



ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY

Dublin Group



NEWSLETTER NO. 53 – WINTER 2010

CONTENTS

Editorial-----	3
Alpine Miscellany-----	4
Philip Shuttleworth by Billy Moore-----	11
<i>Gentiana verna</i> , at home and abroad by Robert Rolfe-----	13
Shortias by Liam Byrne-----	19
Review of Recent Group Events-----	22
Fixtures-----	40
Officers and Committee-----	42

Front cover illustration is of *Gentiana verna*
(Photo: Liam McCaughey) – see p. 4

EDITORIAL

A common concern among gardening and horticultural societies in recent years has been the steady and seemingly inexorable fall in numbers. We are an exception: our membership has increased slightly over the past three or four years. It is difficult to pinpoint the reasons for this but it seems logical to conclude that our members are happy with what their subscriptions entitle them to, but the poor attendances at our September/October fixtures would seem to suggest that there may be a problem.

One of the main benefits of membership is the excellent programme of lectures on offer each year. The programme is carefully constructed to cater for all interests; from beginners to the more experienced. Our lecturers, whether local or from overseas, are chosen for their knowledge and expertise, and for their proven skills as communicators. Most speakers charge a fee and all must have their expenses reimbursed. These expenses can be quite significant, especially in the case of lecturers from abroad. The decision of the Committee to increase the membership subscription is in part to ensure that the quality of the lecture programme is maintained.

Oliver Schurmann's talk (24 September) in Stillorgan and **Magnus Lidén's** (1 October) at the NBG were very poorly supported, almost embarrassingly so, although both talks were superb and were much enjoyed by those who attended. Also, Oliver had brought plants for sale which usually guarantees a good turnout. The attendance at the Autumn Show and Workshop was so poor that the Committee has decided to drop it altogether. So a number of questions arise. Do we have too many lectures? Is the subject matter appropriate? Should the lectures be held on Saturday? Is September/early October a bad time for members? Are the venues suitable? It is important that these questions are answered because there is no point in continuing to put time, effort and money into providing events that few members want. The AGM will provide a good opportunity to air these matters, so, hopefully, there will be a representative attendance in Stillorgan on 21 January. Alternatively members can send their views to me. My contact details are on the back cover.

ALPINE MISCELLANY

Happy New Year to all readers. I hope the joy you get from your plants in 2010 will soften the harshness of these difficult economic times.

Gentiana verna

Many thanks to those members who submitted images for the competition to find a suitable picture of the Spring Gentian to adorn the cover of this issue: they were all excellent. **Edwin Davison** judged the entries and chose the fine photo by **Liam McCaughey** as the winner. Congratulations Liam. The picture was taken in the Tien Shan, above Chimbulak, and Liam tells me that when **Michael Longley** saw it, being reminded of the Burren, he was inspired to pen a poem which mentions the Gentian – not the poem referred to on p.33.

Membership Subscriptions

Now let me get the bad news out of the way. It is with great regret that the Committee has decided to increase the annual subscription for all categories of members. It is especially unfortunate that these increases come at a time when everyone is feeling the strain of the recession. From 1 January 2010 the subscription for sole members will be €18, for family members, €25 and for students €7.50. These increases may seem high but must be seen against the background of no increase since 2003 and the depletion of our reserves as shown by the accounts. They should also be viewed in the context of the fees charged by other societies: the RHSI charges €35 for an individual member and €50 for family membership while the IGPS rates are €30 and €42 respectively. The main criterion that should be used in assessing the increases is whether the new rates offer value for money in these straitened times. A glance at the fixture list for 2010 will show that the Group offers great value to members. Also each member gets two newsletters each year, which now that they are being professionally printed, are quite costly. The alternative to increasing the subscription rate would be to reduce the number of speakers and revert to a photo-copied newsletter. If members would prefer to see us take this route they can air their views at the AGM.

Valerie Keegan

Val will retire as Chairperson at the AGM after three years of selfless work for the Group. She has been superb in that role guiding the affairs of the Group gently but firmly. Val has that great talent of being able to get things done efficiently and effectively, and without any fuss. This has always been evident in her other role as Show Secretary, a job which, thankfully, she is continuing to do for now, and has served her well while she has been in the Chair. We all owe a great debt of gratitude to Val for all she has done and continues to do for the Group and I would like on your behalf to offer sincere thanks to her for her sterling work for the Group to date.

Martin Walsh

As you know Martin is our Fixtures Secretary and many of you will have heard him speak about his extensive travels in the mountains of Asia, most notably the Himalayas. Martin is a superb speaker and an excellent photographer whose reputation is growing rapidly. As well as lecturing to our Group, he has given many talks here and in the UK. His lecture at the 2008 annual conference of the **Scottish Rock Garden Club** was described to me by a disinterested observer as “the best talk of the conference”, despite some very big names among the other speakers. The **AGS** has now invited him to speak at the highly prestigious **Alpines 2011** conference to be held in Nottingham next year. These decennial events always feature the top speakers on alpines from all parts of the world so Martin will be joining a very exclusive club indeed. His talk will be entitled ‘High and Low in the Himalaya’ and on behalf of the Group I would like to offer him our congratulations and best wishes.

In This Issue

I am most grateful to **Robert Rolfe** for the fine article on *Gentiana verna* that he penned specially for the newsletter. Robert is a very busy man and it is to his great credit that he found the time to write this piece for us.

I must once again extend thanks to Liam Byrne for his article on shortias. He never lets me down and I know that readers value his

practical advice.

Our esteemed member **Philip Shuttleworth** died just after our last issue was printed. There is an obituary on p.11.

The standard of the reports on our various fixtures that members continue to provide me with remains very high, and I really do appreciate your efforts. I was especially impressed by Patricia McGeown's evocative account of our visit to the garden of Jean van der lee last August.

Fixtures

The programme of events for 2010 is an exciting one indeed - see p. 40 for a detailed list. The year opens with our AGM on Thursday, 21 January in Stillorgan. No doubt there will be much discussion about the committee's decision to increase the members' subscription rates, but there will be other matters to consider also – see editorial, so attendance at this meeting is important. Apart from the formal business it provides an excellent opportunity for members to raise any issues which concern them. If the AGM itself doesn't attract you, the talk which follows by **Edwin Davison** on digital plant photography should. Edwin judges the artistic section at our main Show each year and, as a professional photographer, knows everything there is to know about taking the pictures and managing them on the computer. Please bring your camera along. I feel certain that irrespective of your level of expertise you will learn something.

On Saturday, 13 February our annual lunch will be held at the Royal St George Yacht Club in Dun Laoghaire. On this occasion our thanks are due to **Amanda Chambers, Jamie's** wife, who has arranged for the club's facilities to be made available to us. No doubt **Joan Carvill** will be with us in spirit. After lunch, Jamie will entertain us on the topic of: 'Home thoughts from abroad - a Kiwi Gardener in Ireland'. More details can be found in the booking form for this event.

On 18 February in Glasnevin we have a real treat when **John Blanchard**, whose name is synonymous with the genus *Narcissus*,

will speak on 'Daffodils in the Wild'. I believe it is true to say that nobody on the planet is more expert on this subject than John. His book, *Narcissus - A Guide to Wild Daffodils* is a classic, and he is revered by daffodil lovers everywhere. His lifelong passion for the genus is manifest in his lectures which he has given all over the world. This is a unique opportunity to hear this legendary plantsman and should not be missed.

The **Local Show and Members' Plant Sale** will be held in Stillorgan on Saturday 6 March. Here members can exhibit their plants in both competitive and non-competitive classes. As well as the show there will be workshops on cultivation, including twin scaling of bulbs, and a plant sale where lots of good alpinists will be available for members at reasonable prices. See the Show Schedule for more information.

