



ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY

Dublin Group



NEWSLETTER NO. 66 – SUMMER 2016

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Front cover illustration is of *Armeria maritima* - see p. 5. (Photo: Liam McCaughey)

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EDITORIAL

The Burren is surely one of our greatest National treasures. We in the AGS love it for the flowers, but there are so many other dimensions to it. There's the landscape and the way it changes under different light conditions; the amazing geology; the wealth of archaeological sites; the wildlife; and the undefinable sense of agelessness, peace and tranquility that can be found there. All this was brought home to those of us who participated in the Group's visit to the area in May. You can read George Sevastopulo's account of the trip on p. 33 from which you will see that it was a great success. George made an enormous contribution to this success by sharing with us his deep knowledge of all features of the region, an aspect which he modestly omits in his report. This is not to take away from Carl Wright's input which was superb, as was his wonderful garden.

One thing that was very clear to us all as we headed for home was that we had just scratched the surface and that further visits are mandatory. All our visits to the area up to now have been in May when the gentians and the other spring-flowering plants are at their best, but, there is floral interest at other times of the year also.

There are however threats to the region, including changes in agricultural practices and indeed tourism. It strikes me that given our commitment to the conservation of alpine plants the Group should be as informed as possible about the region, and the issues, so that we could lobby where necessary in the interests of protecting this wonderful habitat.

George has agreed to write an article on the Burren for the next newsletter as a start. Also we have decided to mount a major non-competitive exhibit at our 2017 main show. This project will be directed by George and he will be looking for material for the exhibit including photographs and plants. Any contribution from members in the form of ideas or material will be most welcome.

As an aside, I was saddened to learn (from George) that one of my favourite Burren plants, which I have always known and loved as *Helianthemum canum*, must in future be called *Helianthemum oelandicum* subsp. *piloselloides*. I think I'll stick with the old name!



The 2017 'Farrer' plants, top, Ulster, *Dionysia aretioides* 'Phyllis Carter', (see p. 14), (Photo: Heather Smith), bottom, Dublin, *Gentiana ligustica*, (see p. 15), (Photo: Billy Moore).

ALPINE MISCELLANY

2016 to date has been good for the Group: we have had excellent talks; the shows went well; membership numbers are stable and our Burren excursion was very successful. There are more very promising talks in the autumn and the panel of speakers for Termonfeckin couldn't be bettered. A lot of this success is due to the hard work of our retiring fixtures secretary, Paddy Smith, so thank you Paddy. We will miss Paddy, but the good news is that the latest recruit to the Committee, Triona Corcoran, has bravely agreed to step into his shoes and we all wish her well.

Also I must thank Triona for her excellent report on Dr Keith Ferguson's lecture – not an easy talk to summarize - and also the other contributors, especially George Sevastopulo who reviewed two events. Sorry George.

We had a photo competition for the participants in the Burren trip. Bernard van Giessen, who most of you know is a professional photographer, kindly agreed to judge the competition. Thank you Bernard. The winning photo was by Liam McCaughey and is on the front cover. Congratulations Liam.

In this issue there are reports on the two shows as well as photos of some of the plants. No issue of the newsletter would be complete without an article from Liam Byrne and this time he is writing about composts and, given Liam's success as a grower and exhibitor over the years, his advice should not be ignored.

I have just become aware that Jamie Chambers' father has died in New Zealand. I would like on behalf of all members to extend our sincere condolences to Jamie and his family at this sad time.

Facebook page

Our Facebook page is an excellent resource for the Group but it is seriously underused. We all have our reservations about Facebook, but I think it has a lot to offer to a society like ours. For example, I think it has potential for recruiting new members. It is also an excellent forum for members to share photos and information with other members. If

you have a cultivation query, post it, and you should get a response. Recently, I have been putting up photos of plants in flower in the garden and they have got some 'likes', some more than others. Interestingly, I seem to get more 'likes' from people who are not members, including from eminent alpinists like Jim Jermyn and John Good. I intend to continue doing it, and I would urge other members to do so as well. It is a pity to see the page inactive for long periods. Putting up a photo or comment or question couldn't be easier: go to the Visitor Posts section, click on 'Share Photo' and upload your picture; if you just want to leave a comment click on 'Write Post' and type your message. Jamie is the expert on this area and you can expect to hear more from him on the topic in the next issue.

Show Update, from Gavin Moore

On 25 April we held our annual show in Cabinteely Community School. It was a great success both in terms of the quality of plants and as a contribution to the Group's finances. Possibly more important than either of these, the day was immensely enjoyable, allowing members of our Group and the public to spend time with friends discussing a shared interest.

The overall quality of the plants was very high, boosted by some fine entries from across the water. All the winners are well documented in George Gordon's show report on p. 15. One aspect that gave me great satisfaction was the standard of the Novice Section. In years past, picking the best plant in this section has not taken long as there was seldom more than one plant to be considered. This year four plants were taken aside for judging. Our head judge, Martin Rogerson, commented that this would be the envy of most shows in the UK. It's great to see new exhibitors, but we need more. In about six weeks the nurseries get in all their bulbs. In September last year I bought some bulbs of *Tulipa clusiana*. I planted them in a pot, left it in the open garden and ignored it completely until late March when I moved it to a sheltered spot to avoid wind and slug damage. A few weeks later it won a first in the Ulster Show in the 19cm Open Section bulb class. Anyone could do this. Please

consider exhibiting in the show next year. Buying bulbs is the easiest possible way to start.

The show was a great commercial success too, which is very important as it is the main contributor to our finances aside from membership. I know I've thanked many people already, however, two people deserve special credit when mentioning the commercial contribution. Carl Dacus ran the plant sale again this year and thanks to his hard work and the plant donations of our members, especially Michael Campbell, it was hugely successful. Patricia Maguire managed the catering and publicity for the show, and for both it was her first time having taken over from others. Both were a great success and contributed significantly to numbers of people at the show and their enjoyment of it.

Finally, the reason we put on a show is because we are interested in growing alpinists. Part of the enjoyment is growing a few of them to such quality that they can be displayed and judged against those of other members. It is one of the highlights of the gardening year for me, and not because I win or lose (although winning is very nice), but because of the day itself and the people involved. If you do not already exhibit your alpinists, please consider doing so in 2017. I've never met anyone who has not enjoyed the day more when they have plants on the bench. If you're not sure where to start, please contact me at any time, or any of the many experienced exhibitors at a local meeting. You won't regret it!

