



ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY

Dublin Group



NEWSLETTER NO. 60 – SUMMER 2013

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Front cover illustration is of *Pulsatilla grandis* 'Waverley Budapest Series' (p. 15), Photo: Liam McCaughey . Back cover, top, *Sebaea thomasi*, growing outside in the crevice bed at Aberconwy Nursery, (p.23) and, bottom, varieties of corydalis in one of Janis Ruksans' bulb houses (p. 34) Photos: Billy Moore.

EDITORIAL

The summer issue of the newsletter tends to focus on showing, this one a bit more than most. While the two Irish shows this year were excellent (despite fears that, because of the exceptionally cold spring, there would be a big drop in exhibits), there is a concern North and South that the dearth of new exhibitors bodes ill for the future of both shows.

Consequently, the committee has decided on some initiatives to encourage members who do not exhibit to do so, and to urge existing exhibitors to try harder.

George Sevastopulo has prepared a list for the website of alpines, which are readily available, easily grown and suitable for exhibition in the Novice Section. The mentoring service whereby experienced exhibitors will provide hands-on guidance to novices will continue to be available. The workshops at the local show next year will concentrate on growing for showing, and preparing plants for the bench. While the plant is the main element of an exhibit, presentation is also important, because the judges will favour a well-presented plant over one that is equally good, but badly dressed. Also the general public will be less impressed by plants in dirty pots, or with damaged or dead leaves or flowers.

Aspiring exhibitors should never hesitate to contact any member of the committee for advice or assistance in choosing and preparing their plants for exhibition, but please don't leave it until the last minute.

As has been said often, the annual show is our shop window. It is the one occasion during the year at which we can demonstrate to our visitors the unique beauty and diversity of alpine plants. One of our objectives is to promote the growing of alpines, and our show aims to inspire people to do so. It also aims to inspire existing alpine growers to be more ambitious, so it is vital for the future health of our Group that the Show continues to impress, as it has undoubtedly done heretofore. But leaving aside the promotional aspect of the Show, it must always be remembered that showing is, and is meant to be, fun, and the danger is that once you put your toe in the water you have a good chance of becoming addicted. So, if you haven't shown before, or if you have escaped addiction and given up, please have a go in 2014. You won't be sorry even if you don't get a red sticker.

One encouraging development this year is that we are likely to have a greater number of top exhibitors from across the water in the open section in future. This can only be welcomed.

ALPINE MISCELLANY

In This Issue

If you have read the editorial, (and why wouldn't you?), you will be aware that a main theme of this issue is showing. The reports on the two shows are worth reading (if I may say so) not just as a reminder of the highlights, but also as they contain excellent tips on cultivation from experts. For example, as a result of hearing from Don Peace about his regime for growing non-North American fritillaries I will use a much richer compost for mine from now on.

In his regular slot Liam Byrne has written about five excellent candidates for the show-bench for beginners to try. And, as you know, Liam knows what he's talking about.

Gwenda Wratt has written a tribute in memory of the late and much lamented Peggy Parker, whose recent death has diminished the Group. My sincere thanks to Gwenda.

As a break from the show theme, we have the usual reports from members on our various events in the first half of 2013. My heartfelt thanks to each and every one of them for their excellent contributions. I would like to pay a special tribute to the contribution from a relatively new member, Clare Beumer, on Vojtech Holubec's talk. This was a difficult talk to summarize, and I think you will agree that she has done so brilliantly. As many of you know, Clare sells alpines, so I asked her if she would write an article for the next newsletter, and I'm delighted to tell you that she will be writing about Hepaticas in the next issue. Clare is also a botanical artist and she has promised me an illustration to accompany the article.

Fixtures

Our Autumn programme kicks off on Thursday 17 October, in Stillorgan, when **Brian Burrow** will give us a talk entitled 'European Alpines in the Wild and their Cultivation'.

Brian is a well-known and highly regarded plantsman. He was a lecturer in horticulture at Wythenshawe College of Further Education, South Manchester. For years he ran Lismore Nursery, and is responsible for raising, selecting and introducing many choice plants that are popular in cultivation bearing the name 'Lismore', e.g., *Primula* 'Lismore Yellow'. He has a very wide knowledge of the plants of Europe and has a special affection for primulas. He is also an AGS exhibitor and judge. Brian is a

very talented grower, and you can be sure that you will learn a lot from his talk. I wouldn't miss it for anything!

On 7 November, also in Stillorgan, Professor **David Rankin**, another superb speaker, will talk on 'A Short History of Alpines from the Big Bang to Last Week'. This is another unmissable lecture and is bound to be entertaining, informative, and I suspect, provocative.

David and his wife Stella run the renowned Kevock Garden Plants Nurseries and Garden south of Edinburgh and stock a wide range of choice alpine plants, many of which are rare or new to cultivation. They won a Silver Gilt Medal at Chelsea Flower Show in 2011 with an assembly of alpines that was widely acclaimed. They have staged many plant exhibits at Gardening Scotland Festival and Harrogate RHS Show. David lectures widely (we have had him in Termonfeckin) and is much sought after.

The 30th Alpine Weekend will be in An Grianán, Termonfeckin, from 15 to 17 November. We have always had a great line-up of speakers for this event and 2013 is no exception. This year we will be entertained, informed and stimulated by **Brian Duncan**, **Ron McBeath** and **Ger van den Beuken**. Full details on the speakers, the Programme and an application form are in your mail-out. Remember that members of the Ulster and Cork groups are eligible to attend the weekend so don't leave it too late to book your place.

Our Christmas Miscellany meeting on 12 December promises to be a convivial and entertaining evening if last year's event is anything to go by. Apart from the fun, there were many interesting presentations and I have no doubt that this year will be no different.

Facebook

From Jamie

In the last newsletter I gave you an overview of our Facebook page and all the benefits you might see by joining it. Reading over it again I find I have little reason to add to what I wrote then (except for one thing which I'll explain later), but every reason to urge you to give it a try.

From 61 people Liking us back in December, we now have 102, and as before these are members, other gardening organisations, and anyone with an interest in alpines that come across us. Recent additions come from Turkey, Croatia, Luxembourg and Sligo. Janis Ruksans' daughter Liked our Facebook page shortly after our visit there earlier in the year.

The numbers of people looking at us is growing too. As you might expect, the busiest time is around our Annual Show. 239 people looked at us on 3 April, just three days before it. To me that says that our Facebook page is a great way of informing and interesting others in what we do. People who Like us get to hear about what we are doing, and can share their own information with us.

So let me remind you of all the reasons why you should join our Facebook page:

- you can see our events there, with any updates to times, venues etc.;
- you can share your photos or information with other members;
- you can comment on things you see on the page;
- and, you can see some lovely photos from others. Michael Campbell continues to post some beautiful pictures, and has been joined by Billy Moore and another AGS member known mysteriously on Facebook as *Erica Cinerea*!

If you need help, get hold of me! Which brings me to my final point. In the last newsletter we planned to hold a computer workshop to help members do just this kind of thing. Unfortunately I was ill so we had to cancel the original arrangement. But we still plan to hold one, so keep an eye out for a rescheduled workshop later in the year.