We have another unmissable lecture on 18 March when **Malcolm McGregor** will be in Glasnevin to talk about saxifrages in the wild and in the garden. Malcolm's wonderful book, *Saxifrages - a Definitive Guide to the 2000 Species, Hybrids and Cultivars* was published to great acclaim in 2008. As well as being an expert on saxifrages, Malcolm has lectured extensively and is a fine photographer. In this huge genus there is a saxifrage for everyone and no one in the audience will have any excuse for not growing one when the talk finishes.

The Ulster Group's AGS Show is on 10 April in **Greenmount**. This is always a great occasion and even if you are not exhibiting you should make an effort to attend. There will be lots of plants for sale, from commercial growers and from members. There is always a good attendance of Ulster Group members at our show so we owe it to them reciprocate generously.

Our own **Silver Jubilee Show** takes place as usual in **Cabinteely** on 24 April, and I appeal to every member to make a special effort in this milestone year to put at least one plant on the show bench. It is much easier than it looks and once you have broken the ice you could become addicted. Remember to bring plants for the

plant sale also because the Group depends heavily on the proceeds of plant sales to maintain our financial viability. As well as our own sale a number of top commercial growers will be offering their wares.

Carl Wright, who grows alpiners in the Burren, will talk to us in Stillorgan on 6 May. Carl is an environmentalist who gardens accordingly. I believe his garden is wonderful and is visited regularly by groups from various garden clubs. This will be a most interesting talk and one that I'm looking forward to.

On 8 May we will have a **coach trip** to gardens in Waterford, including Mount Congreve. Full details can be found on the booking form.

An innovation on 3 June will be a **workshop** on 'Basic Botany' to be given by **Matthew Jebb** in the NBG. (Please note the earlier start time of 7 pm.) Matthew is a taxonomist and curator of the Herbarium at the National Botanic Gardens in Glasnevin. There should be a large attendance at this event which provides a great opportunity for members to extend their botanical knowledge under the guidance of an acknowledged expert.

Our last fixture before the summer break will be a visit to the excellent garden of our member **Patricia McGuire** in Sandyford on Sunday, 13 June. This is the first opportunity the group has had to visit Patricia's garden and I hope to see you all there. You can be sure of a warm welcome.

As you can see there are further fixtures in autumn which I will elaborate upon in the next issue of the newsletter.

Our Website

The website which was created by, and is maintained by our webmaster, **Jamie Chambers**, is a real asset to the Group. The content of the site continues to grow and it is now a very useful resource for members with a lot of valuable information on all aspects of our activities. The site is also of interest to non-members, some of whom have joined the Group as a result of

their visit. Jamie, who is a very busy man, continues to improve the site as he outlines below. We all owe him a great debt of gratitude.

From Jamie

In the last newsletter I talked about a new project for the website - to scan in the old newsletters so current members can avail of the useful material there, or just browse for curiosity. Luckily I did warn you that this would take some time to complete, but I didn't realize that it would also take some time to begin. Not long afterwards I began my weekly migration to Amsterdam to work, so the project has fallen down the priority list I'm afraid. However, I have now begun, and if you go to the Newsletters page of the website you'll be able to read the July 1984 Newsletter, with a useful article on seed sowing by **Carl Dacus**.

Gentle growth is still to be seen in the website statistics - 12,938 hits in November compared with 7,386 a year ago, and 1,327 sites visiting us, up from 743. Our plant images are still a draw, as are the back issues of the newsletter. I'll be keeping an eye out to see how many of you take a look at the July 1984 issue.

For your convenience I've introduced a new page to the website - Downloads. There you will find all the forms, leaflets and newsletters that are available to download from the website across all the other pages. It should save you a bit of searching now that we have quite a few pages on the site.

Questions? Ideas? Material? Send them to me at agsinfo@eircom.net, and if you don't know what I'm talking about, go to www.alpinegardensociety.ie and have a browse.

Pots

Michael Meagher has seven and nine cm, rigid, square, plastic pots for sale at ten and twenty cent each respectively. If you want any you should phone Michael (01 8382368) well in advance of any meeting and he will bring your order along.

OOOPS!

The first Alpine Weekend in Termonfeckin was held in 1984. At some stage in the intervening period, probably 1994, it was decided to number the weekends, so the 1994 event was described as the tenth, whereas it was of course the eleventh. This error has been carried forward ever since and in the interest of historical accuracy must now be corrected. The 2009 weekend was undoubtedly the 26th, not the 25th as previously advertised, although it is true that 2009 was the 25th anniversary of these get-togethers, if you follow me, so the silver jubilee celebration *was* justified.

Editor



Saxifraga longifolia – see p.31 (Photo: Billy Moore)

OBITUARY

Philip Shuttleworth

1922 - 2009



(Photo: Rhona Shuttleworth)

Philip Shuttleworth, a longstanding member, and in recent years an honorary member, died in July after a long illness, aged eighty seven.

Philip was one of the greatest alpine growers this country has known. His garden in Gormanstown with its extensive tufa beds and huge collection of choice alpines (alas due to increasing frailty falling into decline in latter times) was a Mecca for lovers of alpines from all over. His daughter **Ann** had this to say at his funeral: "Over the years Dad had plenty of hobbies: photography, drawing and painting, he loved listening to music and talked about his interest in trains and planes and the travels he had. He took an intelligent interest in current affairs and we covered a great range of topics in our discussions. But his overriding passion was gardening and the farm yard became notorious for all its gardens. He was a member of the Alpine Garden Society and people often came to visit our gardens, occasionally by the coach load when the

gardens were in their prime. Spending time in the garden with my parents was an education; not only would they be able to name a plant but also fondly name the person who had given it to them – like all true gardeners they loved to give as well as receive and I hope some of you here today will still have some of their plants growing in your own gardens”.

Philip was of enormous assistance to the Group in the early years and was almost embarrassingly generous. All the old stagers will be able to point to plants in their gardens that they got from him. He gave great support to the early shows, arriving at one stage with a trailer load of gorgeous plants for the plant sale. **Rhona**, Philip’s wife of almost fifty years, who died seven years ago, was also a great gardener, though her interests were more in the direction of mainstream garden plants, especially primulas. Between them they brought a wide variety of plants to the Country Markets. They were a wonderful and very likeable couple and those of us who knew them will always remember them fondly.

As a very busy farmer, Philip seemed an unlikely grower of alpines and it is remarkable that with his professional workload he was able to garden to such a high standard and to find time for his many other interests: he is an example to all of us. Ann again: “It was not an easy life. On cold wet winter nights, when the rest of us kept warm and dry in the house, Dad was out in the fields looking for newborn lambs who would not survive the conditions and bringing them in for my mother to revive by the Aga in the kitchen. As the years went by he handed over to Fred but never really retired and carried on keeping the farm account books until the age of eighty five.”

He is survived by his son, **Fred**, his daughters **Ann** and **Rhona**, nine grandchildren and two great-grandchildren to all of whom we must offer our condolences on their loss.

Billy Moore

Gentiana verna, at home and abroad

Late April is around a month too early to see the out-on-a-limb, English population of *Gentiana verna* in upper Teesdale at its best. I've passed that way at Easter time, witnessing only a lek of a comparably rare inhabitant, the Black Grouse, to repay the diversion. And I've not had the chance to witness first-hand the rather earlier-flowering, disjunct Burren populations that complete the Spring Gentian's rather quixotic representation on these islands, though I've seen plenty of slides taken in the latter locale, these also featuring various congeners, the almost equally wide-ranging primrose included.

