



# **ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY**

## **Dublin Group**

[www.alpinegardensociety.ie](http://www.alpinegardensociety.ie)



**NEWSLETTER NO. 70 – SUMMER 2018**

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Front cover illustration is of *Roscoeae humeana alba* in the Editor's garden in late May  
– see p.5. (Photo: Billy Moore)

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## ALPINE MISCELLANY

It has been a very difficult year in the garden with a long cold winter, hardly any spring and a blazing summer which has given rise to a serious drought which persists as I write. Plants have died in my garden and, given the watering restrictions, more will follow unless we get significant rain very soon. It has, however been a good year for the Group with a very full programme which, as you can gauge from the reports below, has been varied and interesting. My thanks to all the contributors for their excellent work. I particularly enjoyed Rose Sevastopulo's evocative account of the garden visit in February and was amazed at the wealth of detail in Liam McCaughey's report on Cliff Booker's talk.

Having such a full programme, of course, means extra work for the Fixtures Secretary and we must say a special word of thanks to Triona for all her efforts so far in 2018.

The Show this year was one of our best ever, but as we have the earlier date, next year will be more challenging. Gavin has a few words of advice below for prospective exhibitors.

### **Facebook page and website** from Fionnuala Broughan

This year, the Committee agreed that it would be good to re-design and move the Society's website to something a little easier to use for our members and easier to maintain for your committee. We asked Neal Walsh to do the re-design for us (Neal has designed websites for the Dublin Garden Group, Jimi Blake, the IGPS and others) and the new site went live just before our Main Show earlier this year. The site is based on WordPress and its management is now shared between Jamie and me.

We've kept the content from the old site, but we've added a calendar of events—so you can check any time what's coming up—and we've also included a 'feed' from our own Facebook page so you can see more recent updates, bits of news, items of interest etc. Crucially, the site is designed to work on any device, not just computers but also tablets and smartphones.

There are still a few minor issues with moving content and with displaying it, mainly due to the volume of content that we have and the

size of some of the photographic files. But we're working our way through these bit by bit with Neal's help, and we hope the site will be running very smoothly when our season kicks off again in the Autumn.

Also, we've started to use our Facebook page more this year. We're delighted that Billy has been posting beautiful photos of his plants as these always generate a lot of interest. We note that others have been leaving visitor posts too and we do our best to re-post these when we see them. We've also started to share items that we feel will be of general interest to our members and followers (such as links to Ian Young's Bulb Log or information from the Burren National Park), so do keep an eye on it! And, of course, we use the page to promote our activities so we post photos of our shows and trips to give people a taste of what the Society offers. We're pleased to note that the number of page followers has gone up from 1600 a year ago to about 1900 this July. If you've any suggestions about what you'd like to see on the Society's Facebook page or website, do let either Jamie or me know.

### **Annual Show** from Gavin Moore

With all the dry weather that we've been having, the weeds seem to have slowed down a little in my garden. As a result, I finally managed to get around to pricking out seedlings and get some re-potting done. Immediately it made me think of how well these plants might look on a show bench sitting proudly behind a red sticker. If you plan to exhibit at a local or main show next year (and you really should), now is the time to start planning.

If you have a plant that you think could win you a prize, and if you have not yet re-potted it in 2018, then you need to do it now. I find that even if a plant has not yet outgrown its home, knocking off some old compost, refreshing it and putting it back in the same pot is still a very valuable exercise. Show plants should be re-potted once a year, possibly more depending on their vigour.

If you grow your alpines from seed (and again, you really should), now is the time to prick out the seedlings. When doing so, make sure to do a

couple extra and keep them aside for the plant sales at our local and main shows in 2019.

Finally, in a few weeks, the garden centres will be full of spring bulbs. I've said it many times but I'll say it again, the easiest way to create a show plant is to buy bulbs, so why not give it a try. There are many options that are suitable for showing, but also many that are not. If you need some guidance, contact me or any other seasoned exhibitor for advice. We're always willing to help.

## **Fixtures**

On Thursday, **18 October**, **Ian Christie** will give us a talk in St Brigid's entitled 'Thirty-five years and still growing'. Ian hardly needs any introduction as we have had talks from him in the past. His alpine nursery in Kirriemuir in Scotland, which has been in business for almost forty years, is very well known and admired. He specializes in alpine plants, woodland plants, meconopsis, trilliums, lilies, nomocharis, and has a specialist collection of rare and unusual Snowdrops. He is an experienced speaker and traveller and is heavily involved with the SRGC of which he is a past president. This opportunity to hear a talk from this master plantsman is not to be missed.

**Jamie and Amanda Chambers** travelled to Bhutan last year on a trip led by Martin Walsh. It was gruelling, but rewarding in terms of plants found. Jamie will tell us about his experiences on **8 November**, also in St Brigid's, and I expect that we will have a record turnout for this talk which he is calling 'Insane? Or an ardent botanist?'. See you there.

From **16 to 18 November** our **35<sup>th</sup> Alpine Weekend** will take place in An Grianán in Termonfeckin. As usual, we have a great line-up this year with **Brian Burrow**, **Mike Keep** and **Bob and Rannveig Wallis**. I well remember one participant at the weekend a few years ago saying that Termonfeckin had the same priority as Christmas in her calendar. If you've been before you know what to expect, and I hope you'll join us again this year. If you've never been you should give it a try. You won't regret it. Full details of the programme and a booking form are in your mailout.

Our last event for 2018 on **6 December** is the annual **Christmas Miscellany** where we will hear from members about their plant experiences during the year. There will be fun and seasonal refreshments so please come along with a selection of your favourite plant pictures. Jamie will send you all a reminder shortly beforehand.

### **Roscoea humeana alba**

This was one of my favourite plants in the garden this year and I pictured it on the front cover to encourage you all to look out for it. It is a superb plant, easy and increases well.

### **Keith Lever**

Most members will be aware of the sad news that Dr Keith Lever, proprietor, with his wife, Rachel, of Aberconwy Nursery for more than thirty-five years, has died. Many members will have met Keith and have benefited from his advice on how to grow the superb alpines sold by his nursery. He was a warm and friendly man and will be missed by alpine growers here and in the UK. No one will miss him more than Rachel, Tim and the family and we send our sincere condolences to them all.

### **Frank Kennedy**

I have just heard of the death of Frank, beloved husband of our long-standing and popular member, Pat. Frank was a devoted husband, father and grandfather and his passing is a huge loss to Pat and all the family. Our sincere condolences go to them all.

**Billy Moore**

## Ranunculaceae

Members of the Ranunculaceae family are found in most parts of the world but principally in the Northern hemisphere. They range from lowland plants to high alpiners and can have tuberous or fibrous root systems. While some can be persistent weeds many are excellent garden plants. The smaller species are ideal for the rock garden or for pots in the alpine house.

I grow a number of plants from the family that I regard as real treasures.

*Anemone nemorosa* in all its forms is a beautiful, easy, plant, ideal for the woodland garden. Another easy plant for a light-shaded position is

*Anemone x intermedia* with soft yellow flowers in April. *Anemonella*

*thalictroides* f. *rosea* 'Oscar Schoaf' is fairly rare and a real beauty. If you can get your hands on it give it a humus rich soil in light shade and enjoy its lovely double pink flowers from March to May. It is slow to increase and is dormant from mid-summer. From the Himalayas, *Anemone obtusiloba* 'Big Blue' requires similar conditions and flowers from April to June but the form, 'Pradesh', with flowers which



range from white to rich blue on the same plant, is very special. It is also a woodlander and needs good drainage.

*Pulsatilla vernalis*, sometimes called 'the lady of the snows', is one of the most beautiful alpiners and, although not easy, is worth trying for its white, somewhat hairy, bell shaped flowers, flushed blue, which appear in March/April. It needs humus rich, well-drained soil in full sun. It is perhaps best grown in a pot. A plant to tax your growing skills is *Ranunculus parnassifolius* from the Alps and Pyrenees. It has dark, glossy green leaves and flowers with overlapping white petals with pinkish margins in May/June.



