



*The Newsletter of the
Irish Garden Plant Society*



Issue 108 April 2008



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Front Cover Illustration: *Narcissus* ‘The O’Mahony’

Over the past year or so I have been searching out Irish snowdrops and, in the course of this pursuit, I made contact with Chris Sanham in England. Chris is a seriously enthusiastic snowdrop collector with several hundred different snowdrops growing in his garden. In the course of our snowdrop swapping Chris passed on this narcissus which he received from a friend as “The O’Mahony Daffodil”. It was a new plant to me; indeed, I had not even heard of it previously. Charles Nelson’s account in ‘A Heritage of Beauty’ gives the following information: *“A form of *N. pseudonarcissus*; flowers lemon yellow, corona smooth, flared at mouth and notched, darker in colour than the petals; occasionally has 7 – 8 petals; early very early in flower. Class 1Y – Y. Origin: Presumed to have come originally from the O’Mahony’s garden at Coolballintaggart, Co. Wicklow, but it only surfaced in the early 1990s, when various people, for example Kath Dryden and Kate Reade received it from Frank Waley (as ‘The O’Mahony’)*

This certainly is a very pretty daffodil, a lovely lemon-yellow colour and very early indeed and I am delighted to have it in the garden and look forward to it bulking up and passing it along to others.



EDITORIAL

The Annual General Meeting and the AGM Weekend is the big event of the IGPS year. Many might well say that the actual General Meeting itself is hardly riveting stuff but it is an essential part of any society, an opportunity for the officers of the society to give an account of their actions over the past year and for the members attending to question decisions and the direction of the society. Many who attend the AGM weekend will attest to the other aspects of such a gathering. It is the best opportunity to meet members from around the country, something particularly pleasant and enjoyable for those not resident in one of the three regions of the society. The setting and activities provide an excellent opportunity to get to know others in the society. I recommend very highly to members who have not previously attended an AGM to make this their first one. If you attend I have no doubt that you will make it a regular part of your annual plans.

At the end of the society's year it is appropriate to remember those who are the 'behind-the-scenes' people of the organisation. Ours is a voluntary society and fortunate to have a great many people who are enthusiastic about the aims of the society and who are willing to give generously of their time to further these aims. The National Committee oversees the general direction of the society, the finances and the major projects. The three regional committees promote the aims of the society at local level, organise the winter and summer programmes. At times, I'm sure, this can seem a thankless job for those involved and I have no doubt that it can be difficult at times to remain enthusiastic. Given the level of their commitment and the enjoyment we, the members, experience as a result it is appropriate and well-deserved that we take the time on occasion to thank them. I'm quite sure I am not speaking for myself alone when I express my gratitude to them for their sterling work on the part of the society.

Perhaps, I am talking to the cognoscenti yet it is important to reiterate the importance of the aims of the society. Recently I had the pleasure of listening to Brendan Sayers speaking to the members of the Waterford Garden Plant Society, an affiliate society of the IGPS, on the topic of Irish plants and their importance in our cultural heritage. Much of what Brendan said was not new to me but I was very struck by the enthusiasm with which he put across the message of the IGPS. Our plants are a significant part of our culture but a part which can so easily be forgotten and neglected. Brendan's talk brought out the interesting connections attached to so many of our Irish plants, the notable personalities and significant locations which give them their provenance and

their value. We have indeed a proud horticultural history, a botanic gardens in Glasnevin which is of the highest international standard, a legacy of outstanding gardeners, a horticultural hero in Dr. Augustine Henry, many present-day heroes who continue this tradition and, thankfully, a society whose members treasure this heritage and intends safeguarding it for the future.

The “Adopt a Plant” scheme which was launched by the National Committee in the past year is an outstanding way for members to become involved in the very essence of the society’s work. I was thinking of this “Adopt a Plant” scheme during the afternoon while out in the garden. It really is not the correct expression but I could not come up with an alternative which would express so succinctly the nub of the idea. Really the scheme is offering members the opportunity to have the privilege of minding a part of our national heritage in their gardens. It’s a little like the National Gallery asking one of us to hang a Jack Yeat’s painting in our home – just better! If you haven’t put your name forward to date, perhaps it is time you thought of it again. Think of the pleasure you will have growing one of these plants and think of the pleasure you will give when you have propagated it and passed it on to another enthusiast. You couldn’t do that with a Jack Yeat’s!

It is good to celebrate success. Success is an excellent foundation on which to build and it is important to note it, to point it out, to hold it up as an example for future plans. Last month I, once again, visited Altamont Gardens in Co. Carlow for the annual Snowdrop Week. Altamont Gardens was the garden of Mrs. Corona North and has been a magnet for enthusiastic gardeners over many years. Among its attractions are the interesting collection of rhododendrons, the continuously developing collection of trees, the commemorative double herbaceous borders and its delightful lake and riverside walks. Of latter years, Paul Cutler has put together a very comprehensive collection of snowdrops with the particular intention of gathering a reference collection of Irish snowdrops. Paul has made significant progress towards this aim and with the continued generosity of fellow enthusiasts I have no doubt that he will achieve this goal. Altamont is worth a visit at any time of year but snowdrop time holds a particular attraction for me when I can see some of our Irish treasures being given the care and attention they so richly deserve. This is a significant achievement and an example for other gardens to follow.

As a parting word, those of you who are attending the AGM weekend do watch out for *Anemone nemerosa* ‘Lucy’s Wood’ when you visit Miss Evelyn Booth’s former garden in Bunclody.

Material for the newsletter should be sent directly to: Paddy Tobin, “Cois Abhann”, Riverside, Lower Gracedieu, Waterford. Telephone: 051-857955 E-mail: pmtobin@eircom.net



Annual General Meeting

The 27th Annual General Meeting will take place this year at the Carlton Millrace Hotel in Bunclody, Co. Wexford, on Saturday 3rd May at 11a.m. All members are welcome

Annual General Meeting Agenda

- 1. Apologies**
- 2. Minutes of AGM, 2006**
- 3. Matters Arising**
- 4. Chairman's Report**
- 5. Treasurer's Report**
- 6. Election of Committee Members**
- 7. Any Other Business**

Nominations for committee

Nominations for election to the Committee must be forwarded to the Honorary Secretary. I.G.P.S. c/o The National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, Dublin 9 at least two weeks before the Annual General meeting.

All nominations must be in writing and signed by two paid-up members of the Society and by the Nominee.

Annual General Meeting Weekend, 3rd - 5th May: Notes

Our AGM will take place this year at the Carlton Millrace Hotel in Bunclody, Co. Wexford on the weekend of the 3rd to the 5th of May.

The Annual General Meeting itself take place at 11 a.m. with tea and coffee being served from 10.30 am.

Bunclody is on the N80, just off the N11 close to Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford.

It is an ideal location from which to visit several interesting gardens. As it normal on these AGM weekends there is a programme of garden visits organised for those attending. Following are some brief notes on the gardens. They are not given in any particular order.

Hardymount:

A wonderful walled garden behind the house contains many unusual plants and flowers in the herbaceous border. A truly amazing walled garden worth knowing because of its owner and her dedication to gardening over the years.

Altamont Gardens:

The estate gains much of its character from the many mature trees, both native and exotic specimens growing throughout the gardens. Altamont is a great experience at any time of the year.

Lucy's Wood:

This garden was developed by former owner, botanist Mrs Evelyn Booth and extended in 1998. The borders and island beds include many varieties of roses, rhododendron, magnolias, lilies etc.

The Bay Garden:

This garden began in 1989 and surrounds a 19th c. farmhouse. The garden is full of interesting design features and unusual plants. One passes from the cottage garden, white garden, to a formal rose garden with old and new varieties. New areas are added each year. A wonderful place to spend an afternoon.

Lissnavagh:

A very old garden in Rathvilly rarely open to the public now and we are delighted to be able to visit.

Stonewell Cottage:

The garden of Marie O'Leary. A relatively new garden with many interesting and novel design ideas.

Tombrick Garden:

County winner for Wexford in the 2006 Viking Irish Garden Awards.

It is a garden of 1.5 acres and comprises herbaceous, shrubs, trees and water features.

There is also a collection of ornamental poultry.

Newtownbarry House and Garden:

Newtownbarry was the old name for Bunclody and this is a great opportunity to see an old garden and learn more about its history and plants.

