could be economically used wholesale for vines and common crops. The 10% dividend suggested a brilliant prospect for the company.⁴² An important order was received in December 1897 from the government of Austria-Hungary for ten tons of Jadoo fibre to be distributed to the principal schools of viticulture. A further two tons of Jadoo were for experiments on tobacco culture, a major crop in Hungary. Excellent results with tobacco had been reported from Pennsylvania.⁴³

The Jadoo factory clearly increased the trade through Teignmouth Docks. ‘Moss litter’ was imported from the continent as well as the export of Jadoo fibre.⁴⁴ A second shipment for the United States left the Docks in February 1898 to be used in the cultivation of tobacco plants.⁴⁵ A high point was reached in October 1898 with the publication of *The Jadoo Album*

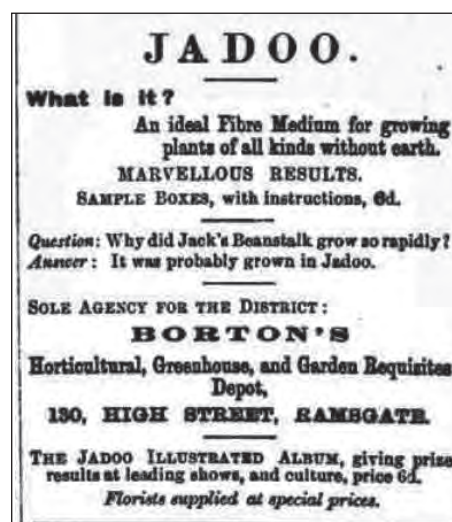


Figure 7. Jadoo Album in *Thanet Advertiser*, 17 June 1897, p. 1.

by the Secretary of Jadoo Limited, Palace Gate, Exeter, and the Director of the Jadoo factory in Margaux, France, with a foreword by Colonel Halford Thompson (Figure 7).⁴⁶ At the third annual meeting, the report was heard by the directors, officials and four shareholders. The company had concentrated on the foreign trade. There were pictures of the factory at Margaux, which was now operating and had been visited by Thompson at his own expense. The patent rights had been sold in Germany, where another factory was being erected at Breslau. Similar arrangements had been made in Austria-Hungary, where the government experiments had given 'most satisfactory results', and there were negotiations in Spain. A very large income from these sources was anticipated. Shipments were being sent worldwide and Thompson had visited sites in South Africa where Jadoo was proving particularly useful for nursery plants in brackish soil. There was a long list of awards and successes, but the directors admitted great difficulties in baling Jadoo for export. These had finally been overcome and the works had been remodelled with hydraulic machinery. In the future the company intended to concentrate on the home market, especially fruit and vegetables intended for the early market. A dividend of 5% was to be paid and more shares were offered.⁴⁷

Thompson was unable to be present at the annual dinner for employees in January 1899 but a steady increase in the sale of Jadoo was reported and the factory was employing twenty men.⁴⁸ As yet, Jadoo was still popular. An experiment with Jadoo on old vines in the Margaux area was reported in the *Gardeners' Chronicle* by Thompson. New rootlets had formed in the treated soil but not where it was untreated.⁴⁹ This claim was challenged, suggesting that the turfy or peaty loam used by nearly all vine growers might be just as good. A comparative test would prove the point and 'admit of neither amusement nor scepticism'.⁵⁰ In March 1899, an article in the *Wiener illustrierte Garten-Zeitung* (*The Vienna illustrated Garden Newspaper*) reported on a series of scientific experiments with the Jadoo fibre sold locally, presumably by the agent who had bought the patent rights. This Jadoo improved the growth of vegetables, especially beans, but the vines grown with added peat grew just as well as those with Jadoo. Since peat was so much cheaper and almost as good, the Research Station could not recommend the use of Jadoo.⁵¹ How far this affected sales of Jadoo across Europe is not clear but the financial return to the parent company from this source must have fallen.

However, in June 1899 the Philadelphia Florists' Club had admired plants grown in Jadoo, which were 'looking A1'. The local method of manufacture was described and claimed to be 'more expeditious than the method in England'.⁵²

Thompson wrote in March 1900 that he had seen several instances of *Pilea muscosa* germinating and growing in Jadoo. This 'artillery plant' must have come from a seed dormant in the peat for thousands of years since it is a native of tropical America. Even the boiling process had not killed it.⁵³ An expanded account of this seed vitality, but using the synonym *Pilea microphylla*, stressed that the moss (peat) was obtained solely from Yorkshire, where this plant cannot grow in the open air. This observation was repeated in 1903 in *Pearson's Weekly*.⁵⁴ Germination occurred at a temperature of 70°F (21°C), the same as that suggested by geologists for the Mid-Eocene period in Britain.⁵⁵ Given his former career, it is surprising that Thompson did not comment on its common name; this arises from the way in which the small male flowers explosively discharge pollen. The plant self-seeds widely and is considered invasive in many tropical countries.