Postcard Gardens at Bloom

The organizers of Bloom introduced a new category of garden at this year's festival, which they are calling 'Postcard Gardens'. Essentially they will provide a plot 6m x 2m, free of charge, to suitable applicants who can build an exhibit on that space. The committee has decided to apply for a site for next year, and if we are successful, to build an alpine display with the objective of encouraging more people to grow these plants. Speaking to some of this year's entrants we were told that they had a huge number of visitors, and that great interest was expressed, so it is a unique opportunity to popularize alpines – there were around 120,000 visitors to Bloom this year.

It is hoped to involve as many members as possible in this project as we will need plants for the display, help with its construction and volunteers to man, or woman, the exhibit during the festival.

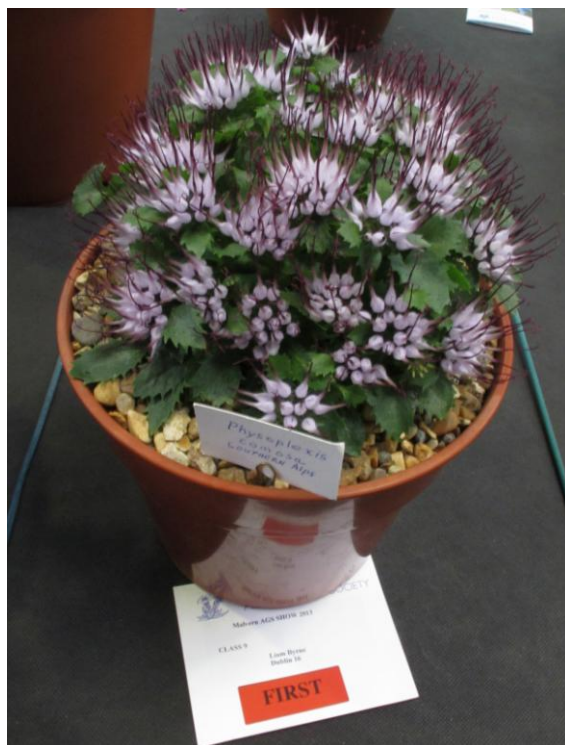
Assuming we get approval we will be looking for volunteers. We will let you know if our application has been successful, and, meanwhile, would like you to consider in what capacity you would like to become involved.

I am optimistic that we will be accepted, as the small space is ideal for alpines, and we should be able to create a stunning display that will enhance Bloom, and will demonstrate how, even in the smallest garden, alpines can have a huge impact.

Malvern Show

On 10 May Liam Byrne, George Sevastopulo and I set off on the ferry for the Malvern Show which was held on the following day. We brought a few plants for exhibition, and we didn't do badly, as you can see if you look up the show results on the main AGS website.

It was a good show, much bigger than ours, with some superb plants on



the benches. This was the fourth English show that we have attended and in each case we have found the experience instructive and enjoyable. We have always had a very warm welcome, and were either asked to judge, or to accompany the judges as they assessed the entries. We were official judges at Malvern, and have the badges to prove it. A call to Aberconwy Nursery on the way is of course obligatory. We hope to maintain this tradition for as long as we can. Pictured above on the left is Liam's *Physoplexis comosa*, and on the right, Gavin Moore's *Primula bracteata*, which I brought for him.

Billy Moore

Memories of Peggy Parker



Peggy and Gwenda at Termonfeckin (photo: Val Keegan)

Marjorie (Peggy) Parker was a long-standing member of the Dublin Group of the Alpine Garden Society, involved in so many aspects of the group's activities, and has been missed since she had to go into a nursing home in Howth, not far from her beloved house and garden. She was there for two years before her death on 21 January this year. Thursday, 24 January saw a goodly number of the group's members attending her funeral and Service of Thanksgiving in St Mary's Church in Howth, and we were reminded of her many and varied interests, high amongst them being the AGS.

Who among our members, north and south will forget the challenges she set us each year at Termonfeckin: puzzles and quizzes; members wandering around An Grianán with their crosswords, set by Peggy, and showing their relief on finally filling in the grid, and posting the finished article in the box provided. A few feet away would be the display of botanical artists' cards, chosen with great care, for us to purchase.

I became very aware of how much attention to detail went into her choice, insisting on attractive and botanically correct artwork, when I took a selection of cards out to her to decide on, while she was in the nursing home. Even now, a frequent comment when the stall is set up each year is “I can't bear to part with the ones I bought in previous years”. There would also be various items relating to our gardening interests that she had purchased during the year with the stall in mind. We were always delighted when some of Peggy's own artwork was for sale, little notebooks with beautifully painted alpine flowers on the cover being very popular.

Peggy's Garden was also raided each November so that she could add a posy to each table in the dining room at An Grianán, a time consuming task, but so appropriate, and much admired and commented on by the delegates.

Her garden was a joy to her, and it must have been a real cause of sadness when her health prevented her from spending the time needed to keep it going as she would have wished. As well as caring for her plants, she was also a keen observer of the myriad forms of wildlife that visited the garden.

Her increasing lack of mobility also affected her ability to join in with the various Botanical Tours, which took her all over the world. Every now and then, we were privileged to hear and see lectures on the places she visited, her photography emphasizing her eye for the beauty around her, and the wonderful alpenes to be found in their natural setting.

I wonder if those entering exhibits, and visitors to the AGS Show each year realized how much care and attention (typical of Peggy) was put into the displaying of all the entries in the artistic section. Each entry was hung in a manner that would show it off to the best advantage, leaving us with a very pleasing wall of artwork each year. Peggy herself entered many an item in the show's Artistic section, and won many awards, both in Dublin, Ulster and the UK. She created cards for different occasions, designs for wrapping paper and paintings of plants suitable for several of the sections in the schedule. These were all time consuming projects, to be fitted in with her many other interests, and all completed with the meticulous attention to detail so characteristic of her.

Peggy seldom missed a lecture, driving herself, while she could, in from Howth on many occasions, or coming with George and Rose, who were

always so supportive. I was privileged to be able to help her with both the work for the annual show and the stall at An Grianán over the years and valued her friendship a great deal. She taught me a lot.

She was an exceptional person, talented, intelligent, kind and determined to live her life and pursue her interests to the full until her failing health made it impossible.

I was honoured to be able to design and embroider a framed certificate, which was presented to her while in the nursing home by committee members, in recognition of her becoming a Life Member of AGS Dublin Branch.

She is greatly missed.

Gwenda Wratt

Five easy alpiners

There is a myth abroad that alpine plants are difficult to grow. It is true that some of the higher alpiners can be challenging but the majority are easy to grow, whether in the open garden or in pots. I would advise beginners to focus on the easier genera until they have gained some growing experience, and leave the dionysias, androsaces etc. until they have gained confidence. The five plants I will discuss you will find trouble-free and enjoyable to grow, and I hope some will find their way on to the show bench next year, as the Group needs new exhibitors.



Sempervivums

Sempervivums, or houseleeks, are a must for beginners, and easiest of all to grow in pans. They will tolerate neglect and even drought. Over-feeding opens the rosettes and they will lose their compact form; over-watering causes stem rot.