Fixtures

On 20 October, at Glasnevin, **John Amand** will speak on 'Unusual bulbs and how they get to your garden'. This lecture is joint with the **IGPS**. John is the proprietor of Jacques Amand International, the well-known bulb firm which specializes in the rarer bulbs and exhibits at many of the main shows in the UK, including Chelsea. He is an experienced lecturer, much in demand, and you'll be sorry if you miss this. And I nearly forgot, he's bringing bulbs, so this might be your chance to get a pot-full for the 2017 Show.

We have another star turn on 10 November in Stillorgan when **Professor John Richards** will talk to us about 'Some Asiatic primulas'.

John is an eminent botanist, prominent in the AGS as a speaker, writer, exhibitor and judge and has an excellent blog on their website which he calls 'A Northumberland Alpine Gardener's Diary' – well worth a look. John is also the author of the indispensable 'bible' on primulas, simply called *Primula*, published by Batsford. He is an acknowledged expert on the genus so his talk is indispensable. He has spoken to us before on the Dolomites and his talk was much enjoyed.

Our weekend at Termonfeckin this year (18-20 November) is very special and, believe me, it will be booked out, so if you haven't already done so, send your booking form and deposit to Barbara without delay. Our main speaker is **John Massey** of Ashwood Nurseries who really needs no introduction. Anyone who grows lewisias, hellebores, cyclamen or hepaticas must know him for the extraordinary work that he has done on those genera. Apart from that he is a charismatic speaker, in demand worldwide, and we are indeed fortunate to have him at our weekend. I hope our other two speakers will forgive me for calling John our 'main' speaker. Both of them are plantsmen of the highest calibre and experienced and accomplished speakers. **Peter Korn** is an innovative Swedish gardener who has been to Termonfeckin before and was very well received. Our own **Martin Walsh** completes the trio. Martin has an international reputation as a speaker, particularly on plants of the Himalaya, and his knowledge of his subject is encyclopaedic. I can say confidently that few plant conferences have a line-up of speakers to equal this year's Termonfeckin cast. Be there.

Our final event of 2016 is the **Christmas Miscellany** on 1 December, a little earlier than usual, in Stillorgan. This is always a well-supported and festive occasion. Please bring a selection of any interesting plant related photos that you have taken during the year. Jamie will be reminding you nearer the time.

Billy Moore

Composts

The compost requirements of the many different types of plants that we grow in pots vary quite a lot, and can be confusing for beginners. It is important that the compost used suits the particular plant's requirements. For example, the very lean mix needed by high alpine such as androsaces will not suit lower level primulas or woodland plants. I will describe the composts that I use for my show plants all of which have served me well over the years.

The five main ingredients that I use are good loam, leaf mould, peat, grit and sharp granite sand. Loam is very variable and I use topsoil which I buy from garden centres. It is a medium loam and is sterilized. The ideal leaf mould is made either from beech or oak or a mixture, and this is what I use. Normal peat has no nutrients so I use Brown Gold which has some added fertilizer. I prefer granite grit but if this is not available any neutral 4 to 6mm grit will do. The same can be said of sand; any sharp non-limey sand will suffice; never use builders sand. To top dress I use limestone grit for lime lovers and granite or neutral grit for lime haters.



The number of different formulae that you will read about in books and articles would fill the entire newsletter. I use just four and I will describe each of them in some detail. The ingredients should be free of weed seeds, spores, eelworms, earthworms and harmful bacteria.

For easy plants, most bulbs and dwarf conifers my compost consists of equal parts of loam, leaf mould, or peat in the form of Brown Gold, and grit.

Woodland plants require a compost with plenty of humus, but also one that won't become waterlogged. For these my compost is made up of equal parts of loam, leaf mould, Brown Gold and grit.

More humus is required for choice ericaceous plants and rhododendrons and my compost is made up of one part loam (neutral if possible), two parts leaf mould, two parts Brown Gold and one part grit.

My final compost is for the high alpiners like androsaces, dionysias etc. and consists of one part loam and two parts very sharp granite sand or fine grit. I was discussing androsaces with our editor recently and he mentioned that he has used a compost of one part leafmould and two parts grit, as recommended by Geoff Rollinson. As Geoff is the undisputed master of androsace growing I intend to try this mix.

Finally, if the compost you are using now is working for you, you should stick with it.

Liam Byrne



Lewisia tweedyi, exhibited by Liam at Cabinteely in 2009 (photo: Billy Moore)

THE SHOWS

Ulster Group AGS Show, 9 April

April the ninth dawned cool and bright, perfect for the early morning drive from Dublin, and for transporting the plants into the show hall. The drifts of spring bulbs, dotted around the show venue on the Greenmount Agricultural and Horticultural College campus, sparkled in the sunlight, giving our spirits a lift. There are only two AGS shows each year in Ireland, one in Ulster and one in Dublin, both held in April, alternating, one early, the other, late. This year the early show was in Ulster, and was thoroughly enjoyed by exhibitors from the Ulster and Dublin Groups who will stir into action again later in the month down south.

The long, cold spring brought mixed blessings for the show bench this year, with some plants that would normally be over in early April remaining in fine fettle, while many others that should be in full flower were still in bud. Early fears that the poor weather would result in a big drop in entries proved unfounded, and, while there were a few gaps, the show was well up to standard with many fine plants on the benches.

Pat Crossley, who is the longest serving Show Secretary in the AGS, and her team, are to be congratulated on a well-run show that went without a hitch. The Acting Director of



Shows, Mary Randall, kept the judges in order, gently but firmly.

The predominant species on the benches were trilliums and pulsatillas. One of Harold McBride's plants in his Festival of Britain Trophy-winning large 3 pan entry was a very fine pink form of *Pulsatilla ambigua*, (above) a species that he has maintained for years from seed, selecting only the best forms. Several of the other Pasque Flowers that attracted attention had a McBride connection also, as the exhibitors had either received their plants from Harold, or grown them from seed obtained from him. One of these was the seldom seen *P. sukaczewii* (above) which won a Certificate of Merit for Gavin Moore. Another was a very nice white *Pulsatilla grandis* exhibited by Paddy Smith. Paddy has become



established as Ireland's most successful grower of gentians, and reinforced his standing by winning the Cowan Trophy for the best pan of Gentiana with *G. clusii*.