The gentian's far more numerous foreign-derived, cultivated counterparts, of uncertain, doubtless mixed origin, were certainly in full display in the last week of April this year when I arrived very early indeed at the Harrogate Flower Show,



an hour's drive further south of the still semi-sleeping English gentians. No frost this time round, thankfully, but still brisk enough at seven a.m. to encourage shelter indoors, so I hurried down to the twinned flower halls, persuaded the security guards to let me wander at leisure long before the crowds arrived, and spent an hour ferreting around in the semi-darkness (no overhead natural light, and little filters from the show hall margins) and comparative warmth. Many of the exhibits are predictably the same from year to year - tiered ranks of daffodils in faux Wedgwood vases, euphorbias of every persuasion, tropical orchids, and seemingly immutable bonsai displays, but this time round I chanced upon a display of alpines in troughs, enlivened

throughout by almost vulgarly large clumps of *Gentiana verna*, fully open even in the half-light. (Warmth, together with flower age, must determine their opening, for I have many times witnessed a rapid re-furling of the flowers in the mountains, inspired by a drop in temperature and (perhaps) a change in humidity levels, rather more than a dramatic dip in light levels).

The nursery in question had bedded *G. verna* with a mix of suitable and silly companions; silver saxifrages, drabas and *Silene acaulis* on the first count; the fast-growing *Arenaria montana* and soon-engulfing *Heuchera* hybrids on the second. The bright blue clumps, with up to fifty flowers apiece, were also on sale for six pounds, but of course they represented not individual plants, but clumps of seedlings, potted *en masse* rather than pricked out, and giving their all two years from the date of germination. Not always easy to tell that this is the case, unless a few white forms infiltrate, leaving you with a parti-coloured grouping, not unattractive as these things go, but still slightly out of kilter.

Over the years I have seen the Spring Gentian in various parts of Europe and western Asia - the eastern Pyrenees, throughout the Alps, on several Greek mountains, and in north-central and north-eastern Turkey. Without viewing the slide captions, who could pronounce on the locale of any of them, unless a clue comes courtesy of the supporting vegetation - *Geum coccineum* in the northern Pindus, for example, or *Cyclamen parviflorum* on the Zigana Pass? One reads of all manner of colour variations, but I've personally seen very few, though only a week ago, I was shown a photograph of a phenomenal patch with pale greyish-blue flowers growing in north-eastern Turkey.

And until a short time ago, I would have insisted that very few have been given cultivar names. Those that come to mind include 'Amy Baring' (although reckoned to be 'more permanent than most' in the 1950s, long since gone), 'Burren Blue' (another ice-blue version, still going strong), 'Clare' (pale Cambridge blue; born and died in the 1960s) and 'Zeppelin' (a vigorous, true-breeding, very large form with rosettes carrying up to six flowers, which occurred in the one-time Askival garden of Mike and Polly Stone). As an update, the very recent arrival of a new monograph, 'Gentiana' (by a German professor, **Jürgen Matschke**) adds a

slew of others ('Astrocaerulea', 'Began', 'Chionodoxa', 'Davma', 'Papillon', 'Rosea' and so on) that are little if at all known in the UK and Ireland to date.

These apart, **Joe Elliott** used to distribute both the deep blue standard bearer and a violet-amethyst version, which he called (if I remember aright) 'Violacea'. His Cotswold nursery was associated for many years, until the mid-1980s, with the production of thousands upon thousands of seedling plants, either sold direct or else wholesale. Until my first visit, forty years ago, I knew *Gentiana verna* only from its portrait on the 3d postage stamp issued to mark the International Botanical Congress in 1964 - ironically, the following year test borings were made in the Cow Green area, and soon afterwards a reservoir left a sizeable percentage of the English native plants submerged. But back to Joe, who excelled in the cultivation of the Spring Gentian - a trough densely planted with nothing else would meet the gaze of visitors as they went through the narrow entrance to his converted farmyard premises. He sold the main stock under the name *G. verna angulosa* (you can quibble about the naming, but his ability to grow the plant is unquestionable) and gave sound advice on cultivation in his catalogues, repeated verbatim in each issue. 'It is not a difficult plant', he explained, 'provided it is given the few essentials it asks; an open, sunny position, sharp drainage without ever becoming dry at the roots, and a rich diet including a good proportion of leaf-mould, peat or really well rotted cow manure. If you start with a young vigorous plant, which I can guarantee', he concluded, 'and give it these conditions it will thrive and give immense joy.' No selling of 'instant' clumps made up of many seedlings, you will note.

Joe Elliott's equally illustrious father, **Clarence**, provides a link to another pivotal figure in the British history of the gentian's cultivation, for through his colleague **Frank Barker**, he came into contact with the divertingly-named **Grimshaw Heyes Berry**. The author of a book on the genus, his devotion was pretty much lifelong - one reads that he was discussing gentians with a friend even on the night that he died. Possessed of a scientific, analytical mind, in his Enfield garden he meticulously recorded the results of growing a batch of seedlings in any number of soil mixtures (he

even grew a couple in pure bonemeal, which was not a success!), repotting at different times and varying the sowing date. His work began in 1932. Initially a compost of pure peat or leaf-mould alone gave promise, but plants in this non-mixture soon began to stall, so he advocated using 'an equal quantity of sand, manure, grass loam, peat and crock grit, to which is added a sprinkling of bonemeal'. But he admits to struggling to persuade the plants to perennate: 'New shoots from the roots do appear occasionally, but they are exceptional, and the old crowns become too loose and straggly after three years to be worth keeping'. Even so, one seedling produced almost 100 flowers in its second year.

Not one to admit defeat, he put into action a plan B (or, in view of the scale of his experimentation, plans B - Z), and in 1950 (AGS Bulletin 18:328 -33) produced a more considered article, simply entitled '*Gentiana verna*'. Among the more telling insights, one might highlight his observations that cuttings are not straightforward ('it will take its time to grow, probably four years before it will make a plant as large as a saucer'); that *G. verna* does not route adventitiously from below the crown, and damage to the lower roots is resented; that it sets seed in profusion (425 from one capsule, though how he had the patience to enumerate the dust-like grains, heaven alone knows) which is best sown fresh, in high summer, but germinated for him in March and at no other time of the year; and that his original 100 seedlings were never treated with an insecticide, but instead watered twice a week in hot weather with a hosepipe, which worked miracles.

He decided upon the above quoted compost (which also incorporated a sprinkling of charcoal, and was referred to as his 'one fifth mixture'); a rival concoction, which he called 'a little bit of everything' was also recommended (one-eighth of Bedfordshire sand, loam, peat, leaf-mould, manure, limestone chips with two-eighths of crock grit, with or without the sprinkling of bonemeal and charcoal). Thankfully, he went on to add that the species was tolerant of various other composts, doing best in an acid mix with some gardeners. Just as well, for on my last garden centre visit, I struggled to find any sharp sand (nowadays disguised as 'Soil Improver', or else simply not stocked); a request for Perlite was greeted with a bemused grin; the so-called John Innes was in fact

badly-sieved peat, and while there were numerous permutations on the driveway gravel/decorative pebbles themes, the fairly fine grit product sold as 'Horticultural Pink Grit' had also been deleted. G. H. Berry would not have been impressed; nor was I.

Although he regarded *Gentiana verna* as capable of living for many years, he reckoned that young plants were much the most productive and attractive; even annual topdressing didn't solve the problem of senescence, and cutting back the straggly shoots was futile. As such he advocated sowing a batch of seed at least every other year, and keeping a sharp lookout for aphids. Hence the kudos achieved by growing a large plant: one recalls a Farrer Medal specimen which only received its gong after what was described as 'careful examination' by the deciding judges (presumably they scooped away the topdressing to source a single crown, or else parted the flowers and foliage to arrive at their decision). The owner, incidentally, attributed the health of the plant to a dollop of well-rotted cow manure, placed under the root ball at the last repotting. Often one sees healthy plants in cow-grazed alpine meadows, but this may have as much to do with the micro-environment provided by the intermixed vegetation. It is characteristically an inhabitant of short turf and rather lush alpine meadows; recalling good stands growing in otherwise barren scree or any form of moraine save the stabilized, part-colonised sort is a struggle.