Demonstrations of potting to the Devon and Exeter Gardeners' Association included one with Jadoo by Mr. G. F. Fletcher of Teignmouth. His advocacy was muted, since he admitted that it had 'some drawbacks but could be profitably employed mixed with soil'.⁵⁶ From his new home at Lamerton, Thompson exhibited apple trees and tomatoes grown in Jadoo fibre at the Tavistock Cottage Garden Society Show in August 1901, which 'attracted a great deal of attention'. However, with the illness and death of Halford Thompson in December 1901, the Jadoo Company lost its driving force. This was reflected in the local and national newspaper coverage, which dropped dramatically from 1900. In 1902 Jadoo Ltd. was still trading as 'manure manufacturers' at Old Quay, Teignmouth, and from the office of Harry Vodden, the secretary, in Palace Gate, Exeter. The Teignmouth works closed briefly in 1903 but restarted production.⁵⁷ In a directory of 1906-11, the Jadoo Co. was listed at Cullompton and the Old Quay, Teignmouth, and its Exeter address was 2, Deanery Place, occupied by Harry Vodden, accountant and auditor.⁵⁸ In Kelly's directories of 1914 and 1919, the company was listed only at Cullompton.⁵⁹ In 1923, Major H. S. Phillips was operating the Jadoo Company at Cullompton. Plumpton and Sons of Cullompton had a display at the Tiverton Show that year which included 'a section devoted to an



Figure 8. Jadoo House at Veitch Nurseries, *Western Times*, 25 May 1899, p.1.



Figure 9. 'Only for Bulb Growing' in *Cornish Gazette*, 28 Oct 1910, p. 4.

exhibition of "Jadoo" fibre for the cultivation of all descriptions of bulbs and plants.⁶⁰ There was a closing down sale at the end of 1929.⁶¹

Early national advertisements for the Jadoo Company came from Thompson's home, 21 Dawlish Road, Teignmouth.⁶² However the promotion of Jadoo fibre soon became a well organised marketing system with several strands. Local and national interest was caught and sustained with reports of lectures, displays at horticultural shows from a cottage garden society to those of the Royal Horticultural Society, plus prizes specifically for plants grown in Jadoo, such as hyacinths and 'dinner table plants'.⁶³ In Exeter the support of Peter Veitch at these events, the use of the Veitch shop and their name in advertising was important, linking Jadoo to this established and well-respected firm. There was a 'Jadoo house' at the Veitch 'Royal Nurseries' to display its advantages for growing a variety of hothouse and greenhouse subjects. (Figure 8) Outside, vines, peaches and apple trees were grown in Jadoo and loam for comparison.⁶⁴

Articles and reports mentioning Jadoo often appeared in more than one magazine or newspaper. A commendation of Jadoo would be used to support an advertisement by the company, such as endorsements from the Head Gardener to the Bishop of London, and the Honorary Secretary of the National Amateur Gardeners' Association.⁶⁵ Another drew the attention of tea and coffee planters to an article on Jadoo in the *Madras Mail*.⁶⁶ Thompson's East End lecture was the first of many reports used in this way.⁶⁷ E. Molyneux wrote a letter to the *Gardeners' Chronicle* praising the quality of chrysanthemums grown in Jadoo fibre by Thompson's gardener and shown at Torquay in the previous November. Jadoo fibre was of particular value for hanging baskets and packaging plants for transit, because of its lightness.⁶⁸ A letter in the *Gardeners' Chronicle* about the successful rooting of vines in Margaux was reported in two local papers and an advertisement then quoted this and another personal recommendation of Jadoo from a Dutch bulb grower.⁶⁹ Using Jadoo for rooting strawberries

was promoted at the right time of year by reference to an article in *Fruitgrower* on 1 February 1900.⁷⁰

Articles and advertisements not from the Jadoo Company were initially enthusiastic. Later there was more caution about its usefulness, usually confining it to window boxes, Wardian cases, hanging baskets and jardinières and for house plants, particularly bulbs, palms, orchids and ferns. It was often ranked equally with bulb or cocoa nut fibre or recommended as one ingredient of a compost mix, being 'rather too expensive to use on a large scale' (Figure 9). Town gardeners could use it instead of their poor soil and it was effective for potting chrysanthemums, sowing seeds and rooting cuttings. Applications of Jadoo in the open garden were rarely mentioned.⁷¹ Not all comments were positive or accurate. 'A son of the soil' was dismissive of Jadoo, assuming it was simply peat moss, which he had not found to be as good as soil. Such syndicated items had considerable influence: this one was published in Blackburn, Bridport, Moray and Nairn.⁷² 'W. S. R.' considered that plants did not make progress in Jadoo but it was most useful for rooting plants and cuttings.⁷³

The full extent of national sales was shown by the number and range of advertisements by agents and tradesmen across the British Isles. In 1895 at least twenty-three newspapers outside Devon referred to Jadoo, many several times, ranging from Salisbury to Lincolnshire and Sussex as well as Forres and Mid Ulster. There were fewer in 1896 but several advertisements ran for weeks e. g. *Croydon Advertiser* and *Glasgow Herald*. 1897 and 1898 achieved at least twenty-nine mentions, some with national circulation such as the *Westminster Gazette* and *Pearson's Weekly*. The twenty-one in 1899 spread as far as Wigton, Portadown, Diss and Monmouthshire. There was a marked drop in 1900 to ten and thereafter only four or less, except for slight increases in 1904 and 1906. There were very few advertisements during the First