We do hope to see you there, in the shadow of Mt. Leinster in the valley of the beautiful river Slaney.

See below email for the Carlton Millrace Hotel and telephone numbers for a selection of B&Bs in the area.

reservations.millrace@carlton.ie.

Meadowside BB - 05393 76226

Millview Farmhouse BB - 05393 77779

Moss Cottage - 05393 77828

Ryan BB - 053 9375775

Leinster Committee



Slaney side

By Christopher Mahon

“Home is where the heart is and mine is in the Slaney valley at the foot of majestic Mount Leinster.” – Christopher Mahon, a native of Tullow, Co. Carlow and now living in South Africa.

When you come to seek me,
come down by Slaneyside
where the valley sweeps from
Knocknacree
through Tullow like a tide,
where the Slaney plunges onward,
by the Blackstair’s rolling ridge,
past beautiful Bunclody
and on to Wexford bridge.

And when you come to seek me,
down by the Slaney side,
you’ll see the otters frolic free
and badgers running wild;
the salmon leap and trout abound
and wildfowl throng the weirs
as graceful swans and water hens
their bustling broods still rear.

And having sought you’ll find me
down by the Slaney side,
strolling down the river bank
with a collie at my side,

among the lush green meadows
and cornfields fat with grain
‘til I later rest at Aghade falls
by the watermill’s remains.

Or maybe when you seek me
down by the Slaney side
you’ll see towering Mount Leinster
with fleecy clouds collide
high in those haughty mountains
where on a clear day,
the view embraces all four coasts
and takes the breath away.

But most of all you’ll find me
down by the Slaney side
amongst the kindly country folk
whose river is their pride
who are born and live and die one day
near the murmur of its stream
as it plies its course towards the sea
lost in a timeless dream.



Primula 'Kinlough Beauty'

Robert S. Myerscough & Paddy Tobin

A recent e-mail brought a very interesting story, a story of an Irish cultivar which I had only previously read about and had never seen growing. It immediately sparked my interest and the follow-up proved even better still.

Robert Myerscough, from Dunlavin, Co. Wicklow, told me that a friend had a primula which they thought might be a rare Irish cultivar and that she had obtained it from a friend in Donegal. The cultivar in question was Primula 'Kinlough Beauty'.

The entry in 'A Heritage of Beauty' for *Primula* 'Kinlough Beauty' is as follows:

'Kinlough Beauty' – before 1930
syn 'Kinlock Beauty', 'Irish Polly'

Single, polyanthus-type; a neat plant with rose pink (or warm salmony pink) flowers with a creamy-white stripe (candy stripe) down the middle of each petal; very free flowering.

Origin: 'I do know', wrote Cecil Monson (alias C. S. Marsh), 'that when the late Mrs. Johnson came back to her home in Co. Leitrim she found several seedlings had appeared from her [*Primula juliae*]. Amongst them was the lovely pink polyanthus type 'Kinlough Beauty', while another was the creamy yellow 'Lady Greer'. 'Kinlough Beauty' was a chance seedling, 'neat and small and covered with blooms'.

Miss Eda Hume also recorded that the primrose was 'raised by a great old lady who lived at Kinlough'. Co. Leitrim.

In a letter to J. S. Harrison dated 3 August 1976, Mrs. Gladys Emerson of Limavady, Co. Londonderry, stated that 'Kinlough Beauty' was 'raised by Colonel Johnson of Kinlough, Co. Donegal. [sic] I never met him but his cousin was an intimate friend of mine.'

Robert's correspondence was all the more interesting when he told me that the friend in question was Miss Pamela O'Mahony, previously of Grange Con in Co. Wicklow. Her parents used to fish in Co. Donegal, generally as guests of the Tyntes of Tynte Park, Dunlavin, Mrs Tynte being an expert fisher. Their holiday home in Donegal was

situated quite close to the Leitrim border and Mrs. Tyntes would have known Mrs. Johnson and must have been given plants which in turn were passed to Pamela's family. This all fits in with the pre 1930 date given in 'A Heritage of Beauty' for *Primula* 'Kinlough Beauty'.

Miss O'Mahony's grandfather was The O'Mahony who is remembered in various Irish cultivar names. We have two O'Mahony forms of *Galanthus* 'Staffan', one referred to as 'The O'Mahony form of Straffan' and the other 'Cool Ballintaggart'.

Pamela's grandfather, the penultimate chief of the clan, Pierce O'Mahony (full title, The O'Mahony of Kerry) had a great love of botany and of Bulgaria where he sponsored a botanical expedition which included C.F. Ball in 1911. It would be very interesting to find out more about these connections and I (Robert) shall see if that is possible, with possibly a future article for the newsletter.



The chief was an impressive figure --

This photo was taken shortly before he died aged 80 in 1930.

How wonderful that Miss O'Mahony has kept this plant going over the years and what a treasure it is with such connections in Irish horticulture.

Many thanks to Robert for bringing this to our attention. It is his intention to begin bulking up this cultivar and hopefully we may see it at the annual Plant Sale within a short few years.

Does anyone else grow this plant?



Propagating Irish Plants

- A Generous Offer and a Request

Paddy Tobin

A Most Generous Offer and a Possible Saviour for Irish Plants.

Pat Fitzgerald of Fitzgeralds Nurseries in Oldtown, Stonyford, Co. Kilkenny is involved at the cutting edge of the propagation of plants. His business employs almost 40 people working on plants in both a scientific way and in nursery production and they have developed quite a number of their own varieties. They have carried out extensive work for the Eden Project and some of their local colleagues collecting plants in Cornwall for introduction to the gardening public and Pat has just returned from there to bring back some subjects and discuss future projects. He has also carried out extensive work for clients in New Zealand as well as in other parts of the world.

Pat has had a long-time interest in plants of Irish interest and has wished to assist in the IGPS project of conserving these very special plants. To date there had been hopes that perhaps one of the government agencies might provide funds or that sponsorship of some sort might be available to finance this work. This, unfortunately, has not happened. Recently however, Pat contacted me to advise me that he now had possibilities of funding some work on plant propagation via tissue culture of Irish cultivars that might prove difficult to bulk up or indeed propagate at all by normal methods. Pat now intends to proceed on his own with this project in his company lab and nursery. He intends to make his own variety choices and source the plants himself but has said that if any of the members have varieties that they feel are more deserving than others and have plants that could be supplied to make the initiation possible that he is more than willing to consider this.

He does stress that for this project the plants must be:

1. Of Irish origin
2. Rare or almost out of cultivation.
3. Merit propagation and distribution / sale into the gardening public.

Pat has informed me that this offer is open to the IGPS as a society, i.e. something for the National Committee to consider, select plants as a priority for this method of

propagation and then set up a project with Fitzgerald Nurseries. It is also available to individual members who have plants which are particularly rare and which Pat can bulk up through his nursery.

Pat can be contacted at the following address:

FitzGerald Nurseries Ltd.
Oldtown
Stoneyford
Co.,Kilkenny.
Republic of Ireland.
Tel: 00353 56 7728418
Fax 00353 56 7728481

For those who would like to find out more about the work carried out by Fitzgerald Nurseries you should visit their website: www.fitzgerald-nurseries.com

This seems to me to be an extraordinary opportunity for the IGPS. Here is the possibility of taking presently rare and threatened plants and bringing them out of the shadows and into mainstream horticulture. The efforts of IGPS members are very laudable and well intentioned but do not compare with the resources available to a business such as Fitzgerald Nurseries and the involvement of such a business in the conservation of Irish plants is surely a godsend and one which the National Committee must consider as it offers the possibility of a certain future for many of our presently threatened heritage plants.

Celmisia ‘David Shackleton’ – A Request for help.

As part of the initiative to conserve special Irish plants Dr. Gerry Douglas of Teagasc is investigating ways to improve the propagation of Celmisia ‘David Shackleton’. However, Gerry has had great difficulty in sourcing plant material of this special celmisia and hopes that some members may be in a position to donate a plant or two or even some shoots for this propagation project. Gerry would also be quite happy to buy plants wherever available.

If you can help Gerry with this project, please contact him.
Dr. Gerry Douglas
Teagasc
Agriculture & Food Development Authority
Kinsealy Research Centre, Malahide Rd. Dublin 17



HISTORY 'TAKE-AWAY'

A Note from the NCCPG

This is a recent press release from the National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens. The IGPS is affiliated to the NCCPG and shares its aims for the conservation of plants, particularly those of local and national interest. I thought the contents would be of interest to members and might provide inspiration for future plans within the IGPS. Ed.