The Spring Gentian, one of the most widely distributed of Eurasian species, has a number of close relatives, some difficult to distinguish from one another, though the suckering, narrow-leaved *G. verna* is very distinctive, so too the repeatedly bog-dwelling, often late-flowering *G. bavarica*, and the very tightly rosetted, condensed *G. brachyphylla*, which I have seen growing in near-vertical crevices on a high altitude eyrie that was chiefly home to a cable car terminus. You could add a dozen others.

A few are inter-fertile, and have given rise to hybrids, in the wild and in cultivation, but most occupy different habitats, and keep themselves to themselves. What was once deemed a variety of *G. verna* is now sometimes regarded as *G. angulosa* in its own right (found from the Caucasus through to Mongolia, and distinguished by its pronouncedly-winged calyces and rather narrower leaves).

Another close ally from a small area of the western Caucasus (further-flung reports haven't been corroborated), subsp. *oschtenica* was regarded as a separate species as long ago as 1903: certainly there is no mistaking its light yellow flowers. And it would be as well to mention that the Spring Gentian has been recorded as far east as the Tien Shan and Siberia; it also has a toehold in Africa; subsp. *penetii* grows in the High Atlas. This too has recently been upgraded to species status.

The usage of *angulosa* in any guise appears to have been done away with in cultivation; in its stead we are left with subsp. *balcanica*, *G. verna* unembellished, or just occasionally subsp. *tergestina*. The difficulty of naming is akin to that presented by the portmanteau usage of *G. acaulis* rather than *G. clusii*, *G. kochiana* and their close relatives. Much cultivated stock derives from long-ago introductions, selected and crossed over many generations.

Pontificating on subspecies *pontica* (another taxon shared between *G. angulosa* and *G. verna* depending on whose viewpoint you share) and the rest from garden material is often futile. It is a pleasure to acknowledge the veracity of long-maintained, pure stocks such as 'Burren Blue', but it is surely best to stick with the unqualified name *G. verna* for most of the rest. G. H. Berry lauded it as 'the best of all alpine plants', and whether I have come upon it in the dingy light of a Harrogate show hall, in a Cotswold nursery yard, figuratively ablaze at midday in the floriferous meadows above Mont Cenis, or on innumerable other occasions, the accolade has always rung true.

Robert Rolfe

Shortias

Shortias must be included among the aristocrats of alpine plants. Their home is in the mountains of Japan and eastern and North America. Their main attractions are that they are so mouth-wateringly beautiful and a challenge to grow.

Shortia uniflora from Japan forms slow-creeping mats; the leaves are glossy green in spring and summer and turn brilliant red in autumn. Single flowers are carried on short stalks, slightly nodding and funnel-shaped, white or pale pink in colour, with the ends of the petals fringed. The form 'Grandiflora' is very much coveted,



the flowers being larger and produced more freely.

From the woodlands of Carolina and Georgia in the USA comes my favourite of the genus, *S. galacifolia*. It creeps slowly sending up shiny leathery green leaves, toothed at the edges. The foliage is green in springtime turning slowly to a rich crimson in autumn. The nodding white flowers are

funnel-shaped with heavily fringed petals, and are carried singly on seven to ten cm stems. When it flowers in April, the loveliness of this plant is breathtaking. To me it is the *crème de la crème* of alpinists.

A summer-flowering shortia, again from Japan, is *S. soldanelloides*. It is larger than the previous two and forms mats of rounded leaves. The flowers are bell-like with heavily fringed white or pink petals.

Cultivation

Shortias grow in humus rich, lime-free soil that does not become baked in summer. Place them in light shade in cool positions in the

garden. Top dress with leafmould or peat in the autumn. Once settled in they do not like disturbance. A decade or more ago I had a nice clump of *S. uniflora* 'Grandiflora' which I lifted from the garden to exhibit. Alas when I returned it to its original place in the garden it slowly deteriorated and eventually died. I remember also, quite a number of years ago, a magnificent large pan of shortia (the species I forget) was exhibited at the Ulster Show having been lifted from the garden. Needless to say it won the Farrer Medal. As far as I can recollect, **Patricia Crossley**, the Ulster Show Secretary, was the exhibitor. I have often wondered if her wonderful plant survived. If you want to exhibit shortias grow them in pots. The compost I use is made up of three parts leafmould or peat, two parts granite sand and one part John Innes No. 2 or good loam. When they finish flowering, at every second watering, I feed them with an ericaceous fertilizer. Keep the pots in the shade and only bring them into the alpine house when in flower.

Propagation

The books will tell you that you can increase your stock by careful division after flowering, or by taking cuttings in late summer. I would not divide any shortias because they hate disturbance as I have said. I have tried taking cuttings but none of mine struck; a mist unit would probably give more success. Seeds are worth trying if you can get them but it is a slow process. My plants rarely set seed, but on one occasion I got a few which I sowed immediately and got one seedling. It is very slow-growing and after four years is still quite small with no sign of flower. The compost I used was equal parts peat, granite sand and John Innes No. 1. After Jim Almond's talk in Termonfeckin on propagation I would now add coarse vermiculite or Perlite.

If you would like to grow these beauties you should search the catalogues of the specialist nurseries. If you are really determined you will succeed in obtaining and growing them, although the

plants will not be cheap. When you discover a nursery that sells them please let me know.

Liam Byrne



Shortia uniflora var. *kantoensis* (Photo: Jim Almond)

REVIEW OF RECENT GROUP EVENTS

Visit to the Garden of Jean van der lee – Saturday, 29 August

This is a garden with something of interest for all keen gardeners. Here there are: herbaceous borders, unusual plants, a woodland area, a kitchen garden, gravel and courtyard area and finally a secret courtyard garden within the confines of the house. Jean has indeed a special talent for combining colour, leaf shape and architectural features of plants.

Steps from the back of the house lead past two raised beds and up to a lozenge shaped lawn, bounded on either side by herbaceous beds. Hot colours predominate on the left, while the right contains softer, cooler shades. A stand of three silver birches forms a focal point and leads the eye to the woodland area.



On the left, showy red-orange Tiger Lilies are complemented by yellow helianthemums and the apricot-yellow and bronze leaves of *Crocosmia* 'Solfatare' while the exotic is combined with the ordinary by an orange nasturtium nestling at the foot of the dark purple leaves of *Canna indica* 'Purpurea'. Elsewhere, the tall golden spikelets of *Stipa gigantea* soften the vivid hues of dahlias and schizostylis. On the trellis behind was the outstanding *Clematis viticella* 'Purpurea Plena Elegans' with its beautiful double magenta flowers, seldom seen as nicely grown as this. This plant came originally to England from Spain during Elizabethan times and was known as 'Virgin's Bower'. Behind the trellis a path runs past the well-tended kitchen garden bordered by an informal display of Sweet Pea, Cornflower, nasturtium, daisies and nigella, all sown by Jean's husband from a wild flower mixture from the local supermarket! In the woodland area the delightful large white flowers of *Hydrangea* 'Annabelle'

were a pleasant surprise while the contrasting leaves of pulmonaria, smilacina, euphorbia, and hellebores bore evidence of the presence of flowers earlier in the season.

Cool colours prevail in the left-hand bed where whites, pinks, lemons and blues predominate. Here the acid yellow of *Solidago* 'Golden Wings' is set off effectively by the opulent tassels of an exceptional grass, while the silver-grey leaves and blue panicles of *Perovskia* 'Blue Skies' contribute in foliage and flower. Nearer the house, spiky eryngiums, combined with a silver leaved astelia, and with the handsome, shiny leaves of a bergenia, make a fine example of architectural planting against the background of the dark leaves of the not often seen *Acacia baileyana* 'Purpurea'.