Gordon Toner is an outstanding grower

of trilliums and was awarded Certificates of Merit for two different forms of *T. chloropetalum*, one with dark flowers and the other an attractive pink and white. This reporter's yellow-flowered *T. chloropetalum* 'Bob Gordon' was also given a Certificate of Merit as well as the Frank Walsh Cup for the winner of Class 13. This plant was written about in some detail in the 2014 Ulster Show report. There were numerous examples of the quite variable *T. rivale* on the benches the nicest form of which, in my opinion, was Val Keegan's (see back cover). Val was given a few bulbs by Helen Dillon many years ago, and, by regular repotting, has produced a potful that has been the recipient of quite a few red stickers over the years



Gordon Toner also won the award for the most points in the Open Section. His skills as a grower are not confined to trilliums by any means. His large pan of *Primula* 'Linda Pope' got a lot of attention as did his arresting specimen of *Pulsatilla* 'ex Budapest'.

The best plant in the Novice Section in flower was first time exhibitor Gordon Finch's

Cassiope mertensiana var. *gracilis*, one of the very few ericaceous plants on the benches, unusual for the Ulster Show, which is noted for fine exhibits of these plants. The dearth of ericaceous specimens was probably due to the long cold spring which had delayed flowering. Gordon also got the Diamond Jubilee Award for the best pan of Ericaceae in the Novice Section and the award for most points in that Section. The Carol McCutcheon Award for the best pan of Ericaceae in the Show went to Frank Lavery's well-flowered *Rhododendron* 'Shamrock'.

Saxifrages were also unusually scarce. I liked Cilla Dodd's *S.* 'Allendale Bonny' (above) in the Intermediate Section, which I hadn't seen before. A nice specimen of *S. stribrnyi*, a plant that I'm fond of got a red sticker for George Gordon.

In the Intermediate Section a very floriferous *Cyclamen persicum*, shown by Mac Dunlop, was adjudged the best plant in the Section, and the award for the most points in the Section also went to Mac. George



Sevastopulo's *C. persicum* in the open section was in fine condition also even though it had been in flower for weeks.

Susan Tindall received the Alpines '96 Award for her large pan of *Celmisia astelifolia* and her excellent specimen of *Primula* 'Netta Dennis' was given the SRGC Quaich for the best plant in a pan not exceeding 19cm. Susan also showed a very nice example of *Jeffersonia dubia* (above) which was widely admired.

The Crassulaceae classes are not often mentioned in show reports but Liam Byrne's 3 pan exhibit of *Sedum spathulifolium* 'Cape Blanco', *Sempervivum ciliatum* var. *borisii* and *Crassula socialis*, each in a 36cm pot, deserves inclusion.

The Farrer Medal went to this reporter's *Dionysia aretioides* 'Phyllis Carter' (see p. 4) which probably benefited from the late season as usually in early April it would be past its best.

Finally, a well-deserved Gold Award was given to a non-competitive photographic exhibit by Joan and Liam McCaughey entitled 'Alpines on Five Continents'. This fine exhibit, along with a smaller one by Heather Smith, replaced the much lamented, discontinued, photographic section, which had become such an integral part of AGS shows over recent years, adding an additional dimension to the show environment, and valued by visitors who were often intrigued to see photos from the wild of some of the plants on the benches.

Text: Billy Moore.

Photos: Heather Smith.

Dublin Group AGS Show, 23 April

This was the 31st Dublin Group Alpine Garden Society Show, and as my wife Pat and I drove south the temperature hovered around freezing. Consequently, I wondered how the plants would have fared, as a mild winter and a very cold spring make a dangerous combination. Entering the show hall at Cabinteely it was clear that I need not have worried unduly.

The benches were packed, with Liam Byrne's large six-pan entry in the Open Section the first group of plants anyone entering the show hall would have seen. An eventual AGS Medal Winner, it was a very welcome sign of things to come. Liam has been a mainstay of Ulster and Dublin Shows for many years.

Amongst his other award plants, a Certificate of Merit went to *Primula* 'Wharfedale Village' (right). Around seven years old, it had been grown in a shaded greenhouse in a mix of equal parts leaf-mould, peat, John Innes and grit.



The Farrer Medal, against stiff competition (seven plants were brought up by the judges) went to Paddy Smith for a superb pan of *Gentiana ligustica* (see p. 4). This was Paddy's third such award for his spring and trumpet gentians. It had been grown from 2008 SRGC seed and is kept in the open all year round. Coming from the Maritime Alps, it had been given a benison of lime, mixed with Vitax Q4, added to fertile garden soil. Paddy's advice for growing these gentians to such a standard is moisture and sun, but I am sure many of us would struggle to produce gentians of this quality even with both.

Trilliums are a typical feature of Irish Shows and there were plenty of

them on display, mainly *T. chloropetalum* and *T. rivale*. We had another opportunity to see Billy Moore's yellow-petalled *Trillium chloropetalum* 'Bob Gordon'. Gordon Toner has consistently produced show standard trilliums from his north Londonderry garden and his *Trillium albidum* (below) was awarded the best plant from North America. Grown from seed it was only three or four years old and had been grown in leaf-mould and garden soil fed with blood, fish and bone. Kept in the open for most of the year, it had only been sheltered under glass shortly before the show.



Billy Moore's six-pan entry of 19cm pots in the Open Section was eye-catching and comprised *Saxifraga cinerea*, *Lewisia brachycalyx*, *Dodecatheon* 'Sooke variety', *Paraquilegia anemonoides*, *Anemone obtusiloba* 'Pradesh' and *Androsace vandellii*. It is always difficult to get six pans to such a standard simultaneously, so the AGS Medal it received was well-deserved.