PLANT HERITAGE DAY - 8TH JUNE BRINGS TOGETHER 30+ NATIONAL PLANT COLLECTIONS®

Gardeners will be able to take home a little of Britain's history on Sunday 8th June, when a special Plant Heritage Day brings together plants and information from over 30 National Plant Collections - living plant libraries - at Cambridge University Botanic Garden. Part of the 30th anniversary of plant conservation charity NCCPG and its National Plant Collection system, the event will feature displays and talks by National Plant Collection holders from across Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk, plus tours of Cambridge University Botanic Gardens' Collections in season. Special guest for the day is plantsman Roy Lancaster: the event takes place from 10am-4pm.

National Plant Collection holders range from individual gardeners to heritage properties, botanic gardens plus nurseries large and small. All of them help to keep choice alive for the gardening public by conserving some 100,000 species and cultivars from past and present in over 650 Collections nationwide. Gardeners will be able actively to take part in NCCPG's programme of 'Conservation Through Cultivation' as plants from many of the participating Collections will be on sale, enabling them to take home their own piece of Britain's plant history.

Plant Heritage Day is kindly supported by plant labelling specialists Brother UK Ltd, and is being organised by NCCPG's Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk groups in conjunction with Cambridge University Botanic Garden. CUBG has been associated with NCCPG since its formation 30 years ago in 1978. Normal Garden admission charges apply to this event, and travel details can be found at: www.botanic.cam.ac.uk/VisitorInfo.html. Cambridge has a frequent Park & Ride system and Cambridge railway station is a short walk from Cambridge University Botanic Garden. Further details will be posted on www.nccpg.com and www.botanic.cam.ac.uk as they are known.

**PLANT HERITAGE DAY:
PARTICIPATING NATIONAL PLANT COLLECTIONS®**

Over 30 National Plant Collections will be represented at NCCPG's Plant Heritage Day in Cambridge University Botanic Garden on Sunday 8th June, many through their plants, and for those plants not in season there will be informative displays. The Collections by county (Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk) are as follows:

Cambridgeshire	Norfolk	Suffolk
<i>Alchemilla</i>	<i>Citrus</i>	<i>Aesculus</i>
<i>Bergenia</i> , primary hybrids and spp	<i>Colchicum</i>	<i>Buxus</i>
<i>Crocus chrysantha</i> and <i>C. biflours cvs</i> E A Bowles	<i>Crocus</i> (spp)	<i>Campanula</i> – Alpine
<i>Frittilaria</i> (European spp)	<i>Eleagnus</i>	<i>Dianthus</i> (Malmaison carnations)
<i>Hyacinthus orientalis</i>	<i>Ficus</i>	<i>Equisetum</i>
<i>Juglans</i> (incl <i>J. regia</i> cvs)	<i>Lavandula</i> (sect <i>Lavandula dentats, pterostoechas</i> and <i>stoechas</i>)	<i>Erysimum</i>
<i>Lathyrus</i> (excl <i>odoratus</i> cvs)	<i>Molinia</i>	<i>Euonymous</i> (deciduous)
<i>Lonicera</i> (spp and primary hybrids)	<i>Muscari</i>	<i>Hibiscus syriacus</i> (cvs)
<i>Ribes</i> (spp and primary hybrids)	<i>Sisyrinchium</i>	<i>Hosta</i>
<i>Ruscus</i>	<i>Vitis vinifera</i> (<i>grapes</i>)	<i>Iris</i> (Sir Cedric Morris introductions)
<i>Saxifraga</i> (European spp)		
<i>Tulipa</i> (spp and primary hybrids)		
<i>Yucca</i>		

To find further details on each collection, visit: www.nccpg.com and select **National Plant Collections**, followed by **Where are the Collections?**, which will take you to a list of counties and so to further details.



Wind and Water Storm and Sheugh

By Rae McIntyre

When I wrote for the January Newsletter it was near the end of November and we had just enjoyed quite a long spell of good autumn weather. I was full of ideas and plans to make changes in the ensuing months. That just didn't happen because the rains came and through December, January and the first week of February we had days when it poured relentlessly. For a bit of variety the Clerk of the Weather sent along a couple of snowfalls and a storm or two to really liven things up.

It was the rain that had the most adverse effect on the garden. I have only seen paddy fields from the air but parts of our garden bore a remarkable resemblance to these. If the temperature had been a lot higher I reckon I could have had a good rice crop. The worst affected part was in the stackyard – an area covering a bed and a border in the centre of it. The border was one from which Andy, who works in the garden sometimes, had removed all the damp-loving herbaceous plants, simply because I was sick looking at them and longed to replace them with rhododendrons. He spent a day digging out plants like *Darmera peltata*, *Persicaria campanulata*, *Rodgersia podophylla*, *Filipendula rubra* 'Venusta' and various irises. Without them the border turned into a swamp so the rhododendrons have had to wait for some time for conditions to improve.

The bed opposite this border is surrounded by stones and the water lay in it for six weeks being regularly topped up by days of non-stop rain. All the alliums and crocuses I planted in it last September have rotted away. Ironically this bed was made to grow plants that like sunny well-drained conditions so has various eryngiums, *Echinops ritro*, *Lavandula stoechas*, agapanthus and cistus as the main denizens. These plants detest having wet roots so over the years I have worked hard at making the soil in the bed as sharply draining as possible. I have removed countless big stones and must have added about half a lorry load of grit in instalments. It had never been lake-like before so I wondered what on earth – or should it be *in* earth? – was wrong.

Apart from the occasional depressing walk round the stackyard I avoided it for weeks on end. I was working near the bottom of the main garden one day in January where it

was fairly dry because of the number of trees around. There were plenty of weeds there because growth didn't stop all winter and I was busy removing these while thinking about something else. I thought I heard the sound of running water but dismissed that as pure imagination. Then I heard it again and pushed through the clutter of tough shrubs at the bottom right hand corner of the garden and through the leylandii hedge that had got out of control. There is a bank there and a barbed wire fence separating us from the field where grazing cattle and sheep would like to come in and sample alternative vegetation in the garden. Down at the bottom of the bank there's a sheugh. And that's where the water was running.

The word sheugh is onomatopoeic. By nature a sheugh is squelchy and gluggy and slurpy being comprised of mud and water that's sometimes slow-flowing and sometimes just sits and stagnates. Many English people (and possibly Irish people south of the border) have difficulty pronouncing the word because the 'gh' sound in it has a distinctly guttural sound. Ask them to say it and they come out with *shuck* just as they say *uck* or *yuck* instead of *ugh*. A sheugh, according to one definition, is a primitive Irish field drain. I know someone who knows someone who did his doctoral thesis on the sheughs in an area of North Antrim and who, for some very strange reason, had a most fastidious academic supervising him. He (the supervisor) seemed to be in a state of bewilderment about the whole thing particularly a map of sheughs which covered the floor of a sizable room.

Anyway I was pleased to be re-acquainted with the bottom-of-the-garden sheugh because I had almost forgotten its existence. Andy hadn't been here for about two months because of the rotten weather and was appalled when he saw the mini paddy fields in the stackyard. He said it was all coming from a blockage in the sheugh at the other end of the garden. This, to my mind, was like a doctor saying that the boil on one's big toe was causing a headache. But he was right as usual.

He spent two half days removing the unlovely leylandii hedge bordering the sheugh at the bottom of the garden. From outward appearances it was all right but it had spread out so that it was about 2.5 metres from front to back and inside it was brown and dead. He loves playing with his chainsaw and with it also removed a *Salix alba* that was blocking a drain into the sheugh. This willow has regular amputations in storms but quickly grows new branches. Its roots had spread into the outlet of a stone drain and when he cut them away the water gushed out. Andy shouted triumphantly that a paddy frog was having trouble going upstream and had to reverse and go with the flow.

Davy had booked a man to come with a digger to clean out the sheugh but, in the way of workmen, he didn't arrive. Andy was impatient to see it cleared so came back the following Saturday and removed the mud – lovely rich, black, leafmouldy stuff it is too

– with a spade and shovel. There has been no rain since and yet the water is running steadily. I am thinking streams here, not sheughs, but it's early days yet. Calling a

sheugh a stream is like referring to a backyard as a patio or a living room with six books in it as the library. A sheugh is a sheugh is a sheugh but there's no harm in visualising it lined with bog primulas or Japanese irises is there? Andy has grandiose

ideas about making a *wee carry* or two along it. A *carry* is a weir so the sheugh would have to be blocked by very large stones over which the water would flow noisily.