Below the garden-house from which delicious teas were served, a gravel bed leads to a courtyard. Here the well placed and surprisingly hardy *Eucomis comosa*, the Pineapple Lily, displayed its unusual racemes of star-shaped flowers. Nearby, in a decorative pot, grew a much admired and nicely displayed edelweiss and further on the creamy white trumpet flowers of a datura made a decorative statement.

Finally we came to the secret courtyard. It is bounded on three sides by walls of the house. The focal point is a small specimen tree, under-planted with hellebores, and all enclosed by a square, clipped box hedge. From the entrance the eye is drawn to a graceful sculpture of two figures, artistically canopied by *Solanum laciniatum*. Elsewhere in a variety of well-chosen coloured pots, the black and green leaves of aeoniums form a dramatic group.

It was difficult to do justice to Jean's garden in the space permitted. Her great success with form and colour combinations must stem from a deep knowledge of individual plants. It was great pleasure to visit her garden.

Patricia McGeown

Members' Show and Workshop, – 19 September

We had a poor turn-out for our Autumn Show with only nineteen attending, made up of eleven members, our two stalwarts **George Sevastopulo** and **Liam Byrne** giving practical demonstrations and six Committee members. With 134 Members in the Group we are wondering WHERE WERE YOU? We would like to hear from anyone with an opinion on our changing from October to September for our local show and why so few attended. Maybe let



us know your reasons for not doing so.

George gave a demonstration on how to obtain healthy plants from sowing seeds. As some seeds are so very fine he collects them

into old nylon tights where they cannot fall through! Where to obtain seeds? There are 4,500 items on the AGS list which comes out annually from Pershore to those who are members of the parent association. These are free. You have to be a member of the parent organization in order to exhibit at our Cabinteely Annual Show. George brought along a live vine weevil to show anyone not familiar with these evil creatures. He sowed seeds that had travelled from China in his trouser turn ups (China does not approve of seeds leaving the country). He showed us the technique of growing ferns with fine spores. Once the seeds germinate, a weak tomato feed - low in nitrogen - is George's elixir for healthy growth.

Liam Byrne talked about growing for showing. He told us how to lift a plant out of the garden and into a plant pot. Place the pot

around the plant and cut around it. Then lift out, leaving an exact size hole for it to be replaced. Plants must be cleaned up, dead leaves etc. removed. Any plant left outside should be brought in three to four weeks before Show time in order to ensure that they are clean, and to tidy them up generally. Make sure they are in the correct size pot for the class entered as a centimeter too large is not acceptable. A plant **MUST** be in your possession for a minimum of six months before you are allowed to show it.

We had twenty plants in our non-competitive local show. One which took my fancy was a *Cyclamen purpurascens*, which bears very fragrant reddish-purple flowers. Val brought along her winning trough from this year's Cabinteely show showing its winter foliage. We all enjoyed tea, coffee, biscuits and chat!! We had Joan Carvill's books, which she donated to us. These were much sought after and sold for a very small price as Joan would have wished. A big thank you to all who gave so generously to our plant sale.

Tessa Dagge

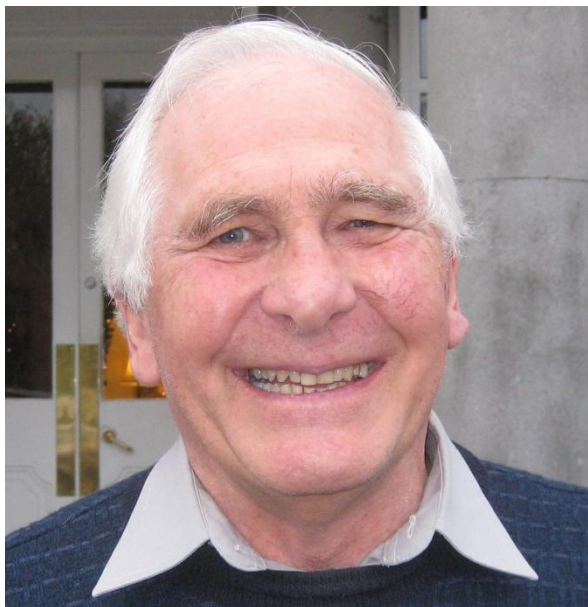
Corydalis, Bleeding Hearts and their Relatives

1 October

Dr Magnus Lidén is a botanist who has specialized in the study of *Dicentra* and related genera.

He has recently co-authored a book with Henrik Zetterlund on *Corydalis*.

The family Fumariaceae has twenty genera, of which *Corydalis* and *Dicentra* are the dominant and best known. At present there are 560 species in total. The main distribution areas are in Asia, North America and South Africa.



There are ten North American species of *Dicentra*, the most outstanding of which is *D. cucullaria*. An exception is *D. peregrina* which originated in Asia and is a parent of the easy and reliable hybrid 'King of Hearts'.

Also described were several lesser known genera and their relationships to each other.

Dr Lidén's main enthusiasm however was for the genus *Corydalis* on which he has an international reputation and to which he has devoted years of study. At present there are 470 species of *corydalis* of which 357 are native to China. These figures cannot be definitive as 180 new species have been discovered since 1980 and of these 70 new species have been discovered since the 1999 edition of *Flora Sinensis*. Remarkably, 80% of these are endemics. He still rates *C. flexuosa* which was introduced in 1987 as the most garden-worthy species but named *C. mucronipetala* as a possible rival in the future. *C. mairei*, *C. balsamiflora* and *C. calycosa* are also rated very highly. New introductions are continuing and *C. capitata* was in commerce even before it was scientifically described. Much more difficult to cultivate are those which grow on high screes between 4,000 and 5,000m such as *C. hendersonii*, *C. glycyphyllus* and *C. milarepa*. These are far removed in appearance from the more common species with which we are familiar.

This was an outstanding lecture delivered with humour and modesty.

Dermot Kehoe

Fascination - Show Gardens, 24 September

Oliver and Liat Schurmann have won medals and accolades with their wonderful Show Gardens for several years and Oliver's lecture to us on was fascinating indeed! He showed us four or five of his designs, right from the first idea which could be a view or a memory or anything else that impressed him, maybe a picture of a lake, a sunken path through tall trees, a misty morning in winter.....

And then, moving the concept on to paper, Oliver gives Liat most of the credit thus far, but then the real labouring begins.



A virgin site at Garden Heaven in the RDS, or Hampton Court or Bloom in Phoenix Park – digging out - building up – bringing in material etc, and always water – water – water. Ever aware of environmental factors, he made an interesting observation at this point –“ no soil should ever leave the site”; we saw JCB’s and trucks carting it away from sites beside his -

not at all environmentally friendly! We moved on through the various stages of development until the design is fully interpreted. He plants as he goes along; the trees and plants look much more comfortable if they have been in the ground for longer than a few hours before the opening time.

Oliver keeps his budgets low: that’s the way he likes to work, reusing everything to keep costs down. He observed that at Hampton Court, in this year of recession, there were a lot fewer show gardens than previous years, pointing out that a lot of the ‘big’ designer names actually can’t think in low budget terms so they opted out altogether.

Indeed a fascinating lecture - “you can make a garden out of anything”, he said, well, you can, if you are Oliver Schurmann!

It was a super evening with lovely photography, just a shame there weren’t more people there to enjoy; those who stayed away missed a treat!

Jean van der lee

Twenty-sixth Alpine Weekend at Termonfeckin

20-22 November 2009



Henry Taylor, Jim Almond, George Sevastopulo, Margaret Taylor and Susan Band at Termonfeckin (Photo: Billy Moore)

Yes, it was the 26th Discussion Weekend, but held in the 25th Anniversary year of its launch (see p.10). Again we had a full house. Our own members were joined by a lot of delegates from the Ulster Group and strong contingents from Cork and Waterford. **Joan Carvill's** brainchild continues to delight all the participants and her absence for the first time this year was almost palpable, although **Valerie Keegan** and her team, including **Mary O'Neill Byrne**, our new Secretary, ensured that, had Joan been present, she would have been more than pleased. Apart from an additional speaker the format was largely unchanged and a number of people adjudged it to be the best weekend yet, but I seem to hear somebody saying that each year.