For growing most of these plants in pots the compost I use is one part peat, one part leaf mould, one part good garden loam and one part fine grit, mixed thoroughly, giving a normal supply of water during the growing season. The high alpine plants need sharper drainage so my compost for them is one part good garden loam, one part leaf mould and three parts fine grit. I always advise, however, that if the compost mix you use is working, stick with it. Finally, I remember Brian Burrow in his talk a few years ago recommending that members of the Ranunculaceae, especially when grown in pots, appreciate a regular feed of tomato fertilizer while in growth, a recommendation I fully agree with.

**Liam Byrne**



Susan Tindall's lovely *Anemonella thalictroides* f. *rosea* 'Oscar Schoaf' at the Dublin Show. (Photo: Billy Moore)



## THE SHOWS

### **Ulster Group Show, 7 April**

The fine display of plants on the benches on the day banished our fears that this year's Ulster show would be affected adversely by the long, cold, winter, and almost non-existent spring. While entries were down only marginally, there was a marked difference in the genera shown as compared with most Ulster shows of the past: for example, there were no gentians, and hardly any members of the Ericaceae, which usually had a strong presence in previous years. Plants like hepaticas, early primulas and dionysias, however, were still bench-worthy and compensated for the absence of some of the regulars. The result was that Pat Crossley was able to chalk up another success in her long career as Show Secretary. As always, she and her team ensured that everything ran smoothly, and the judges were kept in line firmly, but sensitively, by the ever-cheerful Director of Shows, Martin Rogerson.

The show hall was enhanced by an informative and attractive special exhibit on the Burren prepared by George Sevastopulo. It occupied the space which once was the home of the late and much-lamented Artistic Section which, at least for this reporter, always added an extra dimension to the shows and is missed. George is a Burren enthusiast and a regular visitor. As well as detailed graphics on the history, flora and geology of the region and the conservation issues that arise, the exhibit also included some thirty photographs of the Burren and its plants sourced by George from members of the Dublin Group. The exhibit generated a lot of interest and was given a Gold Award.

Members of the Dublin Group featured strongly among the exhibitors, underlining once again the dependence of each group on the other at show time. A very welcome feature of the show was the strength of both the Novice and Intermediate sections which bodes well for the future. There were 164 plants from twenty exhibitors in the Open Section; fifty-one from twelve in the Intermediate; and thirty-six from six in the Novice Section.



Gordon Finch, (Belfast), won the trophy for the highest aggregate points in the Novice Section. One of his entries was a nice specimen of *Shortia uniflora*, an unusual exhibit in this section at any show.

Best plant in flower in the section was *Primula* 'Clarence Elliott' (above) from Triona Corcoran, (Dublin), and Triona also got the award for the best pan of Ericaceae on the Novice bench, *Pieris japonica* 'Erik'.

The award for the highest aggregate points in the Intermediate Section went to Kay McDowell, (Limavady), whose lovely, dark-flowered *Trillium chloropetalum*, was adjudged best bulbous plant in the section. Gordon Toner (Limavady), of whom more later, was awarded a Certificate of Merit for a larger specimen of the same plant in the Open Section, which I suspect was the parent of Kay's. Nancy Derby's, (Bangor), *Shortia uniflora* (below) was the best plant in the Intermediate Section.

Hepaticas are appearing more often at the earlier shows and the late



season saw more than usual at Ulster. Susan Tindall, (Ballynahinch), received a well-deserved Certificate of Merit for her fine exhibit of *H. japonica*

‘Haruno-awayuki’ (right). Paddy Smith’s *H. nobilis* was also much admired. Back to Gordon Toner, who is without a doubt now Ulster’s top exhibitor, and who had most



aggregate points in the Open Section. He also got an AGS Medal for his large six pan entry; a trophy for his *Trillium rivale*, raised from seed; the Festival of Britain trophy for class 2, three pans rock plants, distinct genera, which included his eye-catching *Pulsatilla* ‘Budapest Blue’, for which he was awarded a Certificate of Merit. He was given this plant some years ago by Harold McBride who enjoyed the show and, with his wife Gwen, was a most welcome guest at the judges’ lunch.

Paddy Smith, (Navan), who in your reporter’s opinion is now Dublin’s top exhibitor, also brought home a lot of silverware. Paddy is well known as an expert grower of gentians, but his talents are not confined to that genus. Few growers can match his skill with *Cyclamen persicum*, as evident by several fine specimens that he had on the bench. My favourite, although it came second in class 66, one pan rock plant grown from seed, was a most elegant specimen with white flowers and beautifully marked foliage (below). These plants are given careful watering by Paddy and he ensures that they are exposed to as much sunshine as possible during the summer so that the corms are well ripened. The winner of class 66 was Gavin Moore’s, (Dublin), very nice *Saxifraga strobilata*. Paddy’s *Ozothamnus coralloides* was the best plant from Australasia and his three rock plants from seed, including another lovely *C. persicum*, earned him the Phoebe Anderson Trophy.

Frank Lavery,  
(Dublin), won the  
award for the best  
pan of Ericaceae  
for his well-  
flowered entry of  
*Rhododendron*  
‘Snipe’.

Finally, it is always  
difficult for a show  
reporter to write  
about her/his  
successes, but it  
must be done, so,  
here goes. My

*Trillium chloropetalum* ‘Bob Gordon’ was awarded the Frank Walsh Cup  
for the bulbous class 13; my *Dionysia aretioides* ‘Phyllis Carter’ got the  
award for the best plant in a 19cm pot; and its grandfather, or, maybe  
great grandfather was awarded the Farrer Medal. I have kept this  
dionysia going for about forty years, but I think this is only the second  
time that I was able to exhibit it as it’s usually going over by early April.  
So, I have to be grateful for the late season – it’s an ill wind etc.



**Author: Billy Moore**

**Photographer: Heather Smith**

### **Dublin Group AGS Show, 28 April**

A wonderful sunny morning greeted us as we arrived at the Dublin Show – a bonus after a long cold winter and virtually no spring, which had caused concern to all exhibitors. However the Cabinteely school assembly hall was laden with beautifully presented alpines, their perfume sweetening the early morning air. Even though it was a short three weeks since Dublin and Ulster exhibitors had met at the Ulster Show, there was much camaraderie and chat. The AGS Dublin Group provided very welcome homemade goodies for early morning exhibitors. The



show Hall was enhanced by an informative exhibit on the Burren prepared by George Sevastopulo, surveying the history, flora and geology of the region, with some excellent photos of the area and its plants. This caused much interest among members of the general public, who attended in large numbers on a gorgeous sunny day. This exhibition had won a Gold Award at the Ulster Show.

Gavin Moore was cheerful and efficiently in control of the willing volunteers on this, his fourth time as show secretary. The quiet harmony of everyone working together was carried through by the Director of Shows Martin Rogerson, who led the judges in a firm but relaxed manner.

A novel idea of the Dublin Show committee was a show guide for each member of the general public. This showed the position of commercial stalls with their names and the layout of the Show Hall. On the back there was the opportunity to nominate their favourite



plant, as well as the request for their email address and options to receive notification of next year's show date, and further information about the Alpine Garden Society. Interestingly the public's favourite plant was a pan of pleiones (above) shown by novice exhibitor Janet Wynne, displayed in an attractive clay pot made by her mother. An excellent raffle table with a good selection of prizes was manned by willing helpers throughout the afternoon, who raised a substantial amount of money.

During the afternoon, quiet background live piano playing added to the buzz as visitors viewed the excellent plants on the bench. Trilliums were very much in evidence, and certainly created the wow factor! They

earned two awards for top Ulster exhibitor and expert grower of trilliums, Gordon Toner, namely the Margaret Orsi Bowl for the best plant from North America, and his third Farrer Medal with *Trillium albidum*. Gordon grew this from seed sown in 2002. His trilliums are pot-grown until the clumps outstrip their containers, whereupon they are planted out in the garden. The compost is a mixture of leaf-mould and garden soil, kept well-watered, with a dusting of blood, fish and bone. While kept in the open for most of the year, they are brought under glass shortly before the shows.