I hope I am not tempting fate when I say that the stackyard flooding problem seems to have been solved. The field behind the garden is L-shaped. There is a stone drain apparently, running the length of the whole garden and it empties into the sheugh which runs along the base of the L. The theory goes that the drains were so badly blocked that the water flooded into the stackyard. I've been working there during the last two days and the ground is nearly as dry as snuff.

There have been some terribly fierce gusts during winter gales and the garden has been littered with ash branches on the days after. The prevailing wind is from the west and we seem to get the full force of it living as we do near the top of Blackhill. However it was a gale from the south that destroyed my *Eucryphia nymansensis* 'Nymansay' in January 2007. The morning after it was leaning out of the ground at an angle of 45 degrees. I managed to get it propped up again and put fresh soil over the roots but it was no use. During last year it was obviously dying slowly and when it was removed recently it had a very small root system. I'd heard of other people experiencing the same thing. This eucryphia was one of the first trees I planted in the garden and I had to wait ten years for it to bloom. Most years it was spectacular and I'll miss it badly because its blooms were so fresh and lovely during the dying days of summer from mid-August to mid-September.

The despised leylandii hedge faced south so there will be no eucryphias planted in its place. Instead I have two magnolias and a Spanish Chestnut to plant. I really love magnolias and was delighted to learn that they are in the top list of trees that can withstand gales; this fact was discovered after the dreadful storms in England in 1987. Spanish Chestnuts are good too and my mother is giving me one that's nearly a metre high and which she grew from a cutting. It's not getting a chance in a large tub.

Yet again the appearance of the garden has changed. We are no longer secluded now that the leylandii hedge has gone and I can see three other houses from our kitchen window. However the garden is a lighter place and if the sheugh grows up to be a stream, helped by the many springs around, I might be able to view it from upstairs windows. Andy has suggested a little Japanese style bridge (over a sheugh?!) but I think that would be a bridge too far.



Brightening the Dark Days

By Peter Milligan and Nicola Milligan
3 Ros Cuan, Mount Stewart
Newtownards, Co Down

My late mother used to talk of the “dark days before Christmas”. While she loved the Christmas period it is fair to say that she disliked, even detested, the short dark days of winter. Her spirits always lifted in the New Year when she would observe that each day was “a cock’s stride longer” than its predecessor and a sure indicator of the approach of Spring.

Like my mother I have a special love of the Christmas period but unlike her I enjoy winter. Indeed my favourite seasons are autumn, winter and spring. It is not that I dislike the summer – I simply prefer the cooler, crisper weather of the other seasons. Nicola shares my mother’s dislike of the ‘dark days’ preferring the bright blue skies of summer.

Many gardeners may take Nicola’s, and my mother’s, sides and dislike the winter when poor weather conditions can limit outdoor gardening activity. In addition many gardeners, due to limited space, can not grow a significant range of plants that would provide colour and interest all year round. It is reasonable to say that if most of your time in the garden will occur during the summer months then most of your planting will be geared to providing colour and interest for that period.

We are fortunate in that our home is situated on the Ards peninsula in Co. Down. Thus, we have the Irish Sea on one side and Strangford Lough on the other. While we do not have the almost exotic microclimate that envelopes the formal gardens at Mount Stewart house we do have more favourable conditions than many other gardeners in Co Down, e.g. we would rarely have frosts and if we do experience one it is generally very light.

In this article my wife Nicola and I present some of our favourite plants that bring colour to those dark days before and after Christmas. It is probable that all of these will be known to you but, nonetheless, we feel that they are worthy of mention for the ‘flash of life’ they bring to the winter period.

One old favourite is easily obtained, should grow in most gardens, and provides elegant sprigs covered with bright yellow flowers. *Jasminum nudiflorum*, the winter flowering cousin of *Jasminum officinale*, will brighten any wall or fence and can be cut to

provide indoor decoration as well. The lack of scent is more than compensated for by the bright splash of yellow this plant provides. We grow our specimen at the back of the sitting room bed – in other words the bed beneath the sitting room windows (our beds and borders are ‘named’ to reflect their position with respect to the house, the greenhouse, the lane, etc.). The jasmine appears to enjoy this position as it has scaled the wall and is making steady progress over the conservatory roof.

Another firm favourite is the **Clematis** family and a number of winter flowering clematis are available, e.g. *C. armandi*, *C. chiisanensis*, *C. cirrhosa*, *C. napaulensis*, and *C. paniculata*. As many of these winter flowering species, and their cultivars, are not frost hardy they will need some protection depending on your local climate. We grow one of Nicola’s favourites, *C. cirrhosa* ‘Freckles’, in a large pot positioned close to the main door. Here we can enjoy the beautiful flowers as we come and go from the house. With us, this plant can flower from November through to March. Its flowers are beautiful with the inside of each ‘bell’ covered with a generous sprinkling of deep maroon/purple spots – hence the name ‘Freckles’.



Clematis ‘Freckles’ (Nov – Mar) Photograph by Nicola Milligan

The interest in this genus is reflected in the numerous good books that have been produced, e.g. *Clematis* [1] by Christopher Lloyd, *Clematis – The Queen of Climbers* [2] by Jim Fisk and *Clematis – The Complete Guide* [3] by Ruth Gooch. As usual Christopher Lloyd’s book is full of an excellent combination of his famous wit and

wisdom – he loved this genus and grew numerous examples at Great Dixter. Jim Fisk is an acknowledged expert on this genus having introduced and grown many examples. Ruth Gooch is widely known as a grower, hybridizer, and exhibitor of clematis. She runs a nursery in Norfolk (Thorncroft) which we have visited and from where we have obtained most of our Clematis specimens.

There are numerous **Berberis** species and cultivars to choose from and all will give double value in that you can enjoy the flowers in spring or summer (depending on the species) and coloured berries in the autumn or winter. We have a *Berberis x lologensis* (*B. darwinii* x *B. linearifolia*) at the corner of our ‘sitting room’ bed. The south-west aspect of this bed seems to suit this plant as it flowers and fruits quite well. The text books will tell you that it should flower in late spring (and often again from summer to autumn) but with us it flowers from the end of January onwards. Once again, we believe that our local climate is responsible for this early flowering. There are some named *B. x lologensis* cultivars available, e.g. ‘Apricot Queen’ (dark orange flowers) and ‘Mystery Fire’ (dark orange flowers) but I prefer the species.

Among my favourites are the **Colchicum**, the so-called autumn crocus. These beautiful members of the Lily family grace the borders with their wonderful flowers and, in some cases, magnificent stem colours. There are numerous species and some named



Colchicum speciosum ‘Waterlily’ (Sept – Oct) Photograph by Nicola Milligan

cultivars to choose from. Currently we are growing *C. atropurpureum* which is a distinctive deep magenta with a beautiful purple stem. Our specimens were obtained from Avon Bulbs. *C.* ‘Antarres’ (lilac) and *C.* ‘Dandaels’ (very pale lilac) came from Felbrigg Hall in Norfolk who hold a National Collection of this genus and who sell bulbs during the dormant period from their garden shop. We have the well-known double *C. speciosum* ‘Water Lily’ – this beautiful double pink is a must for any garden. We have a pot of these flowering at the main door as I write and it is a wonderful greeting for any visitor.

Nicola has observed that many of the *Colchicum* species have a ‘spike’ at the bottom of the bulb. Damage to this ‘spike’ appears to compromise the bulb. A bulb may recover from slight damage but extensive damage means that the bulb may never recover and simply rots away.