Obviously the success of the weekend depends primarily on the line-up of speakers and once again it is difficult to see how this year's could have been bettered. In alphabetical order our speakers were **Jim Almond**, **Susan Band**, **George Sevastopulo** and

Henry and Margaret Taylor. Each talk was a gem and in combination delivered a balanced experience that was educational and entertaining.



Rose's Cake (Photo: Liam McCaughey)

Socially, the weekend was highly successful and we were well looked after by **An Grianán**. **Jamie Chamber's** quiz was testing but was enjoyed by all the contestants and, as the winning team scored twenty six out of a possible thirty points, the questions couldn't have been that difficult. As well as giving a talk, **George Sevastopulo** played auctioneer and achieved excellent prices for the interesting range of plants on offer. **Peggy Parker's** crossword was as popular as ever and she and **Gwenda Wratt** had the usual range of tasteful cards and small *objets d'art* for sale. The

plant sale was organized by **Carmel Duignan** and combined with the auction raised a handsome, and badly needed, sum for the Group's coffers. Special thanks must go to **Arthur** and **Tessa Dagge**. Arthur seems to do everything and Tessa looks after the cash. **Rose Sevastopulo** produced a splendid cake which tasted as good as it looked, and she also managed the raffle.

Business was brisk at the commercial stalls of **Keith Lever**, **Norrrys Maxwell** and **Susan Tindall**.

The programme kicked off on Saturday with a brilliant talk from the Taylors on the plants of the high Pyrenees. Margaret and Henry were introduced by the irrepressible **Hugh McAllister** of the Ulster Group who described them as 'living legends'. This was an apt description because the contribution that they have made to the world of alpinists is immense, both in exploration and cultivation terms, and the depth of their knowledge of alpinists in the wild and in the garden is bottomless. They are also a very nice couple, friendly and unassuming, and unfailingly generous. This was their fourth time at Termonfeckin and on each occasion they brought seeds and plants which were distributed free of charge to the delegates. They are very much a team with Henry giving the talk with occasional apt interjections from Margaret.

The Pyrenees range is Henry's favourite and this was evident as he took us on a journey from east to west through these accessible plant-rich mountains. They are sunnier on the Spanish side and, with both granite and limestone areas, provide a wide range of different habitats. The slides were superb, whether of plants or impressive landscapes, neither of which is in short supply in the high Pyrenees. Many alpine aristocrats grow in these mountains and we saw them at their best. *Ranunculus* spp. were well represented in the talk with the Nuria form of *R. parnassifolius* drawing gasps of admiration from the audience as did *R. x flahaultii*, a cross between *R. parnassifolius* and *R. pyrenaicus*, and *R. glacialis x parnassifolius*. None of these plants is easy so *R. alpestris*, evergreen with white flowers, might be the one to start with.

Senecio leucophyllus is a superb silver foliage plant and is easy from seed. *Erigeron uniflorus* is a lovely daisy and well worth growing. A beautiful shot of *Pulsatilla vernalis* reminded us of how desirable this plant is but, although seed germinates readily, it is not easy to maintain. *Narcissus poeticus* is also lovely, and easy, and we saw fields of it growing in a spot near Andorra. Further on huge drifts of the small yellow flowers of *N. jacetanus* made a lovely picture.

It was nice to see *Androsace vandellii*, which often appears on the show bench, growing in the wild. We admired the lovely pink flowers of *A. laggeri* but the most impressive in this genus were the superb tight cushions of *A. ciliata* growing at the higher levels, greatly superior to the more lax specimens seen growing lower down. A photograph of *A. cylindrica*, a relatively neglected but lovely species, taken on a precarious ledge, showed the lengths to which this indomitable couple are prepared to go to record a good specimen.

Henry showed some great pictures of *Saxifraga longifolia* which I think is my favourite of the genus, even though it dies after flowering. I love the large, handsome rosettes which increase gradually for up to five years before producing their dramatic inflorescence. *S. × lhommei*, a cross between *S. paniculata* and *S. longifolia* is also a good plant and is perennial. A fine picture of *Thalictrum tuberosum*, easy in the garden, made one realize why George Seavastopulo is so fond of it. The standard form of the greenish-flowered *Daphne laureola* is a rather dull plant and totally outclassed by *D. laureola philippii*, as pictured by Henry, with its good yellow flowers.

This was a stimulating talk and left some of us wondering why we haven't been to the Pyrenees – one of these days, hopefully.

We remained in the Iberian Peninsula for the second talk from the Taylors on the bulbs of Spain, and travelled from the *Picos de Europa* in the north to Alicante in the south. Spain is, of course, the centre of distribution for *Narcissus* and some twenty five species were illustrated, but there are other bulbs as well. We got a

wealth of information about each plant and again wonderful shots of montane landscapes, half of them taken by Margaret. Local colour was not ignored either, including a visit to a cider house.

Fritillaria pyrenaica is a fine plant which varies considerably in the wild as Henry showed. *F. lusitanica* is perhaps more beautiful, especially in its higher altitude form. We saw lovely forms of *Anemone nemorosa* and a fine *Ranunculus abnormis* which is a good garden plant. *Colchicum triphyllum* is lovely and well worth growing. *Scilla peruviana* which is widely grown nowadays and deservedly so, is a Spanish native and not from South America as I, and I suspect others, have always thought.

Many other non-daffodils were covered including *Crocus*, *Tulipa*, *Erythronium* and *Acis* ssp. along with several lovely orchids. But, naturally, the daffodils predominated, and it was a treat to see so many members of this much-loved genus growing in nature. All the species shown were desirable, some tricky in cultivation, but most perfectly growable with a little care. Plants that particularly appealed to me were *N. triandrus pallidus*, *N. asturiensis*, *N. bulbocodium citrinus*, *N. hedreanthus* with its flowers resting on the ground, the beautiful white *N. cantabricus* and the tiny hybrid between *N. luteolentus* and *N. triandrus* which Henry didn't name.

Like the previous talk, this tour of some of the bulbs of Spain left many of the audience wishing to go there themselves, and certainly to try growing the plants in their own gardens. I hope that it won't be long before Margaret and Henry return to Termonfeckin to share with us their inspiring mountain adventures.

When I heard **George Sevastopulo** give this talk, which he calls: 'Burren: a Rocky Place', at the SRGC weekend in Glasgow in 2008, I concluded that it had to be the definitive talk on the region. A second hearing confirms my first impression.

The Burren is indeed a national treasure and one that, as George pointed out, is under threat. He took us through its geological history going back to the time when it lay in the southern

hemisphere. This was a fascinating outline of the profound changes our planet has undergone over the past 500 odd million years, and made the audience realize why it is that geologists take the long view. George described the Burren as an incredibly rich archive of archaeological material and illustrated some of the artefacts. He also touched on the architectural treasures of the region from the 12th Century Corcomroe Abbey of *Santa Maria de Petra Fertilis* to the more recent Leamaneh Castle.

But the plants were not forgotten as George opened this section of his talk with an image of swathes of Cowslips (*Primula veris*) adorning a field in the area. The now rather rare *Ajuga pyramidalis* retains its foothold while *Lotus corniculatus*, *Dryas octopetala*, *Minuartia*, *Geranium sanguineum*, *Helianthemum oelandicum* (formerly *canum*), *Gentiana verna*, *Saxifraga rosaceae* and *S. hypnoides*, and three species of *Pinguicula* are quite plentiful. There is a rich population of orchids with *Orchis mascula* leading the field. *Potentilla fruticosa* still flourishes as do *Campanula rotundifolia* and *Caltha palustris* along with the Maidenhair and Rustyback ferns and the Burnet Rose. George showed how the geology merges with the botany in the terraces, between which is a layer of impervious clay creating the wet conditions that *Pinguicula grandiflora* needs to thrive.