Flowering rosettes are monocarpic (the rosette dies after flowering) and



will leave gaps in your nice cushion. I remove the flowering rosettes just as the stem starts to grow, thus preserving the uniformity of the cushion. The plants increase by

offsets and these should be placed carefully into any empty spaces between the rosettes, and all surplus offsets removed. These can be used to create new plants, which can be planted in the garden or given to the plant sale. Any pans intended for showing should be put in the alpine house or frame for the winter, and kept there until after the shows. My favourite of the genus is *S. arachnoideum*, the ‘Cobweb Houseleek’, which is widely available, easy to grow, and forms a tight, congested mound of rosettes, covered in white thread-like hairs. I grow it in a compost of one part J12, one part grit and one part peat, in shallow pans. (the photo above is of an excellent three pan sempervivum entry at the Malvern Show this year. Ed.)

Pulsatilla vulgaris

This plant, known as the ‘Pasque Flower’ is among the most beautiful of mountain flowers. The blooms arise on 15cm stems and vary in colour from purple, through red, to white. They need a normal supply of water during the growing season, but should be kept on the dry side, not arid, during winter. I use the same compost as for sempervivums. The plants are herbaceous and will die down in winter. I particularly like the white form, *P. v.* ‘Alba’.

Primula denticulata

Known as the ‘Drumstick Primula’, this Asiatic species is another easy-going plant. It is vigorous and clump forming, carrying its flowers in April on stout stems about 20cm high. The flower heads are rounded and can be lilac, purple, red or white. The clumps should be divided every third year after flowering. I prefer the white form.

Fritillaria meleagris

The ‘Snake’s Head Fritillary’ is an easy bulb for pot culture. The flowers are bell-shaped, usually purple with chequered green and white veining, but I like the pure white form, *F. m. var. alba*.

I plant the bulbs in September, about 8cm deep in a compost of one part J12, two parts peat and one part grit. Keep the compost just moist until growth appears in the early part of the year, when water can be given freely. A weekly feed of diluted tomato fertilizer is beneficial when the flower buds are forming. Watering can be reduced after flowering but don’t let the compost dry out.

Andromeda polifolia

This is one of the easiest ericaceous plants to grow, and is lovely. The leaves are long, narrow and leathery, green on top and silvery grey underneath. In late April/early May, light pink, urn shaped flowers appear. A good compost is three parts peat, one part lime free loam and one part granite grit. Water regularly with lime free water during the growing season and keep moist during winter. Only bring into the alpine house when they are in flower, and put them in shade after flowering. After hot days the foliage should be sprayed in the evening. Top dress in spring with fresh compost. My favourite Andromeda is *A. p. var.*

compacta.

All five plants can be grown in the open in good free draining soil, but the andromeda needs acid conditions. With the exception of the fritillary they can be lifted from the garden for exhibiting three to four weeks before the show. Pot them up in a suitably sized pot – refer to the Show Schedule – and bring them into the alpine house or frame. I know you will succeed with these plants and will enjoy the experience.

Liam Byrne

THE SHOWS

Dublin, 6 April

As we left Ulster early on Saturday morning with the BBC announcing that the temperature at nearby Aldergrove was -7°C, snow, still on all the mountains, making it look more like Switzerland than Ireland, and, after officially the coldest March for fifty years, we wondered if there would be any flowers at all in bloom for the Dublin Show. We needn't have worried as, while cold outside, the sun shone all day through the windows in the hall at Cabinteely on a kaleidoscope of beautiful plants and a warm welcome - no matter what the weather, AGS members always manage to rise to the occasion.

Rising to the very top, and described in the International Rock Gardener as 'the Irish Master', Harold McBride showed his experience and skill by winning so many awards, including the ACC Cup for most first prize points in the open section, but space will only allow me to highlight three of his plants.

Firstly, his Farrer winning plant of *Soldanella carpatica* x *pusilla*, grown over the past seven to eight years from Harold's own seedling of *Soldanella* 'Sudden Spring', had just reached the peak of perfection after being shown at the Ulster Members' Show, flowering slightly later than the parent plant and producing even more flowers. It is grown in a



compost of 1 part John Innes no 2, 1 part 3 year-old leaf mould and 1 part grit, and overwintered in a well ventilated frame. Watering is commenced with growth, and like all soldanellas, it needs maximum light in spring to encourage

flowering, and great care taken to keep slugs at bay! This plant was also awarded the David Shackleton Trophy for best pan Primulaceae,

Harold thought his most interesting plant was a *Ranunculus* species, (subsequently identified as *R. creticus*. Ed.) which was awarded a Certificate of Merit. The seed came from



the late Jim Price and was sown in 2000. It will be interesting to have it fully identified, but this golden buttercup really shone, reflecting its light onto the AGS President, David Haselgrove, as he inspected it.

The third plant of Harold's that created a lot of admiration was *Pulsatilla grandis* 'Waverley Budapest Series' (see front cover) sown in July 2008, which was part of the AGS Medal winning 6 pans rock plants distinct entry. Harold tells me that the origins of this plant date back to the late Dr Molly Sanderson, who got it from David Shackleton, who got it from Lady Moore, who in turn received it from Valerie Finnis, who was given it by a lady in Hungary where the plant grew wild on the hillside, and was used to decorate the breakfast table - what an interesting provenance and what a lovely way to keep alive the memory of some of our most famous gardeners. In addition other seedlings from the same source made their way to England to become prize-winning plants there.

It is not only the prerogative of plants to pass on good genes, as Gavin Moore follows in his father Billy's footsteps, inheriting a skill in growing good alpines, and was awarded a Certificate of Merit for a very large specimen of *Dionysia aretioides* 'Bevere'. The plant was at least six years old, originating from Aberconwy Nursery, and two thirds of it died four years ago due to either scorching or drought or even both. Instead of discarding it, Gavin removed the dead material, kept it in its covered



frame, watered it only via the plunge, where it fully recovered growing on with new vigour, and the resulting plant well deserved its certificate. It is important to keep the frame shaded in

summer to avoid scorching and the plant is frequently repotted in a very lean, gritty compost. Gavin thinks the pot is around 30cms but he does 'know for sure that it is heavy'.

The Margaret Orsi Bowl for the best plant from North America was won by Val Keegan for a large plant of *Trillium rivale* which she had been given by Helen Dillon at least 15 years ago. Unlike many trilliums the leaves are a matt green. It grows happily outside in an open frame and very occasionally is fed when Val remembers.



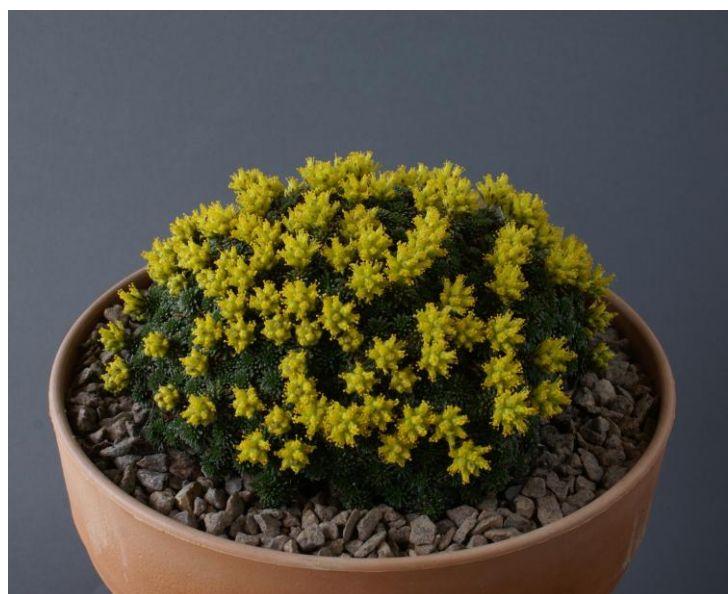
Another *Trillium rivale* won the Millenium Cup, awarded to the best plant in the Novice section, for complete newcomer, Elizabeth Ross. Once again this plant had an interesting history, coming from Woodfield, and given to Elizabeth by the late Dr Keith Lamb eight years ago. She grows her plant outside in a free-draining slightly shaded area, but I found that the origins of many Irish plants are as interesting as the cultivation, which illustrates the importance of spreading plants around.