A Handbook of Crocus and Colchicum [4] by E. A. Bowles provides a wonderful source of information on this genus. Bowles devoted considerable time and space to growing a wide range of bulbs in his garden and his interest in growing *Colchicum*s was rewarded with the naming of a species after him. The October flowering *C. bowlesianum* is noted as a beautiful species with long, strongly chequered, bright purple-pink flowers (up to six inches high). I have been informed by Dr Paul Christian

(the owner of the Rare Plants nursery in Wrexham) that this species has been renamed *C. bivonae* (no doubt due to the dark activities of the botanical taxonomists’ clan). Notwithstanding this up-to-date information I will continue to refer to this plant as *C. bowlesianum* as I prefer to perpetuate the link with Mr Bowles. If you can find bulbs of this species they are well worth the purchase. Dr Christian has a few named cultivars of this species available - *C. bivonae* ‘Apollo’ (chequered bright violet blooms with a central white star and lightly scented), *C. bivonae* ‘Giona’ (from Mt. Giona in Greece, scented, heavily chequered purple-pink flowers with green anthers fading to yellow) and *C. bivonae* ‘Vesta’ (strongly scented violet flowers).

Since most of the ‘exotic’ crocuses seem to be alpine, we initially kept our crocuses in small clay pots, sunk in groups in a larger pot of gravel. However, this ended the year that we went on holiday in October, leaving my parents to feed the cats. On our return we looked suspiciously at the pots, each of which had a little perfect tunnel and the skin from each of the crocuses left carefully beside it. Unfortunately, we had not asked my folks to feed the birds - as a consequence our resident Red Squirrels – who suck up the peanuts like little red Dysons flying over the lawn and walls – went mooching round the house and discovered my prize crocuses. As we now know from reading, squirrels have a taste for crocuses, and they proved it that year.

These days my crocuses are kept on the kitchen window sill and in one of Peter’s wooden cold frames (a very useful gift, that was, that I bought him!). Once the

crocuses are in flower they are brought into the conservatory to get some light, otherwise they never fully open (the kitchen is north-east facing and the frames are against the north-westerly wall). This year I have tried taking a small paint brush to those brought in – it is too early yet to tell whether seed will ensue.

There are some real beauties amongst the crocuses. One of my autumn-flowering favourites, yet an easy one, is *C. sativus* – the Saffron Crocus. This used to be grown as a crop in England, but I suspect our climate is too wet for them – like many of the colchicums they collapse under heavy rain never to recover. I suspect that it may be worth trying to naturalise them under some reasonably heavy evergreen cover – *if* you live in a squirrel-free area! For naturalising, though, it is best to stick to those with more petite flowers e.g. spring-flowering *C. tommasinianus* ‘Roseus’, which gives real staying power and is a wonderful foil for snowdrops.



Crocus tommasinianus ‘Roseus’ (Jan – Feb) Photograph by Nicola Milligan

While we grow a wide range of **Galanthus** I have a soft spot for the species. As reported in Bishop, Davis and Grimshaw [5] *Galanthus reginae-olgae* subsp. *reginae-olgae* was unique in its autumn flowering habit when it was discovered in the mid-1870’s. This year our specimens were showing ‘buds’ in the second week of October and these opened in the third week of October. In addition, this year we obtained another variant of this species. *Galanthus reginae-olgae* ‘JCA form’ came from Dr Paul Christian’s nursery and flowered about one week after the *Galanthus reginae-*

olgae. When I mentioned the ‘JCA’ form to Paddy Tobin he was kind enough to send back the information that the ‘JCA’ refers to J. C. Archibald (Jim Archibald) a noted collector. The flowers of ‘JCA form’ are smaller than *Galanthus reginae-olgae* but are elegantly marked and I think they look quite attractive. It should be noted that this is the first year of flowering with us and it will take a few years for the plants to settle in and then their flowering habit and vigour can be assessed more accurately.



Galanthus JCA form (Oct) Photograph by Nicola Milligan

A number of variants of *G. reginae-olgae subsp. reginae-olgae* have been selected and named, e.g. ‘Cambridge’, ‘Hyde Lodge’, and ‘Tilebarn Jamie’ to mention but a few. If you are interested you can find descriptions of these plants in *Snowdrops – A Monograph of Cultivated Galanthus* [5].

In addition to *G. reginae-olgae subsp. reginae-olgae* some other species have produced pre-Christmas flowering plants. A good example of this is *G. plicatus* ‘Three Ships’ aptly named for its habit of flowering at Christmas (remember the old Christmas carol “I saw three ships come sailing in”). Limited numbers of most of these early flowering cultivars can be found with a little diligent searching but they can be quite

costly. An article by Rod Leeds entitled *Early Snowdrops* [6] gives an excellent account of the various snowdrop species that have produced early flowering forms. This article is illustrated with a good range of photographs and is an interesting read.

The genus **Hamamelis** (the Witch-hazels) provides numerous species that will flower from Christmas to March. These are well known and rightly popular brightening the dull months of January, February and March with their wonderful 'spiky' flowers. The most popular, and most frequently grown is *H. mollis* whose golden-yellow flowers brighten January days. *H. japonica arborea* offers yellow and claret flowers and *H. japonica* Zuccariniana provides delightful lemon-yellow flowers and growing to between three and six feet will fit in most gardens. Less well known, and less frequently grown, is *H. virginiana* (the Virginia Witch-hazel) which produces its yellow flowers in October and November. This plant, in the right conditions, can reach twenty feet so bear this in mind if you decide to hunt down a specimen.

The **Iris** is another popular garden plant and provides a range of colours and flowering habits to suit most gardens and most gardeners. The well known *I. unguicularis* will provide beautiful primrose scented lavender flowers in mid-winter.



Iris unguicularis (Jan – Mar) Photograph by Nicola Milligan

A hot sunny spot is ideal for these plants as a summer baking should improve their flowering potential. Mathew [7] notes that “... although they should not be given a rich diet they do respond well to a dressing of potash or bone meal in the autumn and spring ...”. There are a number of named forms of which we grow *C. unguicularis* ‘Mary Barnard’. Reputedly from Algiers it is noted as a good violet blue. Mathew draws attention to another form, *C. unguicularis* ‘Cretensis’, which is restricted to Crete and the Peloponnese. This form has small strikingly coloured flowers described by Mathew as follows “... the falls have a violet or deep lavender apex but the rest of the blade and the haft are white with violet veins – in the centre is an orange mediam stripe – the standards are lavender or violet with a brownish, violet spotted zone on the haft while the small style branches are a pale bronzy-purple”. Paul Christian offers this form, which he refers to in his catalogue as *I. unguicularis cretensis*, and describes as follows “... short, narrow leaves and strikingly coloured flowers of violet and lavender, with an orange crest and darker standards – flowers from February onwards when colour is doubly welcome ...”. Both descriptions suggest a flower with interesting colour combinations and I can see some specimens moving from a certain nursery in Wrexham to Mount Stewart in the not too distant future.

Arthur Osborn in his book *Winter-Flowering Plants* [8] says of **Viburnum** “... A genus of interesting and useful deciduous trees and shrubs with white or pinkish-tinged flowers, followed in most cases by handsome fruits and brilliant autumn foliage ...”. Mr Osborn, who was in charge of the Aboretum at Kew, recommends *V. tinus* indicating that it will thrive in sun or shade, under trees, and facing north. It flowers in late autumn and will carry trusses of white blooms all through the winter months. He states that “... it is, undoubtedly, the most useful evergreen Viburnum ...”.



Viburnum x Bodnantense (Nov – Mar) Photograph Nicola Milligan

We have a specimen of *Viburnum x bodnantense* (*V. farreri* x *V. grandiflorum*) which is richly scented and bears light pink to mid-pink flowers. With us this starts flowering anytime from the end of October onwards.

A much maligned but very useful plant is the ubiquitous **Mahonia** japonica, with many cultivars now available. Personally I find the scent and flowers quite pleasing, but more important are the benefits to nature. During the entire winter period it is full of Blue Tits flitting through, and gathering the nectar from, the racemes of flowers, and once the berries form the Blue Tits are joined in the feast by Blackbirds. Also, on sunny days in winter, our local bumblebees can frequently be seen out on the hunt to stock up the hive supplies, with our Mahonia acting as the local convenience store. Those bees caught out by a temperature drop from a sudden clouding over can normally be revived by a ½ teaspoon of honey left beside them.