The Burren is not the only area in Ireland and Great Britain where these arctic alpine and Mediterranean plants grow, and George showed the rather idiosyncratic pattern of distribution. For example, in the reasonably nearby Dartry Mountains grow *Silene acaulis* and *Saxifraga oppositifolia*, neither of which can be found in Co. Clare.

The threats facing the Burren range from inappropriate tourism, agriculture and changes in agricultural practice, unchecked growth of hazel scrub, and ignorance. George finished his excellent talk with a quote from **Michael Longley's** poem, 'Burren Prayer', with its nod to Corcomroe Abbey:

"Our Lady of the Fertile Rocks, protect the Burren.

Protect the Burren, Our Lady of the Fertile Rocks."

And so say all of us.

Susan Band is the proprietor of Pitcairn Alpines in Perth and she specializes in bulbs, all of which she grows outside in her nursery – see: www.pitcairnalpines.co.uk. In order to keep her stock free of disease she does not buy in bulbs, but grows her plants from seed. Her talk consisted of a slide show and a practical demonstration of her propagation techniques, using live material, most of which she distributed to the audience afterwards.

Susan's pictures were excellent, all of plants in her nursery and she should expect to get lots of orders from Ireland as a result of her talk.

Among the more desirable lilies she showed were *L. mackliniae* which thrives in cool, leafy soil, *L. lophophorum* with lantern-like flowers, *Ls. taliensis*, *duchartrei* and *langkongense* which are stoloniferous and so run around a bit, the Chinese lily, *L. ligiangense* and *L. kelloggii* from the USA. All of these beauties can be propagated by pulling a few scales off the mother bulb and placing them in a slightly moistened medium, such as Perlite, in a sealed plastic bag, until new bulbils have formed. She illustrated the process with slides showing the various stages.

Trilliums should be split when dormant and *Corydalis* immediately after flowering. The white-flowered *C. malkensis* is especially desirable as it seeds gently about and disappears entirely once the seed is set. Irises should not be dealt with until they have died down when the 'rice grains' can be harvested and grown on. A fairly new Iris, *I. 'Evening Twilight'*, is similar to *I. 'Katherine Hodgkin'* and would make a nice change. *I. stolonifera* is also worth seeking out. Erythroniums should be divided every three to five years and scales of fritillarias can be removed when the plants have died down and treated in the same way as lily scales.

Other genera dealt with by Susan were *Sanguinaria*, *Glaucidium*, *Tulipa* (she sells *T. sprengeri* which is rarely listed), *Narcissus*, *Scilla*, *Muscari* and *Tropaeolum*.

I have only touched on the range of plants that Susan discussed and illustrated. Nor has it been possible to deal with all the propagation information she imparted, but I feel she will be back. The combination of slides and live material worked extremely well and her presentation was greatly enjoyed by everyone. I think we will all be more courageous in future in the propagation of our bulbs.

Jim Almond was the other speaker at the weekend who gave two talks, and I left him until the end because I was daunted by the task of summarizing the prodigious amount of information on plants, people, places, cultivation, propagation, pest control, and photography that he provided. I will do my best, but to do justice to Jim's achievement would take a special edition of the newsletter all to itself!

Jim is an Assistant Director of Shows with the AGS, a very experienced grower and breeder of alpines, and a talented amateur photographer. His growing skills can be guessed at by the fact that he holds the British National Collection of Juno irises, a group that is fiendishly difficult in cultivation. He is also a most engaging speaker, leavening the substantive content of his talks with humour and striking anecdotes.

His first talk was titled 'Propagation – A Matter of Life & Death' and dealt with the subject comprehensively. The amount of information he managed to impart in an hour long talk was amazing and he illustrated the process with superb photographs.

Jim sows seeds in a compost consisting of equal parts of JI 2, coarse vermiculite (in preference to Perlite) and grit. Ephemeral seeds such as those of hepaticas must be sown fresh.

To encourage seed set on some plants, e.g., Juno irises, hand pollination is necessary, using a paintbrush or a tweezers, and ensuring that the temperature is conducive. For many plants two clones are needed and for primulas, for example, one must be pin-eyed and the other thrum-eyed. In order to create crosses hand pollination is essential and he showed the result of crossing *Lewisia*

rediviva with *L. cotyledon* and also with *L. pygmaea*. Jim is well known, of course, as the breeder of the popular 'Coolock' strain of saxifrages based on *S. georgei*, and his pictures of the pink *S.* 'Coolock Kate' (after his daughter) and especially the gorgeous pristine white *S.* 'Coolock Gem' produced appreciative noises from the audience.

Correct storage of seed is important and glassine envelopes are the best containers. Seed should be stored in the fridge, where, at a temperature of around 4°C, most seeds will remain viable for many years.

Normally Jim covers his seed pots with grit after sowing, but with very fine seed he applies the grit first, sows the seed and waters it in. For the first watering after sowing of all seeds, and again after germination he uses a solution of Cheshunt Compound to prevent damping off and other fungal-induced problems.

Some seeds need special treatment to break dormancy. Gibberellic acid is essential for, among others, rosulate violas. Chitting is often helpful also. For example, alstroemeria seed should be chitted, but also soaked for twenty four hours, kept warm for a month after sowing and then exposed to the cold. Smoking can also be helpful for some species. The seed pots are placed in a reasonably airtight cardboard box into which smoke is introduced, using, say, a beekeeper's smoker, and left for about twenty minutes.

Seedlings should be pricked out when true leaves appear. *Hepatica* seedlings should be left for a second year after germination, as should all bulbs, and given a dilute fertilizer periodically.

Propagation by cuttings is necessary for many hybrids as seed may not come true. For saxifrages Jim fills a 7.5 cm pot up to about two thirds with compost over which he places a layer of sand into which the tiny cuttings go. For dionysias he uses crushed pumice instead of sand. Plants that can be propagated by leaf cuttings include *Petrocosmea* ssp., which are currently fashionable, ramondas and other gesneriads.

A novel accessory in the grafting process is knicker elastic, as used in Aberconwy Nursery.

If a plant can be increased by division Jim advises that you should do it when you get the plant.

Bulbs can be increased by several methods, including twin scaling (e. g., *galanthus*, *narcissus*) and splitting, (e. g., *fritillarias*). Twin scaling is carried out in late May/early June using dormant, healthy bulbs. The scales are treated with a systemic fungicide, placed in damp vermiculite in freezer bags where they remain until the new bulbils form. There will be a practical demonstration of this technique at our local show in March.

Jim finished his splendid talk with a musical interlude during which he re-ran some of the more impressive images that he had shown.

‘Out and About –Adventures of an Alpine Enthusiast’ was the title of Jim’s second talk. In it he took us on a tour of gardens, private and public, nurseries, shows and included a section on plant photography all illustrated with terrific images of plants and people.

In **John Good’s** garden a highlight was a fine specimen of *Meconopsis* x *beamishii*, which is an Irish hybrid, as well as huge plants of *Lewisia cotyledon* that John grows outside in old chimney pots, the secret being to surround the crown, not with grit, but with plenty of coarse shale.

On to **Ron and Joan Beeston’s** garden where *Aethionema* ‘Warley Rose’ lit up the rock garden. This is an easy plant that we all used to grow but doesn’t seem to be available any more, at least in this country. *Penstemon rupicola* also thrived here.

The crevice beds and sinks in **Pershore** are developing very well making a visit well to the AGS Centre well worthwhile.

Hans Kaupert, who gardens in Kent, specializes in dionysias and Jim showed us a view of his immaculate alpine house crammed with many *Dionysia* spp. at various stages of development. We also

paid a visit to **Brian Burrow** who grows a vast range of plants and to **Val Lee** who is the new President of the AGS.