The Waverley Trophy for the best plant in the Intermediate section was won by Frank Lavery with *Hepatica japonica* 'Takumi'. Frank tells me he travels a lot, so all his plants have to survive outside. The winning plant, which he covers over in winter with leaf mould and old manure, had its old leaves cut off, was brought inside and set on top of the under floor heating which brought on the new leaves and flowers - surely a new and unique way to grow alpine!



Frank also grows plants outside in tufa columns, and passed on his tips in drilling tufa to Janet Mathias who, against experienced competition, won class 34 for her pan planted as a miniature garden. Her tufa originated in North Wales but unfortunately the quarry has since closed down.

It is lovely to have competition from across the water, and Ian Leslie, as usual, showed some exquisite plants, but most attention went to *Saxifraga desoulavyi*, which was awarded a Certificate of Merit. Ian has had this plant for ten years and says it is very slow growing. He grows it in an open shady frame and thinks it may have come from Dutch nurseryman, Ger van den Beuken. The plant originates from the Caucasus where it grows in limestone screes and crevices along with similar saxifrages. Its fresh and original appearance has stimulated many of us to think of trying to grow them.



Paddy Smith again showed many lovely plants and his perfect pan of *Primula* 'Clarence Elliott' deservedly was given a Certificate of Merit. The original plant



dates back to 1982 when Joe Elliott crossed *Primula allionii* with *P.* 'White Linda Pope', creating this popular European hybrid. This cultivar was the best and most floriferous of three that Paddy planted up three years ago, and he modestly ascribes the success to the cultivar rather than the skill of the grower! To keep it in character it gets no tlc and is grown in a 'lean' compost - 60% grit, coarse sand, and perlite, and the rest homemade compost fortified with Vitax Q4 and no other feeding. Water is given when the leaves lose their turgidity, and it is kept where there is good air movement, which helps to prevent botrytis.

The Dublin Show would not be complete without exhibits from Liam Byrne who also favours a 'lean' compost of 1 part John Innes no 2 and



1 part grit for his award winning Certificate of Merit plant *Gypsophila aretioides* 'Caucasica', which he has had since 1987. The plant is kept in an alpine house which is shaded from May; it is sprayed

regularly and fed once yearly with a weak solution of tomato fertilizer.

Many more plants by exhibitors both North and South deserve descriptions but there is just space to comment on the large artistic entry under the supervision of Maeve Spotswood. The judge commented that the standard is going up and up, and with such good quality that judging becomes more difficult.

Congratulations must go to Show Secretary, Michael Higgins, and his team for a very successful show where the attention to detail paid off. As well as the always popular members' plant stall, there was a large and varied collection of commercial nurseries offering interesting and unusual plants. Gwenda Wratt again had beautiful cards for sale, and raffle prizes were tempting. George Sevastopulo attracted a lot of attention for his trough planting demonstration, but thanks and praise are no less due to the ladies who provided afternoon tea. The Ritz could not have offered more delicious home-baked treats in the colourful setting of alpine plants, and all to the accompaniment of the tasteful background music of their own in-house pianist.

Joan & Liam McCaughey

Photos: **Billy Moore**

Ulster Group Show - 27 April

It is well known that the two Irish shows are, to an extent, interdependent, Ulster exhibitors exhibiting in Dublin and Dublin exhibitors reciprocating, with an occasional grower from across the water exhibiting also. This all changed at the 74th Ulster Show in Greenmount this year, however, with a veritable invasion of entries from English and Welsh exhibitors, resulting in what was probably the largest AGS show ever staged in Ulster. More than a hundred plants arrived on the ferry in Belfast port, causing some space problems for Pat Crossley and her team, given that entries from local exhibitors were also up. On the day, all the plants were staged effectively and presented a dazzling display for visitors.



One significant affect of this development was that the number of entries in almost all classes in the Open Section increased significantly, as also did the overall standard. It is inevitable that the arrival of skilled exhibitors such as Don Peace at any show will lift the standard, and indeed Don was awarded the Cooke Cup for the most first prize points in the Open Section, the first time that this trophy has left Irish shores. Both Irish groups greatly welcome this development and hope that what

happened in Greenmount this year is the start of a trend, and that exhibitors from Great Britain will consider coming to Dublin and Ulster in the years ahead. They will be welcomed with open arms.

The Artistic Section was again very well supported by both domestic and overseas exhibitors, but most first prize points, as they did last year, went to locals, Liam and Joan McCaughey.

The Novice and Intermediate sections were unaffected by the visitors. Sam McDowell of Limavady received most first prize points in the Novice Section, and won the trophy for the best pan of Ericaceae in that section. Kay McDowell, Sam's wife, got most first prize points in the Intermediate Section, as she did last year. Mac Dunlop, who



exhibited for the first time in 2012, staged the best plant in flower in the Novice Section with a nice potful of *Fritillaria acmopetala*.

Pat Kennedy of Dublin won an AGS Spoon for her nicely staged six pans in the Intermediate Section.

One of her plants was the double *Sanguinaria canadensis*, in perfect condition. She has a big patch in her garden and lifted some for the show just as it started into growth. It takes luck as well as skill to have a perfect exhibit of this very ephemeral plant on the day.

The AGS Medal for the large six-pan class in the open section went to Harold McBride's beautifully balanced entry, including a colourful pan of the Himalayan meadow primrose, *Primula rosea*. The plants were grown from seed obtained from Vojtech Holubec, potted into a moisture-retentive compost with added moisture crystals, and treated



with Provado, as this primula is very subject to attack by vine weevil. Wintered out of doors, the pot was placed in a plunge frame three weeks prior to the show to protect the emerging flowers from weather damage, kept well watered and given a liquid feed. The colour of this



easygoing plant can be variable, but the plant exhibited was a vibrant rose red and it glowed on the bench.

Keith and Rachel Lever showed a well-flowered pan of the very attractive *Lamium*

armenum from Turkey. Robert Rolfe described this plant in the Bulletin in 1994, vol. 62 (4), p. 384. The plant shown was raised from cuttings provided by Tommy Anderson and is grown in the alpine house in a free draining, loam-based compost which is kept moist. It is a short-lived species, tending to flower itself to death, and is difficult to propagate. To



be successful cuttings must be taken from very young material. It is variable from seed, which must be sown fresh.

Tim Lever's exhibit of *Leontopodium pusillum* from China, India and Pakistan attracted a lot of interest and was given a Certificate of Merit. Tim says that it

looks completely dead in winter, and it is almost a surprise to see new green shoots in February. It is grown in Aberconwy's standard compost.