Mahonia (Nov – Feb) Photograph by Nicola Milligan

There are numerous other plants that flower in the ‘dark days’. We are sure that you can list your favourites but we hope that you will find something of interest in our selection. As usual, to end on an Irish note and to return to one of my favourite plants, I will mention some of the Irish snowdrops that brighten the late winter period. We have a small collection of *Galanthus*, around forty plus species and cultivars, and of these six can be considered to be of Irish origin. There are more Irish snowdrops listed but these are very hard to locate and virtually impossible to purchase. I will mention a couple that can be obtained without too much difficulty and are well worth growing. A beautiful double, *G.* ‘Hill Poe’, was first offered by the Giant Snowdrop Company in 1964 at the price of 7s 6d (a fairly hefty price in those days). According to Bishop et al [5] “.... it was first mentioned by Bowles in his 1917 lecture on snowdrops and was growing in his garden at Myddleton House prior to this. It appears that it was found by James Hill Poe growing under a walnut tree near the dining room window at their home near Riverston, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary in about 1911.” We obtained our plants from Susan Tindell’s nursery (Timpany) in Co Down.

My second choice would be *G.* ‘Straffan’. This is another beautiful snowdrop, and again according to Bishop et al [5], is the oldest extant snowdrop cultivar apart from *G. nivalis* ‘Flore Pleno’ and *G.* ‘Sharlockii’. The history of this plant is well worth reading, and as one might expect E.A. Bowles figures in its cultivation and naming. Our plants came from Harvey’s Garden Plants, in Bury St Edmunds.

As you can tell from this selection of some of our favourite winter flowering plants many do not require a great deal of space, e.g. the colchicums, crocus, snowdrops and narcissus can be fitted into small corners. By the time you read this winter should be behind us and in the sunny days of spring and summer it is easy to forget the coming winter. So if you do not grow any winter flowering plants do take the time now and try to find a space for some of these plants and do your bit to bring a little brightness to the dark days of winter.

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Dreaming Dreams

By Therese Murphy

For some time now, my hobby has become my obsession. Over the years I have bought and stockpiled plants, seeds, bulbs, trowels, forks, electric cables, cloches, magazines, books and accoutrements of every sort. This is only a short list for starters! I really do need a twelve-step programme!

I have a reasonable garden, nothing too fancy or exotic. It gives me great pleasure in the winter. There are plenty of bones to it, so that when the exuberance of summer passes, the shapes, the curves, the focal points are more apparent. There was a time when I longed for it to fill up quickly. It was then that I developed my love of garden centres. My growing children used to say, "Not another garden centre, Mammy". Now I am looking for space! There are so many considerations about the planting of every specimen. How high? How wide? What colour? What texture? What soil? Shade? Sun? Evergreen? Deciduous? The space might be there, but not the right space. There is this creative tension all the time. Most of this work goes on in my head. Unlike really passionate gardeners, I wait for good days to venture outside, and then when one good day presents itself, very often there are more pressing matters in hand!!

With the exceptionally long winter of 07/08 now giving way to Spring, the old enthusiasm is resurfacing. Was there ever a time when gardening was so popular in Ireland? At one stage you had to search for information. Now we have it coming at us from all sides. However there is a repetitiveness with a lot of the information in magazines and gardening columns. There are speakers doing the rounds of clubs and programmes who have very little to say that has not been said before, both by themselves and others. Of course, there is always the possibility of new members being present, but unfortunately there are fewer people joining clubs. We are all talked out, and in many situations, the club diversifies into other activities. What a pity, when we all have so much to learn. Was it Socrates who said that wisdom is knowing for sure, that we know nothing at all? My version!

Gardening visits are on the wane too. Many people who welcome visitors, are now only catering to groups. It is difficult to get groups of ten or more to commit to a given day, at a given time. It used to be a pleasure to drop into a garden as a break on a long journey. The changes are perfectly understandable. People are living increasingly hectic lifestyles.

Is this malaise in gardening clubs worth addressing? The numbers are dropping, and the old techniques are not being passed on. We hear that there is surge of interest in allotments, and as a result there is great liveliness and sharing of ideas, behind the spade on Saturday mornings! So, do we need to rethink gardening clubs?

The era of the big show is here. The advertising budget for these shows must be fairly significant. The crowds turn up, spend money, and satisfy the trade but there are a lot of people searching for know-how, and making costly mistakes. Evidence of this can be seen around the country. My point in all of this is that there must be a market out there for another type of information gathering exercise- where people access the information they want, rather than the pat delivery decided on by the “trade”. I use the term lightly.

There is a certain degree of envy that creeps in when I receive the schedule of events from the NBG in Glasnevin. There, the public have access to various workshops and programmes of a very varied nature. The schedule usually includes talks on a wide-ranging list of topics. Between January and June there are no fewer than twenty-two lectures and demonstrations planned. They range from workshops in rose pruning, winter maintenance, propagation etc., to lectures on native trees, plant hunting in Chile, smaller woodland plants, euphorbias and cacti. There is indeed something for everyone.

Now this is where the dreams come into it. It would indeed be wonderful if we could have an outreach programme, possibly funded by the local OPW, in various locations around the country. I know that from time to time there are lectures delivered by members of the staff of the Botanics, and others, to groups here and there on request. That is fine. However what I am advocating is different. Up to now the system that interested groups invite a speaker, and possibly, but maybe not, throw the doors open to all comers, has served a need. Now I propose a parallel or an overlapping model.

Fota Island is a wonderful amenity, and is being used increasingly by the citizens of Cork. It would be a very suitable location for an outreach programme. Interested parties could access it from a very wide radius. Maybe this would encourage other national institutions to follow suit. The National Organic centre in Rossinvor runs courses in both Clare and Wicklow. It would be great to see a trial run in Cork. I think there would be plenty of interest. Fota House has been restored to its former glory, but needs funding on an ongoing basis. Business being business, I am sure the committee there would welcome an initiative of this sort.

Has anyone out there any ideas on this matter? Maybe we could pool our thoughts and get the ball rolling. For starters, I would request the powers-that-be in the Botanics to try their five/ten week botany course in Cork. Then, I would like to see the Organic

centre trial their polytunnel course. These two courses would be very different to what we are used to, and would test the waters nicely.

Of course there is great need in other counties too. There is one county in Ireland that has no gardening group in the whole county.

I am merely planting an acorn here. Others can run with the seed, make it germinate, make it happen.

I would welcome reaction to, and interpretation of my dreams!!!

“Tread softly because you tread on my dreams”



Seed Distribution 2008

By Stephen Butler

A very brief note as I am still in the middle of packing! Request numbers are certainly down again though – at end February I have only had about 90 requests in.

I had a couple of minor problems with some seeds – some Nerine seeds germinated so early (despite being kept cold and dry) that I sowed them myself. Anyone who requested these has been notified they will get them after this season’s growth stops. The only real grief I had was with *Hordeum jubatum*. This grass has seeds that are attached to an awn that I can only describe as like a dead dried spider, and when you try to persuade a group of them to go into a small packet they just bounce back out as if made of sprung steel. Bundling them up just made them stick to paper, fingers, pens and pencils, table tops, trousers...need I say more!

Happy sowing!



Regional Reports

Leinster

The Glasnevin expedition to Chile (2007).

Seamus O'Brien, currently head gardener at Kilmacurragh Arboretum, gave us a splendidly illustrated lecture on February 28th. His topic was the Glasnevin expedition to Chile led by Paul Maher. A team of four, Paul, Seamus, Kevin Kenny and Peter Meleady trekked through Chile observing plants in their native habitats, collecting seed for Glasnevin and, ultimately, Kilmacurragh. Seamus explained that the purpose of the expedition was to re-establish the historical floral links between Kilmacurragh and Chile. Kilmacurragh, with high rainfall and a low pH has excellent growing conditions for many Chilean plants. Its double avenue of *Araucaria araucana* was wild-collected by William Lobb working for Veitch's nursery at Chelsea in the 1840s and is still partially extant. Seamus plans to restore and recreate the originally Chilean flora at Kilmacurragh. On display at the lecture were a number of already germinated young plants demonstrating that the expedition has had some success and I'm sure there will be hundreds more plants ready soon to enable the execution of the grand plan.

The team spent their first week at the recently established Talca Botanic Gardens where they held a series of workshops on horticultural techniques e.g. composting, propagation, recording data etc. After this, with the correct permits, they headed off into the hills and valleys of the Andes in extremely cold temperatures to see, marvel and collect seed.