Don Peace has been a regular visitor to Irish Shows for several years now, always bringing a wide selection of his beautifully grown plants. Two in particular caught my eye. The first was a large *Androsace vandellii* from seed sown in 2008 (below), grown in one part leaf-mould, one part

John Innes no. 3
and two parts grit.
Don had two other
plants from the
same sowing on
display but this one
had outstripped its
siblings – one of
the advantages of
growing from seed.



This was awarded
the David Shackleton Trophy for the best pan of Primulaceae. David
Shackleton was a direct descendant of Ernest Shackleton and
appropriately its icy white flowers had the look of Antarctica about
them. The other plant was SE Turkish *Fritillaria alfredae* subsp. *glaucoviridis*
whose narrow tubular flowers exactly matched its blue/green foliage. It
had been grown in two parts John Innes no. 3 and one part grit. Kept
out in a cold frame it had been re-potted annually. Amongst other
awards (including the most points in the Open Section) Don received a
Certificate of Merit for *Corydalis macrocentra* (below).

Susan Tindall had a fine *Cassiope wardii* hybrid, awarded the Jacki
Troughton-Smith Trophy for best pan of Ericaceae. Given to her as a
rooted cutting many years ago it had been re-potted annually. Slow to
increase, it showed none of the browning on the lower stems so



characteristic of these
crosses. Like all
cassiope you need to
keep them well
watered, especially in
the hot summer
months. Susan also had
Primula 'Lindum
Rapture' (below) now
filling a pot following
its acquisition in 2008.

She considers it an easy plant that increases well. This was a single plant (not several off-sets) and would be a good beginners' plant with its yellow flowers and efarinose green leaves.



Two Certificate of Merit plants sat adjacent to one other on the benches but could hardly have been more different. Val Keegan's climbing *Tropaeolum tricolor* with its vivid scarlet flowers comes from Chile and was visible from afar. I wonder what the pollinator would be in nature? In the same class Tim Lever's *Sebaea thomasi* (right), a member of the Gentianaceae from the Drakensberg



Mountains, completely filled a large pot with its strongly scented, long-lasting yellow flowers. This was a year younger than his previous Farrer Plant and, since seed is rarely set, it had come from a cutting reared in a mix of loam, sand and grit (with minimal humus as this can lead to overheating in the pot). Given a haircut in late May after flowering, it is never allowed to dry out.

Harold McBride had a tall *Ranunculus cortusifolius* with buttercup-yellow flowers. Coming from the Azores it had been grown in a cool greenhouse and allowed to dry out in summer, with a close eye kept out for aphids and powdery fungus.

Following his success at the Ulster Show two weeks previously, Liam

McCaughey was awarded a second Gold Medal for his inspiring photographs of 'Alpines on Five Continents'. With his wife Joan, Liam also received the award for best plant in the Intermediate Section with *Primula* 'Maisie Michael'. This is one of many *Primula* crosses raised by Joe Kennedy, some sadly now rarely grown. 'Maisie Michael' however has stayed the course (in no small measure thanks to Aberconwy Nursery). It had been lifted from the garden and its sturdy flowers showed no signs of having suffered in consequence.

The best plant in the Novice Section was a *Saxifraga* sp. (above) shown by Fionnuala

Broughan, who also was awarded the most points in

that Section. It was an encouraging sign that four plants were brought up by the judges for the best plant, recipient of the Termonfeckin Trophy.

This show was directed under the watchful (and amiable) eye of Martin Rogerson, and attracted a large and appreciative crowd. I have always found the Dublin Shows very friendly and this one did much credit to the Dublin Group of the Alpine Garden Society.



Text: George Gordon

Photos: Billy Moore

REVIEW OF RECENT GROUP EVENTS

‘Growing hardy exotics and my travels’, Billy Alexander, 21 January

After the important matters of the AGM were dispatched with efficiency by Jamie and Barbara, we could start the more engaging part of the evening, which was an entertaining talk from Billy Alexander. Billy runs the Kells Bay House and Gardens in Kerry and, based on this talk, it is somewhere that I definitely want to visit soon. Billy took over the gardens in 2006 when they were in a state of considerable disrepair. The house has a history dating back to the 16th century and has had several owners over the years. Not only was the house in need of a significant overhaul, the garden was completely overgrown; indeed, ‘garden’ is not an accurate description of its state at the time. The property had once been cared for, as the owners in the early eighties had none other than the great Roy Lancaster as an advisor on the planting. Roy planted rhododendrons, azaleas and magnolias, many of which survived later neglect and have matured well over the years.



The garden is primarily a tropical woodland, and although Roy Lancaster’s legacy lives on and thrives, it is now also a showcase for ferns and other mainly hardy tropical plants. Apart from the house and gardens, Billy also runs a nursery called Dicksonia Direct. This all started from a *Dicksonia antarctica* that he purchased prior to buying the house. From that came the nursery business plus the current garden at Kells. Billy showed many photographs of how the dicksonias have completely naturalised at Kells. There are now tens of thousands of dicksonia seedlings throughout the garden. The winters that we’ve been getting recently do not trouble them, although the winter of 2010 killed many immature plants. In addition to the masses of tree ferns, Billy showed us some truly spectacular specimens of gunnera that clearly enjoy the space and conditions at Kells.

He gave an interesting history of the house covering the ten years he's been there. There was a significant amount of work to do on both the house and gardens, specifically in terms of creating interest for guests and visitors. The most noticeable talking point at the front of the house is a gigantic *Jubaea chilensis*. The specimen weighed eleven tons when purchased, and Billy showed several photographs and recounted some amusing stories from the day of its installation.

The gardens and the house are first and foremost a business and Billy has created what is probably a unique garden in Ireland, with plenty of attractions for all ages including dinosaur sculptures hand carved from felled trees. To finish off this part of the talk we got a tour of the house that made me want to take a trip to Kerry and spend a weekend enjoying the gardens and gastronomy of Kells Bay House.

After the talk on the house and gardens, Billy gave us a very short description of a trip that he took to Chile and the Juan Fernandez Islands. These islands are where Alexander Selkirk was marooned for four years, which may have been the inspiration for the story of Robinson Crusoe. The main aim of the trip was to see the tree fern *Blechnum cycadifolium* growing in the wild. In addition to finding the blechnum, he also found *Lophosoria quadripinnata*, a fern that has graced our show bench in the past. Billy's photos demonstrated how he has tried to replicate the effect of the Chilean flora in parts of his own garden. Overall, this was a very entertaining evening that showed how hardy exotics can be grown in our gardens, and gave us all a recommendation on where to visit when next in Kerry.