Tim's floriferous *Benthamiella patagonica* grows in the same compost and



according to Tim thrives on relative neglect, disliking any disturbance. It was also awarded a Certificate of Merit.

It was a good day for the Lever family as Tim's exhibit of *Phylliopsis* 'Crinoline', a beautiful Barry Starling cross, was given

the Carol McCutcheon award. A Certificate of Merit also went to Hugh McAlister of Castlewellan for his outstanding exhibit of *Sebaea thomasii*. Hugh's wasn't the biggest example of this plant at the Show but it was the most compact. He bought the plant from Aberconwy Nursery in 2009 and it now occupies a 19cm pan. This year it sported at least 120 flowers. He grows it in a mixture of equal parts JI3, Cambark Fine and coarse river sand. It is kept outside in a sheltered frame plunged in sand where it receives good light. It is only taken into the alpine house in extremely harsh weather. Good light is the key to keeping this plant compact, as even in a well-lit alpine house it tends to etiolate slightly. The pot is turned periodically to ensure good shape and gets a light clipping after flowering. It is much hardier than generally thought: I planted a small specimen in a crevice outside in November 2010; it has

no protection and despite several spells of very severe weather since, it is in flower as I write. However, when I saw the specimen in the crevice bed at Aberconwy Nursery in May I realized how far I have to go (see back cover).



I was impressed by Ian Leslie's *Saxifraga columnaris* with its rich purple, large silky flowers. It is much slower in growth, and more difficult than *S. dinnikii*, which appears more often on the show bench. Both grow in the northern Caucasus at 2,000 to 3,000m and were introduced to cultivation in 1996.

Don Peace showed a number of very fine fritillaries, including three in the educational class. I thought that his *F. crassifolia crassifolia* from Turkey in particular was impressive. Don finds that species native to Europe and Asia thrive under his cultivation regime, but that



American species emphatically do not. He uses a surprisingly rich compost of two parts JI3 to one part sharp grit, and repots frequently, usually in August. No supplementary feeding is given. The plants are in clay pots that are plunged in sand that is kept moist at all times, in a covered, well-ventilated frame, and are watered liberally while in active growth.

Don's *Corydalis griffithii* \times *macrocentra*, which he got from Janis Ruksans a few years ago, was part of his large three pan entry and was in peak condition. According to Janis this hybrid was raised in Gothenburg BG and can be increased only by breaking the tuber. Don's growing method

for this and all his other *leonticoides* corydalis is as follows. As soon as the foliage dies down he removes the (clay) pot from the plunge, puts it inside an identical sized pot, and then returns the pots to the plunge. This keeps the plants away from the moist plunge but provides a buffer against temperature swings. They are kept dry until early October when they are repotted and returned to the plunge (without the outer pot). He uses the same mix as for frits (2 parts JI3 and 1 part grit). He usually positions an inverted and bottomless plastic pot over the tuber and fills it with grit, before filling with the compost. The plastic collar is an attempt to stop the new growth running straight for the edge of the pot. But Don says that this is only ever a partial success, since the new growth just waits till it has cleared the collar, and then runs outwards as usual.



The Farrer Medal was awarded to a pristine potful of *Trillium chloropetalum* shown by Gordon Toner of Limavady. Gordon grows a lot of trilliums in his garden and last year noted this clump as a potential show candidate. He lifted the plant in August last and potted it up in a mixture of good soil and leafmould with some blood, fish and bone added. The pot was then plunged in the garden and remained outside until February, when it was lifted and brought into a cold glasshouse to protect the emerging foliage and flowers from weather and pest damage.

With fifteen flowers and uniform foliage Gordon's fine plant was well deserving of the top award at the Show.

One downside of the influx of plants from across the water was the number of local exhibits, many of them excellent plants, which ended the day with no sticker on their show cards. A small price to pay for an exceptional show that was a fitting prelude to the 75th Anniversary event next year when, hopefully, the visitors will return.

Billy Moore

Photos: **Heather Smith**

REVIEW OF RECENT GROUP EVENTS

A little medley of flowers, Koraley Northen, 17 January

We've all seen Koraley Northen's photographs in various publications, but her presentation after our successful and non-controversial AGM was something special - an A to Z of wonderful pictures.

We started off with a little dip into Barry Murphy's rock garden in Lusk to see his *Agapanthus* followed by a wonderful close up of another *Agapanthus* from Avril Larmour's garden. We traveled on through *Anthemis*, *Billbergia* and *Crocasmia* to C. 'Severn Sunset', a very good Mount Venus plant which flowers for four to five weeks. The pictures of *Foeniculum vulgare* in flower, the cottage garden plant, Feverfew, and a carrot seedhead made all these very ordinary plants look quite exotic. One could imagine them scattered through herbaceous beds as a lovely foil for the rich colours of perennial plants.

We moved on to the Orangery in Marley Park to see and almost smell the sweet pea display and from there to Huntingbrook Garden to see Jimi Blake's showstopper *Lilium* 'Red

Flavour' and across the hedge into June Blake's to admire a perfect pale blue *Meconopsis betonicifolia*.

We visited Jean Van der Lee's garden to see *Rosa* 'Golden Celebration' and finished with a lovely shot of the Mexican desert plant, *Zinnia* with hoverflies.

A lovely gentle 'stroll' through some beautiful plants with tips on cultivation along the way.



Rose Sevastopulo

**‘From Castlepollard to Baba Dag: five years with glorious bulbs’,
Octavia Tulloch, 9 February**

Our annual lunch was held as usual in the Royal St. George Yacht Club. It was great to see so many members and friends there, including some very welcome visitors from the Ulster Group.

On entering the dining room we all stopped to admire the delightful display of alpine plants that were brought in by George Sevastopulo. These included *Corydalis popovii* with its unusual purple tipped blooms, *Cyclamen persicum*, which had an abundance of tall dainty blossoms, *Narcissus bulbocodium*, to remind us that daffodils are on their way, and the beautiful little *Iris winogradowii*.

After the excellent meal, Michael Higgins presented the show awards for 2012. Barbara O’Callaghan, won a bronze medal for gaining ten firsts in



the Novice Class. Janet Mathias also got a bronze for ten first points in the Artistic Section, and Valerie Keegan received her first gold bar. Maeve Spotswood got the award for the highest number of points in the UK and Ireland in the Artistic Section.

Then our speaker for the afternoon, Octavia Tulloch, embarked on her interesting talk, starting in Tullynally Castle

with her description of the castle, and her beautiful slides of interesting aspects of the gardens. She showed us the plantings of ‘Duc van Tol’ (an old variety of tulip), *Fritillaria meleagris* and the white *Scillia mischtschenkoana*, on the woodland walks. We learned that thirty-five varieties of snowdrops are grown there, and we looked at a wonderful picture of Thomas Pakenham looking very small beside the giant lily *Cardiocrinum giganteum* (eight years from seed to flowering).

She described her work with Heritage Bulbs and their experiments, growing a selection of unusual and historic bulbs in order to establish which were most suited for Irish conditions. She spoke at length about the owners of Tullynally, Thomas and Valerie Pakenham, and of all the hard work they put into placing Tullynally on the tourist map. I put a

visit there on my list of things to do this spring, as I am sure did many of the audience.