Seamus is very taken with *Puya* species and he particularly wanted to see them growing in the wild. The team encountered *Puya berteroniana*, *P. alpestris* from which they collected masses of seed, and *P. chilensis*. *P. alpestris* is already well established at Innacullin and Seamus thinks it should prove hardy at Kilmacurragh also. He would like to establish a bank of *Puya* species there in the near future. However, *Oxalis valdiviensis* which has tiny flowers and was growing in sharply drained scree was rejected because of the invasive nature of its "cousins". *Luma apiculata* already grows like a weed at Kilmacurragh.

The team came across huge stands of *Nothofagus dombeyi* (conifer) growing in riverine valleys; its relative *N. obliqua* (deciduous) was quite common and *N. alpina* (deciduous) was growing to heights of 25m displaying wonderful autumn colour along miles of volcanic ash. These are the only 3 species of *Nothofagus* to be found in Chile and Argentina. *Gaultheria mucronata* was also found growing on the slopes of a volcano on nothing but pumice.

Embothrium coccineum, so much admired as an evergreen tree/shrub in Ireland, is deciduous in its native habitat. *Gunnera tinctoria* we would expect to favour damp, shady sites. It actually grows on waterfalls at 100% humidity. *Tristeris tetraptera* is a very pretty widespread member of the mistletoe family. *Blechnum chilense*, a very well-known fern in Ireland, was growing to heights of 1m and to indefinite width in its native habitat. *Luriaga radicans* was found growing in dense shade and *Eucryphia cordifolia* in lush wet areas. *Lapageria rosea* which the Irish still recommend be grown in the greenhouse was to be found growing everywhere! There were also acres of *Desfontainea spinosa* in many locations. Much more rare, due to over-felling, is *Fitzroya cupressoides* the Patagonian cypress but the team did encounter it. *Philesia magellanica* is already growing as a climber at Mt. Usher, so that seems a likely candidate for Kilmacurragh.

Araucaria araucana the Monkey-Puzzle tree which can live for 1,500 years and has been so successful in Ireland cannot be legally collected from the wild any more. However, thousands of its edible seeds are sold at markets all over Chile. It must have been difficult for the team to walk away from such a banquet but when seed collecting nowadays, rules may not be broken.

All in all this expedition appears to have been very successful. It is easy for us in the comfort of a lecture theatre to admire the wonderful photographs of plants and scenery. I wonder do we fully appreciate the hardships endured by the team working in extremely cold temperatures, in cramped quarters, putting in long days on the mountains and nights seed-cleaning and labelling. We know they are a dedicated bunch of gardeners, but their work is not done for commercial gain as in former times, but so that beauty and diversity of plant life may not vanish from the planet.

Mary Bradshaw.

Brendan Sayers – Through the Window Pane

It is always a pleasure to hear Brendan talking about plants and this talk was true to form, a glimpse through the ‘window’ of amenity that most visitors see, looking at the

important work of conservation, education and research that goes on, often unseen, behind the scenes.

Brendan walked and talked us through the various greenhouses, with excellent pictures of course. We were treated to a cornucopia of plants, ranging from ancient cycads, succulent Lithops, insectivorous Sarracenia, epiphytic Vireya Rhododendrons and, of course, plenty of Orchids! Brendan also brought out the elements we too often neglect – how giant tree bamboo is great for the education staff to focus kids attention and some of the useful plants grown such as Bixa which gives us the food colouring anato.

Changes in the recent past have included using peat free compost throughout the gardens, insecticide free control of most pests, and much more linking to in situ conservation and twinning with botanic gardens in developing countries.

An excellent talk enjoyed by all present.

Stephen Butler

Munster

“Dreaming of a Hot Summer” Miriam Cotter **Friday January 11th 2008**

I am glad to say that in spite of the best efforts of the inhospitable Irish weather on that Friday evening we had a very good turnout for the talk entitled “Dreaming of a Hot Summer” given by Miriam Cotter. Miriam is Chairperson of the Alpine and Hardy Plant Society in Cork.

Miriam started the talk by explaining how she started her garden in Waterfall from nothing but a bare field over nine years ago. With the help of copious amounts of Roundup, she cleared the ground of noxious weeds. Due to certain geographical factors the garden is very damp but she very sensibly has learned to live with the situation and uses plants that can adapt to these conditions.

With the aid of slides, she took us on a tour of the garden through the various seasons of the year with special emphasis on the summer months.

By her own admission, Miriam classes herself as a lazy gardener, if there is such a person, who does most of her work in the winter and apparently does absolutely

nothing to the garden in the summer. She has a very pragmatic style of gardening in as much that if any plant needs too much care and attention it does not deserve a place in her garden. Her pragmatism even extends to encouraging her children to make good use of the garden, but cleverly placing stepping stones throughout. Kids love steppingstones! She is a great believer in the use of bark mulch because it cuts down the amount of time one has to spend weeding.

Miriam makes good use of repeated planting using such plants as *Polygonum persicaria*, *Crambe cordifolia* and *Angelica*. She grows very few roses but one exception is R. ‘Souvenir de St. Anne’.

She gave us a timely warning about the advance of the dreaded lily beetle. As Miriam has a great love of lilies, she told us of the total shock and horror that she experienced when she discovered her first lily beetle. Undaunted, using her Grandmother’s old hand mirror to spot the offending creature on the underside of the leaves, she removed said creature along with the eggs and plunged them all into a bowl of bleach.

Everybody enjoyed a very witty, informative and entertaining talk.

Martin Edwardes

“Remarkable Trees of South Africa” by Thomas Pakenham

An unusually large group turned out on a very frosty February evening to hear Thomas Pakenham’s lecture on the remarkable trees of Southern Africa which was in itself a reflection on his reputation. Thomas introduced himself by telling us that his background began with writings on history but that his first book on trees sold a quarter of a million copies thus making his debut into the history and passion for trees a very successful one!

His talk on the trees of Southern Africa, which is the subject of his most recent book, began with several slides illustrating the dangers he undertook just to get to the sites of these wonderful trees. The journey began with a trip in a dugout made from a single tree trunk and a lake crossing fraught with the danger of being attacked by hippos and crocodiles in Botswana. We saw some very beautiful elephants grazing in Kruger National park where Thomas briefly mentioned the dilemma facing the management of wildlife in tandem with the preservation of trees in the national parks of Africa.

Our tree safari proper began with the African Baobab which is also called the upside down tree because it looks like its roots are growing upwards. These trees are extraordinary in size, habit and outline and are truly giants. One of the most spectacular examples of this tree is a group of seven known as Baines Baobab’s. This

artist/explorer painted this group in 1862 and the extraordinary thing is that the group looks pretty much the same today although a little larger. Another example we saw of this giant and ancient tree was one known as Chapman's Tree which measures 86 feet at the base and had a post office situated in its hollowed-out trunk.

One tree which has survived the browsing of elephants is the Sycamore Fig whose roots are like serpents entwining themselves towards the ground. Another extraordinary specimen was the sausage tree whose fruit can be up to 20 lb in weight and can reach 3 feet in length. Not a good tree to stand beneath!

The story of the beautiful Yellow Wood was tragic in that there are so few ancient specimens left in the wild having been felled for their timber. Thankfully it is now being protected but Thomas pointed out that they will never return to their earlier magnificence as their growth rate is too slow.

Totally different was the Coral Tree which is common in Zululand. These trees often marked the grave of a man or the site of a village. They were regarded as having magical powers and bloomed with magnificent red flowers on bare branches. There were some beautiful slides of the Silver Tree which only grows on the slopes of Table Mountain followed by harrowing pictures of the blazing mountain side where a fire had been started by the discarded cigarette butt of a tourist. Amazingly Thomas told us that a year later when he returned the hill was covered in silver tree seedlings.

A controversial story was that of the Jacaranda Tree of Pretoria. They are under threat due to a plan to cut them all down because they are alien and invasive. This tree was a victim of its own success since it was introduced as an ornamental tree and naturalised so well it is now regarded as a pest in spite of its beautiful purple blooms in October and November.

The last group of trees discussed were those which are under threat from global warming and for that we were taken to Madagascar which is full of endemic plants and contains 6 species of Baobab alone. However, these sadly are deteriorating and are showing signs of stress. The lecture ended with what has got to be one of the most remarkable pictures; that of a Monkey Puzzle tree from a different era. This was taken in a petrified forest in Namibia and the extraordinary thing was these trunks were lying in sections along the ground and they had literally turned to stone because they were part of a forest that grew in the pre-Jurassic era. And so our talk ended with a 250,000 million years old palm!