Another of Gordon's first prize-winning entries was labelled *Trillium grandiflorum* 'Variegatum'. This unusual plant was much admired and had been given to Gordon by another great North West gardener, the late Doreen Moody. Another Trillium won the Millennium Cup for best plant in the Novice Section, Janet Wynne's *T. rivale* 'Winifred Murray'. This is only her second year showing. Now around six years old, her plant is kept in a long tom, to which it was moved last year, in a mixture of John Innes no. 3 plus grit and leaf-mould. It stays outside, whatever the weather!

It was great to see some magnificent pans of gentians on the bench (the genus was absent from the Ulster Show, but the milder weather now





brought them to their full glory). A beautifully presented pot of *Gentiana verna* (above) earned a Certificate of Merit for Paddy Smith, as well as a first in the class 'native to Ireland'. Paddy grows his wonderful plants in 25% garden soil, the same quantity leaf mould with the remainder made up of grit, and some bone meal. He emphasises that the plant must not dry out.

An excellently presented collection of six plants won the AGS Medal in the Open 19cm class for Billy Moore, a talented perfectionist whose attention to detail is apparent in every plant he produces for the bench.

In the Intermediate Section one of the three Ulster exhibitors, Gordon Finch, won the Waverley Trophy for a wonderful pan of *Tulipa cretica* 'Archanes'. The bulbs are grown in a mixture of vermiculite and garden soil, and kept in a plunge bed in a polytunnel.

The Jacki Troughton-Smith Trophy for the best pan of Ericaceae was won by long-time exhibitor Liam Byrne with *Rhododendron* 'Ginny Gee', which makes annual appearances at the Ulster and Dublin Shows. Now 10 years old, it is kept in a pot rather than lifted from the open ground for exhibit.



The David Shackleton Trophy for the best pan of Primulaceae was won by show secretary Gavin with his pan of *Primula henrici*, which won a Farrer at the Ulster Show in 2017. An extremely lean mixture is used and water is always given with care from the base (rotting at the neck is an ever-present threat with this species). It is covered all year by a frame.

Five exhibitors presented wonderful entries of pleiones. Singled out for mention here is *P. 'Shantung'*, (above) entered by Ulster showers George and Pat Gordon. They grow their pleiones in bark and sphagnum moss, applying weak tomato feed when in full leaf, and repot in January in



fresh compost. Water is withheld until the leaves start to grow.

Further Certificates of Merit went to Liam Byrne's beautifully grown pan of *Androsace studiosorum* (above) and Susan Tindall's *Anemonella thalictroides* 'Oscar Schoaf' (see p. 7 ). Her original plant, a gift from the late Carol McCutcheon twenty-five years ago, grows very happily on her rock garden.

There were two new exhibitors at the Dublin Show which always augurs well for the future, and the Novice Section, while low in exhibitors, was high in quality. A wonderful, happy Show was how I would describe



Dublin 2018, with warm sunshine and a large number of visitors, superb plants and a constant buzz! Well done Gavin and team, and in conclusion I'll add a notice from the Cabinteely wall: 'The sun sets, only to rise again!'

**Author: Pat Crossley**  
**Photographer: Billy Moore**



Gordon Toner with his Farrer plant.

## REVIEW OF RECENT GROUP EVENTS

**AGM**, 18<sup>th</sup> January

The business of the AGM was completed quickly, and the out-going Committee was re-elected *en bloc*. We had expected to have a talk from Zoë Devlin but she was unwell so three of our members stepped in.

Val Keegan was first up with a talk entitled 'Plantless photos', which was based on images taken from the archives. She began by showing some from the first show in Kilruddery House, Bray. Photos of some famous gardeners of the past included Molly Sanderson, David Shackleton and Keith Lamb.

Pictures of the Group's 21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary workshop in 2004 held in Val and Ian's garden brought back memories for some, and were followed by images from the 2005 trip to Wales which included Aberconwy, Bodnant and John Good's garden. A photo of participants waiting for the ferry home with a 'few' plants caused some amusement.

There were plenty of photos of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations in the Botanic Gardens showing our old friend, the late Arthur Dagge, and Bob Gordon planting the beautiful silver birch, 'Trinity', presented to us by the Ulster Group. Helen Dillon looked well receiving her life membership and we admired the magnificent cake that Rose Sevastopulo made for the occasion being cut by Carl Dacus.

Val showed us pictures of our long-time Secretary, Joan Carvill and some from the Nottingham Conference in 2011 where Martin Walsh was one of the speakers and George Sevastopulo conducted the auction, and finished with photos of the trip to Latvia in 2013. The presentation was a great trip down memory lane.

Next was Jamie Chambers who spoke on 'Winter flowers of the Waterford Greenway'. Jamie and Amanda stayed near Lismore and hired



bicycles to cycle the Greenway. He began by showing the pre-Raphaelite artist Edward Burne Jones's stained glass window in Lismore Cathedral. It is called 'Justice and Humility' and is very beautiful.

The Greenway runs from Dungarvan to Waterford along the old railway line and stretches for 45km. The plants which Jamie showed in his lovely photo presentation may be common in Ireland but seeing them this way made us look at them more closely. They included Winter Heliotrope, *Petasites fragrans* - only the male plant grows in Ireland and is not a native but escaped from gardens; *Veronica persica* (Speedwell); *Ulex europaeus* (gorse); *Taraxacum officinale* (dandelion) which has health properties in its roots; *Solidago virgaurea* (goldenrod); as well as primroses, hogweed and hawkweed, all identified with the help of Zoë Devlin's book on wild flowers of Ireland.

Jamie also showed lovely views of Helvik Head and the Comeragh Mountains as well as the River Suir at Mount Congreve, and more lovely flowers such as scabious, yarrow, wild carrot, ox-eye daisy, red poppy and campion.

The bikes which they hired in Dungarvan were left in Waterford and Jamie and Amanda were driven back to their starting point. It was all well organised, and it sounded like a very good day out.

George Sevastopulo then spoke on 'I wish I could grow them like this'. While George grows many wonderful plants, he would like to be able to grow snowdrops in the drifts seen in Altamont Gardens, or *Tulipa doerfleri*, growing in Spili, Crete, and nowhere else; delicate white *Tulipa cretica*; fabulous, scented *Trillium luteum* in the Great Smokey Mountains National Park in Tennessee; *Colchium macrophyllum* growing in Crete, once again. *Sternbergia sicula*, which needs more heat than we can give to get it to flower - Brian Duncan uses an oven.

George showed us a beautiful clump of *Cypripedium calceolus* in Italy which had disappeared when he went back to see it at a later date having being dug up. Then on to thousands of *Primula spectabilis* flowering after snow melt in a small area in the Passo di Croce Domini, Italy; and *Polygala calcarea* at the Rock Garden Show in Prague. Not all of his



photos were of faraway places: one was of *Cyclamen coum* in Primrose Hill, Lucan and the Burren was represented by *Gentiana verna*.

George showed us many more marvellous pictures of plants from all over the world and had amusing stories and tips on how they should be grown. He finished by showing us ‘the queen of alpins’, *Daphne petraea*, which, I suspect, is George’s favourite plant.

I really enjoyed this unusual evening of varied talks given by our talented members.

**Barbara O’Callaghan**

### **Visit to snowdrop gardens, 10 February**



#### **Emer Gallagher’s garden, ‘Barnhill’**

You may be familiar with Monty Don’s ‘Jewel Garden’ but have you heard of Emer Gallagher’s Winter Jewel Garden in Clonsilla? In February we were dazzled by her *Galanthus*, *Crocus* and *Cyclamen*; *Eranthis hyemalis* seeding around in the gravel paths; *Hepatica* ssp; and even a few miniature *Narcissus* sparkling in the Winter sunshine

which we were lucky enough to have on the day of our outing. Emer is definitely a Galanthophile and had a printed list of all her snowdrops (all 200 of them that is!) for each of us. She has been collecting; buying and swopping for twenty years .