We were then transported to South West Turkey and the hilly area of Baba Dag. The slides of native plants and shrubs growing there were very interesting. *Gladiolus anatolicus*, *Styrax officinalis*, *Tulipa julia*, *Fritillaria sibthorpiana*, *Orchis anatolica*, an *Arabis* sp. (growing out of rock), Bee Orchids, *Arbutus andrachne*, *Anemone blanda* and many more, all in their native habitat. We traveled up and down the high rocky slopes with dizzy drops at the side of the paths, and admired the breathtaking views. We looked down at the colourful 'Juet', Octavia's transport, anchored far below on the blue waters of the lake - this area of Baba Dag can only be reached by boat. It would seem to be a 'trip of a lifetime' to visit the area.

Barbara O'Callaghan proposed a vote of thanks to Octavia for her wide-ranging talk and slide show.

And so ended a very pleasant and informative afternoon.

Elizabeth Ross

'Plants and nature of the Far East - Kamchatka, Sakhalin and Kuriles', **Vojtech Holubec**, 21 February

The flora of Sakhalin Island and the Kamchatka region is of such great interest, with many endemic species, that the lecture by Vojtech Holubec was awaited with great expectation, which was more than fulfilled by a fascinating talk.

Vojtech Holubec somehow manages to combine his professional career, as researcher in the gene bank at an agricultural research institute in the Czech Republic, with pursuing his love of alpine plants. He is an eminent plant hunter and has travelled seemingly everywhere in the world there are mountains: North and South America, China, Central Asia, the Caucasus, Turkey, the Far East, as well as, of course, in Europe itself. He is much in demand internationally as a lecturer, has written several books including, with Pavel Krivka, *The Caucasus and its Flowers*, cultivates his own mature rock garden and sells seed from his greatly admired 'Wild Seeds' list, now in its nineteenth year.

Considering how much colder the climate in Sakhalin and Kamchatka is than in Ireland, it came as a surprise to learn that in latitude all these areas are very similar, but whereas we benefit from the warming

influence of the Gulf Stream, Sakhalin and Kamchatka are subject to strong cold winds from the Ochotck Sea. This point was brought out memorably by the stands of *Abies sachalinensis*, their windswept branches sculpted into strange shapes by the prevailing gales. In winter the snow in the Kamchatka region can be as much as 6m deep, insulating the plants underneath from sharp variations in temperature.

Vojtech made the important point that although Kamchatka is a peninsula, part of the 'bridge' with the mainland is too dry for plant growth, so the flora of the region is in effect an island flora like Sakhalin. Here the similarities largely end, as Sakhalin presents a green landscape of woodland, meadows and tall herbaceous vegetation, the land rising to no more than 1,600m. Alpines are mostly found growing along the timber line, usually not in an alpine zone as such.

Kamchatka, on the other hand, has a central ridge of high mountains running the length of the peninsula, is actively volcanic while Sakhalin is not, the highest peak being Koviakskij at 3,800m, and has a clearly defined alpine zone.

Vojtech talked first about the flora of Sakhalin, starting with plants of the mainly deciduous woodland and meadows. Of the very many noteworthy plants, *Trillium camtschatcense*, growing up to 56cm, with large white flowers must be one of the most beautiful. *Cardiocrinum glehnii*, spectacular in flower, towering up to 2m, *Lysichiton camtschatcense* with its exquisite white spathe and blue *Gentiana triflora*, from 50 to 70cm drew much admiration. *Clintonia udensis* with large, glossy bright blue berries, following the white flowers, was a personal favourite.

From the Dikaja River, Vojtech moved on to Pik Chekhova, which at 1050m does have an alpine zone, as does the unforested Zhdank Ridge on the east coast of Sakhalin. Many special alpines grow here, including blue *Campanula chamissonis* on north-facing slopes, the endemic *Eritrichium sachalinense* with extremely beautiful blue flowers, more robust than *E. camtschaticum*, which in turn is larger than *E. sibericum*.

Appreciative gasps were heard at the sight of *Dicentra peregrina*, in different colour forms, growing in scree and crevices. It is also found in Hokkaido, but is very rare, in widely scattered localities. Vojtech grows *D. peregrina* successfully using a mineral mixture of sand, perlite, gravel and pumice, but no soil.

Introducing the Kamchatka region with a panorama of the highest peaks touched with snow, Vojtech described the flora of the boreal

woodland, taiga and forest clearings. A rare daphne, *D. kamtschatica*, rather similar to *D. mezereum*, *Ranunculus altaicus*, flowering in Spring after the snow melt, and the blue-flowered *Merendera kamczatica* stood out from the many interesting plants.

Screes in the alpine zone of Viliuchinskij Volcano offer a rich flora, including the outstanding blue *Eritrichium camtschaticum*, *Saxifraga merckii* with red-centred flowers and *Dianthus repens* which grows well from seed. Rich woodland areas in Kamchatka are home to *Fritillaria camtschatcensis*, familiar in cultivation, and the exotic *Cypripedium yatabeanum*, yellow with brown spots and *C. macranthos*, usually purple, but a rare white form is also to be found.

As many as 150 different species of *Salix* grow in the mountain grasslands and on rocky slopes, including the dwarf *S. reticulata* with most attractive leaves, *S. tschuktschorum* and *S. erythrocarpa*, only 1cm tall. *Bryanthus gmelinii*, an ericaceous prostrate shrub, *Rhododendron camtschaticum*, which likes cool summers and *R. chrysanthum*, 1m tall at low altitudes but dwarfer at higher elevations, provided more shrubby interest.

Vojtech is particularly fond of blue flowers: *Mertensia kamczatica* with blue bells; *Gentiana glauca* and *Campanula lasiocarpa* which needs to be grown in lava stone, were among the finest.

Vojtech shared his deep knowledge of plants in the wild, and practical experience of successfully cultivating the most challenging with an engaging diffidence. From his understated account, one would imagine that toiling up 2,800m to the rim of the active Avacha Volcano, sulphurous steam billowing from its depths, and periodically spewing hot ash over the scree alpine he was photographing, was no more than a gentle stroll.

When, please, may we look forward to the next visit to Ireland from Vojtech and his wife, Lenka?

Clare Beumer

(My apologies to Vojtech and readers for the omission of the accent over the 'e' in his forename in this article and elsewhere in this issue. My computer doesn't have that symbol in the typeface that I use. Ed.)

Local Show, workshop and members' plant sale, 9 March

This spring event has improved immensely over the past few years, and while attendance has improved, a lot of members are missing a most enjoyable, interesting and informative afternoon.

This year we had a very good competitive show of plants, and introduced a photography section for the first time. There were some fine exhibits in the non-competitive section also.

Liam Byrne gave a master class on growing and showing in which there was great interest, judging by the response of his audience with questions and applause.

There were lots of good plants for sale at very reasonable prices, and there was afternoon tea.

Hard to understand why there is not a much bigger attendance.

For the record, Val Keegan won the Local Show medal for the most points, and Gavin Moore won the Margaret Orsi Trophy for the best plant with his magnificent *Dionysia aretioides* 'Bevere'. George Sevastopulo won most firsts in the photographic section, although Val Keegan and Patricia Maguire also did well. Thanks and congratulations to all the exhibitors, thanks to the plant donors, to Liam Byrne for conducting the workshop and to Barbara O'Callaghan and her team for a well organized and stimulating event.