We had a wonderful evening and Thomas Pakenham imparted his great knowledge of and passion for his subject generously. I strongly recommend you to read his book and enjoy his beautiful photographs.

Martin Edwardes



Looking Ahead

Northern Ireland

APRIL 19 GARDEN VISIT

Mrs Margaret Glynn, 2 Old Galgorm Road, Ballymena, BT42 1AL; 2pm for 2:30pm. A return visit to Margaret Glynn's 2.5 acre garden with its established trees, shrubs and lawns, alpine sinks, herbaceous plants, annuals, scree and water garden and new woodland areas. Guided tour. Donations for Ulster Gardens Scheme.

DIRECTIONS: On A42 road to Portglenone, 1/2 mile west of Ballymena centre, at junction of Old and New Galgorm Roads. Black wrought iron gates. Car parking.

MAY 18 GARDEN VISIT

Ann Kee, The Hill, Altnapaste, Ballybofey, Co Donegal; 1.30pm for 2.00pm. A 3-acre wildlife garden on a bog, with 3 ponds with native planting; gravel gardens, herbaceous plants, vegetables. Guided tour. Donations for charity. Car parking very limited – please car-share if possible.

DIRECTIONS: From Ballybofey take R252 (Glenties) Road. After about 4 miles at 'Y' junction take left fork on to R253 (Glenties). Take 3rd tarmaced road on left, then second laneway on LHS (wooden fence on both sides of the road)

JUNE 5 GARDEN VISIT

Richard & Beverly Britten, 316 Carrowdore Road, Greyabbey, Co. Down BT22 2LU; 6.30pm for 7.00pm. A garden made in a quarry site, surrounded by woodland, where many diverging paths lead across streams and via primula-edged ponds to seats and viewpoints; lawns in front of house are surrounded by colourful shrubs & trees; slope to conservatory, carpeted with herbaceous plants; kitchen garden. Guided tour. Donations for charity. Limited parking – do not park on main road. Try to car-share, and try to give estimate of numbers of cars coming.

DIRECTIONS: From the Newtownards to Portaferry Road (A20) turn left into the Mount Stewart Road towards Ballywalter; after about 2 miles turn right towards Greyabbey into Carrowdore Road. House is about 1 mile on LHS.

JULY 8 GARDEN VISIT

Ken and Dawn McEntee, 7 Main Street, Hillsborough, Co. Down BT26 6AE; 6:30pm for 7.00pm. An interesting town garden to the rear of the old Barrack House, which is

divided into 3 different areas, leading to a formal pond in a hidden garden. Amongst the mature planting is a *Gunnera manicata*, a *Cornus controversa* and a 'Rambling Rector' rose. Guided tour. Donations for charity. Parking on Main Street and public car park.

DIRECTIONS: Main Street, Hillsborough.

Leinster

Thursday 24th April

Joint lecture with the Cacti and Succulent Society

Euphorbias with Orla Mullen.

Orla Mullen is a professional gardener with a particular interest in Euphorbia and their use in landscaping.

Saturday- Monday 3rd- 5th May

A.G.M. to be held at Carlton Millrace Hotel Bunclody Co Wexford.

Wednesday 14th May

Joint lecture with the Alpine Garden Society The Smaller Woodland Plants with Dr. Tim Ingram.

Dr. Ingram is a nurseryman, and proprietor of Copton Ash Specialist Nursery in Faversham, Kent who specialises in plants for dry situations, particularly herbaceous plants.

All lectures will be held in the National Botanic Gardens Glasnevin at 8pm

Saturday 14th June, Summer Garden Visit

The Leinster Committee has arranged a visit to the adjacent gardens of artists Wendy Walsh and Lesley Fennell for Saturday, 14th June. As well as both gardens we will visit the studios of Wendy and Lesley where original art-works will be on display. Among these will be illustrations from the recent book "Wendy Walsh - A Lifetime of Painting". Tea / coffee will be available in the house and the gardens will show us many of the plants which have inspired both these artists. A limited number of books will be for sale. If you have been lucky enough to acquire one of Wendy's recent publications, Wendy will sign it for you. Also on sale will be some prints of illustrations from Wendy's huge oeuvre of botanical art.

Please see the enclosed booking form and note that places are limited and **must** be booked by May 16th. We look forward to seeing you there.

Mary Bradshaw.

Munster

FRIDAY 4TH APRIL

Mary Waldron

"Spring in the garden"

Mary Waldron writes a garden column each month in the Irish Garden Magazine.

MUNSTER PLANT SALE ON SATURDAY 12TH APRIL.

S.M.A. Hall, Wilton. 10a.m to 12noon. All welcome.

All contributions of plant material would be much appreciated.

Please contact any of the committee members

Martin and Janet Edwardes 021-4652204

Kay Twomey 021-4381169

Catherine Coulter 086-8498086

Michael Kelleher 021-7336407

Rosemary Hickey 021-4346304

Therese F. Murphy 021-7331451

Garden Visit, Anne's Grove, 19th April

There will be a visit to Annes Grove Gardens, Castletownroche, Co. Cork on Saturday 19th April.

Bring a picnic and meet at the Car park at Annes Grove at 1.00pm.

We hope that there should be a good display of rhododendrons and azaleas for all to enjoy.

Directions. Castletownroche is situated on the Fermoy to Mallow road (N72). Take the road to Doneraile in centre of village (opposite Post Office and Batterberry's Pub) following sign to "Annes Grove Gardens". After 100ms fork right still following sign for "Annes Grove Gardens". Drive through entrance gates to gardens (on right-angled bend approx 1.5kms from village) onto the carpark.

If you need further directions or details contact Martin or Janet Edwardes at 021 4652204 after 6.00pm.

More details can be obtained from the Annes Grove Gardens website :-
www.annesgrovegardens.com



Snippets

Great Loss to Irish Horticulture

Patrick Forde of Seaforde, Co. Down passed away at the age of 67 on the 1st March. Seaforde nursery is well known throughout Ireland especially for the quality rhododendrons which were supplied from there. Seaforde was also the location of the National Collection of eucryphias. Patrick was the 12th generation of the Forde family to live at Seaforde, his ancestors came there in the early 17th century. His plant hunting exploits brought him to China, Africa and South America as well as travels in the Himalaya with Thomas Pakenham. Our sincerest sympathy to his family.

Our Sympathies to Seamus O'Brien

On behalf of the IGPS I would like to extend our sympathies to Seamus O'Brien on the recent death of his father who passed away on the 17th February last.

West Cork Garden Trail

The West Cork Garden Trail will run from the 14th -29th June.
Brochures available from Phemie Rose, Kilravock, Durrus, Co. Cork.
email kilravock1@eircom.net Tel 027 61111

The National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin

I regularly have a look at the National Botanic Gardens website (<http://www.botanicgardens.ie/>) as it is an excellent source of information on the latest news and developments in Irish horticulture. For those of you who wish to expand your horticultural knowledge you really will enjoy a visit to this site. You will find the most interesting and informative articles, the latest news and development in Irish horticulture and a list of lectures, classes and practical demonstrations that are simply outstanding. Congratulations to the staff at the Botanic Gardens. You are providing an excellent service and how I wish I could be there to enjoy it as I am certain I would.

Of course, I should not forget Kilmacurragh which has a guided tour every day at noon and at 3p.m. and also has an excellent selection of lectures and classes to suit the keen gardener. I must give Seamus a call and arrange a visit – the invitation has been there for ages!



The Newsletter of the Irish Garden Plant Society

The Irish Garden Plant Society

The Aims of the Society are:

- **The study of plants cultivated in Ireland, and their history.**
- **The development of horticulture in Ireland**
- **The education of members on the cultivation and conservation of garden plants.**
- **To research and locate garden plants considered rare or in need of conservation, especially those raised in Ireland by Irish gardeners and nurserymen.**
- **To co-operate with horticulturalists, botanists, botanical and other gardens, individuals and organisations in Ireland and elsewhere in these matters.**
- **To issue and publish information on the garden plants of Ireland and to facilitate the exchange of information with those interested individuals and groups.**

Correspondence:

*For membership information, general correspondence, enquiries etc:
The Irish Garden Plant Society, c/o The National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin,
Dublin 9.*

(Please note that staff at the Botanic Gardens cannot take telephone enquiries about the IGPS. They simply facilitate by providing a postal address for the convenience of committee members.)

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