The garden is made up of a number of beds surrounding the house, some planted with trees; *Nothofagus dombeyi*, *Cornus officinalis* with its lovely leaves just emerging, *Cornus* ‘Porlock’, a flowering and fruiting small tree, a *Larix* with *Clematis urophylla* ‘Winter Beauty’ scampering through it showing off its lovely bell flowers, to mention but a few. As I write I hope C. ‘Winter Beauty’ is surviving the Beast from the East that is blowing outside! Snowdrops, snowdrops everywhere..., double ones,



tall and short ones, green tinted ones and yellow ones. All the beds are planted with snowdrops; large clumps of *G. 'S. Arnott'* are used as a repeating plant. A big patch of *G. 'Gerard Parker'* caught the eye with its very large flowers. We saw *G. 'Margaret Owen'*, another very good snowdrop and *G. 'Imbolc'*, short but very stout and *G. 'Penelope Ann'* which Emer considers a wonderful cultivar. Moving round to the front of the house there were lots of admirers for the groups of *G. 'Wendy's Gold.'* A very strong large flowered snowdrop appears in great profusion throughout the garden: *G. 'Barnhill.'* Emer received this from the Shackleton garden, *Beech Park.* Over the years she showed it to many Galanthophiles but nobody could name it so it is now called 'Barnhill.' Opposite the house there was a nice low box hedge acting as a backdrop for a long row of double snowdrops, a lovely idea. There were lots of *G. woronowii* in a corner bed. I asked Emer what comes on after the snowdrops in that bed and she told me that it was allowed to rest as she and her husband hang two hammocks from the trees overhead so they can lounge and sip a glass of wine on a nice summer afternoon. That's the kind of gardening I like! However, I did notice in all the other beds the noses of narcissi just over ground, lots of hellebores and a very striking *Bergenia 'Eric Smith'*. I'm sure that garden is as good in other seasons as it is in Winter.

### **Eileen Collins's Garden 'Twin Chimneys'**

After lunch we visited Eileen Collins in Celbridge. Hers is not just another snowdrop garden. Of course, because of the time of year there were many of the same plants as at *Barnhill*, and Eileen also has a lot of island beds, but there the similarity ends. This garden is at the end of a country lane, backing onto the wall of Castletown House estate on two sides, and with a long beech hedge planted by Eileen on the third side, beautifully private and full of atmosphere. From the gate there is a wonderful view right across the garden, the large pond in the foreground, great spreads of *Cyclamen coum* in all directions and snowdrops drifting off into the distance.

It was a very wet site when they acquired it, so Eileen and her husband Gerry planted a lot of trees through the property to soak up the water.

There was a beautiful *Acer griseum* with very attractive peeling bark alongside a multi stemmed *Betula albosinensis*. There were a number of other *Betulas* all grown from pre-germinated seed by Eileen, a packet of seed costing £2.50. There were several *Nothofagus* as they are not attractive to grey squirrels of which Eileen and Gerry have many in the garden. The trees and the quiet make it a magical garden, a light woodland well away from the city noises. Eileen's use of the trees in the flower beds gives a very nice recurring theme. The beds, beautifully constructed by Gerry, were full of a myriad of snowdrops with lovely splashes of colour created by *Cyclamen coum*. The bed opposite the house had a big clump of *Galanthus* 'Primrose Warburg' a good yellow. Some of the others we saw were *G.* 'Bill Bishop', *G.* 'Icicle', *G. ikariae*, *G.* 'E A Bowles', *G.* 'Margaret Owen' and *G.* 'The Whopper'. The centres of the beds were filled with *G.* 'S. Arnott' and *G.* 'Galatea'. We wondered if these beds would be bare when the snowdrops died down but no. After the snowdrops come *Erythronium dens-canis*, *Corydalis* and *Fritillaria meleagris*, followed by Martagon lilies and later *Cyclamen hederifolium*! More beds contained sterile hellebores, 'Anna's Red', a much-coveted plant in one bed and 'Harvington Rebekah' in another. This was my absolute favourite with deep pink buds opening to a lovely soft pink with slightly picotee edges, a stunning plant. There were also nice yellow hellebores, but these were not sterile.

I counted six large troughs and several small ones. In front of the house was a magnificent stone trough with alpines to come. The smaller troughs were of hypertufa made by Davy, Eileen's son. This is a family garden in every sense of the word.

In the house we were treated to a delicious tea prepared by Davy's girlfriend Mandy, with a great variety of homemade cakes. As we left we walked past a large tub with *Camellia* 'Cornish Snow' whose delicate white flowers flushed pale pink were just coming into bloom.

Absolutely lovely. A truly beautiful garden.

What a wonderful day we had with Emer and Eileen in what must rank among the two best 'snowdrop' gardens in the country.

**Rose Sevastopulo**

## **The story of Blarney Castle Gardens, Adam Whitbourn, 15**

February

If kissing the Blarney Stone bestows the gift of eloquence, it is hard to believe Adam Whitbourn's protestation that he has never kissed it in all his twelve years at Blarney. He spoke with infectious enthusiasm and confident knowledge about the development and history of the gardens at Blarney Castle, switching sometimes from touristic anecdote to detailed botanical information almost in the same breath. It was a wonderful, thrilling experience to hear him.

It is very clear that he absolutely loves the gardens: he spoke about 'favourite' trees and plants, and his photographs, taken at all times of year, and showing both works in progress as well as established planting, gave us a most enjoyable 'tour' of the whole estate. It is enormous; there are twelve full-time gardeners, and many volunteers especially in the summer when students may come and work in the gardens too. The scale of the undertaking is daunting, though not to Adam apparently. He seems to be constantly planning and developing new ideas for different areas, both for conservation of existing specimens and for the introduction of new and heritage plants. He describes the entire garden as being involved in Irish Heritage Plant Conservation; as he explained, different plants require different conditions and there is no use in just putting a 'heritage section' together, regardless. He involves his colleagues in this and has encouraged one to set up a Hosta collection which has over 200 varieties. He has Irish Heritage Plant projects with IGPS, and has designed a special label for these plants, with an Irish harp on them - so when you go, look for these labels.

It was also very clear that he is steeped in the history of the estate, both of the 'lost' historical gardens and the buildings. One felt that the rocks and the old yew trees were almost like friends of his, especially one 600-year-old Irish Yew which has literally rooted into and through rocks. He tenderly described how delicate the roots of such an old tree must be, and the care he lavishes on them. What a contrast with the way he spoke about a 'plantation of sitka spruce in a square block' which had been, most fortunately, blown down and irreparably damaged in a gale - giving

him the opportunity to landscape the area properly and do away with the dull conifers entirely. This frank way of expressing his views was most refreshing, and it was clear that the audience absolutely appreciated his openness.

One interesting theme was the economic constraints of working on a private estate, in this case one where the owner actually lives in the big house most of the year and is himself a keen plantsman. On the one hand, such an owner might be unwilling to spend money on garden equipment, but on the other hand, generous in purchasing plants and supporting the dramatic landscaping effects which Adam comes up with such as the ‘Seven Sisters’ stone ring with its accompanying ‘myth’ to satisfy the tourists’ expectations. Adam told us about this with a delightful combination of fun and mystery - obviously, he is very used to holding an audience in the palm of his hand.

A very serious side of his work involves ‘responsible introductions’ of plants. He has been on several plant-hunting expeditions to Vietnam, with the aim of conserving plants which are under threat in their native habitat. At the other end of this scale, he has ‘the only plant of poison ivy in Ireland’ (the only known plant, that is, of course). This scary creature is kept in an iron cage in the ‘Poison Garden’ where lots of other plants which are medicinally interesting but poisonous too are grown, including Rue and Foxglove, Mandragora and Lupins. Adam notified the Department of Agriculture of his intention to grow the poison ivy, half expecting them to refuse permission; but in fact, they were interested, and came along to see the plant as they had never seen one growing, so they could not be sure of recognizing it.

I cannot believe that anyone came away from this lecture who was not full of determination to visit the gardens at Blarney Castle as soon as they can, if not sooner!