Billy Moore

'Yunnan – in the Tibetan Marches', Liam McCaughey, 28 March

Liam and Joan McCaughey are the most regular attendees from the Northern Group at our local events. On March 28, we were treated to a really superb talk on Liam and Joan's visit to Yunnan. From start to finish Liam's talk held our interest as he switched from interesting stories of their trip to engaging references to the plant hunters that introduced to cultivation many of the plants we grow in our gardens today. That alone would have made for a memorable talk, but together with a seemingly endless series of spectacular photos of plants in their native habitat made for the best talk that I attended this year.

Liam started by introducing us to the geography of the area that they visited by clever use of Google Maps highlighting their route. The trip was mainly based in the Hengduan Mountains in the northwest corner of Yunnan. The area is well known for the mountain ranges that separate the deep valleys through which run



three great rivers of Southeast Asia – the Mekong, Yangtze and Salween, and is home to over 6,000 plant species – more than four times that of the UK. Before getting to the plants Liam gave us an overview of the area. He advised that if any of us get the chance to visit we should do so before the Chinese ‘improve’ it further, as modernization could spoil some of its natural beauty. This point was illustrated by some photos of daily life in Lijiang City where Liam and Joan stayed on the way to the mountains. Later in the talk Liam would include video clips of life in the towns and villages they passed through. He then gave us a virtual tour of their route including the exotically named Blue Moon Valley and Leaping Tiger Gorge.

Armed with our knowledge of the area, we then enjoyed photos of the plants that Liam and Joan saw, starting with the tiny *Iris colleti*, many *Arisaemas*, and *Roscoea tibetica*, which is only 10cm tall and a vivid purple. The big prize that day was to see and photograph the extraordinary looking *Cypripedium lichiangense*. That day they also saw the 1m high *Incarvillea lutea*.

At this point Liam moved away from the plants to discuss the men who, over 100 years ago, travelled to this region in various capacities to hunt for new plant species. He mentioned Arthur Kilpin Bulley, who employed E.H. Wilson to travel to Yunnan to hunt for plants for his nursery. At that time Wilson was searching for a specific tree that had been reported by an Irish plant hunter – Augustine Henry, who is buried in Antrim.

Then we were back to plants, and Liam showed us a variety of Cyripediums, including the spectacular *C. guttatum*, a yellow form of *Stellera chamaejasme*, and a photo of *Nomocharis aperta* taken under an umbrella. After a great shot of *Rhododendron racemosum* growing with *Lilium souliei*, Liam gave us another view of the lives of plant hunters at the turn of the Nineteenth century. *Lilium souliei* is named after the French missionary Jean André Soulié who, together with Jules Dubernard (of *Primula bracteata* x *dubernardiana* fame), was murdered in 1905 during the Tibetan rebellion. He also showed *Aquilegia rockii*, a good plant for Irish gardens, which is named after Joseph Rock, who lived near Lijiang for the many years he spent in China.

The trip that Liam and Joan were on was organized specifically to see the local flora and, as such, included guides to bring them directly to the plant locations. This was good in the sense that very little time was spent having to search for plants, however the downside was that there was little time available to stray off the arranged path. Liam showed a photo of *Androsace tapete* growing just off the boardwalk that took them through the forest and wondered what else might have been seen if time allowed. There was, however, no shortage of interesting plants to be seen, including the very tiny *Primula nanobella* growing in moss, the stunning *Corydalis melanochlora*, and *Cremanthodium decaisnea* and *Cremanthodium campanulatum* flowering by the side of the road.

Finally, the tour took them to the famous area of Bai Ma Shan. This leg of the trip highlighted the logistical dangers of travelling in the area as the Chinese authorities will sometimes dig up fifty miles of road at a time for repairs, without warning. Luckily, Liam's group was only temporarily inconvenienced, and they were able to travel on to see a site where *Paraquilegia amemonoides* was known to grow. Unfortunately the site had been turned into a quarry, but Liam still managed a shot of a lone plant growing in a vertical rock face. Liam's talk ended with many more great photos, including the unusual *Spongiocarpella yunnanense* and the iconic *Chionocharis hookeri*.

The mix of local knowledge, anecdotes from the three-week trip, and historical information added greatly to the 100 or so fabulous plant photos. During question time one member opined that the photos were

‘astonishing’, which was not an exaggeration. The entire presentation was brought together by Liam’s careful use of maps and video, all of which made for a very memorable and enjoyable talk.

Gavin Moore

‘Pulsatillas and other Alpine Members of the Ranunculaceae’,

Christopher Grey-Wilson, 18 April

Lecture cancelled by speaker due to illness.

Latvia, 19 to 22 April

Twenty members travelled to Riga to visit Janis Ruksans’ wonderful bulb nursery. It was a great trip and Janis and his family were most hospitable. The best day of the trip was spent in Janis’ home and nursery where we not only had unfettered access to all his bulb tunnels and bulb fields, but were also spoiled with the range of food and drinks, including fresh birch water, that we were plied with.

Weather-wise we were lucky and unlucky, lucky that the thaw set in just a few days before we arrived, as otherwise we would not have been able to get to the nursery; unlucky in that the field bulbs were just beginning to appear so that we missed the spectacular display of corydalis and other bulbs outside that Janis is famous for, and we were unable to visit his wife Guna’s nursery and garden as nothing was yet above ground. But there was adequate compensation in the tunnels, which were dazzling with colour.

The range of rare bulbs that Janis has on offer is unparalleled, and naturally order forms were filled out and we are all looking forward to a package arriving in the post in August.

Janis and Guna, came to our hotel on the morning we were leaving, dressed, as you can see on p. 43, in traditional Latvian costume.

If you want to hear more about the trip and see more pictures don’t miss our Christmas Miscellany meeting in December.

Billy Moore

‘Nei dintorni dei laghi’(‘Around the Italian Lakes’), George Sevastopulo, 9 May

The region around the Lakes of Northern Italy is clearly a favourite holiday destination for George and Rose Sevastopulo. And why would it not be so - the area is home to the delightful *Daphne petraea*, a plant that many of us would love to grow. I do not know how many of our members have successfully grown this Daphne but I guess it is a pretty difficult plant in cultivation. Even on a tiny shrub the root is enormous but with very few side roots! And it clings on to very steep limestone cliffs high up on the west side of Lake Garda. Often, the first hint of its presence is not the plant itself but its heady perfume when in flower. Seeing plants like that in habitat is always thrilling, no matter how many times one has seen them. I certainly have made a mental note to visit the area and find *Daphne petraea* for myself.

George brought us on a tour around Lake Garda, taking in Monte Baldo on the east side, which rises steeply from 80m at the lake shore to 2218m. The weather here can be very variable and often there is still snow in early June. We find *Geranium argenteum*, *Callianthemum kernerianum*, a speciality of the area, *Geum montanum*, which produces very nice seed heads, *Primula elatior* and *Soldanella alpina*, *Dactylorhiza sambucina* in late May/early June and *Gentianella germanica* in late September!