Gavin Moore

Annual lunch, 'Designing with diversity', Oliver Schurmann, 13 February

Forty-eight members and guests gathered at the Royal St George Yacht Club, Dun Laoghaire, for our annual lunch and an associated lecture by Oliver Schurmann of Mount Venus Nursery. Although Oliver's lecture

preceded the lunch (an arrangement that seems to work well), I will cover the latter first.

As usual, the 'George' provided a good lunch and the diners admired the newly refurbished dining room. During coffee, there were speeches from Jamie Chambers and Margaret Kennedy on behalf of the Dublin and Ulster Groups, respectively. Then Gavin Moore, the Show Secretary,



presented several awards won at shows during the year. Liam Byrne earned his eleventh Gold Bar (550 first prizes!); and Gavin won his Gold Medal after a relatively short career in showing. Paddy Smith was presented with the Farrer Medal for his magnificent pot of *Gentiana acaulis* on the bench at the Ulster Show and Val Keegan won her second Farrer with a venerable plant of *Draba longisiliqua* shown at Cabinteely. Paddy also got his Gold Medal. Pat Kennedy received an AGS spoon for winning the six pan class in the Intermediate Section. Frank Lavery gained his silver medal, as did Maeve Spotswood for her first prizes in the Artistic Section, in which the writer secured a bronze.

Oliver began his talk with some background to his own career: he and his wife Liat had trained with Dr Hans Simon, a pioneer in the use of prairie plants, at the latter's nursery in Bavaria. There he absorbed the precept of working with nature, which he has applied to the use of prairie plants in gardens in Ireland, where the climate is generally not 'prairie-like'. I was struck by the way in which Oliver has married observation and experiment of the conditions in which plants thrive, rather than relying on received wisdom from the literature, much of which is not relevant in Irish conditions. He advocated preparing the soil for 'prairie' plants by mixing top and sub-soil so as to induce the plants to search for food to give a deep vertical root system, thus allowing the close planting of individual plants. I was particularly impressed by his

illustration of cross sections through a range of habitats, from woodland to the water's edge, providing differing habitats in terms of sun and soil moisture to support a diversity of plants.

Oliver illustrated his talk with reference to several gardens. One of these was the celebrated High Line in New York City, where he met the even more celebrated Piet Oudolf. Oliver pointed out this was unlikely to be as self-sustaining as claimed. Another example was the transformation of an urban bungalow with a front garden containing some fine trees but not much else of interest into a stepped amphitheatre surrounding a pond, the whole design adorned with his signature planting of perennials, particularly grasses. He showed several other inspiring but contrasting examples: the planting at Woodbrook golf club, where golfers can learn that there is more to grasses than a putting green; a garden in Connemara incorporating a former quarry; and a spiral design (unfortunately unrealized) for the vegetable garden at Airfield.

I learned a great deal from this talk and went home determined to pursue two of Oliver's ideas: the use of a render of hypertufa to ameliorate the brutish look of a concrete block wall and a trial of Lidl's cat litter as a component of compost.

George Sevastopulo

Myths, fantasy and frilly knickers', Assumpta Broomfield, 18

February

A cold and frosty evening, at the end of a demanding day at work, caused me to question whether I really wanted to go out to hear a talk which, as I smugly told myself, "can't really tell me much new." This ambivalence deepened on exposure to inexplicable heavy traffic, only arriving with moments to spare. Well-loved and familiar faces greeted me, as a medium sized crowd of enthusiasts and cognoscenti had gathered. Once embraced in that milieu of expectancy, all ambivalence was banished!

Assumpta Broomfield is well known to all plants-people in Ireland as a connoisseur of really good, garden worthy plants. She is no less well known for her generosity and willingness to share plants with other likeminded gardeners. On a previous occasion, this reporter had heard her give a memorable talk about climbing roses she had grown, and the abiding memory of that lecture was the combination of knowledge gained from growing the plants herself, observation of the same plants grown in other conditions and a smattering of amusing social anecdote about the plants, the gardens and the owners. Her talk on Irish snowdrops was a triumph of similar cocktail. Even the most casual listener could not fail to be captivated by the charm, erudition and memorable enthusiasm of our lecturer.



Agreed, seasoned galanthophiles will have known many of the snowdrops mentioned, indeed grown them, perhaps killed them, but never can such a confection of social history, original research and interesting anecdote, centred on gardeners of past generations who have contributed to our current store of distinctive snowdrops, been presented in their social and historical context to greater effect.

The sweep of this lecture was immense, incorporating local history of individual estates in the Ballitore area, particular families and individuals who fought in the Crimea, presumably returning with bulbs from those distant parts to enhance their home estates and gardens, the subsequent neglect of some of the associated gardens, latter day photographs of sites of these historical gardens as well as photographs of the same gardens in their heyday. Interspersed in all of this were anecdotes gleaned from personal interviews with elderly family relatives, some now gone, which distilled personal and family relationships, offering plausible insights into the manner in which snowdrop bulbs were shared between different gardeners, families and individuals, thus explaining the gradual colonization of individual bulbs beyond their initial garden of origin. Assumpta humanized the social interaction of gardeners of over a

hundred years ago by reproducing letters, photographs from family albums and recounting well-polished family histories to illuminate her talk. The bulbs were central to her talk, but the bulbs are well known to many of her listeners – what made this talk so fascinating was the historical detail she presented. The volume of research underpinning her talk was extraordinary. Repeatedly she showed photographs of abandoned gardens she had visited to see if the snowdrops still grew there, explaining the changes which had taken place and charting the survival of snowdrops where that could be reported.