[There is an excellent overview of the gardens on the Blarney Castle website, [www.blarneycastle.ie](http://www.blarneycastle.ie)]

**Mary Montaut**

We have an arrangement with the IGPS that when we share lectures each society will take turns to report on the lecture. I am grateful to the IGPS and to Mary for this excellent account of Adam's talk. Ed.

## **Annual Lunch, 'Developing my rural acre', Philip Hollwey, 24 February**

February is a time when we're hard pressed to remember what our summer gardens look like, so it's always great to have the opportunity at our annual lunch to hear someone describe their garden and illustrate their talk with colourful slides that bring summer (and often other seasons too) to life. This year, our speaker was Philip Hollwey who both entertained and informed us as he described his design approach and showed us the development of his rural garden in Co. Wexford.

Arriving in 1999 to a field full of over fifty rows of strawberry plants running up from a small 'Parnell cottage' built in the 1920s, Philip began by stripping and spraying everything back to a '*tabula rasa*'. In 2000 he began his work to transform the acre to a garden of several parts, delineated by long sweeping curves with a single long 'line of desire' running centrally through them, carefully managed by a series of hedges, stops and glimpses of what lies beyond.



From a carefully tended area near the house, broad steps lead to a curved lawn enclosed by generous and colourful herbaceous borders, which lead to an open meadow, beyond which lies a semi-wild woodland. There are different routes through the garden and always there's something new to lead the visitor on – glimpses of wildflowers in the meadow, contrasting with the cool palette of the woodland, the fragrance of *Rosa* 'Kiftgate', the airy movement of *Thalictrum* 'Elin'.

Some of Philip's recommended plants included hydrangeas, which he remarked provide great reward for little care. He likes *H. aspera* and also

*H. paniculata* 'Limelight' which he prefers to 'Annabelle' which can get very floppy. Ferns he likes include *Polystichum polyblepharum* and *Dryopteris wallichiana*, which is good for dry shade, as is *Geranium nodosum*, which seeds gently around the place. Other geraniums that work well in his garden are *G.* 'Rozanne', 'Anne Thompson', 'Silver Shadow' and the beautiful 'Kashmir White'. More colourful additions to his garden palette are *Geum* 'Totally Tangerine' and 'Fire Opal'.

Philip reminded us that while a garden can (and should) be a refuge, it is also often a place of fantasy where it's possible to try things out and have fun. His own approach is not without rigour though: well-maintained hedges provide good structure (yew hedges are working well in his garden); in a rural garden, the boundaries must merge well with the surrounding landscape; a restricted palette works well in the shaded woodland; repetition provides a pleasing rhythm for the eye. He draws inspiration from many places and adapts elements of what he sees even in 'grand' gardens such as Powys Castle, Doddington Hall, or Sissinghurst, to his own haven in Co. Wexford.

Philip occasionally opens his garden for charity on one or two days in the summer and it's well worth a visit: his Facebook page provides details (search for 'Philip Hollwey Gardens').

**Fionnuala Broughan**

### **Local Show, Members' Plant Sale and Workshop, 3 March**

2018 will be remembered by all gardeners as an eventful year weather-wise... A baking hot summer was preceded by a long, damp, chilly spring, which included snow (lots of it) in March! Because of that snow, we had to postpone our Local Show from its planned date of 3 March to a few weeks later on 24 March. But maybe it was just as well – it gave us all, or more importantly our plants, some time to catch up on the late season.

And it was a very enjoyable show: we had a great turnout of both exhibitors and attendees, with good numbers of entries in just about all of the classes, with the Saxifraga, Primula and Bulb classes being particularly populous! It was a Saxifrage (*S. boydii*) that won the best in



show for Paddy Smith, and Paddy also won the Kiltrea pot for most points at the show this year; congratulations to him. But it's not just the experienced growers who enjoy the local show and this year Triona Corcoran and Sandra Fowler had some lovely plants (*Primula* 'Clarence Elliott' and *Hepatica japonica*) that placed well.

A notable feature of our local show is always the workshop and this year Gavin Moore did the honours giving a great talk and slide show on 'Growing for Showing'. There were lots of hints there for new and not-so-new growers and show-ers, and many thanks to Gavin, a most informative talk. Many thanks too to our judges Liam Byrne, Billy Moore and Patricia Maguire and stewards Barbara O'Callaghan and Breda Handley.

Due to the generosity of members and the great selling techniques of Val Keegan and Koraley Northen, the plant sale generated proceeds of almost €400, with the ever-popular *Cyclamen coum* and *Galanthus* spp. contributing nicely to the coffers. As always, teas were graciously served up by Tessa Dagge and Triona Corcoran.

We say it every year and it remains true: the local show is a great place to try your hand at showing if you haven't done it before. If a competitive class is a bit daunting, the local show also has a non-competitive section for all members. And don't forget, there is a photographic section, a cut flowers class, a bulbous plants class and of course the ever-popular miniature garden class too. Something for everyone in fact. See you next year, weather permitting!

**Fionnuala Broughan**

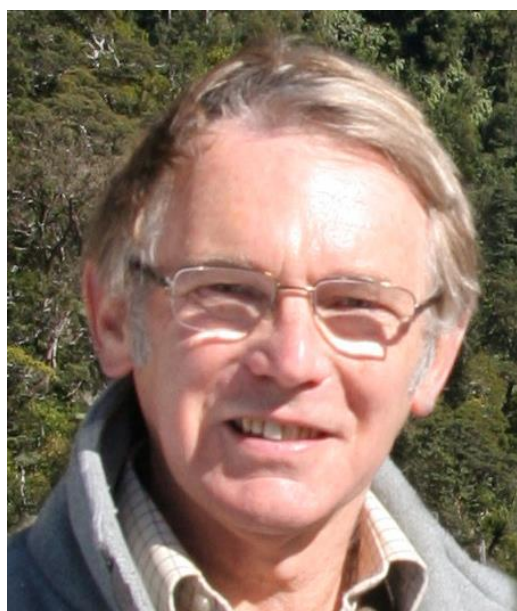
### **Outstanding gardens home and away, Cliff Booker, 15 March**

This world-wide wander around outstanding gardens began deservedly in the Czech Republic, and in a truly outstanding garden - Jiří Papoušek's garden is full of stonework - crevice beds, raised beds, construction in limestone and in slate; not only has he an alpine house, but also a covered tufa tunnel ten metres long, and the whole place is full of plants. The tufa was brought in from a quarry 700km away! Many

distinguished visitors were seen examining the treasures. Among the plants, Cliff took particular note of *Saxifraga longifolia*, *Aethionema subulatum*, gentians, *Polygala calcarea* and much more.

Zdeněk Zvolánek is well known for his wonderful rockwork, having built crevice gardens in Ireland, England, Canada and many other places as well as at home. His garden, which includes what he refers to as 'the beauty slope', again is a mass of alpine plants in perfect condition. This includes some memories of his long-time partner, the late Joyce Carruthers. The garden is on a steep slope and is constructed in what was a mediaeval quarry.

Contrasting with this, Vojtěch Holubec lives in a modern residential area,



and rather than using the flat rocks seen in most crevice gardens, he has used enormous boulders placed to create a mountain environment, with rock crevices and a pool. This is very effective.

Martin Brejník has another fine rock garden, in a smaller space, and here two styles are used, one with the vertical placing of rocks, and the other a more natural-looking area where the rocks incline at thirty degrees.

Stanislav Čepička gardens in Prague - a steep slope of limestone rocks rising above the house and providing a perfect habitat - the same distinguished visitors scrambling up to inspect dwarf conifers, sempervivums, campanulas, edraianthus in different colours including the white *niveus* and pale *jugoslavicus*, and several different irises.

Petr Diviš has a new crevice garden built in very confined space at the end of a long garden; interesting to see this in the raw state as it is just being planted - very precise rockwork, unusually employing flat pieces of granite, hand-picked from the quarry. Planting was at an early stage, but included some good armerias etc.

Two French gardens were described, and these were in complete contrast.