On the west side of Lake Garda the peaks rise to 1900m or less and there we find the home of the aforementioned *Daphne petraea*. On Monte Tremalzo grows the small but beautiful *Viola dubyana*, *Gentiana clusii* (on alkaline soil) and *G. verna*, *Paederota bonarota* and the beautiful white *Ranunculus bilobus* as well as one of my favourite alpines, *Physoplexis comosa*.

Moving on to Lago d’Idro –where George and Rose usually stay, as it is less touristic than Lake Garda, we find the lovely blue *Aquilegia thalictrifolia*, the frilly *Dianthus monspessulanus*, and to the west, near the Passo di Croce Domini, *Anemone narcissiflora*, *Fritillaria tubiformis* and a magnificent stand of *Cypripedium calceolus*. I have not seen this lady’s slipper in the wild since my youthful days in Switzerland



where we regularly encountered a stand at the edge of a nearby wood. Around the Passo di Croce Domini between the Lago d'Idro and the Lago d'Iseo, we find *Crocus vernus*, *Soldanella alpina*, *Primula daonensis* with *Loiseleuria procumbens* (on acid substrates) and finally on Passo di Maniva there are *Primula spectabilis* (on lime) and *Clematis alpina*.

George not only showed us many lovely photos of alpine plants but also filled us in on the geology of the region. Most of it is limestone and dolomite but there is also sandstone, granite and schist. Historically, the area was a battle-ground in the 1914-18 war between Italy and the Austro-Hungarian empire. That fact explains the many minor roads heading up and down the mountains and valleys that can be explored at one's own peril! The Rocca d'Anfo fortifications in the area are worth a visit too. George's talk brought this region of Italy to life, rich in alpine delights, full of history and wonderful landscapes. He and Rose will be re-visiting the area this September and no doubt will return with more enticing tales and pictures for us to enjoy. *Divertitevi!*

AnneMarie Keoghan

Visit to Frank Lavery's garden, 11 May

Anyone who missed the visit to Frank's garden missed a treat! Being somewhat windy, wet and chilly we gathered initially inside the house while Frank gave us a verbal tour of the highlights of the garden and how he has developed it over the last eleven years since he moved there.

The garden is situated not far from the N11 in Ballsbridge but is quiet and secluded, and, as it is surrounded by a high wall and gates, it is not visible from the road. It is not a large garden, surrounding the front and two sides of the house only, but is packed with an astonishingly large collection of plants of all sizes, from tall trees to a vast collection



of alpiners, all complemented by an amazing range of hard features. A series of interconnecting water features runs through the garden – a large pool with a high waterfall flowing down over a tower of rocks is linked, under a bridge, to a separate deep pool full of golden carp, many about one foot long. This then flows into a rill, which loops around the rest of the garden and ingeniously feeds the planted areas with the fish waste. A glass window in the side of the fish pool means that the fish can be viewed from the house, quite hypnotic! He has also built a viewing platform above the pool accessed by steep narrow stepping-stones in one of the planting beds.

Alpiners are planted into the quartz rocks around the edges of the pools, and into the vertical sides, maximizing the planting space. He cuts out round planting holes in the top of adjacent rocks (with a power tool) to enlarge the planting area. Another clever idea is to wire several pieces of tufa together along with selected plants and soil. Once the plants have grown and rooted the whole structure knits together making a miniature tufa garden. (Frank brought two examples of these to the Local Show in March.)

At the side of the house other features include a dovecote full of doves, a small herb garden, and a smaller water feature on the back wall flowing down from a lion's head into an ornate stone basin and spilling over onto pebbles mounded on the ground. An old pig trough is planted up full of rocks and bonsai trees, in all about four feet high. I particularly liked the unusual stone feet, which raises the trough about a foot off the ground. There are also many other examples of Frank's interest in bonsai planted in the ground. He wires the pliable branches to create a gnarled effect, and pinches out new growth hard in the spring to keep them small.

At the other end of the scale he has a collection of quite tall trees, mainly around the perimeter. Especially mentioned were an unusual *Arbutus andrachnoides* with attractive peeling red-brown bark, *Pinus sylvestris fastigiata*, which remains columnar, and a relatively small species of eucalyptus. A large variety of camellias lined the driveway from the gate. They are pruned to keep them upright but contained within the space available. Many had finished flowering but I particularly liked the

red *C. reticulata* 'Black Lace'. Many ericaceous plants, like azaleas and rhododendrons, are planted around the garden successfully, some right next to tufa rocks, as minerals do not leach out of tufa into the adjacent soil.

The main alpine areas are banked up a steep slope towards the front wall boundary, edged by the rill and the narrow lawn running along the front of the house. Frank initially used quartz rocks from the Sugarloaf, but finds tufa more satisfactory. He sources the tufa for the extensive alpine area from a coastal site in north Dublin. Several of these areas have only been built and planted in the last twelve to eighteen months, but look so established it is impossible to tell which ones are newly planted. They are filled with hundreds of varieties of alpines of all descriptions.

Ericaceous plants are planted in an area filled with a suitable acidic soil mix.

After our tour around we warmed up in the house where Frank's wife, Svetlana, served us very welcome tea and delicious cakes, and Frank answered some of our many questions about different aspects of his endeavour. Many thanks to both Frank and Svetlana for inviting us to their house and garden for a most enjoyable and inspiring visit.

Janet Mathias

Visit to Huntingbrook Gardens

The Committee decided to fill a gap in our programme by arranging a special visit to Jimi Blake's amazing garden near Blessington on 7 July. The weather could not have been better, and the garden looked spectacular. Jimi is constantly changing the planting, and the garden seems to get better and better. Also, and this may seem a bit fanciful, but for me the garden, including the woodland, has a wonderful atmosphere, and is uplifting spiritually, as well as being visually stunning. On the debit side, only eight turned up, and Jimi had catered for thirty. He did not let his disappointment show, but he must have felt a bit let down. I know that there was Wimbledon, holidays, family commitments etc., and at least it beat the turnout of two for Declan Doogue's field trip last year, but it was still a miserable showing.

As well as giving us a great tour, Jimi gave each of us a specially prepared list of the more important plants that he intended to discuss, and the tea/coffee and cakes were superb. It was great value for €10. I would urge anyone of you who hasn't been to this treasure to plan a visit soon.

Also, I would like to repeat the plug for Jimi's Plantsperson Course which I gave in the last newsletter. I believe it is superb and full details can be found on Jimi's website at: www.huntingbrook.com.

Billy Moore

FIXTURES

Thursday, 17 October, 8.00 pm. Brian Burrow,
'European Alpines in the Wild and their Cultivation'. St Brigid's Parish
Centre, Stillorgan.

Thursday, 7 November, 8.00 pm. David Rankin,
'A Short History of Alpines from the Big Bang to Last Week'. St Brigid's
Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

15 to 17 November, 30th Alpine Weekend, An Grianán, Termonfeckin,
Co. Louth. Speakers: **Ron McBeath, Ger van den Beuken, Brian
Duncan.**

Thursday 12 December, 8.00 pm. Christmas Miscellany.
St Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

More details about the fixtures can be found on p. 4.

OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

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Michael



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Paddy



Guna and Janis Ruksans in traditional Latvian costume (p. 35)



This newsletter is edited by **Billy Moore** who can be contacted at 32 Braemor Park, Churchtown, Dublin 14. Tel. 086 8183140.
Printed by **Davison & Associates Ltd.** Tel.: (01) 295 0799.