Interestingly, she drew parallels between the growing and sharing of snowdrops with the development of some legends of Irish gardening. Homage was paid to Cicely and Robin Hall of Primrose Hill, Helen Dillon and David Shackleton, the latter largely responsible for some of the Irish cultivars finding their way into the catalogues of the Giant Snowdrop Company, operated by Colonel and Mrs Mathias and their chauffeur, Herbert Ransom, from their home in Gloucestershire in the 1950's and 60's. This was the first time, Assumpta suggests, that bulbs became more generally available beyond the preserve of a small social circle who shared bulbs among themselves. It is an observation endorsed by others working in the field of historical research of the galanthophile phenomenon whom this reporter has heard speak. This reporter would wholeheartedly agree with her assessment of Altamont as the premier snowdrop garden of the current age. Under the stewardship of Paul Cutler, current Head Gardener, the collection has grown from twenty-five named cultivars at the time of Mrs North's death in 1999 to the current large numbers, all well grown and beautifully labelled. His efforts are a testimony to what can be achieved in a modest, by gardening standards, timeframe.

Most gardeners are familiar with many of the more common Irish cultivars, such as 'Cicely Hall', 'Brenda Troyle', 'Coolballintaggart', 'Kildare', 'Greenfields', 'Castlegar', 'Emerald Isle' and 'Hill Poe'. Indeed, many will know the histories relevant to the discovery of these individual varieties, but to present this familiar material with such freshness, enlightened by new research was remarkable. The important

role of the late Rita Rutherford was acknowledged in championing the distribution of the snowdrop now known as 'Lady Moore'. This reporter heard Rita tell the story of how, going to an RHSI sale at the Mansion House with her Mother, she met Lady Moore, then resident in Rathfarnham. Lady Moore had a large clump of the eponymous snowdrop from her garden and gave some of the bulbs to the Rutherfords, Senior and Junior. Rita distributed it generously throughout her long life. Moreover, new Irish cultivars of more recent vintage were presented and their respective histories elucidated – these include 'Liam Schofield', 'Green Lantern', 'Drummond's Giant', 'Aughacrew', 'Glassdrum', 'Lady Ainsworth', 'Woodtown', 'Hillview', 'Barnhill', 'Jupe's Bell', 'Catherine McAuley', and 'Green Elwesii'.

There were surprises also – 'Mrs MacNamara', one of the best known early snowdrops and always in flower for Christmas is, according to the textbooks, named for Dylan Thomas' mother-in-law. It is less well known that the snowdrop emanated from a garden in Ennistymon, Co Clare where the eponymous lady had lived. Likewise, 'Castlegar', which we all know for its early flowering, and which was identified by Dr. Keith Lamb in the garden of Castlegar House, Galway, comes from a single clump within the old estate there, all other snowdrops in that garden being common *nivalis* forms.

Such was the enthusiasm of the speaker, who held her audience captive throughout a ninety-minute lecture, that it took an announcement from the Glasnevin security staff to the effect that the car park would close in a few minutes, to bring our memorable evening to a conclusion. This was a tour de force of a lecture, delivered in a warm, accessible, indeed affectionate style by a most unaffected and accomplished lecturer. It was a night to savour. Frost, traffic and the toils of the day notwithstanding, this attendee, at least, felt privileged to be present and was not alone, to judge by the mood of the audience.

Willie Reardon

Local Show, Members Plant Sale and Workshop, 5 March

There was a good attendance at the local show in St. Brigid's on a pleasant Saturday afternoon, but it is surprising that more members don't come along. This event presents an opportunity for members to see plants not normally seen at our main show in both the competitive and noncompetitive sections. Many of our best exhibitors have ventured on to the show bench for the first time at a local show. The informal atmosphere makes it ideal for first time exhibitors. There is also a section for photographs, which still has not attracted many entries, but provides an opportunity for members to learn the basics of exhibiting in the artistic section.

Entries in the competitive classes were of a high standard, the benches were well stocked and there was a good display in the non-competitive section.

As usual there was a very good plant sale of alpines and other plants, including a selection of named snowdrop cultivars at very reasonable prices. I picked up a couple to add to my collection.

The event also provides newer members with an opportunity to get answers to any cultivation or showing problems they might have, as there are always lots of experienced and knowledgeable gardeners available. This year, Liam Byrne shared his immense knowledge and experience of growing plants for showing with an enthusiastic audience. For the record George Sevastopulo got most points in the competitive section and the award for the best photo, and also took home the watering can trophy for the best plant, much to the chagrin of Gavin Moore's daughters, who, having become accustomed to seeing the trophy in their house for most of their lives, assumed it belonged to their father. Concluding with tea and biscuits the local show provides a great opportunity for members to socialize and improve their knowledge at no cost.

Billy Moore

‘The Stans – plant exploring in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, John Mitchell, 24 March

With seventy people in the audience there was obviously an expectation of a good talk, and indeed we were not disappointed. John Mitchell’s enviable task as part of RBG Edinburgh’s plant conservation is the collecting and describing of the flora of Central Asia – a vast area covering Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan – and training students from those countries in practical field botany and plant collecting, taking herbarium specimens, digital pictures, and documenting the flora, all essential tools in measuring plant populations and conservation needs over the years.

With a large population there is pressure from grazing from large flocks of sheep and goats, and also firewood collection, though this is often mainly shrubby *Artemesia* rather than trees. The knock-on effect of cutting *Artemesia* back is soil erosion as the plants normally reduce the effect of rainfall, so the soil fertility suffers, and with quicker water movement there is worse flooding downstream. The soil was often clayey, bone dry on the surface but with sufficient moisture underneath for growth, as always it’s essential to know and understand if trying to grow in cultivation.



With magnificent scenery pictures, there were far more excellent plant portraits than I can list. Spectacular were many *Iris - porphyrochrysa*, only found from one site, *magnifica* – up to a metre, much taller than the plant I struggle with, *bucharica* appearing after snow melt as many of these upland plants do, *vicaria*, *hoogiana*, and *zapryagazevii*. It was worth going to the lecture for the *Iris* alone. The botanist’s dilemma was the hybrid swarms that fell between species, with a great range of colours and growth habits

Then add in, again, often just as the snow melts, *Tulipa* – *heterophylla*, *greigii*, *zenaida*, *tarda*, *hissarica*, *turkestanica*, *linifolia*, *batalinii*, *fosteriana*, *grey-wilsonii*, and *buseana*. I cannot single any out, all were wonderful, and highly desirable too. Tajikistan Botanic Garden however had a display of Dutch Tulips that looked so out of place, yet they were very proud of them, as we would be having the species that gave us the breeding material to create the garden hybrids.