*Les Jardins Secrets* in Vaulx, near Annecy, is a sustained folly, with many areas defined by extravagant baroque buildings with carved woodwork and complemented by gardens with ornate pots and planters, containing displays of brightly coloured flowers. Walls, box hedges, etc. make an intriguing experience but not a plantsman's garden.

The *Jardin Alpin du Lautaret*, in a perfect setting at 2100m on the Col du Lautaret, and surrounded by mountains, was created in 1899, and is maintained by the *Université de Grenoble*. Cliff was shown around by Serge Aubert, who was then director. (This brought a touch of sadness to us, as Joan had corresponded with Serge just a couple of months before his untimely death in 2015). The garden has alpine plants from many parts of the world, set against snow-covered alpine peaks. It is a training school for horticulture and botany. There is a fine view of the site from the Col de Galibier, which climbs above it. In the garden plants picked out included androsaces, *Petrocallis pyrenaicus*, *Anthemis austriacus*, an enormous plant of vitaliana, and from the other side of the world the Andean *Loretia acaulis* - plants in the wild can be 3000 years old.

Above the col, a cable-car from La Grave leads to the heights where some of the pictures shown included *Narcissus poeticus*, gentians, *Primula hirsuta*, crocus, *Soldanella alpina*, spectacular *Viola calcarata*, magnificent *Anemone narcissiflora*, orchids, monotropa, *Saxifraga oppositifolia*, *Ranunculus glacialis* (just coming through with red foliage), *Androsace carnea*, a meadow of *Ranunculus kuepferi*, and culminating in an image of *Pulsatilla vernalis* against an alpine skyline.

Contrasting again was *Ses Salines* in Majorca, with cactus planted in hundreds, along with palms and grasses – a spectacular display, though few of the cacti or other plants are named.

Moving to Canada, we saw the Sun Yat Sen Chinese Garden in downtown Vancouver - this differs from Japanese gardens as it is very much based on rock, rather than foliage, with patterns in stone and

carved screens. These set off wonderful conifers to create patterns complemented by Pagodas and moon windows, but hardly any flowers.

Not far away is the Nitobe Japanese Memorial, situated on the edge of the strait – completely different and dependent on greenery, shadow and reflections. The atmosphere is one of serenity, with use of shadow and light, and of course being Japanese there are bridges, some with three staggered steps to indicate decision making.

In San Francisco, within Golden Gate Park is one of the best Japanese gardens Cliff has seen. It is the oldest in the U.S., dating from 1894, and covers 5 acres. The teahouse was the first place in the world to serve fortune cookies! There is superb use of statuary, tea houses, water features, pagodas. There are few flowers - though one carefully placed Iris was photographed - but the main emphasis is on trees - conifers and deciduous - rock and water. Masses of foliage colour; cloud-pruned trees, mound-clipped hedges, and a dramatic arching moon bridge - all contribute to the general atmosphere of peace. (Many years ago, Joan and I experienced the peace in the adjacent Strybing Arboretum, within the same park).

The National Arboretum in Washington DC is a spectacular garden, featuring a Himalayan valley, Japanese gardens and woodland. There are vast cameos of plants including peonies. A highlight on which Cliff lingered is the remarkable bonsai collection, which includes one tree identified as dating back to 1625. Flowers picked out included irises, *Cypripedium parviflorum*, rhododendrons, *Kalmia latifolia* - one being “the prettiest Kalmia I have ever seen” - the spectacular ‘Firecracker’.

Stonecrop gardens in Cold Spring, New York was created by Frank Cabot, but is now a public garden. It features a floating pavilion, stone troughs, a rock garden, raised beds, an alpine house (now neglected) and there are butterflies everywhere. The main feature is a pond area with enormous boulders and crevice work. Timber moon windows surround four sides of a pergola with climbing tree peonies. A special acid area is devoted to cypripediums.

Back in England, in the Lake district with its dramatic landscapes, is Holehird, which Cliff recommended enthusiastically. Run largely by volunteers from the Lakeland Horticultural Society, it has one of the best alpine gardens in the country, with spectacular views from the top. There is a sunken Alpine House - containing along with much else *raoulia*, *asperula*, *dianthus*, and an exotic *Sinningia canescens* (Brazilian Edelweiss). There are the national collections - hydrangea, hosta and astilbe, in a wide range of colours. There are forest areas, a walled herbaceous garden, alpine troughs, and a tropical house. Close-up pictures showed meconopsis, dierama, *Lilium nepalense*. Also, not far away in Windermere is Hayes Garden World, with some excellent displays.

Pershore in Worcestershire contains the AGS headquarters. On a recent first visit Cliff was impressed - he had not realized how much work has been done. He showed views of the many crevice gardens and troughs, and closeups of some of the many fine alpine plants.

In Sutton Valence in Kent, the home of Adrian & Samantha Cooper (Adrian runs the Kent show) is a spectacular house and garden overlooking the Weald. There is an alpine house ("So envious of that alpine house"), paeonies, primulas, *asperula*, orchids, beautiful daphnes, clematis from New Zealand. There is a knot garden - one picture showed this with the house as background. A large cactus house has a remarkable display of cacti grown to perfection, many in flower. Adrian has been collecting cacti since at school. Impressively for such a garden, there is no garden help.

Sometimes the simplest features work - in Skipton in Yorkshire, a row of houses all with same *Campanula portenschlagiana*.

In New Zealand, the Ohinetahi garden in Lyttleton (just south of Christchurch) created in 1977 by Sir Miles Warren, a rich architect, covers many acres and overlooks Governors Bay. The view was described as "truly beautiful". Features include a rose garden, an extensive sculpture collection, an impressive suspension bridge. Planting shows a catholic taste and features along with others grasses and native plants such as grevillea. There is a lawn for bowls (and there are two full-time gardeners).

All these were shown in Cliff's usual dazzling presentation of brilliantly coloured (maybe a bit too saturated for some tastes) and crystal sharp pictures, using all the transitions that Keynote can offer (300 hours in the making!).

Finally, we saw Cliff's old garden with every space at the front filled with flowers, and the rear garden filled with pots for showing. Picked out were *Ranunculus seguieri*, *Physoplexis comosa*, *Callianthemum kernerianum*. They have moved to a new garden from last May - the front garden is top-dressed with stone; the new greenhouse at the back is now full and he's thinking of another.

To finish there were some outstanding pictures of alpine in the landscape from parts of the Alps, and looking forward to future talks, a rosulate viola from among the 7600 pictures taken on the latest outing, to Patagonia.

**Liam McCaughey**

### **Visit to Frank Lavery's garden, 5 May**

The fine Saturday afternoon ensured a good turnout for the Group visit to Frank's garden. For most of us it was a return visit and it was interesting to see how the various features have matured over recent years. Frank's tufa beds in particular have come on very well and the excellent condition of his plants is clear evidence of what a good medium tufa is for alpine. I think he was a little disappointed that due to the late season quite a few plants that should be in full flower in early May were still in bud. Nevertheless, there was plenty to see and Frank was available throughout the visit to answer questions and to talk not just about his successes but also about the occasional failure and its probable cause. Frank always points out to visitors how good alpine are for the smaller garden and the number of plants that he has managed to fit in is ample evidence of that fact.

While alpine are a prominent feature there is much more to Frank's garden. He grows a number of small trees which he believes make the garden feel bigger. He has a substantial woodland area shaded by some fine acers where he grows a wide range of woodland plants including

trilliums, hepaticas, epimediums, and anemones. He particularly likes the smaller ericaceous species including dwarf rhododendrons all of which thrive in the garden.

Small pines are also a favourite and as well as the natural dwarf species he has created some pseudo bonsais including a specimen of *Pinus montezuma*. Tree ferns also do well for him despite some losses in the severe winters of 2010 and 2011.

I first became aware of *Clematis*  $\times$  *cartmanii* 'Avalanche' when I saw it in Frank's garden some years ago. He has some magnificent specimens, better than I have seen anywhere. I grow it but not with anything like the results that Frank achieves. He believes that there are several clones and he certainly has the best.

Frank's large collection of Koi carp add additional interest to his garden as do the pleasant sounds of several water features all of which made for a very interesting couple of hours for his visitors. Our thanks to him for his generosity in opening the garden for the Group.