We visited Aberconwy Nursery where we got a view behind the scenes showing how Keith Lever and his family produce their excellent alpinists. The plants are grown in plastic pots which stand on damp sand, conditions which suit high alpinists including dionysias. Ashwood Nursery as well as the super plants that it has for sale also has a garden of great interest. Their new 'Carousel' range of *Lewisia* hybrids are claimed to be much easier outside than others in the genus.

Jim showed some amusing shots (with the permission of the subjects) of a plant photography workshop that he ran in Pershore. His basic tip is to get right down to the plant you want to photograph and his pupils were doing just that.

The first Botanic Garden we visited was Glasnevin where Jim had been in April 2009. He was impressed by the recently refurbished palm house and showed a lovely picture of **Joan Carvill** and **Michael Higgins** sniffing scented pelargonium leaves.

We visited Kew where we saw three manifestations of its alpine house and some of the plants grown therein, including some magnificent Juno irises. The latest version of the alpine house has been called "an architect's dream and a grower's nightmare", but nevertheless provides a home for some great plants.

The star of the show in Ness Botanic Garden was the lovely *Asphodelus acaulis*, strongly recommended by Jim.

Some pristine show plants, including the stunning *Saxifraga* 'Coolock Gem' again, inspired thoughts of next April when we must all do our best to produce similar specimens to grace the benches in Cabinteely and Greenmount. *Sebaea thomasi*, a gentian relative from South Africa, is being seen more often on the show benches lately, and is a plant that is inclined to become drawn under glass. Jim recommends keeping it outside in all but the frostiest conditions.

Jim ended this hugely stimulating and entertaining talk with a musically accompanied run through of some of the best slides, finishing very thoughtfully and appropriately with the picture of Joan and Michael at Glasnevin last April.

Next year our speakers will be **Christine Skelmersdale**, **Martin Walsh** and **Zdenek Zvolanek** (ZZ) so be sure to get your booking forms, which will be issued in August, in early as once again the weekend is likely to fill up very quickly.

Editor

Christmas Miscellany, 10 December

There was a good attendance at our final fixture of 2009 at St Brigid's and it proved to be a very diverting evening. Around twelve members had submitted assorted images to **Jamie Chambers** who had assembled them into an eclectic series of digital presentations. We had a glimpse of the history and restoration of Lissadell; we visited botanic gardens in Germany and a certain private garden in Kilquade; we spent some time in Mount Venus Nursery, visited Bloom and saw some fine studies of people and animals, young and old; we saw videos of vultures feeding (nasty) and vultures flying (majestic), visited the Saltees and the Skelligs and were introduced to gannets and puffins; we saw lots of plants, including a metre wide specimen of *Daphne arbuscula*; we visited the Shannon and were treated to some super shots of wild birds and scenic views; onwards and upwards to the Zillertaler Alps; visited Stormont Castle for the Ulster Group's celebration of their seventieth show; went from Mount Usher to orchids in Singapore; and the display ended with a mouthwatering display of plant images from a Co. Clare member. Being quite exhausted after all this we celebrated the end of our 2009 programme with chat, tea and mince pies, looking forward to 2010.

Editor

FIXTURES

Thursday, 21 January, 8 pm. AGM followed by, **Edwin Davison**, 'Introduction to Digital Plant Photography'. St Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

Saturday, 13 February, 12.30 pm. Annual Lunch followed by:- **Jamie Chambers** 'Home Thoughts from Abroad – a Kiwi Gardener in Ireland'. Royal St George Yacht Club, Dun Laoghaire.

Thursday, 18 February, 8 pm. John Blanchard, 'Daffodils in the Wild'. NBG, Glasnevin.

Saturday, 6 March, 2 pm. Spring Local Show, Workshop and Members' Plant Sale. St Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

Thursday, 18 March, 8 pm, Malcolm McGregor, 'Saxifrages – across the World and in the Garden'. NBG, Glasnevin.

Saturday, 10 April, Ulster Group AGS Show, Greenmount, Co. Antrim.

Saturday, 24 April, Dublin Group AGS Silver Jubilee Show, Cabinteely, Co. Dublin.

Thursday, 6 May, 8 pm, Carl Wright, 'Between a Rock and a Hard Place', St Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

Saturday, 8 May, Waterford Gardens – Coach Trip – Mount Congreve and Tara Gardens (Iris & John Reilly) – see booking form.

Thursday, 3 June, 7 pm, Matthew Jebb, Workshop - 'Basic Botany', NBG, Glasnevin.

Sunday, 13 June, 2 pm, Visit to the Garden of **Patricia McGuire**, 3 Hillcrest Downs, Sandyford, Dublin 18.

Thursday, 16 September, 8 pm, Philip Cribb, 'Shangri-la, a Botanist in the Tibetan Marches', NBG, Glasnevin. (Joint with IGPS.)

Thursday, 21 October, 8 pm, John Good, 'Climate change and Alpines', St Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

Thursday, 11 November, 8 pm, Billy Moore, 'Alpines at Home and Away', St Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

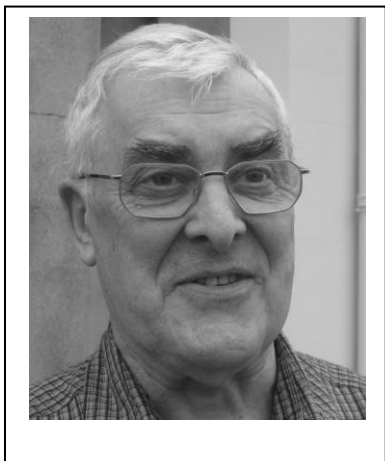
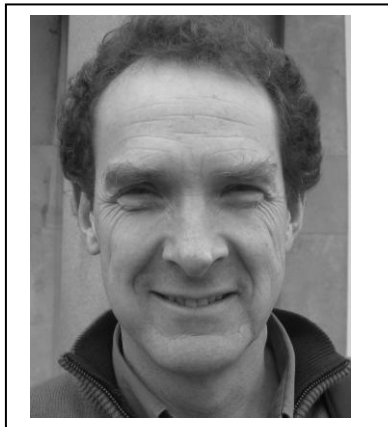
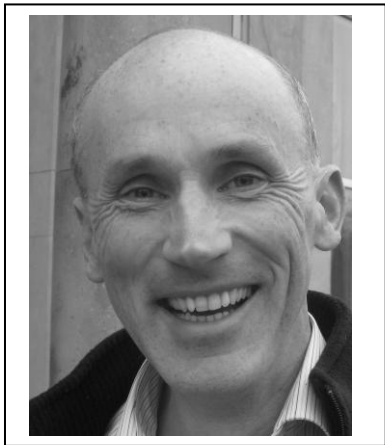
Friday, 19 to Sunday 21 November, 27th Alpine Weekend, **Christine Skelmersdale, Martin Walsh and Zdenek Zvolanek**, An Grianán, Termonfeckin.

Thursday, 9 December, 8 pm, Christmas Miscellany, St Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

Chairman and Show Secretary:	Val Keegan
Hon. Secretary (Acting):	Mary O'Neill-Byrne
Hon. Treasurer:	Tessa Dagge
Fixtures Secretary:	Martin Walsh
Webmaster:	Jamie Chambers
Librarian:	Anne-Marie Keoghan

Committee Members:	Arthur Dagge
	Michael Higgins
	Barbara O'Callaghan



Photos: Val, Mary, Tessa, Martin, Jamie, Anne-Marie, Arthur, Michael, and Barbara.



Sebaea thomasi (Top) – see p. 38 and *Corydalis malkensis* – see p.34 (Photos: Billy Moore)

This newsletter is edited by **Billy Moore** who can be contacted at 32, Braemor Park, Churchtown, Dublin 14. Email: wjmoore@iol.ie.

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