Add in the *Allium*, *Fritillaria*, *Dionysia*, *Arnebia*, *Androsace*, *Scutellaria*, *Cercis*, *Anemone*, *Corydalis*, *Adonis*, *Colchicum*, *Gymnospermium*, *Crocus*, *Astragalus*, incredible *Eremurus*, and *Primula* all excellent plants. Many of these were pictured in their thousands, covering hill sides – to be grazed off fairly quickly by goats or sheep in some places. Some species were found for the first time in this area, having been reported only from other Himalayan regions before, good botanical work helping conservation efforts.

One plant found after long and hard searching was *Hepatica falconeri*, only found previously in Kashmir. The marvellous dappled marking on the leaves make this a real breeder's delight in this wonderful genus.

With its recent history the area may not be top of the tourist trail, as pictures of the dynamited Buddhas at Bamiyan showed, but there are safe places, and some actively encourage tourism. The Ashuu Guesthouse in Kalmak Ashuu, Kyrgystan surprised everyone by having Wi-Fi connections, and walking, cycling, botanical tours are available.

An excellent talk, well delivered by a practical field botanist, with superb pictures of the plants, scenery, and people, a great evening indeed.

Stephen Butler

‘Trilliums and other woodland plants of North America’, Dr Keith Ferguson, 12 May

Dr Keith Ferguson's talk in Monkstown was both interesting and illuminating. He emphasized how important it is for successful cultivation of a plant to understand how it grows in the wild.

Keith is a graduate of Trinity College and worked at Kew for twenty-nine years, retiring as Deputy Keeper of the Herbarium. He has made seven trips to the U.S. in search of trilliums and other woodlanders in the wild, five to the eastern United States and two to the west. The main areas he visited in the east are the deciduous forests of the Cumberland Plateau at the



southern end of the Appalachian Mountains and Great Smokey National Park but many trilliums are also found as far north as the Great Lakes. In the west the coniferous forests of British Columbia, Washington State, Oregon and California are the principle areas of interest.

We were treated to a mesmerizing selection of beautiful photographs. The number of species growing in profusion in the wild is astonishing. Among those he mentioned was *T. grandiflorum* which has pedicellate white flowers and plain green foliage. It is widely distributed in the eastern U.S. but if you can't make it to the U.S. it can be seen bedded out in the National Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh in the first week in May. *T. ovatum*, which is like a small version of *grandiflorum*, can also be seen in huge clumps in Edinburgh.

T. erectum is another widely distributed eastern species with plain green foliage and pedicellate flowers (usually purple but also white). *T. simile* has a very localized distribution in the southern end of the Appalachians but it has black ovaries and can be confused with white forms of *T. erectum*. *T. pusillum* with frilly edges to the petals was highly recommended as a lovely plant. *T. luteum* with yellow sessile flowers and marbled foliage is well known in cultivation.

From the west coast, *T. albidum* has sessile petals and plain or slightly mottled leaves. It is both easy and common but no less lovely for all that.

T. kurabayashii, with deep purple petals and some marbling of the leaves has a more limited distribution being found mainly in California and southern Oregon.

Propagation is far from simple. Keith described it as something of a black art. Seed, which has double dormancy, should be collected before it is ripe, sown immediately in John Innes seed compost and covered with grit. It will usually take until the spring twelve months later to germinate, although after one very cold winter Keith had seedlings the following spring. Prick off in pairs and settle in for a long wait. Keith showed us a very interesting photo of seven pots each representing year one to year seven of growth. In year seven the first flower appeared. To ensure success it is advisable to use blood, fish and bone and give seedlings a foliar feed every ten days. What could be simpler?

T. rivale is much easier. It is from the western United States and is easily raised from seed. It flowers within two years of sowing. It will even come from dried seed which is highly unusual among trilliums. It has white pedicellate flowers spotted pink, yellow anthers and plain foliage. 'Purple Heart' is a particularly lovely selection. It requires a moisture retentive soil and prefers to be in the ground. Certainly worth a try.

With an established trillium plant it is possible to encourage clumping by the following method. As the leaves fade lift clumps and inspect rhizomes for lateral buds. Cut into the rhizomes between the buds but don't cut through more than a few millimetres. This will encourage the buds to break and encourage clumping without setting back flowering.

The final and possibly the most important recommendation on the cultivation of trilliums is to use liquid Slugit in late February to reduce slug damage.

Moving on to other woodlanders Keith noted that most of these, including the trilliums, tend to grow along the edges of trails and in forest clearings. This is particularly true of those species growing in the deciduous forests of the eastern United States where the summer canopy shades out summer growth.

Among those he mentioned were *Claytonia virginica* and *C. carolina* which

carpets huge areas. *Rhododendron catawbiense* was the only rhododendron he showed us as there are few native to the U.S. For *Dicentra cucullaria*, he suggested planting it between deciduous ferns as it comes up in April, flowers late April and dies down by the beginning of June. The same applies to *D. canadensis* which is also an eastern species, and many other woodlanders can be treated this way.

He mentioned two erythroniums from the west, *E. oreganum*, which bulks up quite quickly, and *E. citrinum* which has beautifully marked foliage, pale yellow flowers and comes easily from seed. *E. americanum* from the eastern woodlands was not recommended as it produces few flowers for a metre of foliage. *Calochortus elegans* from the western United States is easy in pots and should be plunged. *Sanguinaria canadensis* grows along margins in the east, the flowers are short lived but the foliage remains attractive over a long period. In the same family *Stylophorum diphyllum* can be invasive. *Anemonella thalictroides*, like *Mertensia virginica*, the American bluebell, doesn't like competition.

Phlox divaricata has a wonderful scent, 'Clouds of Perfume' is a good form and is easy to grow. The eastern *Iris cristata* is ideal for troughs, and rhizomes should be planted on top of the soil. *I. Innominata* has yellow flowers with good markings and is from the west. Keith recommended growing it from seed.

He has seen sheets of *Viola pedata*, which is difficult in cultivation, growing beside wheel ruts on a forest track. *Silene virginica* needs excellent drainage and resents competition as in nature it grows on rocky outcrops. *Disporum smithii* was highly recommended for its ease of cultivation, creamy white bell-like flowers followed by orange fruits in late summer.