**Billy Moore**

### **Trip to the Burren, 12 and 13 May**

We had a very successful trip to the Burren in 2016 on which George Sevastopulo reported eloquently in Newsletter No. 66, p33. This year's trip was also a great success, although, due to the late season, some plants were not at their best, notably, *Pinguicula grandiflora* which was stubbornly still in bud as was the Hoary Rock Rose, *Helianthemum oelandicum* subsp. *piloselloides*, and, while we saw lots of *Gentiana verna*, many clumps were not quite fully open, but we did find a white one. George was our guide this year and did an exemplary job. As well as enthralling participants with his learned discourses on the geology and flora of the region at our various stops he had also carefully planned the entire itinerary which went like clockwork. The group got on very well; the catering elements were fine; we had an exceptionally cooperative driver; good weather; and Carl Wright's garden was better than ever. What more could one ask for!



We left St Brigid's at 8.00 am on Saturday morning and our first stop was at the Slieve Carran Nature Reserve where George explained the geology of the region and we saw the attempt to control the relentless spread of hazel which seemed to be working. We saw our first gentians and other plants. Among these was the native wild garlic, *Allium ursinum*, and while it would probably be unwise to introduce it to your garden, it is very beautiful. I saw a huge patch of it, interspersed with some ferns, in a hazel woodland and I thought it breath-taking. It is not to be confused with *Allium triquetrum*, which is not as nice, is not native and is very invasive. George expressed some fears that it is becoming naturalized in the Burren.



Next stop was Mullach Mór and Lough Gealain where we discussed the long-running controversy about this area as well as its geology. Plants of interest were *Potentilla fruticosa* and *Viola palustris* as well as the white gentian mentioned earlier.

On the way to Ballyvaghan we stopped at Kilfenora Cathedral where George told us about its complicated history and gave us insights into the very interesting high crosses there; and as we passed Lemaneh Castle and the Poul nabrone portal dolmen and other features he filled us in on their significance.

We had an early start on Sunday morning and first visited a fine field of cowslips, *Primula veris*, before going to a site above the Burren School of Art in search of *Pinguicula grandiflora*. After a stiff climb we found plenty of it but, disappointingly, no flowers.

On the way to Poll Salach we passed the well-known Pinnacle well where we noted that *Erinus alpinus* continues to thrive. Poll Salach is one of the richest areas for flowers in the Burren and we spent several hours exploring both the seaward and landward sides of the road and learning about the geological features from George. There were plenty of gentians which were about a week away from their best, *Dryas octopetala*, *Saxifraga rosacea*, *Armeria maritima* in profusion, several orchids, and in one particularly sheltered sunny spot I found a patch of the Hoary Rock Rose just coming into flower.

We had a very nice lunch in Vasco's restaurant in Fanore and then on to Carl Wright. There is little new that I can say about Carl's garden - George described it more than adequately in his 2016 report - except that it still fascinates, and Carl continues to make improvements. I was excited by his new fernery which was in the very early stages of growth on our visit; I would love to have seen it a few weeks later. This garden is quite unique and is one of the most interesting and innovative gardens in the country. Carl's plantsmanship, his design sense, his skill with stone and his capacity for back breaking work all went into the making of this gem. He gave us a very warm welcome and at our request recounted the history of the garden, although most of us had already heard it, but the story was still compelling. Our time in Carl's garden was a perfect finish to what was a most satisfying experience overall. I look forward to our next visit to the Burren in two years' time. Meanwhile, we are all greatly indebted to George for all the work he put in to making this trip such a success and to Triona Corcoran for organizing it all.

**Billy Moore**

### **Alpines through the year in North Wales, John Good, 24 May**

It was in May 2005 that our Group undertook a trip to Wales, visiting Bodnant Gardens, Aberconwy Nursery and the lovely garden of John Good. I remember well the warm welcome; our endless questions being answered patiently and expertly by John and the long list of plants from his garden we all would have liked for our own gardens. So, it was a special pleasure to hear John again talking about his terraced garden which is situated on a hill, overlooking Liverpool bay - about 150m

above sea-level in an open position exposed to wind and storms. It receives quite a lot of rain throughout the year, and there is high air humidity with mild air temperatures, but last year saw some ice in the garden. The soil is variable and rarely dries out. There are shady, Mediterranean, moraine and crevice beds containing a wealth of plants.

John took us through the seasons starting with mid-winter to early spring and a lot of our most loved plants made an appearance. I can only mention a few like *Cyclamen coum* 'Silverleaf', *Galanthus nivalis* 'Howick Yellow' and a particularly nice *Galanthus woronowii* with wide green leaves. Amongst the narcissi, John favours N. 'Surfside' a handsome plant indeed. He showed us some lovely hepaticas, *H. acutiloba*



(white) and *H. nobilis* (blue). *Trillium rivale* always pleases but I really liked *T. albidum* as well as a beautiful white *Rhododendron* 'Dora Amateis'. John has plenty of good advice and tips for growing these plants as in *Saxifraga oppositifolia* 'Splendens' which likes shelter and hates full sun. He declared *Primula* 'Peter Klein' a very good hybrid, while *Pulsatilla slavica* grows much better in a path, self-seeded, than in a pot.

Moving into mid to late spring we encounter one of my own favourites

*Sanguinaria canadensis* with its lovely scalloped leaves. The red *Meconopsis punicea* seemingly is rather short-lived but easily raised from seed - so there is a challenge. John grows a great number of dwarf rhododendrons amongst them *R. pemakoense* with red flowers and growing to eighteen inches in twenty years. He recommends that dwarf rhododendrons with bird names from Glendoick are generally a good and safe buy as in *R.* 'Wren'. Some, like *R. camtschaticum*, need sun for part of the day to flower well, and the same applies to cassiopes, as growing in full shade will make them grow large, but they will not flower well. For a shady trough he had a gorgeous *Phyllodoce nipponica* which can be grown with haberleas and ramondas. There was a fantastic group of

*Ramonda serbica* growing in his garden in 2005 - all of us wishing it grew in our own gardens. Many more plants were shown and talked about like *Haberlea rhodopensis* from the mountains of Bulgaria, *Saxifraga x canis-dalmatica*, heavily spotted like the famous dog. Daphnes are another of John's special plants and the last issue of the Newsletter (no. 69) carries an excellent article by him on the cultivation of daphnes. Go and read it.

In summer time we are looking at late peonies, the charming tiny *Campanula wockii* 'Puck' and the stunning *C. rainieri* which I can only dream of. Another dream is *Lilium martagon* 'Album' which was sold to me a couple of times but turned out not to be white - maybe someday.

Autumn arrives with *Cyclamen hederifolium*, colchicums, *Crocus nivalis*, *Gaultheria itoana*, *Galanthus reginae-olgae* and *Gentiana* 'Silken Night'.

John could have entertained us for another while giving good advice on plants and cultivation, good-humoured and patiently but time eventually ran out. I cannot do him and his great garden justice here and would suggest that another trip to Wales and his hill-side garden would be more than worthwhile. Committee take note.

**AnneMarie Keoghan**

### **Visit to Dublin Zoo, 9 June**

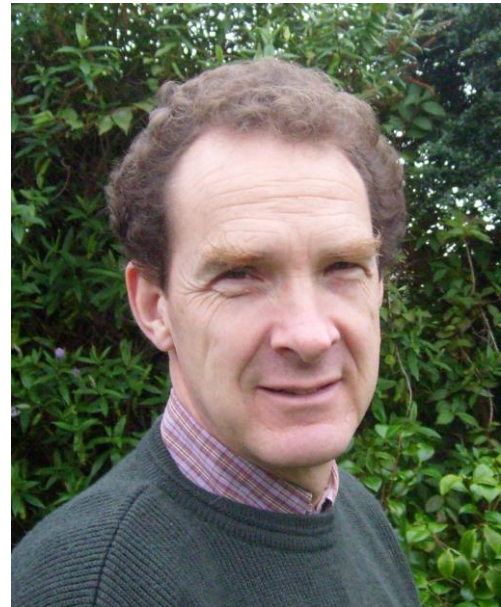
The usual reason for visiting a zoo is to see the animals. But on 9 June a strange sight was seen in Dublin Zoo: a group of AGS members was wandering around, paying scant attention to exotic creatures, instead focussing on the plants while listening to Stephen Butler, recently retired as the Zoo's curator of horticulture, as he told us how, over thirty-seven years, he'd worked to develop the naturalistic, functional, and beautiful plantings we see today. This was one of the most unusual and interesting 'garden visits' I've ever experienced. Over four hours we heard of all the challenges facing the person whose work, inevitably for most people, plays second fiddle to the animal attractions, but which places those attractions in a context that, like a suitable frame around a picture, enhances them without distracting one's attention.