World War: a weekly series in the *Wishaw Press* in autumn 1914 and one in the *Grantham Journal* in 1915.⁷⁴

Local agents were listed at the end of advertisements by the Jadoo Company, but most agents then advertised Jadoo with other products or even on its own. These were usually nurserymen, such as W. J. Godfrey in Exmouth, but also a female grocer, and a horticultural chemist, who listed ‘Thompson’s Vine and Plant Manures’ as well as Jadoo Fibre and Liquid.⁷⁵ There were six local agents in and around Croydon as early as May 1895.⁷⁶ One of them ran a regular advertisement praising all the advantages of Jadoo.⁷⁷ Two agents in Norwich prompted an article about this ‘new commodity, the “booming” of which has, of late, brought it into much prominence’. Thompson was quoted on Jadoo’s virtues and potential overseas sales but the last line commented wryly that apparently ‘the earth itself has been rendered unnecessary’.⁷⁸ Jadoo was still a ‘new’ potting material when shown in an exhibit at the Liverpool Horticultural Association Show in Sefton Park in August 1897.⁷⁹ By May 1905 it had been relegated to ‘Horticultural Sundries’.⁸⁰ Its final dismissal came in 1924, when an article in the *Dudley Chronicle* commented that bulbs for windows could be grown in fibre which ‘in the past was called Jadoo’.⁸¹

As a peat-based compost, Jadoo promised much but

the complexity of manufacture and consequent higher cost limited its use. It failed to justify the claims made for it in commercial field horticulture and became confined to a limited mainly amateur market. Sadly, the use of the alternatives to peat listed in the patent do not seem to have been pursued by Thompson. Of course, there was then no awareness of the effects of peat extraction, where a rare habitat is destroyed and carbon dioxide is released into the atmosphere, whereas a healthy peat bog mitigates flooding and stores carbon. Today responsible gardeners shun peat completely; alternatives cost a little more and need different management but can be re-used. The Royal Horticultural Society has led the way in developing growing media without peat, does not sell peat-based composts and only uses it in its gardens ‘for a handful of rare and exotic plants where alternatives have yet to be identified’. For the amateur, using home-made compost is recommended. Amongst the commercial alternatives to peat, coir has natural water-holding ability but has to be transported, mainly from Sri Lanka. Wood fibre or composted bark is a renewable and sustainable source that can be grown in the UK. Wool and bracken are also used. Other ingredients need to be added and these may have a large carbon footprint, so new labelling to show the environmental impact of a compost is to be welcomed.⁸²

References

1. Carolyn Keep, *F. W. Meyer (1852-1906): a landscape gardener in Devon*, (Devon Gardens Trust, 2015).
2. Rudyard Kipling, *Kim*, (1st edn. 1908; Nelson, 1925), pp. 2-3.
3. *Home News for India, China & the Colonies*, 10 December 1859; *Homeward Mail from India, China and the East*, 13 January 1860, p. 16.
4. Prosecution of Exeter Gas Company by Exeter Town Council, *Western Times (WT)*, 22 April 1976, p. 3. Thompson was among the residents complaining that the smell from the gas works caused ‘nausea and violent headaches’.
5. This was probably one of the three ornate detached villas in Claremont Grove, St. Leonard’s.
6. The grave of Major Robert Halford Thompson is nearby. He died on 8 December 1930 and was Deputy Chief Constable of Devon.
7. Port View was a mansion just south of the Livery Dole almshouses with a large and attractively laid out garden running down to Church Lane along Barrack Road. It was presumably demolished after the sale of fittings in October 1899 (Devon Heritage Centre FOR/B/6/1/285) and replaced by four rows of terrace houses, shown on the 1905 OS map. There is a plaque mentioning Ralph Sanders on the former Exeter Bank in High Street on the corner of Broadgate.
8. East Cliff, 21 Dawlish Road, was to the north of the coastal railway line at Slocum Bridge. The garden was bowl-shaped like a horse-shoe with a fountain in the south-west corner and a perimeter belt of trees around the site. In 1902 it became Major Price Munro’s Army and University College and after WW1 was renamed Overcliff Guest House. The site was made into a car park in the 1950s.
9. *WT*, 24 December 1901, p. 5. *Totnes Weekly Times*, 28 December 1901, p. 3.
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12. Exeter Police Court summons, *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette (EPG)*, 10 November 1876, p. 6.
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14. *WT*, 26 June 1882, p. 3.
15. *Devon Evening Express (DEE)*, 5 August 1884, p. 1.
16. *WT*, 23 May 1894, p. 3.
17. Patent 20,971: A. D. 1894 (with thanks to Ann Keep).
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22. *EPG*, 21 March 1895, p. 3.
23. *EPG*, 20 May 1895, p. 3.
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