If you are looking for a statement plant Keith recommends *Diphylleia cymosa*. It is five feet tall with white flowers, followed by spectacular blue berries on red pedicels and is easy to grow when given a moisture-retentive soil.

Keith finished his lecture with a look at some of his favourite North American ferns. He described *Polystichum munitum*, the sword fern, as a

must have plant. It is evergreen, a metre tall, biddable and very easy. If you require something smaller *P. acrostichoides* is equally good. *Mettenuccia struthiopteris* the Shuttlecock Fern is deciduous and needs a moist soil. *Adiantum pedatum* is also deciduous and has delicate maidenhair foliage. They both work well with Spring woodlanders taking over when the woodlanders die down in summer.

It was a very informative and inspiring lecture and I will certainly be trying some of Keith's recommendations.

Triona Corcoran

Visit to the Burren and Carl Wright's garden, 14,15 May

Twenty-nine members of the Dublin Group subscribed to the two-day trip to the Burren, most efficiently organized and managed by Paddy Smith and Billy Moore. It was a special pleasure to have in our number several members who live outside the greater Dublin area.



After an early start, the coach delivered us to Doolin Garden and Nursery mid-morning and we met up with Carl Wright, who was to be our guide for the weekend. Doolin Garden has been created by Matt O'Connell. Matt grows a wide range of mostly perennial plants that provided a colourful display and showed how plants can flourish in an exposed coastal garden if attention is paid to shelter from the wind. Many of the plants on show in the garden were available for sale at the nursery and, as usual, many of the travellers could not resist the temptation to buy. Two plants in particular caught my eye: a magnificent semi-double, orange *Chaenomeles* that had been expertly pruned to cover the side of Matt's house; and a *Gladiolus* sp. in

the sales area (yes, I succumbed), which was a much softer pink than *G. byzantinus*, which it otherwise resembled.

After picnicking in Matt's garden, shaded from the magnificent sunshine that was to be the hallmark of the weekend, we proceeded to Poll Salach. There Carl demonstrated the wonders of the karstic landscape, including the glacial erratics perched on pedestals, which provide estimates of the rate of limestone solution (on the order of 30-50mm



per thousand years). We scoured the limestone pavement, the scailps (grykes) and the areas of short turf on both sides of the road for the early summer representatives of the Burren flora, and they were there aplenty. The Burren rockrose, *Helianthemum oelandicum* subsp. *piloselloides*, was in fine fettle, with Spring Gentian, *Gentiana verna*, the first flowers on the Bloody Cranesbill, *Geranium sanguineum*, nice tuffets of the Spring Sandwort, *Minuartia verna*, and some lovely cushions of the Irish Saxifrage, *Saxifraga rosacea* (below). Carl showed us the Sea Spleenwort, *Asplenium maritimum*, in the scailps near the sea, and, after a concentrated search on the inland side of the road, he found Pyramidal Bugle, *Ajuga pyramidalis*, and the white form of the Early Purple Orchid, *Orchis mascula*.

We then drove past fields of cowslips east of Ballyvaghan, to Kinvara, where we stayed overnight and had an excellent meal in the Pier Head Restaurant. The following morning, we travelled to Carl's Caher Bridge Garden, which is on the road through the Khyber Pass, east of Fanore.

Carl told us the history of this unique garden, which has been developed over some seventeen years starting from a broken down house and a tangle of blackthorn, hazel and briars. To describe it to the extent it deserves would take more space than is available here. In short Carl has created a remarkable garden that blends seamlessly with the Caher River,



Saxifraga rosacea in the Burren. (photo: Billy Moore)

the surrounding woodland and the rocky landscape of the Burren. Not only is the overall concept and design masterly, but there also are many delightful features within the garden, including the much photographed moon window, architectural exposed tree roots and areas of the limestone pavement bedrock. But it's not just the design and the amount of work required that make the garden remarkable, so too is the planting: this is truly a plantsman's garden. Carl has amassed an extraordinary range of trees, shrubs, climbers, herbaceous and rock

garden plants. There are extensive collections of species and cultivars of *Arisaema*, *Brunnera*, *Celmisia*, *Crataegus*, *Hosta*, *Mahonia* and ferns and many other groups of plants, including snowdrops and Irish cultivars of daffodils. Every member of the party will have picked their own favourites. My eye was caught, in particular, by *Celmisia asteliaefolia* and a very good silver form of *C. semicordata*, which seem to thrive in the warm damp climate of the Burren, and an almost black-flowered *Tulbaghia*-like bulb that I have been unable to identify.

After picnicking in the garden, again under a clear blue sky and in warm sunshine, we reluctantly tore ourselves away to start the journey home. We stopped briefly on the road between Fanore and Black Head to photograph splendid stands of Mountain Avens, *Dryas octopetala*; by good fortune, this turned out to be a very good place to see *Gentiana verna* in all its brilliant, blue glory. After a brief stop at the Pinnacle Well to reassure ourselves of the health of the ‘blow-in’ Fairy Foxglove, *Erinus alpinus*, we travelled on to Corcomroe Abbey to give thanks to ‘Our Lady of the Fertile Stones’ for all that is the Burren and for a wonderful two days.

George Sevastopulo



Carl Wright's Moon Window. (photo: Billy Moore)



The Happy Gardener, Carl in his garden. (Photo: George Sevastopulo)

FIXTURES

Thursday, 20 October, 8 pm. John Amand, ‘Unusual bulbs and how they get to your garden’. Bringing Bulbs for sale. NBG, Glasnevin. **Joint with IGPS.**

Thursday, 10 November, 8 pm. John Richards, ‘Some Asiatic primulas’. St Brigid’s Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

18 to 20 November, 33rd Alpine Weekend, Peter Korn, John Massey, Martin Walsh. An Grianán, Termonfeckin, Co. Louth.

Thursday, 1 December, 8.00 pm. Christmas Miscellany. St Brigid’s Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

More details about the fixtures can be found on p. 7.

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Val Keegan's lovely *Trillium rivale* at Greenmount, see p. 12. (Photo: Heather Smith)