How that is achieved was the fascination of this visit, for the work has many more dimensions than a picture frame. How to preserve the



illusion that the animal is in a 'natural' environment, when Dublin's climate is not kind to species far from their normal habitat? By careful selection of hardy plants and trees with the right exotic look to them, such as *Gunnera manicata*, *Farfugium japonicum*, and *Anemanthella lessoniana*. There are acacias - but not African ones! Then the right balance is needed - clearly the plants can't be poisonous, but if they are edible they won't last long. Stephen makes great use of *Salix purpurea*, *Pterocarya fraxinifolia*, *Libertia chilensis*, various irises and pyracantha, all of which have ways of deterring browsers. But, the task must be manageable with a small team of six gardeners. So *libertia* is on the way out - too hard to prune - and *moraea* is taking over. The animals have ideas of their own too. The orangutans were happy with the plantings on their new island, accessible by a ropeway, but simply did not tolerate the same plants in their existing location. Their strength means no plant is safe, if they take against it.

Landscaping around the animals presents its own challenges too. Preserving, as much as possible, the illusion that one is not part of a group of up to 10,000 people (the Zoo has over a million visitors a year) requires careful planning of routes and sightlines. Various species of bamboo provide screens where needed, but Stephen even makes good use of *Muehlenbeckia complexa*, a plant I'd normally be nervous of, to provide rapid cover, and *Fragaria chiloensis* 'Cheval' was employed around the waterways. There is a great variety of trees (you can imagine we were grateful for the shade this summer), and then for gardeners like us there are many imaginative plantings, with *Grevillea rosmarinifolium*, *Leptospermum scoparium*, and various rogersias being only a few of the many plants that caught my eye. I was particularly delighted to see *Buddleia colvillei*, best of the buddleias, which I last saw in the central highlands of Bhutan.



To those who missed out on this trip, I highly recommend the Zoo as a botanical destination. Stephen and his team have done a wonderful job. The animals are quite interesting too!

**Jamie Chambers**

### **Visit to Kilquade House, 14 July**

We could not have asked for a more beautiful day to visit the two walled gardens at Kilquade House, and we were given a very warm welcome by David Gillard the estate manager and all his staff.

The gardens are set in an estate of over 250 acres. The larger of the two is the original walled garden of Kilquade House itself, while the smaller walled garden is attached to Spring Farm which was added to the estate in more recent years.

We visited Spring Farm first and as we approached we had a tantalizing view of the garden through the arched gate. The garden felt very naturalistic with curving borders backed by shrubs and trees, a natural stream, after which the farm was named, and a large pond.



The stream is unusual in that the level never changes, indicating that it must come from a large aquifer. The water certainly looked pristine. The garden has walls sufficiently high to keep out foxes and other predators so is used to re-home hedgehogs. Admittedly none of the hedgehogs has been spotted since they were introduced but the hostas are unblemished which would seem to indicate that the slug population is well under control.

The garden is also home to two swans who were rescued. Each had a broken wing which was amputated. They have been in the garden for four years, so it must be quite safe. They attempted their first brood this year but were unsuccessful, perhaps next year.

Kilquade House was built in the mid 19th Century. It was refurbished and extended by the current owners over the last thirty-five years. From the dining room at the rear of the house a grand staircase leads down to the garden. This gives you a perfect view to the entrance of the new walled garden. From the stairs you walk through a very large circular hedge, beneath a row of pleached hornbeams and on into the walled garden. A modest entrance!

The garden is far larger than the one at Spring Farm and is the creation of Martin Walsh who started the project in what was virtually a green field in 2012 and completed it in 2017. He still acts as consultant to the owners. Both gardens are meticulously maintained by David and his team. As it is only used in the summer months the planting reflects this. There is a big emphasis on perennial planting. Varieties have only made the cut where they flower over a long period and provide maximum impact. There is also an emphasis on plants that attract bees, making the garden hum. As well as the planting, Martin's design required a lot of hard landscaping, including massive raised beds, paved areas and a central fountain. At the outset I should say that in the space allotted to me by the editor it will be impossible to do justice to this jewel of a garden: it has to be seen to be appreciated.

As I entered I was immediately struck by the blaze of colour... and that was looking at the mixed 'cool' borders containing perennials, shrubs and roses! There were no gaps, just a mouth-watering array of blues, purples and pinks provided by a variety of salvias including *S. 'Mystic Spires'*, *Geranium 'Azure Rush'*; *G. 'Russell Pritchard'*; *G. 'Mavis Simpson'*; *G. 'Sweet Heidy'*; *Eryngium 'Big Blue'*; *Clematis 'Wisley'*; *Perovskia atriplicifolia 'Little Spire'*; *Thalictrum delavayi 'Splendide White'*; many agapanthus; and a variety of roses with *R. 'Kew Gardens'* being one of the stars, the list goes on, all repeated throughout a long border running the length of the garden and a large central block.

In the centre is a block of beds with the hot colours. These were enclosed in perfectly maintained miniature hedges of *Lonicera nitida*. Apparently, this requires cutting four times a year but was a replacement for box due to blight. Like many gardeners I am resistant to hot borders,

but these were wonderful because they were tempered by the use of a number of pale yellow plants such as *Helianthus* 'Vanilla Ice', *Anthemis* 'Lemon Ice', cream shasta daisies and other lovelies. This dialled down the temperature considerably and allowed one to appreciate the contrast between the cool and the hot borders without the latter being an undue assault on the senses.

Martin's exceptional understanding of colour and the way in which the colour of individual plants is affected by, and affects, the colours of its neighbours and his appreciation of the nuances of different shades of a particular colour is evident throughout the garden. One illustration of this is his use of *Nepeta grandiflora* 'Blue Danube', which in isolation is rather dull but in association with paler colours positively sings. The borders are full of other examples and could provide a master class in the use of colour in the garden.

In addition to the perennial borders there is a large border of many varieties of annuals which was quite stunning. One plant which I will definitely grow is the lovely *Nicotiana mutabilis* which can be more than a metre tall, is wind proof and all summer has white flowers which fade to varying shades of pink. There is also a cutting border full of flowers for the house.

No walled garden would be complete without some fruit, veg and herbs, and Kilquade has a satisfyingly well-ordered vegetable patch and some lovely old fruit trees as well as a beautifully paved potager, but the emphasis is very firmly on spectacular borders and this was carried off with great style and flair.

Tea and biscuits were supplied by two very cheerful ladies for the duration of our visit to the larger garden. They could not have been more welcoming as was everyone we met.

Finally, it only remains to say that if we get the chance to visit again, don't hesitate. Book your place.

**Triona Corcoran**



## **FIXTURES**

**Thursday, 18 October, 8 pm. Ian Christie**, ‘Thirty-five years and still growing’. St Brigid’s Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

**Thursday, 8 November, 8 pm. Jamie Chambers**, ‘Insane? Or an ardent botanist?’. St Brigid’s Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

**16 to 18 November. 35th Alpine Weekend. Brian Burrow, Mike Keep**, and **Robert and Ranveig Wallis**.

**Thursday, 6 December, 8 pm. Christmas Miscellany.** St Brigid’s Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

**More details about the fixtures can be found on p. 5.**

## OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

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Top: A 'cool' border and, bottom, some 'hot' borders at Kilquade House, See p. 39. (Photos: Billy Moore)